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## The Clash of Economic and Religious Fundamentalism in Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden

### Abstract

*This study aims to understand the clashes between American economic fundamentalists and Islamic religious fundamentalists in South Asia regarding Nadeem Aslam's The Blind Man's Garden (2013). The study explores that the economic entrepreneurs of the neo-imperialists give birth to counterproductive acts of religiosity. It shows how the ugliness of economic hunger is adroitly hidden behind the polished face of globalization, just as the priggish and snobbish religiosity of Muslim fundamentalists encloses their avarice for power and wealth. Using Tariq Ali's theory of Clashes of Fundamentalisms, the study proves that the root cause of civilizational clashes is the outcome of conflicts of interests between Western economic fundamentalists and Muslim religious fundamentalists. The study concludes the economic, political, cultural and strategic motives working behind the goals of establishing neo-imperialism through the elimination of borders for neo-liberalist gains in the wake of the war on terror.*

**Key Words:** Fundamentalism, War on Terror, Globalization, Glocalization

### Introduction

The current world is fully charged with neo-orientalist ideologies. The split thought patterns of East and West in running world affairs show a hell of a difference in terms of cultural, political and economic affairs. The rift has overwhelmed to the extent that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has truly become the age of clashes between two major civilizations of the world namely Islam and the West as was prophesied by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1997 book. The Post-9/11 phase of world history, however, cannot be perused confining it to Huntington's thesis. The critical circumstances also demand us to critique the subject work in the light of Tariq Ali's theoretical perception (2002) that emphasizes to peruse East-West relations in terms of clashes between economic and religious fundamentalists.

After the end of the cold war, in particular, the world-leading forces under the leadership of the sole superpower, USA had started to launch a new project for prevalence and fulfilling their economic needs. The olden theories were decided to keep reinvigorated but in a new fashion by labeling the bottle of civilizing mission with the most fascinating sticker of globalization. The objective was quite evident i.e. to launch a campaign of convincing the nations to set their borders free for trade so that the motive of neo-liberalist/ economic globalization might be attained. A new network of multinational and international organizations, in the first place, was spread. Besides leveling the ground for the required play, the most important step had already been taken i.e. McDonald and non-McDonald practices were sifted and thus by taking the incident of 9/11 as a plea, the game of the clash of civilizations was played to colonize the world once again for economic exploitation; if not physically then, of course, financially but the previous cultural and political strategies were not forgotten to make the very part of this new game of globalizing the world. As [Chomsky \(2007\)](#) says that globalization can be examined as a way of resurrecting the past colonial relations, though without the essentiality of physical captivation of the lands of others—save that even the metropolitan cities of London or New York are under the colonial entrepreneurs of those people whose own lands were once colonized by the West (cited in [Held, 2004](#), p. 16). By joining his voice to the minute observers of the globalization phenomena, [Tariq Ali \(1993\)](#) says, "From New York to Beijing, via Moscow and

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Vladivostok, you can eat the same junk food, watch the same junk on television, and, increasingly, read the same junk novels . . . instead of ‘socialist realism’ we have ‘market realism’.

The study under discussion focuses on the most critical phase of globalization i.e. glocalization. Globalization encompasses much scholarly controversy; equally, researchers have written a lot on it. But its effects including those of counterproductive reactions have not been explored so far. Hence this study renders how globalization is not merely a purgatory process for all the nations; some are winners whereas the majority of the nations are at a losing end. By taking the advent of globalization as a cultural invasion, the losers combat the globalizers; the cultural clashes change into clashes of civilizations which actually are the clashes of two side fundamentalists i.e. Western economic fundamentalist vs. Islamic religious fundamentalists.

## Literature Review

Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013) argues that the Post 9/11 South Asia became a combating arena for economic fundamentalists and religious fundamentalists ([Ali, 2002](#)). It was, in fact, a time when running dogs of imperialism and religious thugs (ctd. in [Aslam, 2013](#)) spent energies in winning their economic and religious gains respectively. In reality, however, both parties belong to the sort of *Ahl-e-Havas* i.e. the men of greed. Their avarice brought sufferings and hardships for *Ahl-e-Dil* i.e. the men of heart (pp. 85-87); the ones who pass through thick and thin quite patiently. In order to fulfill their hunger for worldly gains, humankind sometimes indulges in such debased meanness that brings but degeneration for the land and its norms; by working as slave-agents, they even go to the extent of molding and then misusing revered ‘religious writings’ for personal aspirations as cited in Karen [Armstrong \(2011\)](#). Imperialists and {also the}ir running dogs never endure defeat; they on the other, follow their targets by ganging up and importing their agents to sow dissention and create trouble. Besides provoking the natives, they also misuse forces to barricade the embattled ports and lands.

## Theoretical Framework

[Samuel P. Huntington \(1997\)](#) expresses, in ‘*Clashes of Civilizations*’, that the future political relations among countries would be basing on cultural commonalities and ties i.e. the nations having the same civilization/ culture would make alliances to form new world order. Negating this, however, [Tariq Ali \(2002\)](#) relates about apparently illogical relationship between the Muslim religious extremists and Western economic fundamentalists. Although Islamic fundamentalists are against the global perspective of market capitalism yet they find no way other than offering resistance to globalizers through using means and modes of globalization itself.

Religious fundamentalism is a reaction to cultural and political globalization. But its relation to economic globalization has not been investigated extensively. Insecurity and unemployment are the adverse effects of globalization rendering people more religious in feelings and practices. Religious fundamentalism, to [Benjamin Barber \(2010\)](#) is a reaction to homogenization and integration caused by globalization. Bernard Lewis argues that Islamic fundamentalism is a reaction by Muslims whose lives are spoiled because of secularization and modernization (2018). Samuel P. Huntington also squabbles that Islamic fundamentalism is a reaction to ideas and values imposed by the West on Muslim societies (1997).

Economic globalization, in particular, has given birth to counterproductive activities by anti-global forces and nations, say, for example, terrorism which is the product of marginalization and poverty and marginalization and poverty are the products of globalization because wherever globalization implants itself with its tools of technologies, there appears crisis in the life of local people ([Lee & Vivarelli, 2006](#)). Being deficient in skills of applying the advanced technologies, they suffer from a loss of employment, and livings. The local culture and social life are replaced with global culture and the reaction emerges in the form of a clash of cultures, the end result of which is rooted in the clash of civilizations.

Now the risks of collision between civilizations have increased more than ever. But the thing does not stop here. Rather the forces of globalization politicize the clash just like the past empires. Following the past track, the reactionary nations are taken as ‘other(s)’ and the global forces assume the status of neo-empire with a covert mission to exploit ‘others’ financially. The old policies and

strategies are being revised with new tactical appliances. Hence, we see a plantation of the seeds of cultural and political globalization as a result of economic globalization.

## Post 9/11 Saga of the Clash of Fundamentalisms: The Politics of Global Neo–Empire Economic Fundamentalism

The loyalty of tribal people and Afghans to their religious norms is uncompromising. This passion began with invasions of empires – Soviet and then American respectively – is now touching the altitudes of skies. The long era of war, hunger, poverty, racialism, and displacement has forced them to find out their identity in religion.

But “[h]unger is the best cure for illusions” (Aslam, 2013, p. 257) whether it be of identity or religion or nation. Besides, how long can one fight the social ailments—poverty, hunger, disease etc.? Man becomes tired of all kinds of battles and waits for the time when ruby will shine in his other hand because:

“[v]alour is associated with this gemstone. The courage to seek the truth at all times. To be able to look tyrants in the eyes. This world of havoc, malice and destruction, where the blood of the innocent is of no consequence, is perfect for him and his kind” (2013, p. 129).

Moreover, blood is cheaper than gold in this materialistic world. The economic effects of the war were equally received by all South Asian countries with Pakistan in particular.

During his imprisonment in a dark chamber in Afghanistan, Mikal (the protagonist Pakistani character) felt the pain penetrating into the depths of his injured soul when a white military man tortured him with his piercing laughter and ripped open his wound by shedding light with torchlight. It appeared to him as if he were contemptuously making fun of his Pakistan, his nation and its poverty; the very country where “the taps don’t have water, and the shops don’t have sugar or rice or flour, the sick don’t have medicines and the cars don’t have petrol” (2013, pp. 190-91).

The man who stood before Mikal was actually jeering at a “disgusting repulsive” Pakistan for her failure in alleviating poverty and facilitating the general public with basic provisions of life. Besides, the social evils including those of adulteration measures and corrupt practices of looting each other on the part of every segment of society, killing others unjustly by bombing while giving air to sectarianism, provincialism, and political rivalries. These economic, social, and political ailments not only place a question mark on good governance but also worsen the state affairs; the once desirous of gaining independence from the British Empire is now intended to leave the place as soon as possible since it is an unlivable place for them (Aslam, 2013, pp. 191-92). The citizens of Mikal’s ‘shameless beggar country’ with a duality of character are soaked into illegal and negative practices from head to toe. The negative state policies and issues of governance have led the country to the wrong dimension thus shrinking it to a mere “wasteland [by converting] their very own caliphate to rubble” (p. 192).

Mikal perceived the situation very well; he knew whatever the current state of affairs was, the white man’s country (America) could not be free of charge from its alleged role in deterioration (p. 192); American global designs and the untoward global war on terror in Afghanistan is responsible for the current degeneration going on in every sphere and walk of local life. The unjust involvement of Pakistan in this *great global game* gave birth to some serious issues of hostility among different segments of society. For instance, Basie, Rohan’s son-in-law and the brother of Mikal, was charged as a ‘running dog’ of imperialism by a terrorist during besiege of the St. Joseph’s school. In truth, however, the Afghan warlords who were doing service for Americans surreptitiously apart from bartering them the wanted-warriors were the real running dogs of imperialism (Aslam, 2013); they earned very little for this debased act of espionage. The folks of Basie’s secular seminary or school of thought, on the other, were ‘the thugs with Koran’ (2013) just because of their misinterpretation of the teachings of Islam; if the religious fanatics take the fundamentalist extreme position, these seculars/liberals take 180 degree opposite position regarding the misreading of Quran. It retards their progress and they become the running dogs of imperialists whereas to quote Deng Xiaoping, one must always attempt to defend the task of self-strengthening one’s national cause as a prime rule provided if one wants to relish the path of growth and avoid being browbeaten (cited in Mishra, 2018). This faux fight destroyed the lives of staunch nationalists such as Rohan, Joe, Basie, Mikal, and Naheed etcetera.

Aslam, however, equally condemns jingoism because these jingoistic feelings are infused into the national pulse for the sake of fulfilling others' whims and desires. But now they have changed the environment by making it a security state. Also, the acquisition of nuclear capability and demos of huge Chagi models could neither appease hunger nor provide any home shelter except for nighttime stay to the beggar-children in their shades (2013, p. 202).

Nadeem Aslam finds fault with the foreign and economic policies of the state; Pakistan paid and is still paying huge costs in political, cultural, and economic spheres for its involvements in Cold War and Post-9/11 war. On the political level, Pakistan became a part of the great game and played its role in the context of strategic depths (Rahman, 2014); all this projected Jihadist culture that brought about changes in the democratic and enlightened dimensions of the state (Aslam, 2013). But more than that there became wreckage in the country's economic progress—the consecutive wars on its borders (Naqvi, 2012) and the jingoism inside the country had weakened the economic backbone leading it to a 'multitude' (to use Hardt & Negri's phrase, 2000); a wasteland converting into a heap of ruins. The thin economic condition let many students of Ardent Spirit waste their time in the Soldier Bazaar rather than doing any job; they used to sit there idly and watched every girl from head to toe with passions that could erupt anytime (p. 101). Such unemployed, deprived, and marginalized persons were ready to do any task for extremist organizations; besides going to Kashmir, Bosnia and Tajikistan (p. 107) for Jihad, they convened protesting rallies where they would burn American flags to catharses their anger over invasion (Aslam, 2013, p. 111). The parents, as the novel shows, admit their children in a charity-cum-madrasa that provides these children hardly aware of "life's deprivations" (p. 14) with food and accommodation. Mikal has to work in a gun shop located in the war-charged city of Heer (p. 15) where West-made weapons of all kinds are available; this reminds us that globalizers break into different regions in search of new markets to sell old weapons and experience new ones. Though "piety discount[s]" (p. 16) are given to Jihadists there, yet jingoism has made them forget how to make both ends meet.

Historically Europe brought its internal war outside the continent even into the tribal areas long before Pakistan came into being; Britain, therefore, had to face the aggression of Hitler while confronting the resistance movement of freedom fighters of Fakir of Ippi. Hitler did counseling of the locals through his deputed advisors who had trained and coached them in gun-making (Aslam, 2013, p. 229). Actually, Europeans had converted this region into a weapon market to sell their own manufactured weapons; old or new, there. The local factory had recently made so much progress in manufacturing advanced weapons that it could meet the needs of locals as well as people of adjacent areas (pp. 229-30). Besides being a symbol of imperialists' legacy, the functioning and manufacturing of guns in gun-factory points to the weak writ of the state that became worsened due to globalizers' ventures in South Asia. But the business of scrap metal supplied by 'a set of gypsies' to the factory was as illegal as the footing of Americans in the region. Both Americans and gypsies were free to move; in fact the area was just like a vast plane to encamp gypsies if they wanted to live there for any purpose. The wretched lives of gypsies are a slap on the so-called enlightened face of globalization that could only exploit all the way without improving the locals' condition.

Post 9/11 war brought calamities to the soil and the sons of the Afghan nation-state. Exceeding the objective of crushing Taliban, the war-monger globalizers enwrapped the whole population into rapacious cruel clutches; besides massive casualties and injuries, the human tragedy had also spawned hunger, poverty, and displacement that, like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, were singing and dancing in the theatre of Afghanistan. As solution-providers, Americans after having demolished the vast Afghan expanse (Appadurai, 1990), "airdropped" the packets of food there to meet the dietary needs of displaced people (Aslam, 2013, pp. 148-49); Jeo observed his transporting van crunching and exploding these bright yellow packets. The *nation-state*' (Giddens, 1990) of Afghanistan received huge economic bruises. The crises were doubled up with the explosion of hidden devices such as tank shells and landmines planted in earth besides gunfire in the far distance (Aslam, 2013, pp. 50-51).

Politically influential Afghan warlords often helped the needy people to fulfill their expectations, even though they were covertly indulged in unfair activities; since they were backed by Americans, so they exploited the people financially, physically and politically. Being allegiant to globalizers in fetching their economic, cultural and political needs, they were exempted from all propagandas and

hence 'good Muslims' (p. 130) to use [Mamdani's \(2005\)](#) phrase. Rohan saw people gathered outside the *torture cell* to pay homage to or seek money from a warlord. He requested the passer-by American army convoy to help liberate the imprisoned boys who were being abused in the nefarious game of "Nail" (p. 120) by the same warlord but the soldiers let it go saying it not their "problem" (p. 131); in fact, consolidating the concept that whoever is on the American side is free from all charges.

## Religious Fundamentalism

The Afghan warlords played games in the name of religion. On knowing that Mikal could not pay ransom for his release, his captor warlord sold him to Americans at the cost of \$5000/-. Mikal was sent to steal away the cloak of Prophet (PBUH) placed in a highland mosque in the company of as well as under minute observation of highly expert thieves—father and son. The plea was that acquisition of the holy cloak with its amazing powers would increase his prestige (p. 143). The warlord had reported about the presence of 22 Arab militants in that mosque who were bartered for \$110,000/- ([Aslam, 2013](#), p. 156). All were picked up by American Special Forces who by leaving behind them the marks of large shoes, in fact, had left a symbolic impression of their very presence everywhere in the world (p. 145) with the probability that neo-empire is a mobile empire established without respecting the boundaries of nations and countries.

Boosting up of economy was at the core of the ideology of war on terror. According to Salma Yaqoob, the strong associations between racism, neoliberalism and the war on terror cannot be overlooked. Enormous migrations in today's world are gifts of neo-liberalism while racism is at the hub of crises of migrations hurled by neo-liberalism. This development is misused to implant Muslims' fright with an aim to start war on terror. Moreover, the operations against the profusion of armaments traffic, Islamophobia and safe havens of terrorists are racially stimulated to project the policies of the 'global elite' (cited in [Hubbard & Miller, 2005](#)). Mikal saw heaps of dollars and riyals, pounds and rupees at every inch of the wide floor of a big room in Akbar's house (i.e. war was being managed). Since this war was an inevitable component of the great game so both parties poured in billions of dollars in winning the hearts and souls of life to achieve their desired targets; land occupancy was central to their efforts. Hence there collided economic fundamentalism of neo-imperialists with the religious fundamentalism of the Taliban, al-Qaeda and likeminded Muslim organizations ([Aslam, 2013](#), p. 28) i.e. the 'clashes of fundamentalisms' to use the phrase of [Tariq Ali \(2002\)](#).

The Americans bribed Afghan-warlords to side with them and the Jihadists, too, distributed money to allure and reward the youth for Jihad. Moreover, al-Qaeda Arab militants cemented their ties and made their stay respectful by marrying girls of their hosts (P. 281). War and turmoil had given them nothing but poverty-headache for which even a pure tablet of aspirin was not available in the market. The children had to sell "two bent iron nails" (p. 284) to manage their education expenses or make both ends meet. Hence the people were applying 'mantar' spells to replace their miserable days with prosperous ones. In the light of past nasty games of the West in Vietnam and Bosnia, the Americans asked most of the Afghan-war prisoners to spy on al-Qaeda and Taliban. A Malaysian boy, for instance, was turned into a double-agent by sending him back to Malaysia to spy on al-Qaeda militants (p. 283).

Apart from combat between neo-imperialists' advanced technologies and globalized people's emotionality, the conflict took happened between the two fundamentalisms i.e. (US) economic fundamentalism vs. (Muslims') religious fundamentalism ([Ali, 2002](#)) to accomplish their fake egos for which either side had invested huge amounts of money. If USA, on the one hand, was distributing dollars among warlords to win their loyalties, Osama-bin-Laden, on the other, was active to award one hundred-thousand dollars per American's captive. To cope up with the emerging plunder of the western "thugs" as locals took them (p. 240), the Islamic scholars like Sheikh al-Uqla had already released a fatwa that Jihad was obligatory to combat the crusaders who had invaded the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan ([Aslam, 2013](#), p. 56).

In fact, marginalization/ poverty breeds chauvinism (since the passion is much more alive to the ambience of weaker segments of the home society as cited in Clifford, 1994) in the soil by uprooting secularism when its inhabitants become sunken into the deep waters of identity that they have to seek due to global phenomena. A conflictual attitude was born due to economic fundamentalists when



instead of finding out the 9/11 culprits from within the very vicinity of the targeted spot, they broke immediately into the region and they did it without much confirmatory investigation into the Muslim lands; i.e. after Afghanistan, “they are planning to invade Iraq and Iran”, and then they would be targeting Pakistan. President George W. Bush, in his first address after the incident of 9/11 had used the word, “crusade” (Aslam, 2013, p. 209) with an intention to motivate his nation to gird up their loins for a lengthy campaign (Naqvi, 2012). The Americans were now reclined to fundamentalism to apply its parts separately (Hamid, 2008) and individually while dealing with other nations; thus some nations would have to face (as parts) the severe rage immediately whereas the others would have to meet consequences afterward, still others would be tested through the degree of expected co-operation that they extend in war on terror to annihilate safe-heavens of terrorists and in case if Pakistan did not cooperate with Americans, it would be thrust into “Stone Age” (Aslam, 2013, p. 207).

Americans started propaganda against terrorist-financing in coordination with worldwide agencies and global forces and bounded the governments to stop facilitators or aiding agencies from financing the militants by various means including that of collections from hides of the sacrificed animals; these same militant groups had been receiving huge grants from America and their governments during Cold War and afterward (2013). Analyzing Riedel’s book, Thomas E. Ricks (2014) says that apart from fighting side by side with Pakistan in Soviet-Afghan war, Saudi Arabia also devised a policy to help coordinate in the “United States’ contributions [of] dollar-for-dollar in public funds”. Saudi Arabia made huge collections of funds for Mujahidin in private donations. According to an estimate they donated as much as \$20 million per month. But the past cooperating-scenario broke between the two fundamentals (economic and religious); now the governments were instructed to have a look on the donors and receivers to curtail the suspicious activities of terrorists or past Mujahidin despite of the fact that they are still doing the works of Allah as they did it before 9/11. This had brought hard times for Jihadist organizations to run their affairs since religious people after 9/11 conspiracy were “accused of sowing something called terror” (Aslam, 2013, p. 207).

Since 1980, there began a strikingly operational struggle within the Muslim world for the sake of the inclusion of those so-called remote warriors who were nonpaid combatants and lacking in any clear connection to the strife other than a devout fondness for Muslim side. Since then, a number of warriors ranging between 10,000 and 30,000 have inserted themselves into clashes from Bosnia inside the West to the Philippines inside the East. These foreign Muslim warriors do matter now since they can influence the clashes they connect, as they did in post-2003 Iraq by advancing partisan savagery and applying unpredictable tactics. The vast scale mobilizations of warriors can enable transnational fear-monger groups such as al-Qaeda to fight vitally, since war-volunteering is the central stepping-stone for personal association in more amazing shapes of militancy (Hegghammer, 2010). Same was the case with locals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who, unlike the Westerns that had come to crush Taliban, were of the view that it was their prime duty to fight against the invaders; in Waziristan, for instance, Salomi’s brother and husband had gone across the borders and into Afghanistan for the same purpose and if it were allowed to women, Salomi too, would certainly have gone to fight for Afghans (Aslam, 2013, p. 240).

## **Conclusion**

Although the wreckage of institutional setup in Pakistan was the outcome of colonization yet the situation became worst when globalization found its footing in the war-afflicted Pakistan. Globalization with its tripartite character – economic, cultural and political – left no stone unturned in shaking the local/ domestic ideological, geographical, political, and social foundations besides challenging the writ of the state especially after the horrible incident of 9/11. The economy had suffered a total loss of \$45 billion of rupees apart from seventy thousand casualties due to global war on terror from September 2001 until 2009. Major General Babar Iftikhar, the current director-general of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) discloses that Pakistan had killed about 18,000 terrorists during the war on terrorism in the last two decades. At least 1,100 al-Qaeda terrorists were either captured or killed to ensure global peace and security, Pakistan has lost 83,000 lives during the war on terror that has cost the country almost US\$126 billion. All these injurious acts profoundly damaged the norms. Thus, globalization has twisted the infrastructure out of shape; its local effects or

glocalization have worsened the situation wherever it finds footing. Masses have lost their trust in institutions and their efficiency in this regard. There is no guarantee that you can be able to purchase pure milk or even disprin ([Aslam, 2013](#)). Muddy water flows from water taps and people are bound to use this garbage. Government officials, however, use mineral water by spending money unjustifiably from government expenditures/ treasury. The government schools do everything save dissemination of education. The religious element has become unbridled. Masajids have become centers of issuing blasphemy 'fatwas' against the opponent sects. People feel insecure on roads, in hospitals and parks.

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