

Analyzing American Desire for Power in Bina Shah's A Season for Martyrs

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Abstract: *This article explores the concept of power in Bina Shah's A Season for Martyrs, and the sufferings of the people of third world countries including Pakistan. Even after the demise of colonialism in the modern era, America for the couple of decades has been putting her influence on the third world countries in different political, economic, cultural and social circles. She has been doing so by adopting new techniques of imperialism i.e. neo-imperialism, globalization and neo-liberalism. Shah in her work presents the indirect rule of Americans to sustain their power and the distresses of third world countries, especially Pakistan in the existing age.*

Key words: *Neo-imperialism; globalization; neo-liberalism; power*

Introduction

According to Oxford Dictionary, neo-imperialism is a new or modern form of, or a revival of imperialism. It is an exercise in which progressive/advanced countries retain their interest with low income nations in such a way that is unfavorable to the expansion or growth of those nations. Such participation of progressive nations slows down the potential of several states for progress. Kwame Nkrumah (1965) states that nowadays one country is not ruling the others by direct control still the monetarily strong countries are interested in old colonies economically. So, he calls this thing 'imperialism' and states that neo-colonialism as the last stage of imperialism. He further says that a neo-colonized nation is one that is liberated in term of power but not in its decision making policies and economy, as these two are structured by the peripheral forces. They are still economically reliant on established nations.

Apart from the dominance of previous colonies, neo-imperialism also refers to the authority or intrusion of new Superpowers like USA in the economies of third world countries. As a result the third world countries cannot move towards the roads of political and economic progress being in the clutches of globalization (Ashcroft et. al. 2000). Cultural supremacy, martial involvement and political interferences are also the practices of neo-imperialism that the prior colonial powers or super powers adopt to rule the low earning nations. In neo-imperialism weaker nations are dominated by the unequal means of economic exchange. It means that

feebler populations are unable to exist/survive economically in the modern world without the support of stronger countries. Neo-imperialists use the power of money. Today, the most evident example of neo-imperialism is the connection between the technologically advanced countries and the third world. For shelter, food and other rudiments, third world nations are mainly at the mercy of industrialized ones. The neo-imperialists countries do not consider it as imperialism. They just take it as an advantageous foreign policy for the upward mobility of all the people of world. Neo-imperialism is the worst form of imperialism. It is used to define several productive operations at the international level which are similar to the conventional imperialism of 16th to 19th centuries.

Arundhati Roy (Indian novelist and political activist) is an ardent critic of neo-imperialism and a prominent voice of anti- globalization. Roy considers US as a major neo-imperialist country. She has claimed about the takeover of people's land and possessions through wholesale corporate in her work *Broken Republic* (2011) which is a direct attack on Indian policies. She portrays that the United States has a right to gobble up any of its subjects because they consider it their moral right allotted to them directly by God. Roy (2012), also criticizes globalization, neo-imperialism and capitalism of US in her article, *Capitalism; A Ghost Story*. So Roy is an eminent critic of neo-imperialism and her condemnation is marked in almost all of her works (qtd in Bilquees Dar 2013 p.46).

Superpower like America not only adopts the policy of neo-imperialism for the subjugation of third world countries but also uses the techniques of globalization and neo-liberalism to remain powerful in the world. The term globalization relates to the progress of a world wide web, which belongs to an economic and social system. Contrasting to the former tools that have been used in colonial era to dominate the people forcefully, globalization is a new way to suppress them nowadays. This is an indirect way to control people's minds. Presently America is using this technique to justify her desire for power. Globalization is normally thought as an economic phenomenon, but the study of it has a tendency to contour it in wider viewpoints, which crosses all limitations.

David Held (1999) opines that, 'globalization in a basic sense talks about the quick widespread interconnectedness' (p. 2). It can be associated to the national, native and the local. On the one hand the relation is made between social and economic dealings and networks, organized on a local/ or national level and on the other hand, it associates economic and social contacts and networks formed on large scale, the local and worldwide collaborations. The political and economic tactics shaped by neo-liberalism and globalization rise the power and wealth of cosmopolitan companies and leading groups. It is a dominant ideology that is shaping our world in the current time. As Saad- Filho and Johnston (2005) state that 'we live in the age of neo-liberalism' (p. 1-6). Neo-liberalism is chiefly the reestablishment of liberalism which means liberation. For Harvey (2005) the world has turned to neo-liberalism in respect of economic and political practices and thinking since 1970s. It is itself a self-governing and innovative theory-not a rebirth of liberalism. Due to neo-liberalism today, the world means are in the hands of a few rich people and majority of poor people of the undeveloped countries have less access to the resources of fabrication. They have limited wealth and job opportunities. Therefore, they work on deficient salary to meet their basic needs. The idea of Welfare State (obligation of state to help the needy in the times of need) has been smashed by neoliberalism as it stresses on

privatization where poor bank on private service which is costly, worse in quality and erratic as compared to public service (Werlhof, 2008).

The neoliberal strategies of IMF have negative impact on developing countries. Shamsul Haque, in his research article “Global Rise of Neoliberal State and Its Impact on Citizenship: Experiences in Developing Nations” opines that the neoliberal supplements of IMF has antagonistic impact in third world people’s rights. He refers to the adoption of UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2003/21 which highlights that the “structural adjustment-reform programs have serious implication for the ability of developing countries...to improve the economic, social and cultural rights of their citizens” (Haque.2008, p.13).

Like other unindustrialized countries Pakistan also depends on World Financial Institutions and IMF loan. Perwaiz, in his book the *Politics of International Economic Relations*, highlights the following conditions of IMF which are damaging to the welfares of the state. IMF provides assist and loan to Pakistan on the bases of interests and conditions; these situations become more severe when Pakistan gets more loans. Pakistan is obligated by IMF to adjust her policies according to the need of IMF. IMF stresses on privatization and wants the Government of Pakistan to cut “spending on education, health care, environment and subsidies to the poor”. IMF forces Pakistan to confiscate agriculture grants granted to the farmers and increase charges of transports, health, education, electricity and increase tax on basic necessities of life. So its policies are anti-poor. IMF wants that Pakistan should facilitate MNCs and stress on free trade in Pakistan which is ultimate source of “Dumping”. It forces Pakistan to wane import duties which is not in favor of the state. IMF wants to privatize even those units which earn the significant amount (Perwaiz, n.d, b, and p.84-85).

Nadim Ahmed and Aisha Khan highlight the opinion of Werlhof that free trade and liberalization is not in favor of developing countries including Pakistan because here the advanced countries get lion share:

Liberalization in Pakistan engulfed domestic markets with low-cost imports, which made it difficult for the local manufacturers to compete and forces them to shut down their business or industries. (...) By depriving the native farmer/industrialist/financier, the bigger economies collect wealth by capturing our markets (Ahmad N and Khan, A.2009 p.7).

According to M. Perwaiz “low level of investment, unemployment, poverty, social evils, bad effect on industrial and agriculture development, outflow of currency, foreign dependency, debt burden, political instability....security (issues)” are undesirable impact of WTO on Pakistan (Perwaiz, n.d, b, p.110).

As having discussed various views of the critics it can be concluded that neo-liberalism is one of the modern forms of imperialism and it has badly affected the developing countries. It only facilitates rich classes and states on national and international levels.

Analysis:

In the neo-liberal era America is propagating her socio-cultural values around the globe in order to promote her economic, cultural and political motives. America wants to be supreme all over

the world and for this desire of power. Desire for power is basically the will to control others. Americans' longing for power is not a new concept but they practiced different tactics in past as compared to the contemporary tools. Currently America is using the tools of globalization, neo-imperialism and neo-liberalism in this post-colonial epoch. Bina Shah in her work *A Season for Martyrs* deals with the same issues.

Presently, America is not directly conquering the soil, lands and the properties of third world countries but starts intervening in the economy and politics of such countries. By doing so America claims that she protects weaker nations economically and promotes democracy and proper balance of power globally. But in the guise of all these things she only hunts for the empire in the third world countries. She only wants to secure her investment, makes her economy strong and rules over the third world countries. Americans' merely fulfill their desire for power.

As Shah's work *A Season for martyrs* does not directly depict the Americans' desire for power but when one goes deeper, may find that throughout the novel the writer discloses the tactics of Americans in order to maintain their hold in the third world countries like Pakistan. Shah tries to emphasize that we are unconfined from the fetters of colonialism even after its demise. America is sustaining her rule or command over third world countries by the use of her political, cultural and economic powers. Politically, America is fulfilling her wish for power by interfering in the politics of such countries. As she has strong political and economic resources so she is using her economy as a tool to exploit the less-developed nations in neo-colonial era. Along with politics and economy Americans are using their culture as a tool to command over the third world countries. They are presenting their culture in such an attractive and trendy manner that the people of less-developed countries cannot help themselves to attract towards it. They claim that one can lead a luxurious and privileged life there. They make their strong economy, better education, privileged lifestyle, freedom of expression as an excuse to subjugate the under developed nations once again and they are quite successful in their mission. One can find the examples of political interference, economic and cultural exploitation of Pakistanis in Bina Shah's work. Shah highlights the incident of 9/11 and its consequences as an example of political interference of America in the political affairs of Pakistan in her work. After 9/11 Pakistan has suffered and is still suffering a lot due to the neo-liberal policy of the USA camouflaged in War on Terror. The worst ever affected country has witnessed in the world due to War on Terror seemed to be Pakistan. According to Rana Ejaz Ahmed (2012), "The impact of the September 11, 2001 incident upon the US and its allies seem less as compared to Muslim community in the world especially Pakistan affected most adversely than any other country in the world" (p.53). America has started the war on terror with the purpose of stamping out the terrorism from the world. For this motive US force many countries including Pakistan for support. US have started threatening Pakistan to bomb her to the Stone Age if she refuses to help America. So Pakistan has entered into a treaty with the US after 9/11 because she has been compelled and forced by the USA to do so (Naqvi, 2011, p.86). In the result of it Pakistan becomes the tower of strength for America in War on Terror.

Prior to 9/11 Pakistan has supported Taliban and thought to be the one who has authorized Taliban's administration. But under the pressure of US Pakistan has altered her Afghan War policy and become US ally. Different military operations have been carried out by Pakistani government in different areas of Pakistan on the behalf of USA.

Since 9/11, the country has fragmented a civil war; fundamentalists were causing havoc everywhere in Pakistan (p.94).

Bina Shah has pointed out that due to 9/11 Pakistan is affected very badly. Pakistan has become the part of endless war. Civil war has lasted in Pakistan. Our own people are fighting against each other on the northern areas of Pakistan. Pakistan has undergone from suicide bomb attacks. In Pakistan people of tribal areas become extremists, fundamentalists and terrorists and commit suicide attacks and blasts. Pakistan has become the cradle of terrorism. Fundamentalists are causing destruction, chaos, lawlessness, upheavals and anarchy in the country. All these circumstances rupture Pakistan. "Was this what they (Americans) had envisaged when they'd pressured Pakistan into taking their sides" (p. 94)? This doubtful state of questioning of Bina Shah makes her satirical and she criticizes the US War on Terror. As US has started this war to wipe out terrorism from the world and from Pakistan as well. For this reason America seeks Pakistan's help as Pakistan shares its largest border with Afghanistan. America considers Osama Bin Laden as a mastermind of 9/11 incident. So for this reason America has decided to go after Taliban in Afghanistan and pressurize Pakistan on the basis of dire consequences. But in the pretext of removing terrorism from Pakistan, America involves all her sects in war and dispute among themselves. Apparently she wants Pakistan's help in order to wipe out terrorism from Pakistan and the world but her hidden motives are dissimilar from it. In this way America only wants to disturb the political structure of Pakistan and other third world countries.

Shah also highlights that our rulers are so much under Americans' political influence that they rarely dare to say 'No' to Americans in their policies and decisions. As they have done in case of Afghan war policy. "The Pakistani President was firmly sticking to his position of supporting American policy in Afghan war, which affected Pakistan much more than in war in Iraq" (p.94). The novel exposes that the Pakistani President cannot refuse Americans demands at any cost. Previously, Pakistan has supported Afghanistan and Taliban but under US political influence she makes changes in her policy. Shah also has criticized that it is an ironic situation that Pakistan is an independent country but cannot enjoy the political liberty. Even the President of the state cannot formulate the political policies on his own. He puts the lives of many people at risk just to accomplish Americans' command. Modern status entails two vital things; one is the sovereignty or independence of state and other is liberty and freedom of individuals or citizens but Pakistan has lost both after being ally of US in Afghan War.

Shah also refers to the secret letter of Benazir Bhutto which she has written to America to highlight the Americans desire for political power. Bhutto is being informed by Pakistani government that her life is in danger "with the top terrorists of the day promising to kill her on her return" (p. 13) when she aimed to come back in Pakistan after her eight years exile in 1996. Apart from it Shah has also depicted the picture of the worst situation of Karachi at that time. Kidnappings, target killings, street crimes, suicide attacks and carjacking were the common affairs of that time faced by the people of Karachi. Shah while highlighting the entire situation of Karachi tries to express what has compelled Benazir Bhutto to return to the country in such a precarious and severe situation? She tries to show Is Benazir Bhutto sincerely concerned for the well-being of Pakistanis and is resolute to fix the problems which they are facing in Karachi? She says that Bhutto secretly makes a deal with government or possibly with America as well that if she is made the Prime Minister of Pakistan, she will let Americans come in and catch Osama bin Laden. The Letters to the Editor column in the newspapers are bursting with letters about secret

deal with the government and possibly America as well: “Make me prime minister and I’ll let you come in and catch Osama bin Laden” (p.13).

The novelist illustrates that apparently Benazir claims that she wants to come back here in Pakistan for the sake of equality, democracy and freedom but in fact she is here to fulfill that secret deal she has made with America. Although she is being informed by the authorities that her life in Pakistan is in danger still she risks her life just to get the power with reference to American’s influence. Through this secret deal Shah wants to expose the Americans’ power in Pakistan (p.13). Shah has also cited the example of Musharraf in her fiction to unveil the Americans desire for stabilizing their political power. Pakistani people want to dethrone Musharraf but it is not possible because America is at his back. Americans want him to be in rule because he all the time is willing to give in all their demands. On one hand they are pushing Musharraf for conducting fair elections in Pakistan but on the other hand they do not want him to leave the government. Shah says about this fact: The United States is reluctant to get rid of a ruler who is so willing to do their bidding (p. 147).

From the mentioned situation, Shah tries to depict that although Pakistan is an independent nation but its policy making verdicts are still under the control of the west/ America. Not only is the president of Pakistan but the Supreme Court, the highest court of Pakistan, is under Americans’ political authority. So under America’s power “the Supreme Court has dismissed all the petitions challenging Musharraf’s eligibility to contest the elections” (p. 147). The Supreme Court has not only discharged all the claims against Musharraf but also permitted him to make changes in Pakistan’s Constitution which is termed as Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO). According to it, all the actions taken during emergency period are right and positive. Shah says that the entire state of Pakistan is in the manacles of American political supremacy so how it is possible for the Supreme Court not to act upon Americans’ will. For the maintenance for economic hegemony, America provides funds, reliefs, aids and alliances to the poor eastern nations. By providing moneys, support and resources to underdeveloped countries Americans do not pave ways for the advancement of such countries but they only want to strengthen their own economy. And on the other hand such countries are bound to take their help because they have no other option. As Kwame Nkrumah (1965) opines that a neo-colonial is one that is liberated in terms of power but not in its decision making policies and economies as these two are planned by external forces. They are still economically at the mercy of the developed nations. He believes that foreign aid or monetary help is used for the oppression of less developed states of the world rather than for their evolution.

This very idea is very much evident in Bina Shah’s *A Season for Martyrs*. During Musharraf’s administration Americans have hunted his help in Afghan war policy after 9/11 incident on the threats of dire consequences. They have threatened Musharraf if he does not help them, they will stop providing monetary help to Pakistan. Americans not only bulldozes Pakistan but other eastern countries as well in this respect. As Pakistan is not economically strong so she has to follow them. Pakistan is still reliant on the financial support of the developed nations like America (p.94). With the help of globalization, America is indirectly controlling the minds of people. It is a new tool for her to justify her cultural supremacy in the neo-colonial period. The culture of third world countries has been influenced by globalization in a vast and diverse manner. It provokes people to change their mindset and lifestyle. Cultural globalization is usually because of media. Our media presents the culture of First World in such a striking and

trendy manner that the people of third world countries are obsessed by it easily. As Bina Shah's central character Ali Sikandar is greatly influenced by the West and its culture, language and liberation in the novel *Season for Martyrs*. He is very much captivated by the American society and he believes that life over there will be absolutely different from the one he is leading here in Pakistan. He opines that in American society there is an independence and freedom of expression. One is allowed to lead his life on one's own terms. Ali is always passionate to leave for America. His desire to leave for America is actually the result of privileged life of his uncle and cousins over there. Whenever they would visit him in Karachi it will always compel him to compare his life with theirs. He considers them powerful and superior because they have a very luxurious lifestyle. They are loaded with money. They have perfect American accent. These are all the things which he aspires for himself. Ali is so obsessed with western supremacy and its life style that he wants to leave for America even at the cost of his family. Shah, talking about Ali's hope of a better life in America, says:

Ali had never even been to America, but he knew that over there he could be a different person: easygoing, happy and free (p. 20).

As language plays a vital role for the acquaintance with any culture. Moreover, it is describe as an instrument for the supremacy of English culture as well as responsible for the influential political control over multiple nations. By European educational system one can debase his native culture. As Thomas Babington Machaully (1972) points out that how the colonial language would train people against their own customs and culture. He describes that by using colonizers language people become Indian in their blood and color and Western in their experiences, beliefs and opinions. Due to English language on the one hand people attract towards the English lifestyle and on the other hand they identify as third world people due to their color profile, origin, traditions and civilization. Moreover, the imitation of colonized people makes the colonizers' power possible not only on the lands but on the minds and psyche of the colonized.

Ali is so much absorbed in West, its culture, language, luxurious lifestyle that he always thinks that how he will live in America? How his life style will be different and more fascinating in America than in Pakistan? And how he will be able to speak American English in a very perfect manner? Ali is very much mesmerized with western lifestyle that is why he always tries to relate things with the west. Bina Shah highlights that not only his main character Ali but all the rising youth of Pakistan are crazy to go abroad. Shah states that it is only because of the idealistic and impeccable image of these countries shown by the media. For the sake of this perfect image our youth is even ready to give up their culture, customs, language and even identity. After analyzing Bina Shah' novel *A Season for Martyrs* in the economic, political and cultural perceptions, it can be seen that Shah, in a very good manner, illustrates the lust of America for maintaining her power.

Conclusion:

Bina Shah, a novelist, journalist and an essayist is a smattering writer of Pakistan. She usually deals with the issues of diversity, tolerance, hybridity, identity and women's oppression. The depiction of American desire for power in her work *A Season for martyrs* along with many other themes is a novel one. According to Meghan Davidson Ladly (2016), no other writers have tried

to draw Bhutto's picture and political realities of Pakistan in their works, but Bina Shah has very confidently discussed Benazir's assassination and many other truths of Pakistan in her work *A Season for martyrs*.

Shah has clearly depicts the new schemes adopted by the colonizers in the modern age just to advocate their power in third world countries. Colonizers in the olden times or in the colonial era are used to govern the poor nations directly by holding their properties, regions, lands and states in the form of colonies in order to be at upper hand in the world. Now the age of direct colonialism has passed still they are maintaining their control over the less developed countries in an indirect way. Now their techniques are different but their motives are similar to the colonialism. At present they circuitously (indirectly) intercept in the politics of other countries. They rule them according to their wishes. They have such a political control that the political leaders of such states cannot dare to say no to them. Same is happening in the political spheres of Pakistan. The novel highlights that America exercises not only political but also the economic hegemony in the third world countries. She has decoyed or tempted the poor nations with economic support. America has strong economy so poor nations are compelled to seek her help in order to survive in the world. US claim that on the account of economic help they want to retain the right balance of money and power all around the world. In the semblance of advancing or developing the poor countries with monetary help they actually captivated them economically in their shackles. The novel also brings to light how America is imposing its culture, values, and beliefs in the eastern countries with the support of media. Americans describe their norms, values, education systems, social systems and ways of living in such an appealing and captivating manner that the native population of poor countries is intentionally or unintentionally bows before them. It can simply mean that they alter the mindset of indigenous people for the accomplishment of their lust for power.

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