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Requiem of a (Socialist) Dream: Locating Tāraṛ's *Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab* in Global Capitalism

Mustansar Hussain Tāraṛ's novel, *Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab* (2013) is the only novel of its kind in Urdu literature that documents the socio-political, cultural and ideological aftermath of the disintegration of Soviet Union, and its socialist ideology that provided hope of economic revival and a psychological prop to many in the Third World. It is the life narrative of a few individuals who embraced socialist ideology as young men and women, and struggled together to challenge the 'Darwinian jungle' and valorize the idea of what Ngugi in his novel *Petals of Blood* calls a socialist "human kingdom":

> The kingdom of man and woman, enjoying and loving in creative labor.[1]

Through their intertwined stories, Tāraṛ has traced the rise and fall of Marxism and its political praxis as communism/socialism. Through the fictionalized life narratives of a few characters who once believed in the grand narrative of Marxism, Tāraṛ has tried to retrieve the power and spirit of a particular moment in the contemporary world history, whose abortive end made Fukuyama propose the-end-of-history thesis.

A Powerful Indictment of Gangster Capitalism

Capitalism's cultural paraphernalia as well as ideological apparatus is expanding in the world and, through its vast cultural machine, late capitalism is at work to muffle and homogenize the rest of the globe. Thus all forms of differential

economies and cultural formations are gradually dismantled and the world is beginning to assume a singular purpose of life, that is, to consume and be consumed by the grand narrative of free market forces. *Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab*is a powerful critique of this dehumanizing aspect of capitalism.

Tāraṛ has adopted a two-pronged strategy to write this almost poetic requiem of socialism. On the one hand, adopting a detached stance, he mounts a powerful critique of global capitalism by highlighting its failures; on the other, he categorically points out how Marxism as a social philosophy and Communism/Socialism as its praxis failed their own adherents. Communism was once the hope of the workers, the proletariat, and the peasants who put up great resistance against the forces of exploitation. That is why many hardcore socialists from across the globe migrated to the Soviet Union, or to its satellite states in Eastern Europe, in the hope of a better future. However, as the communist center could not hold itself, their individual dreams also perished and they succumbed to the power and charms of capitalism. This transformation of the communist society, longing for goods of even daily needs, into a consumer society where there was abundance of capitalist goods, rendered many into destitutes while some turned out to be millionaires in the same span of time. This transformation is highlighted in the novel through the story of Galina, Zahīruddīn's Russian wife, who as a young woman works as a salesgirl in a state-run departmental store. As Tāraṛ informs, people would stand in queues up to Lenin's mausoleum to get a pair of socks, shoes, or old televisions. She was like a goddess bestowing these favours, rare items in the communist Russia in spite of its industrial progress and space and arms race with the US. But since Glasnost and Perestroika policies led to the collapse of Soviet Russia, a new international market is built near the red brick building of the old store where Galina works. The new market, a symbol of the triumph of capitalism over communism, is full of costly western goods – designer clothes, wrist watches, overcoats, handbags, cigarette lighters,

undergarments etc. – instantly available to the nouveau riche of Moscow. The ideological and existential disillusionment plaguing the committed communists is not hard to imagine. Zahīruddīn is such a character who is doubly marginalized as a communist of the old guard and a Pakistani who is now considered an outsider in Moscow and is therefore attacked by the Skin Heads. When he had gone to Moscow as a student, his socialist dream was realized in President Khrushchev's announcement that every Russian would get a home in the next two years. And they did, though the newly built state houses were not very promising. But in the post-USSR Russia, those ugly looking tenement buildings are being razed and in their place grand profitable shopping malls, luxury hotels, and casinos are erected. Zahīruddīn fears that someday soon his own flat in one of those shabby-looking buildings would be razed and a new 'Disneyland' would be raised there instead.

The novel denounces such a system that has created unequal classes by dramatizing its effects on the masses. One prototype communist-turned-capitalist in the novel is Qādir Qureishi, a ruthless man, unconcerned with the misery that his greed generates for others. The novel also presents such entrepreneurs working in complicity with the Euro-American multinational corporations that continue to exploit the labour. Zahīr, ʿĀrif and Mustafa only lament the loss of their dreams and ideals in which the working classes have access to the fruits of their labour by owning the means of production and are no longer exploited and oppressed by corrupt businessmen. Capitalism works in subtle ways to check the exploited working class from rising up and overthrowing the system of exploitation and alienation; for this purpose it employs institutional naturalization of the process via religion, the legal system, the educational system, and the government. What Marx and Engels could not have foreseen was the extraordinary influence of the media in perpetuating the idea that capitalism is the way things are supposed to be. The naturalization and mass acceptance of untruths is a necessary

component in transforming ideology into a state-sponsored system.

Nexus between Religion, Politics and Businesses

Revolutions often generate unforeseen upheavals in their wake. The opportunistsbecome business tycoons in the new Russia and those who were the leaders of their respective fields in science, technology, arts and music are forced to become beggars and jugglers in the Red Square of Moscow. Russia is fast turning into a monster consumer society, consuming western goods, designer clothes, shoes, ties, mobiles, computer games, pop music, Hollywood films, shiny magazines promoting sex, drugs, exercise machines, special diets for the rich. A thriving modeling industry, alongside the glamour of sports and beauty pageants – all typical tools of capitalism to construct carnal desires and instill greed among people for ever new brands. The nexus between businesses, religion and politics, working in connivance with the corporate media, is exposed by Tāraṛ on pages 65-67 where the requiem for the socialist dream reaches its crescendo. Thousands of statues of the great Russian leaders of revolution are pulled down from public spaces from across Russia and stored in a huge basement in a narrow Moscow street. Since these statues are made of iron, lead and other precious metals, the new capitalist government plans to make Christian crosses by melting these iconic statues. As capitalist Russia is witnessing mushroom growth of churches, they need crosses to decorate their rooftops, church-doors, and interiors. Since capitalism is the name of making profit at every cost, by fair means or foul, it is considered a huge business proposition to turn these iconic figures of history into crosses. Thus the statues of VladiMīr Lenin, who famously regarded religion as opium, are now becoming instrumental in serving religion. The irony involved here is acute. As Wāris Chaudhary offers Zahīruddīn to grab this lucrative contract, he refuses saying:

> I grew up with the poster pictures of Marx, Engels and Lenin pasted on the walls of our house by my father Shamsuddin Inqilabi. They are my ideological godfathers. Should I sell them now for religion?[2]

As Zahīruddīn goes down the basement where Lenin's statues are scattered all over the floor, it is like going into the purgatory of his soul. In the darkness he collides against a statue of Lenin. He goes into a trance seeing this modern Ozymandias lying on the ground. Here, in a magical-realist twist, Tāraṛ makes the statue address Zahīruddīn:

> You know in your Gandhara civilization, the followers of Mahatma Buddha built 17,000 temples, believing that their belief is the ultimate truth that will last till the End of the world. But all of that civilization and its own constructed truths are gone. Now kids play cricket there and those sacred places are turned into toilets by the local people. Taliban rule the place where Buddha and his philosophy reigned supreme. They have destroyed all remnants of Buddhism because they believe in the singularity and finality of their own brand of truth. So think. If a prophet and a god's statues can be ruined and destroyed, I'm just a man…So do not be perturbed, for even gods and prophets are rendered obsolete. For the world is in a state of flux and you too be part of the rat race, as there is no other way to survive.[3]

This irony is further accentuated when Tāraṛ informs that the now powerful priests dig up the remains of Czars and their wives, killed by the revolutionaries during the October revolution, and bury them with honours in the churches. They have once again become honourable because capitalism always thrives on exploiting the religious instinct of the masses and the charisma associated with the royalty.

Through Qādir Qureishi's character, Tāraṛ introduces a dramatic dialectic in the narrative, a binaristic opposition between the capitalist interests of the business class and the humanistic concerns of Wāris Chaudhary and Zahīruddīn. Qādir Qureishi is aware that capitalism uses ideology, instead

of force, to control the masses. In Walter Benjamin's analysis, the danger for that system lies in the realization of discontent by its masses. When the discontent rises to a pitch and the diversions of entertainment no longer occupy the mind that is when the alternative consciousness is raised.[4] That consciousness needs to be intoxicated with sexual fantasies that capitalism creates in abundance through its vast machine in the form of pornographic movies and literature, aphrodisiac drugs, glossy magazines of nude models, modeling industry and beauty pageants that ultimately provide fodder for the sex industry. Qādir Qureishi is the king of that world reeking of sin, deceit and exploitation of the beautiful but poor women. He successfully mixes his trade with religion as he often arranges religious ceremonies where he invites *naat* singers from Pakistan. Those 'holy' ceremonies are presided over by the grand priests of Moscow whom he praises, flatters and gives kudos for making 'the fall of the ungodly communist system possible.'

American Triumphalism, Capitalist Expansionism

In the wake of the disintegration of Soviet Russia, the Iron Curtain was removed and Russia opened its borders and cultural boundaries for the outside world. Tourists from the US and Europe poured into Moscow to kill their curiosity about the fallen communist society and system. As Tāraṛ informs the readers, many of those tourists took Russian souvenirs with them. The very rich among them even transported huge statues of Lenin to the US, with great pride, to decorate their houses and buildings as a sign of capitalist triumph over socialism. Tāraṛ has also narrated that one American billionaire from Texas imported a huge Lenin statue and installed it at the main gate of his vast house. With a stroke of ingenuousness, he hung a placard from its neck reading:

> Communists and dogs are not allowed into these premises. As a watchman I warn you. From VladiMīr Lenin.[5]

And outside a casino in Las Vegas, another statue of Lenin is placed, inviting dice players to come and try their luck with 'the capital'. And on top of a building in New York, his statue with outstretched arms is just a piece of cheap decoration. Thus he was displayed as a fallen hero of communism and a reminder of the great victory of capitalism over his Marxist utopia. Both the capital and the labour laugh at his helplessness. It reminds me of a similar celebration of capitalist triumphalism, as reported by the editors of *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*. In a magazine spread showing 'history's most ambitious leaders', a luminous bottle of Coca-Cola was placed next to Lenin's picture, with the caption: 'Only one launched a campaign that conquered the world.'[6] Such display of imperial hubris is an attempt to show that the 'conquest' of the world by the capitalist goods was just a matter of time as it was inevitable.

Disillusionment with Socialism

But Tāraṛ performs a balancing act by highlighting the failures of the socialist states. Russia was the country of long queues – queues for daily food ration, for getting a pair of socks, queue for a camera film, a dress, a tie. Tāraṛ seems to suggest that the reification of the individual also happened in the communist states as it does in the capitalist system and media discourses. The text reveals ideological and economic oppression of the poor at the hands of the new bourgeois born out of the ashes of Soviet Russia. They were quick to embrace the market economy and bourgeoisie values.

At a number of places in the novel, Tāraṛ deplores the failures and fall of the socialist dream. The USSR reached its abortive end. Though the rot might have set in long ago, it was still a mighty power for the rest of the world across the

Churchillian Iron Curtain. It was more like a fall than a downfall whose credit has been claimed by the strangest bedfellows of recent history, that is, the Islamist Jihadists and the Imperial USA. As Tāraṛ's protagonists grow old, they grow disillusioned with their lives spent in struggle for a just world order. ʿĀrif Naqvi sings his requiem steeped in classical mythological allusions.[7]

Is Militant Islam a Replacement of Socialist Resistance against Capitalism?

The question of militant Islam as the new resistance against capitalist domination has been raised by many but the most intriguing is the suggestion made by the renowned British Marxist thinker and cultural theorist, Terry Eagleton. I wonder whether Tāraṛ, at the time of writing this novel, came across this controversy (in the Euro-American press) raised by Eagleton's provocative suggestion. But in a dialogue (on p.101) Zahīr empathizes with the cause of the Taliban which shocks his friend Wāris Chaudhary. Zahīr expresses his desire to join the Taliban because they are the new, ideology-driven force resisting American imperial hubris and the global capitalism. As Wāris expresses his abhorrence at such a suggestion, Zahīr says:

> Just as people used to make fun of my father's socialist ideas and accused him of being out of step with the modern capitalist realities, the Taliban are also regarded as ignorant who are frozen in a parochial ideology . . . . But they have the commitment to their cause so much so that they blow themselves up by tying bombs to their bodies… they are at least sincere with their cause and believe in its truth fanatically… Just as we, from different regions of the world, used to sing 'The International', they too have come from so many places – Chinese, Sudanese, Egyptian, Jordanian,

> Uzbek, even British and American Muslims – but are united in a single cause.[8]

This is an ironic measure of despair of the Marxists and former revolutionaries that they now see hope for revolution in such backward-looking ideologies of hatred and parochialism.

Individual Destinies, Collective Histories

The five protagonists of the novel, Zahīruddīn, Wāris Chaudhary and Sardār Qālib in Moscow, Mustafa Islam in Budapest, and ʿĀrif Naqvi in Berlin, reveal the details of their lives not only in their confessions to others but in their musings to themselves. Their confessions in the novel are powerful and reminiscent of the tales told by oral storytellers, drawing listeners in and creating a heightened expectation of a dramatic revelation. The readers learn of remarkable events in the characters' past and also discover how their lives overlap. The characters' private thoughts are also revealed through their meditations. Zahīrudin, in particular, reminisces about the details of his migration from Boreywāla in Punjab to Moscow, his meeting and marriage with Galina, his present transformation into an old disillusioned man, his struggle to survive in the new Russia, and his visit to Pakistan where, while visiting old places in his native Boreywāla, he disappears into thin air, in circumstances that may be dubbed as magical realist in fiction. By juxtaposing each of the characters' private thoughts about themselves with the narrators' and the other characters' perceptions of them, Tāraṛ presents complex portraits of these troubled human beings.

Indeed, one of the striking features of the novel is the complexity of the five protagonists, all of whom turn out to be quite different than they at first appear to be and who, in many ways, remain enigmas to the end. Other characters in the novel also add to the narrative richness with their descriptions of events and situations. For example, Qādir Qureishi is painted as a villain with a scathing satire on his devilish activities and

for running a global market of prostitution. He is revealed through his private musings and public justifications of his shady trade that he runs with religious zeal.

Gina Islam –the Female Gypsy-Revolutionary

In this novel, Tāraṛ has created one of his strongest female characters: Gina Islam. Through her he exposes the distorted values governing human relationships in contemporary Pakistan. A gypsy by birth and temperament, she is more complex than women in any of Tāraṛ's previous works. In her role as a gypsy who has seen a lot of places and people, Gina succinctly reveals the exploitative materialism that dominates people's lives. Her humanity is reduced to a market commodity and her personal relationships to financial transactions. She does have her own sense of independence and freedom, but Tāraṛ shows these to be as illusory as the so-called independence of a neo-colonial state. She appears to reflect society's conflicts and contradictions, strengths and weaknesses. Her career illustrates the dilemmas facing many Pakistani women in a rapidly changing society, but it may also be seen as a metaphor for the fate of Pakistan itself where capitalist system and religious radicalism create cultural monsters and a confused, divided people. Her crisis of belonging is typical of majority of Pakistanis who love their country and yet yearn for an easy, peaceful life in foreign lands. She comes to Pakistan in sheer love of her father's homeland and leaves as she cannot find her roots in a land that is itself divided in terms of its cultural roots. It is in this loss of innocence and idealism that Gina differs from other Tāraṛ heroines. She is not placed on a higher moral pedestal. She stops short of perfection, and is more human than her predecessors. She has a generous personality with a lot of warmth but can, at times be selfish and reclusive. Nevertheless, independence of mind and generosity of spirit are her dominant

traits. Tāraṛ's own gypsy instinct is fully awake while describing the adventures of Gina.

Mustafa Islam Sheikh – the *Surkhā* from Lahore to Budapest

Mustafa Islam Sheikh's story is told through the interesting narrative of his daughter, Gina Islam, whose mother, Roja, was a gypsy and a socialist activist when she met Mustafa in Budapest. The late 1960s and early 70s were heady times of students' politics, protests and ideological conflicts. As a student at Punjab University Lahore, Mustafa was an active part of the struggle between the left-leaning students and the proponents of the rightist ideology, especially IJT, the student wing of Jamʿāt-i Islamī. Mustafa Islam, reminisces about those days:

> And at the Punjab University were those rebels who were called 'surkhas' [or the Reds]… I came under their influence.[9]

One of his professors, a socialist himself, offers to send him to Budapest to attend a gathering of the progressive students. He is chosen by the professor because, as he tells him:

> I'm convinced of your commitment with the socialist cause. I am aware how you stand against the rigidity of the ignoramuses of a religious party at the campus.[10]

Mustafa, the son of a shoe-merchant Murtaza Islam Sheikh, reveals how he was inspired by the writings of great progressive writers like Sajjād Zahīr, Rajindra Singh Bēdī, Krishna Chandra, Faiz, Sāhir, Jālib, Akhtarul Īmān, KaifīĀʿzmī, Josh and Manto. As a student he consumes the translations of all great Russian literature, meticulously translated by Z. Ansari. He narrates his socio-economic circumstances in Lohari, the old part of Lahore city where he grew in utter poverty. His description of smell emanating from

the shoes made of raw leather and stored in one of the rooms of their house is one of the strongest passages in the novel:

> This smell of raw leather was oozing from every nook and cranny of our house. Beds, pillows, towels, walls, nothing was without that smell. So much so that when my mother would embrace me I would feel the smell of dead cows."

And then the crowning of Tāraṛ's social satire in this description:

> However, there was one positive aspect of this extremely foul smell. It made us all insensitive to the smell coming from the gutters outside our home that were always choked and leaking human waste.[11]

There is an important aside in his narrative. While tracing the origins of various gypsy tribes in Europe and their common bloodline with the gypsies in Punjab, Tāraṛ muses about their tragic yet unwritten history as many of them were exterminated by Hitler's Third Reich. However, unlike the victims of the Holocaust, these Roma gypsies perished without leaving any trace in history as their extermination has never been made the subject of books and Hollywood films. There is a whole industry in the US and Europe that never lets the world forget those crimes committed against the Jewish people. Holocaust is made a living memory, turned into a cultural industry and a symbol of barbarity and banality of evil. By such constant celebration of those atrocities, the Jews have been gaining sympathy, moral support and all its material benefits from the big powers. But what about the other victims of Hitler?[13]

Zahīruddīn, the Marxist from Boreywāla

Zahīruddīn, the son of a trade union leader, Shamsuddin Inqilabi, goes to attend Moscow University on a scholarship programme. He falls in love with Galina and settles there. He cannot come to terms with the new reality where Christianity was making a loud comeback replacing hammer and sickle

with the Christian crosses everywhere in the length and breadth of Russia. Zahīruddīn watches with dismay the mushroom growth of churches across all Russia where even President Putin appears, in shiny and elaborate priestly gowns, to bow to the priests, kissing their holy hands as a sign of his submission to the church. For Zahīruddīn, this is beyond his comprehension. He changes into a grumbling old man who himself begins to attend religious congregation of Juma prayers on the one hand, and regresses into his past and recalls and reminisces about his Punjabi seasonal festivals, flowers, birds, and ponds, and runs after the cotton flakes of the simal/sumbal trees that bring back fond memories of his childhood in Punjab.

ʿĀrif Naqvi

ʿĀrif Naqvi compares himself with Krishna, a god of the Hindu mythology; as a revolutionary ʿĀrif used to sing songs of socialist utopia on his flute. He deplores that he now sings for capitalism, like an American pop singer.

He meets his German wife, Hiltered, when they were young in Berlin and fall for each other: Hiltered for his fiery speeches and ʿĀrif for her serene beauty. Though ʿĀrif , like most communists, is not a religious man, he still derives inspiration from the analogy that he draws from the great sacrifice of Imam Hussain in Karbala, which has become a metaphor of all such sacrifices in his view. The Berlin wall falls and that is the end of an ideology and the triumph of its anti-thesis from across the Wall. Extending this metaphor of an epic struggle between good and evil derived from Muslim history, Tāraṛ writes:

> When the wall fell, West Berlin with all its capitalist shine –modernist architecture, economic activity, free trade, casinos, and night clubs – all the capitalist tricks to hoodwink people, blinded the East Berliners. He saw the face of Yazid reflected in those buildings made of glass. Hussain was once

> again overpowered. . . Neither the crowns could be dethroned, nor the royal seats could be destroyed, nor did the masses empower.[14]

As his socialist dream turns into a nightmare, he decides to leave his adopted home and go back to Karachi. But history has surpassed him here too. He cannot recognize this city which is now turned into an international metropolis reeking with crimes of all horrible kinds. Tāraṛ writes the requiem of this once peaceful city thus:

> And this city was ruled by bullets. *Bhatha* [extorting money from the business community by threatening them; or demanding protection money] was received as if it were a religious duty. Dead bodies sewed up in sacks were discovered every day; racial crimes and riots were consuming all communities… And he [ʿĀrif] was wandering like a lost child in the streets … he felt he did not belong here or anywhere, neither Karachi nor Berlin.[15]

The pathos of this loss of roots, space, identity and belonging is writ large on his face.

Wāris Chaudhary

Sitting in his grand villa that has walls made of thick glass, Wāris Chaudhary has been completely consumed by the capitalist goods, if not its ideology. He muses that items produced for pleasure are in actuality a means of drowning his senses, realizing that the products he has been buying are not the natural outgrowths of his desires, but precisely manufactured bourgeois temptations designed to sell false dreams of fulfillment.In creating this world of heady pursuits, capitalism increasingly does away with the need for Repressive State Apparatuses by instilling in the working class the idea that they must possess leisure and entertainment products to elevate their value. The ruling class subtly subverts the occasions for serious questioning of what is going on in society.

In the cosy comfort of his grand house, standing in front of the glass-wall, Wāris Chaudhary reflects:

> Alas we are now the pimps of capitalism. The masses could not rule. Life is still very hard for the tillers of land and labour. There are still fields from where the farmers do not get their livelihood. Where is your idealism, Wāris of Lyallpur? Remember the time when you never had enough money in your pocket to buy even a plate of rice from Jahangir Pulau.[16]

But he refutes his own burning argument:

> No, I chose what was right, the new reality. I could not, like my friend Zahīruddīn, live with the dead leaders and their defeated high ideals. I adopted the path of existence not extinction, the path of reconciliation. But I haven't relented; I haven't yet relinquished my dream.[17]

It is Wāris Chaudhary, the anti-thesis of Qādir Qureishi, who consciously decides to enter the belly of the capitalist beast, revelling in its offerings. He has embraced the capitalist economy but not its ideology and dehumanizing values.

Sardār Qālib

Sardār Qālib is the son-in-law of a former KGB officer who, since the decline of Soviet Russia, runs the whole establishment of public toilets in Moscow. But the responsibility to collect daily revenue from these toilets near the tourist resorts of Moscow is that of Sardār Qālib. Qālib is the son of Sardār Seemāb whose character is perhaps based on the renowned revolutionary Pakistani poet Habīb Jālib.

Since struggle has always remained one of the permanent realities of human history, *Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab* may arguably be considered a celebration of that human spirit. Indeed, the impression is created that the fact of struggle may, in itself, be an end worth celebrating, because a single struggle or an act of defiance must send reverberations down the

corridors of history, that struggle or an act of defiance easily acquires larger-than-life dimensions in the minds of the people. Yet, the truth is that if the fact of struggle and the act of heroism have consistently been recurring in the history of the people, it is in part precisely because oppression, social injustice and disaffection have also been recurrent among the masses. All those who left their homes and homelands in the hope of creating a just world order feel betrayed by the socialist promise. Particularly, Zahīruddīn who, in his old age, moves about in bitterness, his consciousness of broken promises, and of the wider betrayal of collective dreams.

The Interlinked Fates of Fallen Russia and a Falling Pakistan

Aiy Ghazāl-iShab is an overtly political novel, and the author's intention is to expose the contemporary cultural pessimism and other ills of post-Soviet, post-Cold war era. Tāraṛ's detached perspective in this novel makes it clear that he does not think that his role as a writer is to change society, because only people can bring about change. He seems to believe that writers may only point out where things are wrong, though fiction may embody the aspirations and hopes of the majority of people. While documenting the socio-historical changes in the post-Soviet era, Tāraṛ does contextualize Pakistan's postcolonial condition where the poorer segments of society have been alienated by the ruling elite. This is abundantly made clear in the plight of Sardār Qālib's family in Pakistan. His nephew, Sardār Mīr, is forced to work as a labourer, despite having a fine and sensitive disposition. When the narrative shifts from Moscow, Berlin and Budapest to Lahore, Tāraṛ shows the 'human market'[18] where labourers and educated but unemployed youth wait from dawn to dusk in the hope of being hired by those who come in their SUVs. They hire only the able-bodied, as slaves were rated in ancient slave-trade. This is a modern bonded-labour market. And Tāraṛ,

through ʿĀrif Naqvi and Mustafa Islam, sings a requiem of Pakistan.

> This country has lost its flame, ʿĀrif. It gives smoke only… Nothing but ash all around. I do not see any ambers of hope that we may stay and turn them into a flame. In this country, insensitivity to the present and dishonesty, wearing robes of religious hypocrisy, rule the roost. We would be killed on the dark paths. We do not belong here anymore.[19]

It is significant that this transformation of Pakistan into a state of religious extremism is closely linked to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan that resulted into the growth of 'jihad' industry, supported by the pumping of millions of petro-dollars into Pakistan. From a traditional, liberal society, Pakistan was turned into a country where sectarianism, intolerance of other religions, and radicalization of even the common people grew due to various state apparatuses effectively used by a military general whom Tāraṛ remembers as 'the man with frog-like eyes' in his other novels too. At the behest of his neo-conservative international bosses, he single-handedly transformed Pakistani society and turned it into the hub of international terrorism. Even though he is long dead, his political progeny is still ruling it through his educational policies and controlling over state media and other Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (ISAs and RSAs.)[20] The majority are alienated from this land of many religions, myriad mystical traditions and cultural practices.

The failures of capitalism are much more glaring, Tāraṛ suggests, than those of communism. Tāraṛ describes some of those failures when he mounts a scathing critique of the interplay of religion, politics, business and military power, resulting into large scale corruption. For example, he narrates how a certain Makkāh colony in the posh area of Gulberg in Lahore came into existence. Once just a slum area existing on the fringes of Lahore, it is turned into a mega real estate project. In connivance with the police, municipal corporation officials, local councillors and some politicians, the

construction mafia occupies this land by force, kicking out the gypsies from the area.

While narrating the story of another Pakistani in Moscow, Qādir Qureishi, a sham socialist who made his fortune in Moscow after the fall of USSR, Tāraṛ laments that:

> the printing presses that were known for publishing communist literature and the great classical Russian literature that would reach Peoples Publishing House in Lahore, were now publishing cheap American spy thrillers and pornographic magazines, for when the fires of sex run in the veins of capitalism only then it makes filthy rich profits.[21]

Qureishi now runs a vast empire of prostitution from Moscow to Lahore, UAE, Thailand, and even many poor African countries where he would provide lanky Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, and Ukrainian girls on very cheap rates because the fall of the communist empire had rendered these people extremely poor. These tall beautiful girls not only cater to the sexual needs of the promiscuous in Europe and the Middle East, they would serve another purpose in Dubai: the Indian film industry, Bollywood, hires them to provide a sizzling background in the dance sequences. They are hot property for the Indian film industry. Perhaps the new realization in new Russia is that space race with the US and the export of fine arts and literature are not as profitable as the export of this living human flesh. Some of these women were university teachers as Tāraṛ reports:

> one day a sober looking attractive woman comes to Qureishi's office to offer her services for the new trade: "Sir, I used to sell my brain, now I want to sell my body as there is no demand for my ideas in new Russia.[22]

Qādir Qureishi is proud that in the last shipment that he has sent abroad there is a Ph.D. professor, two scientists and one researcher of classical Russian literature. Tāraṛ gives a satirical twist to this man's justification of doing this business. Qureishi claims that he does it as a religious duty which the

atheists like Wāris Chaudhary and Zahīruddīn cannot understand. According to his pervert argument, since these girls are the daughters of non-believers, he sends them to the Muslim countries as war booty (*māl-i ghanīmat*). He is confident that his trade is a community service for which he will be rewarded in the life hereafter.[23]

Narrative Structure and Characterization

Structurally *Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab* moves in concentric circles. Each circle contains the story of a character; that circle in turn is entwined with the other circles. Thus the individual stories progress at their own but ultimately meet to form the bigger circle that has been surrounding the lives of these characters. Like his previous work, *Khas-o-Khāshāk Zamānē*, this novel also shows a relative complexity which is inseparable from the ambitiousness of its author's aim and scheme: examining the tangle of human relationships, making clear patterns comprehensively observed in the individual lives of people and showing the wholeness of their history and, above all, to achieving these objectives in a way that captures the changeable, dramatic and often chaotic qualities of life or history as it was unfolding. Consequently, this novel shows a greater attention to form than his earlier novels.

Tāraṛ takes care to elaborate his view of human relationships, to which is closely related his view of history. He demonstrates the complexity of human relationships by exploring the whirlpool effect of people's actions, social interactions and personal dreams and schemes. Then, out of the confusion, emerges a clear pattern described by the narrator in almost magical realist vein through Zahīr's vision and final disappearance and, in the final pages of the novel, through the mystical image of love and hate derived from Gita.

A novel on such a subject is bound to have an overtly political message and a didactic voice that emerges from the narrators as well as individual characters. The damning tone of

the book, as it criticizes capitalism and neo-imperialism, detracts from the work's artistic integrity. It may also be assumed that the narrative voices of Zahīr and ʿĀrif are together the voice(s) of consciousness in the novel, and that Tāraṛ endorses their socialist analysis and condemnation of capitalist exploitation. To some readers, this may be regarded as a shortcoming for a piece of an imaginative literature in which the reader is guided what to believe. However, even this tradition of creating art for life is not altogether deplorable and is in conformity with, for instance, the Shavian intrusions in drama.

This emphasis on different interpretations, again underscored by the use of varying perspectives in the narration, seems to urge readers not to take at face value any political viewpoint but to sift through the different impressions and think through possible solutions. This appeal softens the otherwise didactic thrust of the novel. But despite this weakness, Tāraṛ's work offers a bold and original style that is eminently suited to its subject matter, and the unusual method of storytelling adds richness and depth to this ambitious and complex novel.

Conclusion

The main concern of the novel is to present an interpretation of the contested history of Marxism and communism. It divides humanity, in rather Marxian-Manichean terms, into those who exploit and those who are exploited and subjugated. One of the lessons of history is that the so-called victims, the poor, and the downtrodden, had always struggled with their hands and songs of courage and hope, to end their oppression and exploitation; that they would continue to struggle until a human kingdom comes. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,*one of the classics in the twentieth century social sciences, Joseph Schumpeter made the provocative prediction that capitalism is bound to disappear –

not because of its failure, but because of its success.[24] In my opinion, its 'excesses' would cause its downfall.

This requiem of an unfulfilled dream of almost global reach ends on a strange note. Just as Tāraṛ ended his previous novel, *Khas-o-Khāshāk Zamānē*, on a mystical tale from Attār's *Conference of the Birds*, here he ends the novel on a mystical thought derived from Gita, Hinduism's main scripture.

> Lotus flower leaves and wild-duck's oily plumes keep them dry even in water… stay safe and free from worldliness even while living in the world… So that one may be free from any sense of loss as one departs.[25]

Ending a novel, which is otherwise about the material conditions of the world, on a note of mystical renunciation might be a dig at the failure of the revolutionaries who turn to mysticism as their disillusionment grows. But this is just a critical speculation. The novelist has the right to write; the critic has the right to interpret.

Notes

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1 NgugiwaThiongo,*Petals of Blood*(New York: Penguin Books, 1977).

2 Mustansar Hussain Tāraṛ,*Aiy Ghazāl-i Shab*(Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2013),p.68.

3 Ibid., p.68-69.

4 Walter Benjamin,"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* Edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin (Harvard University Press, 2008).

5 Tāraṛ, p.107.

6 Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus,*Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*(UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.7.

7 Tāraṛ, p. 193-94.

8 Tāraṛ, p.101.
This suggestion is repeated towards the end of the book, by Arif Naqvi to Mustafa Islam while they are on their last trip to Lahore. However, by the end of their conversation they both laugh away the idea. Eagleton's anxiety of influence may not be easily acceptable to many in Pakistan and the rest of the civilized world. During a conference at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Lahore in 2011, I asked the opinion of the renowned Marxist Indian critic Aijāz Ahmad if he agrees with Eagleton's provocative suggestion. Ahmad condemned it and said that there was no parallel possible between Marxism/Socialism and the Taliban resistance. However, it seems that for some disillusioned Marxists at least, it is hard to resist the temptation to give the Taliban the credit of resistance against global capitalism. Tāraṛ's two protagonists, in their utter desperation want to believe that the Taliban are the new hope against tyranny; as they have a committed and passionate ideology, they do not shy away from any sacrifice, either of themselves or of others. Violence is an essential ingredient of their strategy. But the question does come to the readers' mind. Is Tāraṛ, like Eagleton, empathizing with the cause of the Islamic resistance movements like the Taliban? I think it's too farfetched but he does make two of his important characters broach this possibility. Such is the state of desperation among the intellectuals, especially those leaning to the Left.

9 Tāraṛ, p.36.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p.37.

12 Ibid. p.38.

13 While tracing their origins in the ancient India who through successive migrations reached Europe and became victims of Hitler's war crimes, Tāraṛ writes, p. 40.

14 Tāraṛ, p.22-23.

15 Ibid.,p.24.

16 Ibid., pp.85-88.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p.235-36.

19 Ibid.,p.238.

20 Louis Althusser's terms, Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses.

21 Tāraṛ, p.21.

22 Ibid., p.53.

23 Ibid., p.54.

24 Joseph A. Schumpeter,*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*(Taylor &Francis e-Library, 2003).First published in the UK in 1943.

25 Tāraṛ, p.296.

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