After reading the selected works of John Hoyer Updike, Orhan Pamuk, Hanif Kureishi and Khaled Hosseini, it may be said that there are two major factors behind the proliferation of literature representing political Islam, mainly novels, in postmodern era. The establishment of the theocratic rule in Iran in 1979, and the 9/11 incident, have had great influence on these postmodern writers.

During the last three decades from the 1980s till date a flood of literature representing political Islam appeared. Most of the works representing political Islam that emerged after the September 11 attacks received extensive critical acclaim and reached a broad audience in varied strata of society. In my assessment of this fiction, I have examined the different issues which made both its appearance and accomplishment possible.

The great majority of post-modern writers dealt with the theme of political Islam and its involvement in the militant activities from the observer’s point of view. This is by no means a wholly new trend but it has got its impetus only after the establishment of the modern world’s first theocratic Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979. It has drawn the attention of the writers after Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989, which becomes the major concern after the 9/11 event and thus much literature is produced. The depiction of the life of the militants having roots in the political Islam in the period’s fiction resulted from the novelists’ excessive interest towards it. Most of these writers wrote about the fanatics and their involvement in several radical organizations from the spectator’s perspective and portrayed the subject matter powerfully. The factor of alienation in the life of the
fanatics and their incapability to become part of the world they longed for is depicted by the novelists. They try to accomplish some kind of spiritual identification. John Updike’s *Terrorist* is an ideal example of this kind of fiction.

The attacks on the American Twin Towers had a substantial impact on the mind of the writers which is reflected through the depiction of their imaginary characters and their backgrounds. Updike’s, Pamuk’s and Hosseini’s protagonists are some of the prominent examples in this regard. Moreover, most of the protagonists represented in the fiction representing political Islam are exclusively concerned with the look for individual styles of survival, a mission that without doubt takes them away from their society and culture.

There is a flood of novels representing political Islam published in the last three decades and they have met with a lot of success. Many novels, like Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album* (1995), Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) got instant recognition on their first appearance. *The Kite Runner* was made into highly successful, commercial film. The other novels like Pamuk’s *Snow* and Updike’s *Terrorist* which also concern us in this thesis, though, were not made into commercial films drew great attention of the people. It was possibly the first time in the history of English literature that fiction representing political Islam enjoyed such wide critical and public acclaim worldwide.

Though the literary tradition involving political Islam started flourishing a couple of decades before the ending of the twentieth century, it has reached its climax only after the 9/11 incident. There are ample examples of the elements of this impact. There are realistic documentation of the life style of the radical Islamists and presentation of the grievances of the followers of political Islam against the Western
imperialism. The usual aspects that seem to be truly cut in the period’s fiction are those associated with the spheres of struggle of the Islamists, and collective political action.

The concerned writers have handled the fundamentalism factor in their selected fictional works successfully. Updike has effectively used a couple of verses from the Qur’ān in Terrorist to show that the decision of Ahmad, the protagonist of the novel with an aim to achieve his mission is wrong. In fact, Ahmad’s preparation to commit suicide with a hope to enter into the heaven is merely the result of the misguidance by his Arabic teacher. Likewise, Hanif Kureishi, who had vague notions about Islam, and it was out of curiosity that he personally visited the mosques and had conversation with some of the religious preachers. He met with the followers of radical Islam to have firsthand knowledge about their psyche. His firsthand impression of the people who appear “educated, integrated, as English as David Beckham” (Malik 202) enabled him to represent the clash of two ideologies – Islamic and the postmodern in his novel The Black Album, in his screen play My Beautiful Laundrette and in one of his short story “My Son the Fanatic” realistically. Kureishi’s keen observation of the religion in general and Islam in particular provides him with such a strong platform that he says to Hirsh Sawhney in an interview that: “... I don’t think it’s only Islam that’s dangerous. All forms of religious omnipotence are. In that sense Marxism and Fascism are dangerous” (Sawhney).

Expectedly, the publishers around the world became ready to accept the literary works which talked about political Islam. The readers from different strata of life showed great interest in it. The Writers in general were confident of achieving a large number of readers without endangering the possibilities of publication and fame. Updike, Pamuk, Kureishi and Hosseini too got overwhelming responses from the
readers so far as their fictional works under discussion are concerned. Realistic depiction of the Islamists in particular and the characters in general based on present scenario itself is one of the distinguishing characteristics of their fiction. With new scrutiny and a great amount of legitimacy, these writers presented the life of the Islamists as they had known it through various incidents. Radical Islamists worldwide turned into literary material for fiction. There is an almost general consensus that such documentary political novels, no matter what their political perspective maybe, have a great value in the mere fact that they put the life of the Islamists at the centre of their interest. This cultural involvement is natural in the material of such novels; life of the Islamists, language, society, and regionality. One key purpose of these novels which needs emphasis, however, is their indirect remarks on the clash of fundamentalisms in the case of pre and post-9/11 fiction representing political Islam.

Political Islam, being at the centre of discussion, the selected novels under discussion explore the distinctiveness of this version of Islam and by doing so unmask its ideology. Despite the fact that the majority of the period’s novelists did not mean to misrepresent Muslim identity, for it was not a subject for most of them, their representation of the lives of Muslims has left many questions unanswered. To emphasise the fact that their work was not written to criticize or attack or misrepresent some novelists had to express this in their articles and interviews.

The novels under discussion, though treating questions of Islamic identity and politics, do not lack secular content. Love stories and sexual affairs are also considered as the important traits of the selected fiction of Updike and Kureishi, which are to some extent accountable for the achievement and recognition of their novels. In the novels, love and sex become the hero’s primary source of contentment and self-realization. Ahmad, the protagonist of Updike’s *Terrorist* is involved with his
schoolmate Joryleen. Shahid’s relationship with his middle-aged teacher Deedee Osgood forms the basis of the plot of Kureishi’s novel *The Black Album*. Most of his adventures are based on this relationship. However, the treatment/depiction of the tangible reality of contemporary Turkey and Afghanistan in Pamuk’s *Snow* and Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* respectively are sufficient for the success and popularity of these novels. The only notable romantic feature in *Snow* is the protagonist Ka’s romantic aspiration as reflected through his yearning for the company of İpek with whom he has aspired to live merrily in Frankfurt. Hosseini becomes so engrossed in handling the theme of Afghanistan’s anarchy in his novels that he left little scope for romance except Amir-Soraya plot (*The Kite Runner*) who got married shortly after their meeting with each other in San Francisco, America.

One of the most prominent features in the narratives of the novels under discussion is the quest for self-realization. Most of these novels trace the lucks of a single, young man in his journey towards self-realization. It is obvious in the cases of the protagonists Ahmad and Shahid of Updike’s *Terrorist* and Kureishi’s *The Black Album* respectively. Finally, both of them have redeemed themselves through their self realization. Updike and Kureishi have maintained the inner-strength and integrity of the characters in unfriendly surroundings through their skilful presentation. In John Updike, fury against imperialism and the Western culture is a means to become part of them. And once the significance of the Islamic Shari’ah comes under threat due to the influence of the Western entertainment, the protagonist is trapped in them where there is no way out.

Updike has been successful in his attempt to look into the driving forces of the terrorists. His narration of the subject matter related to the collapse of the World Trade Center from the standpoint of the survivors is very effective. Updike’s
protagonist Ahmad is found in a state of confusion. The dilemma of Ahmad, the would-be terrorist, is due to the fact that he doesn’t really want to go to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel with the suicide bombing, but his consciousness about the responsibility to play the assigned role is the motivating force behind such decision. However, the weakness of the protagonist lies in his inability to take firm decision. Updike, thus, successfully explores the motivation of the religious fundamentalists and depicts the conflict-ridden relationship between the two cultures—the culture of America and that of Arabs. He has proved that Ahmad’s jihad against the infidels in the said context is not according to the dictate of the Qur’an. His suicidal attempt in this context is also against Islamic Shari’ah.

In Pamuk’s Snow, however, the conflicts are envisaged in terms of ideological differences, a crystal-clear confrontation between the ideology of political Islam and the ideology of the secular government of Turkey. Pamuk has successfully depicted the political and social events of Turkey and the subsequent conflict between Islamism and secularism in black and white term. He illustrates both the inadequacies and enabling factors that constitute Islam and the secular government of Turkey. On the one hand, Pamuk has successfully portrayed the character like the radical Islamist Blue who adores Ayatollah Khomeini so far as the protection of ‘Islamic faith’ is concerned, to represent the demands of the Islamists in a secular country. On the other hand, the author has depicted the character like Sunay Zaim who considers himself to be like Atatürk and is greatly influenced by the ideology of Hegel which states that ‘history and theatre are made of the same materials’, to show the dominance of the secular government of Turkey over fundamentalism. Pamuk’s keen interest in human liberalism is evident in Snow. It is reflected through his inclusion of two Kemelisit plays in the novel with a purpose to liberate women from veil. Though it has drawn
much attention of the people of the West in particular, it is not encouraging to the Muslims because veil is mandatory in Islam. Above all, the writer has to be given due credit for his skilful handling of the big themes such as cultural change, identity crisis, tradition and modernity, and East-West conflict with an appropriate depiction of the various ethnic groups of Turkey which includes the Turks, the Kurds, and the Azeris etc.

Hanif Kureishi is committed in his work to explore the clash of fundamentalisms. *The Black Album* of Kureishi, in addition to his screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* and the short story “My Son the Fanatic” is the most suitable example in this regard. Unlike Pamuk’s *Snow*, the dominant clash in this novel is between the varied ideology of Islam and postmodernism. The author has depicted very effectively the extreme end of the ideology of political Islam through various characters of his works. For instance, Riaz Al-Hassan, Chad, and Hat in *The Black Album* are notable in this context. Omar and Ali, the protagonists of My Beautiful Laundrette and “My Son the Fanatic” respectively also come under this category. Like Ahmad, the protagonist of Updike’s *Terrorist*, Shahid, the main character of Kureishi’s *The Black Album* too is incapable of sticking to one decision. However, the statement of Mark Stein on *The Black Album* that its “strict dichotomous structure is reminiscent of a morality play” (Stein 131) and dubbed the novel as a ‘didactic’ one, certainly raise questions about Kureishi’s political writing. Sara Upstone has rightly point out that:

*The Black Album* represents, most interestingly, a particular irony in this regard. This is because its didacticism is in the service of forcefully stressing the value of the concept of plurality and cultural hybridity against systems of fundamentalist thought. That the multiple
and unstable is presented as a necessary absolute is a contradiction which potentially undercuts its own value as a social belief system. It is this tension which is undoubtedly reflected in initial readings of the novel. Read within the framework of Western postcolonial theory, Kureishi’s evocation of hybridity strongly evokes the discipline’s central concerns. (Upstone 5)

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini has given a very clear picture of the contrast between the Islamic Shari’ah based Taliban government and the liberal government that ruled Afghanistan before the Taliban regime. The writer’s depiction of the major incidents that took place in the history of Afghanistan during the three decades, from the communist turmoil to the Soviet attack to the Bush-led American war against the Taliban, is well-knit and praiseworthy. One of the most important reasons behind the popularity of Hosseini’s novels is his personal experience which leads authenticity to his treatment of the Afghan political scene before the freedom of the country from the Taliban and the special emphasis that he has laid on the Taliban regime in his novels. It is noteworthy to mention the author’s vivid portrayal of the Taliban government that has made new laws based on the Shari’ah replacing the laws made by the liberal government; and the skilful portrayal of the Taliban’s interference in the educational right of the girls who have been debarred from going to schools. Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* also deal with these issues with a greater emphasis on the fate of women in Afghanistan who have been victimized and for whom higher education and freedom were dreams. It shows the author’s extreme concern about the fate of the Afghan victims and thus, his fiction is characterized by sympathy. The comparison and contrast between the two governments that is the Northern Alliance and the Taliban as portrayed by Hosseini is notable. He has also
shown very clearly the contrast between the ‘modern’ women from the urban areas and the rural women, one a figure of modernity, the other hidden behind veils.

In a nutshell, what Updike, Pamuk, Kureishi and Hosseini attempt to focus in their works is the idea of clash of fundamentalisms and secularism. In spite of their limitations as mentioned above, these writers have succeeded in creating fiction that represents political Islam in their selected novels, short stories and plays. The fiction shows how the Islamists try to overcome the threat of the Western imperialism, secularism and postmodernism. The pre and post 9/11 fiction of these authors function ideologically and artistically, reflecting the clash between the dominant ideology of the West and the ideology of political Islam.
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