Chapter 7
TERRORIST
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John Updike once said, ‘Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better.’ Throughout his literary career, Updike has been a keen observer of ordinary life around him. Often he tempts his readers to re-evaluate their preconceived notions of life. (amsaw.com, *It Happened in History*)

It was always hard not to be secretly a little annoyed at John Updike for being so good at everything. The famous novels aside, memoir, travel reportage, children’s literature, humour, literary criticism and essays on everything from Renaissance painting to Boston Red Sox great Ted Williams poured from his typewriter. The mirror in which he viewed life, pleasingly, reflected back this lively element for him in its most exact, true and unbiased manner. It carried everything ranging from physical aspects to philosophical, ideological, political, spiritual and moral ones.

In his last novel, Updike somewhat goes beyond such themes as confined to Christianity as *In the Beauty of the Lilies* and the quest for God’s existence as in *Roger’s Version* and goes as far as to penetrate into another grand religion such as Islam and portray the misconceptions of Islamic teaching amid political stigma along with an individualistic viewpoint that salvation can be achieved through so-called purification of earth of its considerable chunk of non-believers.

Ibrahim N. Abusharif wrote in his article that Updike was an experienced author, a keen observer and an accomplished ‘noticer’, a man with stories to tell. His method of argumentation was smart and compelling. (Abusharif, 2006)

Updike’s novel, *Terrorist* (2006), is an interesting or ambulance-chasing choice of a narrative from an author of high ‘literary’ standing. It depicts the emergence of an elusive ‘home-grown’ terrorist plot brewing in an imaginary, decaying post-industrial city, ironically named New Prospect, somewhere in New
Jersey – thus almost literally in the shadow of 9/11, both in time and place (except this time targeting the Lincoln Tunnel during rush hours), as if some key facet of that event had been somehow overlooked. The elliptical plot focuses primarily on the experiences of a very lonely but extremely devout eighteen-year old American-Muslim, named Ahmad; but it also orbits around the relationships between other characters, all of whom are related to Ahmad within a few degree of separation from his immediate social environment all the way to the secretary of Homeland Security (who seems extremely bewildered by the motives of Islamist terrorists and feels tragically-impotent in the thankless job of facing the shadowy nuisance they represent). 

(Anien Kacou, 2012)

But what shapes 9/11 into a thought provoking and finger raising novel, is Updike’s statement quoted in New York Times-

‘A lot of Koran does not speak very eloquently to a Westerner. Much of it is either legalistic or opaquely poetic. There is a lot of hellfire inscriptions of making unbelievers drink molten metal, occur more than once. It’s not a fuzzy, lovable book, although in the very next verse there can be something quite generous. . . . Arabic is very twisting, very beautiful. The call to prayer is quite haunting: it almost makes you a believer on the spot. My feeling was, ‘This is God’s language and the fact that you don’t understand it, means you don’t know enough about God.’

(Abusharif, 2006)

What Updike’s statement provokes, however, is actually important. Has there been a serious analysis of how the themes of Quran and even its style are perceived by a mind Schooled in the West? Does the current animus and caricatures truly represent an unbiased reading of the text book?
The Quran’s stand, even in its cursory reading, is a powerful statement of, yes, inalienable rights and, in many ways, human agency. The Quran upholds human individual agency, that each individual has access to God, His scriptures: no clerical bureau to move through, no idols to lavish with honey, but a one-to-one prayerful and direct proximity to the All-Holy, regardless of race or affluence. Theology and sociology are not distant cousins at all. If one has access to Heaven with no tolls to pay, then its social dynamics are likely corollaries.

Drinking molten brew is an interesting example that came to Updike’s mind but actually opposes the very point he tries to make about Western appeal. Horrific as the Hell passages are in the Quran, we must go beyond integuments and distil the facts: the inmates of Hell and the dwellers of Paradise Gardens are in ‘circumstances’ that are logically consistent with Western social and political diktats of individual responsibility, that ‘deeds’ mean something, a meaning that transcends any kind of advantage (Old Testament) and one-time salvation utterance (New Testament). All of life, therefore, is an ethical arena, a crucial to prove one’s commitment to the social or religious ‘agreement’ (Quran). The ordering principle and highest truth of life, in the eyes of the Muslim and Book, is the existence of God, His oneness and incomparability, our accountability, humanity’s constant state of return to Him. But ordering principles have always had problems surviving without a path, an identifiable and sometimes ritualistic way in which the subscriber of the Principle decide to take. In other words, Truth (in human trust) requires something to do, something that brings meaning and definition to one’s day. The human creature has an inner, abstract world and also an outer organic ‘body’ that functions in space and time. It makes no sense that revealed religion would neglect the latter and speak only to abstract being, especially when both aspects are God’s creations and not exempted
of the religion project. It is implausible to expect belief to survive internment in the heart with no external ‘visible’ signs. This is a paradigm that fits in the modern Western understanding of human deeds, their evaluations and place in the dynamic relationship between cause and effect, and accountability.

What makes it difficult for ‘Western’ readers to connect with the Quran, is not the Book’s themes or underlying ethos, but the modern political stigma that stalk Islam and its scripture, which can easily cover one’s recognition of the Quran’s core theme and its congruence with many contemporary concepts. The leadership of the Muslim community in America is now made up of more of converts who came from sundry backgrounds but who found an overpowering appeal in the Quran and its first recipient that ultimately led them to pursue its scholarship. Quran apparently figures in their conversation and this is exactly what Updike’s last line tries to convey that Quran should not be the object of conversation rather it should be the subject; and if one deduces ‘violence’ as message of Quran, it means that one doesn’t possess complete knowledge about it or about God.

(patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2006)

In his novel, Terrorist, Updike suggests that what we have overlooked about 9/11 is that there may be an ultimate bond of meaning or perhaps meaninglessness or even an uncomfortable empathy, between Islamist terrorists and their American victims or enemies: and the feeling they share is a feeling of dissatisfaction with the meaningless promises of secular modernity and materialism (the decaying post industrial city of New Prospect). Updike also suggests that a key, universal philosophical lesson emerges from the difference in how this novel’s main characters cope with their feelings of modern meaninglessness. That lesson is a lesson about ‘evil’; it is that Americans should resist the essentialist illusion that they can ever pin
down all evil ‘once and all’ and that they should gracefully or at least ironically accept the anxiety of having to engage with it, in what it would be described as a Sisyphean Jihad.

In fact, resisting the temptation to deny the tragically elusive of terrorism might be a necessary step in coping with it intelligently as opposed to allowing American self to remain, like the Secretary of Homeland Security (symbolising impotent efforts), bewildered by it, thereby running the risk of either overreacting or becoming blind to the share of responsibility that is every American’s due.

The lesson emerges from two main characters – Ahmad, a Central High school product being unawaringly trained to be Al-Qaida recruit, and Mr. Jack Levy, a guidance counsellor at Central High. Ahmad’s mission is to bring the plot to completion with his ultimate act of self-sacrifice but without denying his crucial part of responsibility when he decides not to go forward with his plan for ‘martyrdom’, as a result of disruption of the plot by Mr. Levy who also symbolises Ahmad’s alter-ego.

(Amien Kacou, 2012)

Apart from philosophical aspect, if the novel is judged from a bit narrower angle of personal and educational point of view, undoubtedly, many questions are raised on moral and academic standard of America. At a time, when so much official discourse is directed at merely demonising suicide bombers, defining them as an unknowable enemy, terrifying evil but reassuringly others, Updike’s project – to explore a set of circumstances that might explain how an American mixed-blood teenager could find himself driving a truck full of explosives towards New York city with the express intention of killing both himself and as many of his fellow citizens as possible – seems an important one. He may not have answers but at least he is trying to ask a number of questions. What does it say about America that within a few
months of leaving school, a pair of intelligent and sensitive children like Joryleen Grant and Ahmad, have become a prostitute who takes a ‘puff of crack now and then’ and an Al-Qaida recruit?

By the time, the counsellor, Jack Levy starts to take an interest in Ahmad, it’s too late for him to have much influence over the boy as he himself recognises. But even if it were not, he would still be repeatedly distracted from his mission to persuade Ahmad to go to college, to develop a broader view of the world. Mostly, Jack is distracted by Ahmad’s mother, Teresa Mulloy, with whom he ends up having an affair. Teresa cannot see what is happening to her son or the danger he is in. Many reasons contribute to this thing- introvert and secretive nature of her son, her own job and long working hours along with overtime painting and above all, her sexually playful nature pulled her away from her son- again the emphasis is on theme of contemplation, close attention and observation. She says:

I’m trying to work bigger and brighter. Life is so short, I suddenly figured, why keep fussing at the details? Perspectives, shadows, fingernails- people don’t notice and your peers, the other painters accuse you of being just an illustrator.

(Terrorist, 81)

But, for Updike, this precisely what gives life, however short, its point. When the subject changes from her art to her son, she says, ‘Ahmad’s sheets are un-spotted. . . They were not always.’ (Terrorist, 165) But the reality is that she has stopped ‘observing’ his sheets. Jack, unlike Teresa but like his creator, is a close ‘observer’ of the world. And so, too, despite himself, Ahmad is. If anything gives him a chance for redemption, it is this, not martyrdom. After all, a human being with fermenting
natural instincts in his teenage – cannot help being distracted by sex. Joryleen’s physical details never escape him.

Interestingly, each of the main characters is from a different racial or religious group- they could almost be referred to as the ‘young Arab’, the ‘old Jew’, etc. This suggests that one of the absences that Ahmad has fallen through, is the absence of a community. The characters’ names are freighted with meanings – Charlie Chehab hires Ahmad for truck driving and calls him a ‘madman’ and inside the novel we find the gaze of imam Sheikh Rashid being thought of, by Ahmad, as ‘kafir woman’s’ to enhance his negative character. Jack Levy says his name is Levy, like those things keep the Mississippi from overflowing, so Teresa, flirting back, calls him ‘Mr Down-by-the-Levee’; she signs her paintings as ‘Terry’ and Jack riffs on ‘terry cloth’, ‘terrible’, ‘terrify’ and ‘terry-toons’ though not ‘terrorist’- the novel’s title occurs nowhere in the text. This technique is not new of Updike as he did it before in *Rabbit* series. The difference here is that he saw a need to labour the significance. The character with the heaviest symbolic burden is Jack Levy’s wife, lovingly called Beth; the overweight Protestant, whose people have been in America almost as long as it has been America. Addicted to consuming and living in fear of terrorism but incapable of anything about either of them – She is America. Jack’s feelings towards her, a paradoxical combination of irritation, disgust and affection are pretty much identical to his feelings towards America.He wonders if she had once been as thin as the young dynamic women on T.V screen, a way of wondering if America was ever coextensive with its myth of itself- the unsurprising answer, to both questions, is ‘NO’. The moral of the novel emerges in the moments when the book is at its least fabular, when the myth collapses under the weight of its mess and variety of the everyday in all its accumulated detail. The world repays ‘careful attention’ – the key
to all current worldly problems and few writers are as good as Updike at looking at and describing it so precisely. 

(London Review of Books, Vol. 28)

The theme of religious criticism is prevalent throughout the novel. Islam is eulogised by the fervent protagonist, Ahmad, whereas Christianity is blamed for poor spiritualism which is rendered responsible for religious ignorance. Islam has the Almighty Allah as its owner and the master. Prophet Mohammad is His messenger to this earth with a grave responsibility of preaching and spreading Islam as a message of peace and love and thereby a religion which conveys moral teachings as they are near to God. The prophet was assigned this duty and was to accomplish it in a time-period spanning his entire life. Since the death of Allah’s most beloved slave, teachings of Islam have been carried out by the religious leaders and scholars through the generations. Being a follower of such sublime religious values, when Ahmad glances at other religions and particularly Christianity, with Islam’s reverend eye, he perceives Christianity either a Godless religion or a religion without permanent Lord. The idea of Godlessness is disgusting to him as he believes that such void brings a religion to fruitlessness and stagnation. Ahmad’s conscience asserts that only a just, powerful and merciful God has humble, kind and obedient believers. The Almighty can make his slaves bend before him.

Once Ahmad encounters Christians in Church, when Sunday Mass is in full vigour and is surprised to see the followers of such a fruitless religion looking livelier than he is. Values of Islam as taught to him by Imam of a mosque, Sheikh Rashid, have turned him into a conservative and orthodox person. He is annoyed with the liberty of both genders in Church whereas Islam prefers worship in a segregated form as it promotes reverence for God and prevents arousal of feelings and consequent distraction from worship. God likes to see his worshippers squatted on floor in groups,
busily chanting his name instead of sitting dispersedly and enjoying their freedom with opposite sex in the pews.

Ahmad’s Islam is to be believed, respected and its creator to be worshipped. Islam is not to be portrayed on wooden frames as paintings of Jesus crucifixion because God’s work is ‘Inimitable.’ The marvel of God’s work lies in its originality and an imitation can’t create spell on the viewer. Ahmad knows that the Prophet had always been aware of the fact that ‘only the imagery of words could grip the soul’ with its own spiritual substance.

Ahmad is invited to Sunday Mass by his High School mate, Joryleen, and is welcomed to the Church by the Christians who are unaware of his real religion. He is unable to repel their friendly emotions inspite of his hatred for their moral as well as religious values. Moreover, he is attracted towards Joryleen but is unable to accept a ‘Christian Joryleen’. As he was sitting in the pews with the Christians, he had to lend his ears to the sermon. The priest was mocking the sense of duties allotted to people holding posts to render divine services. He talked of the pleasure and comforts he could have enjoyed at home while sending a mock priest in his place to deliver the sermon in the Church. This was just to enhance the value of such duties which could never be discharged but with purity and honesty. The sermon of the priest was about faith and richly supported with example of the Prophet Moses who was not allowed to enter the Promised Land due to his weak faith in God. The priest emphasized the wickedness, adultery and disgraceful conduct of the Egyptian Pharaohs in Moses’ time, whereas Ahmad could attribute all these qualities and the anticipated punishments to the Christians whom he called ‘disbelievers’. He sees all these examples in his everyday life. During regular intervals, the spontaneous
applauds, comments and slogans from the audience surprised Ahmad because his Islamic guidelines assert the silent belief and noble reverence.

This sermon can also be interpreted as the pretention of faith or no faith by Christians. The people of Moses and Aaron symbolize Americans, who, if taken out of adulterous luxury and slavery, always want to return to it. They cannot bear to be snatched off their materialistic and fleshy pleasures. They never struggle for revival of their faith, to strive for the up-liftment of their morals and spiritual betterment. As in words of Ahmad:

Western culture is Godless.’ Then he says, ‘And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods. Look at television, Mr. Levy, how it’s always using sex to sell you things you don’t need. Look at the history the school teaches, pure colonist. Look how Christianity committed genocide on the Native American and under mined Asia and Africa and now is coming after Islam, with everything in Washington run by the Jews to keep themselves in Palestine.

(Terrorist, 38)

The kingdom of Pharaohs represents the American hypocritical system. The people of Moses, the Israelite Jews, in the wilderness of Zion ignored the signs of mercy and generosity of God, while He continued to provide them with life-sustaining material from nowhere. Even then, when they betrayed God by not following His Prophet Moses, they were like the Americans who betray God, the Ultimate Power, which selected America to surpass other nations in terms of advancement, awareness and modernism. Instead of utilising its gifts for the benefit of mankind, Americans exploit other nations ruthlessly without giving it a thought that they are defying morality. As the novel relates the utter selfishness of American administrative sector over a decade:
the clashing claims of privacy and security, convenience and safety, are daily diet. . .the Secretary’s colleagues in the administration were born rich and have made additional fortune in the private sector. . .from public service under Clinton . . .all the Clintonians. . .are getting pig-rich with their tell-all memoirs. . .

*(Terrorist, 47)*

Even inside their nation, Americans have their own heinous ways of earning money; some girls succumb to prostitution out of their own will or driven into adultery by their sexual partners who use them as temporary means for making easy money (as Joryleen has been pushed into prostitution by her classmate and boyfriend, Tylenol). These young girls, fresh pass outs from colleges can also take up a reputed job but still they go ahead and work as whores under the whim that they will be cherished by men whom they are working for.

Surprisingly, the lecture stirs Ahmad somewhere. As far as the matter of faith is concerned, Ahmad is convinced that the priest had been fighting against all kinds of devils in his own manner and Ahmad respects his struggle.

As presence of Joryleen never fails to arouse Ahmad, he frequently tries his best to attract her towards Islam whereas Joryleen tries to convince him that every religion can be easily modified towards liberalism. As Joryleen says that she doesn’t ‘take religion all that seriously.’ For Americans, religion is more or less a way to adjust in a variant society. On the other hand, for Ahmad, religion is an eternal identity by which a person not only gets through his worldly problems but also guarantees his salvation. However, he manages to chill his anger towards her as his love for her does not snatch away his reason. He knows that the kind of society she lives in can never produce but the likes of her. It is not she, but her surroundings,
mindset and demands of body and life, is what compels her to degrade herself to the level of adultery, an immoral profession that she is barged into, on demand of Tylenol. As Ahmad is aware of her personal compulsions, he finds an excuse for her prostitution and explores all his desires in such a girl. He is fascinated by Joryleen’s receptive mind which has the ability to recognise Ahmad’s stirred feelings. He lacks the courage to express himself openly because, disappointingly, he finds the image of his American mother’s adultery and materialism in Joryleen. He knows that their union will prove a mismatch because like his Egyptian father, he won’t be able to adjust with American dealing and she, as his own mother had done once, would press upon him for more money and luxury, the Westerners are obsessed with. However, being a child to an American woman and having American blood in his veins, Ahmad accepts Americanism as a part of his identity. This might be the reason why he seems to surrender before an American mother and never openly claims to meet his Egyptian father. His mother, who still fancies herself being with Ahmad’s father, projects her reminiscent love for him by drawing Ahmad to pursue Islamic education and values under the supervision of an Imam in a mosque. The Imam, Sheikh Rashid, is a queer person who teaches in a mosque ‘out of a converted ballroom studio’. Most of his teachings might mislead us and present before us the Islam as one of the most violent religions, based on hatred, suppression, bloodshed, cruelty, acute physical restraints and sadism. In fact, he never advised Ahmad to be kind or friendly with unbelievers; instead, he insisted on their killing. He fills Ahmad’s heart with hatred for infidels making The Holy Quran his medium to exploit Ahmad’s feelings. All he does is, to take verses from a particular Sura in Quran where God expresses his hatred for the infidels and says that their lives are just duration to increase their sins. God also says that they will be subjected to a shameful punishment on the Judgement Day. But now,
Ahmad, after listening to the priest’s lecture in the Church, is baffled at how God could be so merciless for his own creatures. Sheikh Rashid never tries to point out the element of mercy in context of God. He never satisfies Ahmad by telling him that the Almighty always has His eyes over the world, making the disbelievers feel His presence and beware of His wrath. He disappoints Ahmad, saying that God hates the unbelievers and will rejoice at their suffering. Instead, Sheikh Rashid commands Ahmad to kill the disbelievers as they will meet no better fate in Hell and if he leaves them alive, he would be placing himself above ‘Almighty’.

(Alexander C. Kafka, 2006)

No doubt that such flamboyant faith arouses in Ahmad a desire to kill the non-Islamic people. He tells Joryleen that he is a faithful follower of his religion whereas other religions just mock faith. It is his way to provoke Joryleen and arouse her curiosity for himself and his religion. Their strolling outside the Church is a debate between being a good follower and being a good part of God’s creation. Ahmad wants to assert his goodness as a person, truth as a lover, chastity as a follower of the best religion. On the other hand, Joryleen, insists that earth is a place for social animals and to exist here one needs to feel good. Ahmad has to accept her point and thus brings a balance between ‘being good’ and to ‘feel good’. At the same time, some of her indications leave Ahmad speechless as when she says that natural instincts of a human body and its hormonal demands always remain within it, though sometimes they are coagulated and suppressed deliberately by people like him. She illustrates an example by pointing out at the behaviour and activities of martyrs who get to heaven ‘all full of spunk’ whereas for Ahmad, physical restraints count for the purity of the soul. In the course of their discussion, it comes out that the scales on Joryleen’s side are heavier because Ahmad, for no reason, finds himself lost in her warmth, thinks of sinking into
her body and experience its richness. Ahmad is also subjected to a brainstorm when Joryleen expresses her doubt about the existence of ‘dark eyed virgins’ in heaven to entertain the martyrs. Her questions are quite rational and Ahmad, due to his inadequate knowledge regarding Islam, is unable to provide satisfactory answers.

The pool of afternoon lectures through Islamic scriptures, by Sheikh Rashid, amazingly, leave Ahmad a crippled scholar, short of tools for dealing with his own self as well as the world. It’s not that Sheikh Rashid is unaware of Quranic explanation but the way he modified his teachings, laying stress on specific verses, without creating least doubt in Ahmad’s heart, was enough to produce a nutshell of hatred out of a sensitive being like Ahmad. ‘The abysses and heights of this religious preacher descend into darkness and their so-called ascent into fake reverence and martyrdom so dominate the plot that even his disciple is flattened to seem a mere foil.’ Not to mention his indoor instructions against the disbelievers, Sheikh Rashid has also decided the kind of profession that Ahmad is going to take up in his near future. He induces in Ahmad that every activity in life, ranging from thoughts to actions, should be carried out with an ultimate purity and the same should be followed when it comes to opting a career. The lessons are given to Ahmad for dual purpose. Sheikh Rashid is not educating Ahmad to enlighten him with religious values but he is also preparing a fervent follower with blind faith in killing as well as dying at his signal on the pretext of unquestioned salvation. Sheikh Rashid is a mediator of terrorist Titans whose plans have to be executed. Updike is mapping out locations which work as terrorist centres. Traitors have no work benches as such; they have to build up puppets to carry their work forward. The mosque Imam here, is the right hand of master planners and is assisting them by trapping young and delicate minds with an illusion of glorious life-after-death. Immature children, whose parents think
that their children are in the safest hands; hands of apostles of love and humanity, are in reality getting hit in their back, for such children no longer remain their parents’ fruits but become sort of victimized minds and for them, life is no more important; attacking other religions without reason and killing the followers become their sole aim. In the same way, Ahmad’s brain is vigorously washed in the name of the explanation of Quranic verses. Sheikh Rashid never misses an opportunity to discuss with Ahmad, the misguided meaning of some verses – God rejoicing over disbelievers’ suffering in Hell fire, Muslims killing disbelievers are honoured in heaven, Muslims dying out of their own will in suicide bombing are labelled as martyrs, the believers who keep themselves detached from the opposite gender and die pure and virgin, are gifted with black eyed virgins who wait upon them in heaven. In this way, Sheikh Rashid is all satisfied with Ahmad as an upcoming executor for already planned terrorist attack in New Jersey. Only one thing remained, is to guide to a profession which is quite apt for his plan proceedings and goes with the restrictions and regulations which are ‘almost religious in quality’. When he reads the Study Course Booklets, he is pleased to find that even least precaution is taken with greatest care. His further applying for a CDL becomes easy as Sheikh Rashid supports him by writing a check on mosque’s account. (Green and Updike, 2001)

Though the counsellor in Central High, Mr. Jack Levy, was taken by surprise at the mention of driving being opted as a profession by a brilliant graduate as Ahmad Ashmaway Mulloy, yet Ahmad’s determination leaves Mr. Levy, funnily helpless, like the rest of the teachers, trying to civilize the students without any authority and with a toy gun in their possession.

Gradually Ahmad began to notice something weighing upon Sheikh Rashid. He seemed to enshoulder some secret responsibility which keeps him tense and spoils
his temper. He is being demanded for something from someone. At times, he says that Ahmad is a tender being and is asked for too much from this world, thus making him feel weak and think of escapism; he pretends to be sympathetic with Ahmad to win his trust and confidence. He trusts the power of his polluted teachings and knows that such a critical situation intermingled with concept of another world of heaven could be a beautiful and fascinating outlet.

On the other hand, Mr. Jack Levy’s dissatisfaction with Ahmad’s future plans and his subsequent interference by visiting Ahmad at his mother’s apartment, made Ahmad denounce him as a guest and suspect him as the next partner for his sexually desperate mother, Teresa Mulloy. During the conversation that takes place in Teresa’s bedroom which is also her workroom for oil-paintings, we manage to penetrate into Teresa’s Psyche as well as into her acute lonely world which is the result of her deserted husband, Omar Ashmaway. She is an unsupported female who has to have a very liberal mind so as to lead her life with a number of male partners to make her living easygoing. Besides, she has to give a tough impression of herself so that no one in this selfish world could crush her identity as a female. Still, she has to compromise and sign herself as ‘Terry’ like a male artist because in spite of harping upon modernity and liberal mindset, gender is a prominent factor in American psychology where personal feelings, dealings and even wages vary with gender factors. As mentioned earlier, Teresa, in spite of being a single and hopeless mother due to a husband’s banishment, still takes refuge in the realm of dream and imagination while describing him. A victim of marriage turned betrayal, feels ashamed before her son, of being without a permanent and faithful life-partner. Her deserted husband is also the reason for Ahmad’s queer nature. Ahmad hates him and further unrestrained pessimism is welcomed to his heart by Sheikh Rashid who teaches him that a
photograph is an imitation of God’s original work and thus admiring it is a blasphemy. In this way, he manages to scratch away the least imprints of bond and natural belongingness in Ahmad for his father, giving way to his own being as a pseudo-father for Ahmad. To accomplish his task, it is very necessary to strip Ahmad of all relations which would act as a source of moral as well as spiritual support for him in his need. Only then, the poor boy would take his tutor as an apostle of reliance and without him Ahmad had to be made to feel lonely, cold and crippled.

As far as the youthful spark and courage are concerned, Teresa believes that her only son should be grateful to her European-American blood. She owes him all the worldly flexibility one needs to possess to deal in a powerful nation such as American subcontinent. She attributes her courage and spirit with her Anglo Saxon ancestors whose roots were spread beyond North-European borders to Scandinavia; the spirit of struggle through Scandinavian wilderness, adventurous voyages and warriors. Unaware of the approaching storm of ‘terrorism’ that her son would have labelled her with, she is happy that Ahmad opted driving; a career full of risks. She would like to see Ahmad controlling the steering wheel and struggling his way through American mainland and be proud of him as Son of America, having American blood in his veins, thus repaying for the sense of loss that she had experienced with stillness turned escapism by Omar Ashmaway.

Teresa has negative feelings for both, her husband and Sheikh Rashid, both Arabs. She describes her husband, Omar Ashmaway, as an opportunist and Sheikh Rashid as a terrible teacher who is unable to satisfy Ahmad’s inquiries with conviction. Updike introduces a misguided student deliberately, so as to intensify the need for right and moral and spiritual guidance for the readers of both religions and also gives a number of clues and terms that lead people succumb to terrorism. He also
leads us to the birth places with a very sincere request that not the place which is to be hated but the worms trying to gnaw it down, are to be abhorred. Ahmad needs a straight forward and robust guide at this tender age when he can best utilize his time moulding and shaping his child nerves for benefit of mankind and self-progress but his doubtful teacher produces a weak and tense student.

This time Updike is quite sympathetic with his female character, Teresa or Terry. He does not objectify or degrade her. Instead, she represents the void experienced by a lonely, restless soul longing for a divine refuge which could satiate her physical as well as emotional thirst in beautifully mysterious way. Updike leaves behind imprints of jealousy on the part of Teresa and the rejection she faced from Sheikh Rashid who treats her ‘as a piece of dead meat’. Somewhere, she wanted to get introduced to Islam from a different angle, with her son this time and not as a secondary domestic object as she had tasted of Islam bitterly, earlier with Omar Ashmaway for whom Islam was just a warrant of restriction for women.

Another reason, why Ahmad sought to rigidity and orthodoxy in every sphere of his life and be extra precautionary, is his mother’s extra flexibility towards her personal relationships. At one instance Ahmad says to Mr. Levy: ‘I think my mother sleeps with people easily. A nurse’s aid is at home with the body, and she sees herself as a liberated modern person.’

(Terrorist, 301)

When he sketches his own future running behind temporary partners and seeking shelter in their apartments just like his mother’s boyfriends, sleep with girls already slept with numerous gloating boys, sometimes spending a single night with a girl on bed-sheet stained by her previous amorous meeting or his own wife betraying him with other men similarly if he happens to leave the place temporarily or to be more
particular, if he would leave permanently like his father. As the novel reveals his mother’s Americanism,

...a typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring. She is a victim of American religion of freedom, freedom from all, though freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air.

*Bombs bursting in air* – empty air is the perfect symbol of American freedom.

*(Terrorist, 167)*

Ahmad has never tried to explore and changing ways of other Muslims. The exploration of his Islamic identity starts with the entrance of the mosque and ends with the stiff teachings of Sheikh Rashid, who never lets Ahmad know the value of mankind love. He was never taught to love life in its every form, size and shape. He was never made to appreciate Almighty for His creation, no matter how trivial it is. In the beginning, Teresa took Ahmad’s obsessive belief as a source of deviation from his father’s thoughts so as to divert his attention towards something else and she to get ample time to satisfy her urges. Once having gone with the onset of her sexual sojourn, she got addicted to the frequency of partners in her apartment. In midst of this journey, Mr. Levy hops into her apartment but this time, Ahmad as the subject of his attention. Gradually captivating Mr. Levy by flaunting her charms, she manages to pull him into her bed and both of them sneak few hours from their places of work to satisfy themselves while Ahmad is out learning to drive heavy vehicles. Mr. Levy on an occasion in his school noticed Teresa in a stole and to his surprise her covered head looked more attractive and innocent than when he saw her without it. Updike is not neglecting the values of Islam which not only enhance the feminine beauty but also contribute to its charm, as Levy, for the first time then, felt drifting towards her for no
reason. As a matter of fact, Mr. Levy is a caring counsellor and a responsible husband
to a wife for whom he has lost his love juices long before.

This Updikean character throws a critical eye on American educational system
and in most of the pages in the novel, he is attributed with human voice of reason and
morality. In spite of sitting in the American system of education, he disapproves of it
as ‘enlightenment of youthful spirit’. He says:

They never knew structure. They can’t imagine a life that goes beyond the
next fix, the next binge, the next scrape with the cops or the bank or the INS.
The poor kids, they’ve never had the luxury of being kids. You see them come
into the ninth gradewith a little hope left in them, a trace of that eagerness
second – graders have. . .and by the time they graduate if they do, we’ve
knocked it all out of them. Who’s we? America, I suppose, though its hard to
put your finger exactly on where it goes wrong. . .capitalism was doomed,
destined to get more and more oppressive until the proletariat stormed the
barricades and set up the workers’ paradise. . .To be on the safe side, they
changed the label ‘capitalism’ to read ‘free enterprise,’ but it was still dog-eat-
dog. Too many losers, and the winners winning too big. . .The basic problem
the way I see it is, society tries to be decent, and decency cuts no ice in the
state of nature. . .We should all go back to being hunter – gatherers, with a
hundred – percent employment rate, and a healthy amount of starvation.

(Terrorist, 136)

In fact he sees the system as ‘a garden of rote teaching which is more or less ignored’.
It prefers to neglect the students’ personal interests. The products of this system are
just as wanton as their teachers and nurturers. Dominators are ignorant of values but
lead the timid and dutiful. The students are called to serve America by joining the
democracy and by being recruited in American army. But in all this what really America demands? America is not the right place for such seeds to sprout. One of the most important values the students lack there is, ‘self-restraint’. Their concept of life is just to say ‘yes’ to anything liked by them, no matter where this ‘yes’ may lead them to – ‘yes’ to more money from nowhere, ‘yes’ to prostitution, ‘yes’ to adultery, ‘yes’ to single life as long as the kaleidoscope of partners foster each others’ needs in terms of desires, finance, maintenance and temporary solace. Therefore, even if American educational system is taken as a garden, it’s no more than ‘a weedy patch of hopes, a rough and ill-tilled seedbed of what this nation wants itself to be’. All these changing traits and flashing tendencies of youngsters are carefully observed by Levy, the counsellor, who can sometimes study the smiles, eyes and unseen behaviour of people as well. While harping the same lamenting tune to his wife, he says:

What really gets me is they refuse to grasp how bad off they are. They think they are doing pretty good, with some flashy – trashy new outfit they’ve bought at half – price, or the latest hyper – violent new computer game, or some hot new CD everybody has to have, or a ridiculous new religion when you’ve drugged your brain back into the Stone Age. It makes you seriously wonder if people deserve to live – if the massacre masterminds in Rwanda and Sudan and Iraq don’t have the right idea.

(Terrorist, 136-137)

Mr. Levy is one of the most virtuous characters of Updike who will readily agree to enshoulde the responsibility of purifying American subcontinent. He is the only character who minutely observes the variations of his nation starting from his neighbourhood and endlessly expanding to cover the domain of American political boundary and he is the one who shamelessly criticizes human behaviour, ranging
from his own-self to the familiar and unfamiliar people. This mysterious feeling full of responsibility is the result of his irreligious but the upright and pious values that he had chalked for himself.

In spite of all this humane personality, Levy has American restlessness imbibed deep in his veins. A Jewish American, he has spent a fair lifetime with his Lutheran wife, Elizabeth, not to that extent for mutual love between them as much to his sense of responsibility towards her as a legal bond signed in presence of priest and some witnesses. Being a cynical atheist, Jack embraces life not as a religious or ideological tool or even as a gift but rather as a Sisyphean burden. He goes on dragging his marital life with mixed feelings of kindness, pity and antipathy for his obese wife.

Updike rotates his telescope now, to pick up the root words for restlessness – ‘tyranny’ and ‘insecurity’ of American spiritualism leads to such obscene mishaps. The entire nation harbours such anxious souls who are ready to drift anywhere for satisfying their urges and sometimes misuse other religions’ values to achieve their interests. Teresa applies this trick on Levy and was thoroughly successful by exhibiting her spontaneous feelings, claiming that she covers her body and head only to satisfy Ahmad that she doesn’t look like ‘a whore’, thereby, sending sizzling signals through Levy’s instincts that without those outfits she is just the right kind of woman that a man would desire to be with; not failing to mention before Levy the nuns who envied her freedom and asserting that now after that her husband left her, she has learnt to value her charms. No doubt, Levy would never have failed to understand that some female is opening herself to him. Moreover, she makes her son an instrument to evoke a sense of tender sympathy in Levy for herself by suggesting the void created by her husband, Ahmad’s father, waiting to get filled up. In this way,
an opportunity to visit a cradle of feminine charisma and partially throwing a fatherly gesture for introducing some change in Ahmad’s psychology, Levy enters Teresa’s apartment to plough his temporary dreamland and enjoy an American seasonal crop. Updike steals away some moments from the gruesome topic of terrorism, bloodshed, atheism, obstinate concept of Godliness preached by Sheikh Rashid, and all that is going on under the nose of Uncle Sam, to wander as a spirit in Teresa’s house and write some grotesquely descriptive passages in his familiar style on the private meetings of Levy and Teresa. With these steaming lovers, Updike is also distracted, apparently unable to help himself sliding the dreamy way down to sex, away from Ahmad, to write instead about middle-aged adulterers – an old familiar theme for his. Even in bed, after the firing spark plugs are drained out, Jack is over burdened with a husbandly responsibility and a sense of guilt. From time to time he keeps asking about Ahmad who, after securing a CDL, is working for a furniture dealer- Excellency Home Furnishing, owned by a Lebanese father and son-Arab by origin and overtly hire Ahmad’s services for delivering and picking up furniture to both, near and far away places from New Jersey; most of the customers are black families and sometimes strange places unfrequented by usual visitors. Even Ahmad, after repeated experiences of insults and statements drowned in humiliation by his mother’s each time’s new lover who would ‘vie with him for dominance of the premises’ (Terrorist, 168), thinks that this time she has a human lover who has no intention of pushing Ahmad out. Updike laments this pathetic family setup and also calls it an ‘American’ way. According to him:

...this valuing of sexual performance over all family ties. The American way is to hate one’s family and flee from it. Even the parents conspire in this,
welcoming signs of independence from the child and laughing at disobedience.  

(Terrorist, 168)

As the primitive aim of literature is to instruct, Updike is being intensely honest with this tradition by clearly mentioning some very beautiful verses from Quran where the prophet Mohammad exhibits his pure fatherly love for his only daughter, Fatimah, and bids all Muslims to behave well with his daughter because whoever hurt her, would hurt him and indirectly would hurt God. By saying this, the Prophet has taught his Muslims to respect their daughters and sons, as hurting the delicate feelings of one’s children and making them feel insecure in their elders’ presence, could infuriate God. Examples given by Updike are apt in their places thereby the valuable instructions from a divine book (Quran) against most of degraded and decayed trends of a nation boasting of its Superiority and Titanism.

Jack Levy is one of those fathers who have given a stable life to their children but he was prompted to do this more out of a sense of duty than doing it for a fruit of his marital life. Here and there, Updike blames his American character and tries to teach him the value of love over sense of duty because Levy attributes his duties to guilt as if he was paying off the cost of his marriage. His Lutheran wife, Elizabeth, tries to tackle the household with her relaxed and light hearted nature. Presently working in Clifton Library, this two hundred and forty-pound lady who once angered her parents by marrying a Jew, usually passes her time watching soap-operas and nibbling into so-called low-fat cookies, cheesecake, oatmeal-raisins and leftovers of previous night microwave. Though her mention is not so important in the novel but she is a vital instrument around whom Updike explains the mystery of health upheavals in American Mainland. Along with her description, Updike exploits the chance of dealing with advancement of technology with changing time, an American
wife’s vague guesses as to why her husband’s outing sessions are getting longer, American personal and political problems, etc. Once been lighter, ‘more lithe and promising’ (Terrorist, 129) than her heavy footed elder sister, Hermione Fogel, who is currently ‘landing an important Washington job with one of the administration’s key players’ (Terrorist, 138), Elizabeth, now, finds it difficult to extricate herself from her favourite rocker recliner, to move about in the house nimbly and do errands, to the extent that she wants to add up more facilities in the house so as to minimize her movements even more. Elizabeth does not feel comfortable with new marvels of technology, the changing shapes and sizes of equipments, increasing complexity of hardware along with Levy’s penny-pinching attitude with her specially when he blames ‘electronic revolution’ for extracting unnecessary money. He says:

. . .its a racket, the charges add up, like on cable TV. . .The so – called electronic revolution. . .has brought about a wealth of schemes for painlessly extracting money from us in monthly charges for services we don’t need. . .

(Terrorist, 121)

Sometimes Levy seems more hateful than responsible as when he refuses to get her a cell phone lest she should disturb him in his work place or when he seems terribly disappointed if his wife missed the chair, fell on the floor but was not injured. There is a level where ‘he would not mind if she were dead, he would be relieved of two hundred and forty pounds on his shoulders’. (Terrorist, 122) ‘On the other hand she knows he will never leave her’ for he was bound to his ‘Jewish sense of responsibility’. (Terrorist, 122) He did not believe in Jewish God and was successful in thrusting himself at Elizabeth never caring if she might have ever hoped that he should accompany her to the Church.
It is rightly said that more the person loves, more possessive he becomes and the more he rebukes. Updike should be patted on his back for criticizing even minute deteriorations of his country which lead to its degrading rank among other nations. Such awkward valuelessness was not always there but the so-called changing trends and fads contributed in their introduction. Once peaceful places such as parks, cemeteries and libraries, now, have become noisy with their attached restaurants attracting dating couples rather than families, contemplators and elderly. Divinity scholars and clergymen used to be young, handsome and dedicated but now they fail to maintain even the eye-contact with their audience due to lack of faith. Now the face of this nation is really pathetic:

The young people. . .talk out like they’re in their own living rooms, it’s the same at the movies, there are no manners any more, television has ruined everybody’s. . .the disrespectful way the other passengers wear shorts and what look like pajamas on the plane: television has made people at home now everywhere, not caring how they look, women absolutely as fat as she wearing shorts; they must never look in the mirror.

(Terrorist, 124)

Shamefully, all motivation and competition in almost every field is driven by murder, sex, jealousy and financial greed. Not only this, Updike aptly magnified his vision at regularly increasing level from personal and domestic life to communal feelings shattering their nation. Internet chatter is up every now and then with each genuine or fake thread of news. Other religions are unnecessarily blamed, made fun of and innocent young followers are criticized and Muslims are at the top of the list. It is believed that mosques are the centres for training young fervents in terrorism and such fanatics are produced who don’t care if they die because they are perfectly
modified to take it as sure way to their salvation; to kill non-Muslims and that will be
a noble cause. Things that add much to American insecurity is the routes leading into
its interior body – sea ports, airways, tunnels, local trains, etc. In words of Levy’s
sister-in-law, Hermione:

Hundreds of container ships go in out of our American ports every day, and
nobody knows what’s in a tenth of them. They could be bringing in atomic
weapons labelled Argentinean cowhides or something. Brazilian coffee –
who’s sure it’s coffee? Or think of these huge tankers, not just the oil, but say,
liquid propane. That’s how they ship propane, liquefied. But think of what
would happen in Jersey City or under the Bayonne Bridge if they got it with
just a few pounds of Semtex or TNT. . .it would be a conflagration: thousands
dead. . .Capitalism has been so open – that’s how it has been to be, to make it
work. Think of a few men with assault rifles in a mall anywhere in America. . .
We can never be happy again – we Americans.

(Terrorist, 132)

These transportations mean that some local hands are actively playing a dominant role
and assisting in such illegal and destructive acts. Hermione is Updike’s opponent who
keeps defending American system and also keeps pitying it that the world wants
America to stagnate but Updike wants the reader to stand before her to get the ‘other
side’ of it. If America is suffering from such shaking insecurities then Americans
themselves should be taught to be honest with their motherland. Otherwise, Updike’s
ideology of American mainland also grieves over the aggressive hands demanding
their share from it:

. . .it’s the Japanese and Chinese and Mexicans and Guatemalans and those
others in these low – wage platforms who are doing us in, putting our work –
force out of work. We come to this country and pen the Indians into reservations and build skyscrapers and super highways and then everybody wants a piece of our domestic markets, like a whale being gutted by sharks in that Hemingway story. . .

(Terrorist, 138)

To some extent Updike is sympathetic with the immigrants who once came to America but gradually individualism crept into their minds with the time and they want their share from American investments, property, etc. in lieu of their services. In the same way, Jack Levy is typically mournful for his motherland and wonders what would be left of America in the end.

Now-a-days this statement could be referred to as – after terrorist attacks, what would be left of American solid image. Americans are just left with an acute sense of hatred for Muslims. As far as Teresa is concerned, she is full of pessimism and insecurity on the part of Arab-Muslims. Teresa conveys a vague image how Americans perceive Islam and its teachings after such mishaps in their nation. An escapist husband and not-at-all generous mosque Imam, Teresa tries to reveal to her son that he no longer manifests any belongingness to her because he is under the influence of outsiders and does not experience any special attachment with her anymore. Gradually her concept becomes radical to the extent that she implies that Islam teaches nothing except disobedience which starts at home by ‘disowning’ one’s parents and ends in ‘terrorism’. Almost all Updike’s novels depict a woman’s plight of insecurity on her husband’s part which turns into a rebellion of its own kind and the woman tries to catch hold of her son, a living caricature of half-her husband’s genes and longs to assert her possession for him or at least cherish his attachment to her. Somewhere it denotes her revenge and domination over her husband’s fifty-percent
self. At the other end of the rope, holding Ahmad is Sheikh Rashid who acts like a girl claiming her share from this mixed-blood boy. Rashid moulds Ahmad’s hobbies as to go with the teachings he is imparting him. Ahmad is made to hate action movies full of assassins as professional killers whereas the great irony lies here about what Ahmad here is being groomed for. Updike is trying to make a cobweb of warnings and emotions around Ahmad so that he would be able to resist such moments of killing others in his life but all of these things are ignored by Ahmad once Rashid makes him dream of garden of Eden which becomes his ultimate place in heaven with black-eyed virgins waiting upon him. Rashid also takes proper care not to let the opposite gender creep into Ahmad’s life as woman symbolises life and means of struggle and such things could pull away the boy from Rashid’s deadly mission. All the time Quranic verses are at Rashid’s finger-tips to dismantle worldly dreams if they happen to exist. Moreover, his way to urge Ahmad to cry out that he is an Arab-Muslim boy and has nothing to do with the infidel American system, never misses its target; even after developing close attachment with Ahmad he cheers him up: ‘Charlie will – what’s the phrase? – show you the ropes. You’ll like him, Ahmad. He’s very American’. 

(Terrorist, 145)

In these words Rashid leaves behind an Ahmadfullof hatred for America and thus fulfils his own desire, as Ahmad now tries ever harder to prove himself such a Muslim as Rashid needs.

Mr. Habib Chehab, seemingly, eulogises America to some extent whereas his son Charlie form a pair of ‘fire’ and ‘ice’ with his own father to drag Ahmad into their conversation, thus, preach him venom against this land. Charlie says:

There are problems. The Zanj weren’t given any rights, they had to fight for them. They were being lynched and not allowed in restaurants, they even had
separate drinking fountains, they had to go to Supreme Court to be considered human beings. In America, nothing is free, everything is a fight. There is no *ummah*, no *shari’a*. . . They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and how they've forced their way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil.

*(Terrorist, 147)*

Also opposing the point of his father, Charlie says:

. . .the U.S has the biggest prison population in the world. . .Plenty big, enough – going on two millions. The young black women don’t have enough guys to go around. They’re all in jail. . .

*(Terrorist, 147)*

He throws a significant point about unequal distribution of income in America as the Blacks are so under privileged that they take to stealing. At another instance he implies that Muslim nations, smaller in size with a tinge of morality in them, can be monitored but America with its large size and immoral population can hardly be instructed.He says:‘. . .they can’t. It’s like animals. You don’t hold rats and rabbits to the same standard as lions and elephants. You don’t hold Iraq to the same standard as the U.S. . .’

*(Terrorist, 157)*

Charlie rides with Ahmad most of the time, deliberately, to knock the boy out of humanity and stuff him with aversion for American self.Sheikh Rashid was assigned to impart spiritual training but Charlie has a bigger duty of diverting him practically against American media, products that only promote flesh stimulation, investments that lavish on sports celebrities and the kind of society Americans are promoting ischiefly, consumer society. He says:
What else do they give us, these media moguls? The news is sob – sister stuff – Diane Sawyer, the poor Afghani babies, boo-hoo-hoo or else straight propaganda; Bush complains about Putin turning into Stalin, but we’re worse than the poor old clunky Kremlin ever was. The commies just wanted to brainwash you. The new powers that be, the international corporations, want to wash your brains away, period. They want to turn you into machines for consuming the chicken-coop society. All this entertainment. . .kept the masses zombified in the Depression, only then you stood in line and paid a quarter for the movie, where today they hand it to you free, with the advertisers paying a million a minute for the chance to mess with your heads.

(Terrorist, 172-173)

He also goes on to express the funny way the commercials allure older generation to go back in their twenties, thus bringing up the discourse for Americans fearing ‘death’ and in this way conjuring Rashid’s teachings about ‘True believers don’t fear death’ because ‘they know that paradise awaits the righteous’. (Terrorist, 174) Ahmad goes forward confidently to recite before him verses from the Holy Book which summarises as ‘God is the only giver of life and he will give you a cause to die.’ (Terrorist, 175) Charlie cleverly seems to offer himself for such a cause and inwardly inviting Ahmad for such an opportunity which could be missed if Ahmad let it go.

Further in the course of their discussion, Charlie shares with him a lot of views on American history which never lacked bloodshed, where innocent and easy-going immigrants were ruthlessly slain by imminent personalities like Washington, thereby, driving home the point that everything is fair in love and war. Charlie adores a specific kind of history just like the American history. In this context, Charlie
says: ‘One revolution led to another. . .History isn’t something over and done, you know. It’s now too. Revolution never stops. You cut off its head, it grows two.

*(Terrorist, 182)*

What he is trying to say is that the revolution or more precisely ‘rebellion’ grows more intense every time it is curbed. This example is very significant because Ahmad attributes it with ‘Hydra’ and simultaneously reminds him of ‘the image’ that ‘recurs in Sheikh Rashid’s sermons in illustration of the futility of America’s crusade against Islam.’ *(Terrorist, 183)* Totally satisfied with his fruitful endeavour in giving birth to a future terrorist, Charlie relates the revolutions with ‘Jihad’ and is quite pleased when Ahmad quotes from Quran,

*Mohammad is Allah’s apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another.*

*(Terrorist, 183)*

It is a stamp for what he is going to demand from Ahmad in near future. A little more brain storming for Ahmad and re-conformation was there for Charlie’s intentions. He further inquires about Ahmad’s desires in his life, asks him to love life as it is, if he is not interested in clinging to women. Along with conversation, Charlie was given the responsibility to hang around with Ahmad so close to Twin Towers of former World Trade Centre. Charlie loves the space without them. He says:

It’s nice to see those towers gone. They were ugly – way out of proportion. They didn’t belong. . .Those people worked. . .furthering the interests of American empire. . .sustains Israel and inflicts death everyday on Palestinians, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold. . .think of it as a war. . . War is not tidy. There is collateral damage. . .The enemies around us, the children and fat people in shorts giving us their dirty little looks. . .do not see
themselves as oppressors and killers... They see themselves as innocent, absorbed in their private lives... Yet, out of all this innocence, somehow evil emerges. The western powers steal our oil, they take our land.

(Terrorist, 187-188)

After making sure of everything, he charges Ahmad with a thumping question, ‘Would you fight them?... ‘Would you give your life?’ (Terrorist, 189) Getting a positive reply, Charlie’s mission is accomplished.

The ottoman delivery to an anonymous Mr. Karini, on the Upper Shores, leaves Ahmad baffled as the cottage was dark and inhabited by four men who did not at all seem to be the owners of the place and Ahmad’s suspicion was changed to confirmation when he stealthily managed to peep into the window and all four men, whose native language was Arabic, were taking ‘quantities of green American currency’ out of the ottoman’s leather top. (Terrorist, 194) The incident haunts Ahmad for a considerable time, he wonders how many other deliveries were similarly loaded in their crevices and interior hollows and also if Charlie was aware of the stuffed contents in the furniture. To his utter surprise, Charlie already knew every detail of the wads of money inside the furniture. According to Charlie, ‘source of money are the fortunate true believers, within U.S. and abroad, who believe in Jihad full of action. He arouses a good feeling in Ahmad’s heart by mentioning the ‘starving Muslim peasants, the Bangladeshi children, Egyptian villagers and Palestinians’ for whose welfare this money is consumed, so that the ‘Muslims are not exploited by the great global Satan who grows fat on sugar, pork and under priced petroleum’. (Terrorist, 198) Ahmad expresses his desire to play a part in such plots of welfare and Charlie indicates that an upcoming anniversary somewhere in September could be his D-day.
Updike is very careful in taking his protagonist as far as making him slip into a female’s warmth. Joryleen, though now a hooker, to make it clear that listening to a female voice with full attention and love and getting aroused due to one’s feelings is an alternative Jihad, to be near God. That’s why Ahmad, after meeting Joryleen, hearing her sing and coming in her presence, Ahmad did not mind to sleep that night, never to wake up again. Apart from his own mother, Joryleen was the second person to warn him against that truck business as both women grew suspicious of something ‘fishy’ about this furniture delivery matter. Within a week’s time after meeting with Joryleen, Charlie sent Ahmad to Sheikh Rashid who wanted to see him urgently and to his amazement, Sheikh Rashid had already been informed of the private conversation between Ahmad and Charlie in Liberty State Park and Ahmad was told that it had been a pre-planned interview to see if Ahmad was liable to be assigned for such a mission. Sheikh Rashid leads him to a plot to die for ‘Jihad.’ This plot would involve a truck and the action would take place sometime around an anniversary of 9/11 to send a message to the global Satan – ‘We strike when we please’. Sheikh Rashid also pointed out the precautionary measures that would be taken – an unidentified truck and all ‘the physical clues would be obliterated.’ *(Terrorist, 236)*

Before Ahmad could deduce that he would burst with the truck, Sheikh Rashid quickly insisted: ‘You will not be there to experience it. You would already be there in Jannah, in Paradise, at that instant, confronting the delighted face of God. He will greet you as His son.’ *(Terrorist, 237)*

He also promises Ahmad a huge compensation for his family which Ahmad transfers to another female friend, who, he believes ‘is lost to God but is giving her life for another, so that person, Tylenol, can live.’ *(Terrorist, 227)*
The other day Charlie accompanies Ahmad in the truck and takes upon sixteenth down to West Main, into that section of New Prospect, extending some blocks west of the Islamic Centre (Mosque), where Ahmad, in an area of non-domestic structures is introduced to a white truck, GMC 3500, with four-thousand kilograms of ammonium nitrate in its back, enough to break steel sheath of Lincoln Tunnel, the plot scheduled to be operated on 9/11 at morning’s rush hour.

On the other hand, not every citizen knows how to react or ‘what to do’ (Terrorist, 75) if the level of alert in some area goes up. Here, Updike comments on the range of unawareness among the common American citizens when only the authorities have time, space and strategy to evacuate the place or resist any anti-social activity whereas, the common man has a vague idea about what to do and the entire situation seems funny to him. Somewhere in the nation, thrive such people who, even after knowing the range of terror, are not able to do anything for it. The utter impotency of the Homeland Secretary is reflected in these words:

My trouble is. . . I love this damn country so much I can’t imagine why anybody would want to bring it down. What do these people have to offer instead? More Taliban – more oppression of women, more blowing up of statues of Buddha. The mullahs in northern Nigeria are telling people not to let their children be given polio vaccine, and then the kids are brought in paralyzed to the health – aid clinic! They wait until they are totally paralyzed to bring them in, if they’ve gone all the way with the local mumbo-jumbo.

(Terrorist, 258)

There is also extensive pondering by Hermione over the beliefs which do not allow Muslims to help their generations sprout into healthy ones and this contributes to ignorance and ultimate evil activities. Hermione is as comfortable with the President
in the office as her soul-mate. Updike’s ‘novels are anchored in time and each for instance has a clearly identifiable President of the United States’ and the characters comment on the political events through them. (Bodmer, 1988)

The American government laments lack of honesty on the part of Muslims contributing to their capitalist sector. Updike also emphasizes on lack of importance given to one’s own language, the moment one steps in America. The internet chatter brings Arabic messages wherein the sense does not clearly open up. Information is provided in bits and pieces, the people connected with the mission have been given a chance to flee. The ones in their captivity are either not questioned well or their translators are not blurting out the complete thing. Altogether, everyone around seems to be giving space to the truck and his driver to reach the appointed destination.

Moreover, at such a crucial time the Homeland Secretary fears the cease of hoarded facilities for him if he fails to detect the terrorists and beat them up. Helplessly but shamelessly, he babbles his inner motives before his secretary, whom he regards as close to his self as one’s consciousness, he says: ‘If this thing in New Jersey blows up, there’ll be no sitting on fat-cat boards for me. No speaker’s fees. No million-dollar advance on my memoirs.’ (Terrorist, 261)

Such revelation is as shocking to Hermione as it should be. To her, he simply symbolises Mammon. At last moment it is Hermione who turns out to be a nation’s saviour in an indirect manner as she calls up Mr. Levy and reminds him of a Muslim-American boy in Central High who took to truck driving on the advice of his Imam in mosque. Mr. Levy realises the co-incidence and smells the danger and with a Jewish sense of responsibility, he took upon himself not to let the nation encounter another 9/11. In his hurry, he waits for Ahmad near off Route 80 (the only one New Prospect interchange), three blocks north of interchange and one-mile South of Central High, in
his mismatched suit. Ahmad lets him in the truck lest he should raise an alarm and alert the entire traffic. He gave Ahmad an important set of information – Charlie was dead, tortured before he was killed and the body was thrown in the Meadows by the canal south of Giant Stadium along with a note saying ‘he who breaks his oath, punishes himself’, God will not deny him his recompense’ (Terrorist, 290) as the doers wanted to reveal their deed. Charlie was CIA undercover and the other side figured it out. His father was in hospital with a stroke; his uncle was in Florida with the feds’ eyes on him; Sheikh Rashid had vanished from the scene; others gone underground and scattered or caught flying abroad. Basically, Charlie, all this time, had been instigating Ahmad for this deadly deed and was using Ahmad to flush out the others. With the discourse on religion and soothing conversation of Mr. Levy, as he was trying his best to deal with truck driver and the explosives in his possession, Ahmad had become less bitter and somewhere accepted oneness in human beings, though still with an under lying distaste of hostility for Westerners. He says:

I don’t mind. It is good for us to seek agreement. Before Israel, Muslims and Jews were brothers – they belonged to the margins of Christian world, the comic others in their funny clothes, entertainment for the Christians secure in their wealth, in their paper – white skins. Even with the oil, they despised us, cheating the Saudi princes of their people’s birthright.

(Terrorist, 295)

Mr. Levy, a character, though rarest his kind but still angelic in sense. A man with a job, family and home does not mind hesitating in sitting in a truck full of explosives that with a ‘thumb down’ could be ignited ‘to ripple up through the enhancing pentrite and racing fuel into tons of nitrate.’ (Terrorist, 289-290) He also gives some guidance to Ahmad on American oneness: ‘. . . we all are Americans here. That’s the idea, didn’t
they tell you that at Central High? Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Jewish-Americans; there are even Arab-Americans.’  

(Terrorist, 301)

But at the same time, he also feels that he has lived long enough and should not wait for something in vain because America fails to give token of belongingness even to its most loyal residents. He, tells Ahmad woefully:

. . .Race, sex – they spook us. Once you run out of steam, America doesn’t give you much. It doesn’t even let you die, what with the hospitals sucking all the money they can out of Medicare. The drug companies have turned doctors into crooks. Why should I hang around until some disease turns me into a cash cow for a bunch of crooks. . .I’ve become a drag on the world, taking up space.  

(Terrorist, 304)

At another instance he says, ‘. . .I’m going to relax. Jesus, I’ve been tired lately.’ In the context of deadly pain he does not regret undergoing it himself in case the explosives are set off but he is concerned about the pain of others, in his words, ‘. . .there will be for plenty of others.’  

(Terrorist, 306)

The way Mr. Levy ignored his own death agony as compared to others’ pain and also expressed his disappointment about the horrible way he is going to die, whereas a person is destined to die peacefully in his bed, giving Ahmad a clue as to what the thousands of others will be snatched of. Suddenly Ahmad thinks about Quranic suras which have mention of life as God’s gift. In the end, with Levy next to him in his truck bomb, Ahmad chooses not to go forward with his plan, it remains unclear whether he still presents a threat or is ready to begin abandoning his intolerant ideology. But ultimately, this indecision seems consistent with the larger theme of elusiveness of the terrorist threat and of the concept of ‘evil’ in general. If the key
lesson that emerges from the novel is that in order to be ‘good’, people should not need to commit ultimate acts of ideological commitments, a related lesson might be that America should give up the pretence that it could ever exactly pin down the potential threat. Therefore, the ‘evil’ in the suicide bomber’s ultimate act needs to be reduced to its horrible consequences because it is already present in its pursuit of the extremist ideological premises. To kill this ‘evil’, a nation must learn to inculcate a feeling of belongingness and security in every individual who comes in its contact in one way or the other. Each soul should be awestruck with the rich values, noble attitude, honest dealings and the pious spirit of a particular federation. Here Updike has obviously confined himself to the American domain but morality has no shape or size; it can be perceived by every genuine soul and followed truthfully. Every nation can safeguard itself, not with the help of its defence panel comprising of military, artillery and explosives but with its integrity and conscience. Such kingdom will always give birth to patriots and legends.
Work Cited


