Chapter-2

Exploration of the Motivation of Religious Fundamentalists in John Hoyer Updike’s  

*Terrorist*

I

In the years following the 9/11 event, a number of writers published works in reaction to the terrorist attacks. But John Hoyer Updike is first among the established writers, who responds early to the catastrophe of September 11 through one of his short stories, “Varieties of Religious Experience” (first published in *The Atlantic Magazine* in its November issue, 2002 and finally posthumously published in the short story collection, *My Father’s Tears and Other Stories, 2009*), in which he narrated the incident from the survivor’s angle. The subject matter of this story clearly hinted that Updike was greatly influenced by the deep wound of that occurrence. “One of the first works of fiction by an established American writer to attempt a representation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the story takes the form of a series of brief episodes, each providing different perspectives on 9/11” (Colgan 119).

II

In the first episode of the story “Varieties of Religious Experience”, Updike describes the experience of Dan Kellogg, a sixty-four-year old Cincinnati lawyer during the latter’s visit to his daughter Emily in New York at the time of the 9/11 incident. The apartment of Dan Kellogg’s daughter is in Brooklyn Heights. It is hardly two kilometres away from the World Trade Center (WTC). The very sight of the “persistent oily smoke pouring from the Twin Towers” from the balcony of his daughter’s apartment perturbs Dan Kellogg so much that the question regarding the
existence of God arises in his mind: “THERE IS NO GOD: the revelation came to
Dan Kellogg in the instant that he saw the World Trade Center South Tower fall”
(Updike, “Varieties” 82). He is dumbfounded at the incident. He can’t make head or
tail as to how such a big disaster is possible. While meditating over the occurrence,
Dan Kellogg becomes more critical regarding his faith in the Creator: “The event was
small beneath the calm dome of sky. No hand of God had intervened because there
was none. God had no hands, no eyes, no heart, no anything” (83). Moreover, his
talented granddaughter Victoria puts him in further trouble through her series of
questions related to the event. As a result of which his spiritual faith and moral values
are further shaken. To Dan Kellogg’s surprise, Victoria who is only five years old
condemns those terrorists who have attacked the Twin Towers. She is greatly pained
to see the wreckage of those towers shown through various television channels: “Bad
men ... bad men going to knock down all the buildings!” (85) Dan Kellogg is shocked
and clueless. His mind is perturbed at the thought that how somebody can be involved
in such a heinous act which is condemned by a little child like Victoria. Dan Kellogg
tries to give the girl a simple explanation: “Because He wants to give men the choice
to be good or bad” (85). But it is in vain. She is not satisfied with the answer of her
grandfather. She further cross examines with guts as to why “bad men can do
anything they want, anything at all!” (85) The image of the total scenario of the site of
destruction that he has seen from the ‘terrace’ as well as Victoria’s questions related
to it unsettle Dan Kellogg’s mind:

Sensory impressions hit Dan harder than usual, because God had been
wiped from his brain. In his previous life, commonsense atheism had
not been ingenious enough for him, nor had it seemed sufficiently
gracious toward the universe. Now he had been shown how little the universe cared for his good will. (Updike, “Varieties” 87)

The painful scenario at the site of the WTC after the 9/11 incident is too much to bear for Dan Kellogg. He cannot but forsake his faith in God. “He joined at last the run of mankind in its stoic atheism” (Updike, “Varieties” 84). Once a true believer in God, Dan Kellogg shows his irritation while attending a ‘congregation’ in “the great old church”:

At the Church, where he [Dan Kellogg] and the four females he escorted found room in a back pew, Dan marvelled at the human animal: like dogs, we creep back to lick the hand of God Who, if He exists, has just given us a vicious kick. The harder He kicks, the more fervently we cringe and creep forward to lick His hand. (Updike, “Varieties” 88)

Moreover, Dan Kellogg has shown reluctance during the time of prayer at the church. While the other people around him “all bowed their heads” and prayed for the “souls” of the victims and “for the fate of this great nation”, “Dan felt detached, like a visiting Martian” (Updike, “Varieties” 89).

The second scene is set in a strip club in Florida, a week before the 9/11 attacks. This scene flashes back how Mohamed, one of the hijackers, engrosses himself in the Western wickedness and vice. Mohamed is accompanied by another man named Zaeed to that forbidden place. They have been enjoying the dance of a couple of nude “sluts” around the ‘brass pole’ and “drinking sweet drinks called Daiquiris” (Updike, “Varieties” 91). They are totally engrossed in drinking and watching the whores dancing before them in the bar because:
Their training regimen had inculcated the importance of blending in, and getting drunk was a sure method of merging with America, this unclean society disfigured by an appalling laxity of laws and an electronic delirium of supposed opportunities and pleasures. The very air, icily air-conditioned, tasted of falsity. The whisky burned in Mohamed’s throat like a fire against which he must repeatedly test his courage, his resolve. *It is God’s kindled fire, which shall mount above the hearts of the damned.* (Updike, “Varieties” 90)

The very first line of the above quoted passage hints at the fact that Mohamed and Zaeed are the puppets in the hands of some organizations. In other words, their actions are not controlled by their own reasons. This is the ground for which one may call them as fanatics. But the question is if they can be called ‘religious fanatics’ because of their Muslim identity? The answer is that “fanaticism is psychological whereas religion falls into the moral and spiritual category” (Engineer, 18). Contrary to fanaticism, religion is firm, resolute and based on some reasons. But it is possible for one to mould the character of the other through strong influence of the former to turn the latter into a fanatic. For instance, in the present case Mohamed has overlooked the Islamic Shari’ah through his visit to the strip club, consumption of alcohol, and hijacking etc. under the influence of others. Ironically, despite such anti-Islamic deeds, Mohamed is optimistic about his entry into the heaven:

Through half-shut eyes and the shifting transparencies of whiskey, Mohamed could see a semblance to the ignorant fellahin’s conception of Paradise, where sloe-eyed virgins wait, on silken couches, among flowing rivers, to serve the martyrs delicious fruit. But they are
manifestations, these houris, of the highest level of purity, white in their flesh and gracious in their submission. (Updike, “Varieties” 91)

Mohamed is cheerful about his proposed mission. He is preparing for the “holy jihad” (Updike, “Varieties” 93) in a “dark unholy place” (89). However, his anxiety could be seen in his eyes:

The day, the fateful morning, of culmination was approaching ... The greatness of the deed that was held within him pressed upward like a species of nausea, straining his throat with a desire to cry out—to proclaim, as had done his prophetic namesake the Messenger, the magnificence, beyond all virtues and qualities imaginable on earth, of God and His fiery justice. (Updike, “Varieties” 92)

Here, it is noteworthy to mention that Mohamed, the hijacker in “Varieties of Religious Experience” is better understood in the light of Althusser's theory of ideology as it is mapped out in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”. Althusser upholds that the concept ideology is not a depiction of people’s actual states of survival but of their relations to the circumstances of existence. Accordingly, it is shown through Mohamed’s optimism regarding his entry into the Paradise and imagination about the bliss of it despite the fact that he is living amid the stark reality of this world.

Next episode moves forward to a woozy activity of the sudden collapse of the WTC, as sensed through body and rationally comprehended by a man named Jim Finch on one of the rooftops. Sitting in his ‘cubicle’, which is on the floor towards the top of one of the Twin Towers, Jim Finch shares the painful moment with Marcy, his wife through telephone. Marcy, on the other hand, who is at her apartment in New
Jersey, could see the Twin Towers faintly. Initially, Jim Finch sees the “curling gusts of smoke and flickering pieces of paper strangely invaded the blue from below” (Updike, “Varieties” 95) through the window. According to him “something strange happened” (96) but he does not know what exactly it is. The heat from the floor is unbearable and the “smoke” coming from “sort of near the top; it’s the tower on the left, the one you work in” (98) is suffocating. Under such critical circumstance, he loses all hope of his life but he doesn’t lose his rational faculty. He says to Marcy to live her life the way she likes: “I mean, you know, live your life. Do what looks best for yourself and the kids. Don’t let anything cramp your style. Tell Annie in case I miss it that I wanted to be there tonight” (99). In every minute the degree of suffering increases. He could hardly talk now because “the smoke, the heat, the jet fuel stink were chasing him to the windows, where silhouettes were climbing up into the blue panels, to get some air” (99).

The final episode occurs on United Flight 93, portraying an elderly female passenger named Carolyn caught up in the hijacked plane. Her point of view is described in the story. It’s all about the panic created among the passengers inside the plane as “we have bomb on board” (Updike, “Varieties” 103). Due to a “sudden tilt” of the aeroplane Carolyn could see the “the land below looked like Ohio now, flatter than the Alleghenies, and there was a smoky city that could be Akron or Youngstown” (104). In fact, Carolyn is not aware of the attack on Twin Towers while she was on board. But the scene of a ‘smoky city’ that she has seen through the window of the plane gives an insight about that heinous incident to the readers.
The story discussed above may be said to have prepared Updike adequately for a detailed and sustained treatment of the same theme in the subsequently released novel *Terrorist* (2006), which deals directly with the attacks on the Twin Towers of the WTC. Like that of McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005), and DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Updike’s *Terrorist* too deals with the real threat and reflects the reality that al-Qaeda started a war against the U.S and its allies on September 11, 2001. In this novel, Updike narrates the story of an Arab-American youth recruited by a radical group to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel.

The oeuvre of Updike has enriched American Literature with several magnificent themes. He is one of the most determined, thoughtful, and erudite writers “who would talk about anything, from God to sex to TV commercials” (Heddendorf 487). However, the dominant themes in Updike’s work as he has mentioned in his autobiographical work “The Doghood Tree: A Boyhood” (1965) are “the Three Great Secret Things”: sex, religion and art. He frequently merges these aspects with middle class American lifestyle. A kaleidoscopic portrait of average citizens in small towns and urban settings has placed him in the first grade of American writers. But politics overshadows other themes in case of his recent novel *Terrorist*.

Updike’s preoccupation with the complex world of terrorism and political intrigue of the Islamists in the present time is shown in *Terrorist*. The writer has kept in mind the claim of the fundamentalists regarding America as “an exploitive, soulless nation” which is the root cause of their anger. However:

Updike’s purpose is unashamedly dialectical and didactic. His novel concerns itself, rightly, with ideology, for while at the personal level
their murderous rage may have roots in the irrational, the radical sons and daughters of Islam share a constellation of ideas. *Terrorist* gains complexity through Updike’s willingness to let opposing ideas play themselves out; a reader feels the resentment American culture arouses in the hearts of the disadvantaged. (Sherman 144)

*Terrorist* examines how quick Updike is in his response to the event of 9/11. His personal visit to the site of the ruined towers of the World Trade Center generates in him the interest to portray the incident in his novel, as in an interview Updike says to Alden Mudge:

> It gave me a sense that I was in a very minor way a witness to whatever we’re engaged in now. Bush calls it the war on terror, as if terror can ever be overcome. And as a novel like *The Coup* [1978] shows, I’m interested in Islam as a more fiery and absolutist and, some would say, fanatical brand of theistic faith. So it was not just my happening to have been there but my sensation that I was qualified to speak about why young men are willing to become suicide bombers. I can kind of understand it, and I’m not sure too many Americans can. (Updike “Holy Terror”)

Based on historical survey, Joseph Conrad can be considered along with Updike to have rendered the theme of terrorism based on reality as the main subject of his work. One of Conrad’s political novels *The Secret Agent* (1907) can be cited as an ideal example in this regard. This novel resembles Updike’s *Terrorist* in many important respects. Like Mr. Verloc (a European anarchist and socialist), who is, actually, a double agent and tries to get a third person to carry out a bomb explosion
to blow up Greenwich in *The Secret Agent* (1907), Charlie Chehab in Updike’s *Terrorist*, plays the role of a double agent who recruits Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, the protagonist-cum-terrorist for a bombing plot that is to detonate the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River in New Jersey. Moreover, like that of the secret agent of Conrad’s novel, Charlie, who is at once the confidant of and rather a guide to the Islamist revolutionaries and a CIA agent in *Terrorist*, is also killed cruelly before the suicide operation can be prevented. Ideologically, Charlie like Verloc is loyal to neither side and the result is his brutal killing as Mr. Levy informs Ahmad:

> Beheaded, in fact. Gruesome, huh? He’d been tortured before they did it. The body was found yesterday morning, dumped in the Meadows, by the canal south of Giants Stadium. They wanted it found. There was a note attached to it, in Arabic. Evidently Charlie was CIA undercover and the other side finally figured it out. (Updike, *Terrorist* 290)

The narrative of both the novels hinges on the actual incident taken from real life. *The Secret Agent* is the outcome of a real incident, the Greenwich bomb outrage of 1894 and the *Terrorist* is based on the Twin Towers attack that took place on September 11, 2001. However, Updike has focused on the theme of terrorism and the psychology of a young terrorist.

It is Updike’s awareness of the major incidents and issues that took place around the world, especially if it had any bearing on America that he tries to analyse them as the subject matter of his writings. In an interview Updike says to Edney Silvestre, “I write fiction, poetry, and literary criticism that seek to describe the world as it is, with its surprises and its paradoxes” (Silvestre 247). In brief, the plot of Updike’s single play *Buchanan Dying* (1974), for instance, is based on James
Buchanan, the fifteenth president of America. In the novel *Memories of the Ford Administration* (1992), Updike has revived our memory about the most overlooked Ford administration by linking its plot to the high tide sexual revolution that came during the reign of the American president Ford. When the protagonist-cum-historian Alf Clayton is requested to donate to a symposium on the Ford administration, instead of contributing he comes forward with lots of confessions related to his own life in the Ford administration. Above all the most striking and relevant example in this context is Updike’s *Terrorist*. The actual incident on which the narrative of the novel hinges is taken from real life, already mentioned above. A number of authors like Khaled Hosseini (*The Kite Runner*, 2003), Asma Gull Hasan (*Why I am a Muslim*, 2004), Ian McEwan (*Saturday*, 2005), Don DeLillo (*Falling Man*, 2007), Moshin Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007), and Richard Flanagan (*The Unknown Terrorist*, 2008) have of late dealt with the theme of post-9/11. However, Updike’s *Terrorist* can be taken, as Dominic Head says, “as an apparent exercise in trying to understand the mind-set of Islamic extremism” (Head 117). In this novel, he handled one of such recent problems of America in the form of terrorism that might be caused by the Islamists any time within the country. In order to bring this issue in focus, Updike has set the plot of the novel in contemporary New Jersey and has sketched the motives of his youthful protagonist, and his fanaticism to become a fundamentalist. Updike portrays the development of Ahmad’s character very skilfully. He has shown how Ahmad attains his manhood at the age of eighteen. Moreover, Updike has shown how Ahmad involves himself in fanatical activities in the name of jihad in order to become a suicide bomber and to cause similar kind of damage like that of bombing at the WTC. In a nutshell, “Updike reminds us that the key factors leading to such a child
performing a terrorist act may be present in the United States” (LoCicero, and Sinclair 19).

IV

Updike tries to explore the motivation of religious fundamentalists; more precisely he has Islam in mind and attempts to reveal Islamic fundamentalists/radical Islamists in the novel. This gives him a chance to express the Arab worldviews. *Terrorist* clearly examines the conflict-ridden relationship between the two cultures; the culture of America and that of Arabs. In one way the novel is an example of Said’s view of a prejudiced Western (specifically American) analysis of the East dubbing it as the ‘Other’. The novel also presents a fictional account of Saidian vision of American imperialism demonstrated in *Culture and Imperialism*. Updike has portrayed the Arabs as “terrorists” and religious extremists, who are actively planning to damage the U.S. Such intention is reflected through the character of Ahmad and the other major characters of the novel having ancestral link to the Middle-East countries. “The same is true for Americans, to whom patriotism is next to Godliness” (Said 311). It is echoed in the words of the State Secretary Mr. Haffenreffer (the head of Homeland Security), when he blurts: “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 statues of Buddha...” (Updike, *Terrorist* 258). It is also reflected through Hermione’s (a spinster assistant of the State Secretary Mr. Haffenreffer) worried reaction due to the imminent danger that would occur in the form of a detonation of a bomb. The destruction of the Twin Towers is peeping through her mind: “I felt fall in the air. The sky is so absolutely clear, like”—*like the day of Nine-Eleven* (Updike, *Terrorist* 265). Above all, Jack Levy is far ahead than the other characters so far as
their anxiety regarding the country’s danger is concerned. His restlessness due to the possible attack in the country as reflected throughout in *Terrorist* is enough to prove the point. It will become more clear in the discussion that follows.

However, it can also be said that Updike has depicted the protagonist of the novel with compassion. In an interview Updike says to Alden Mudge, “I think there are enough people complaining about the Arab menace that I can be allowed to try to show this young man as sympathetically as I can” (Mudge). Ahmad is presented as a model of the Oriental male in spite of the fact that by birth he is an American. It is shown through Ahmad’s inclination towards his absent Egyptian Muslim father whom he admires very often and constant negligence towards his Irish-American mother, Teresa Mulloy. Updike further shows the great influence on Ahmad of the local imam at the Mosque as well as Ahmad’s Arabic teacher, Shaikh Rashid (migrated from Yemen). The imam encourages him to carry out the terrorist attack till the very last moment. On the contrary, his American teacher Jack Levy at the Central High School, who is also his guidance counselor, fails to influence him.

The major Muslim characters of this novel (like Shaikh Rashid, Charlie Chehab, Habib Chehab, Maurice Chehab and Omar), though Americans are also presented as the “Other” tracing their ancestral link with the Middle East countries in the past. For instance, Shaikh Rashid is linked with his ancestral background at Yemen, Charlie Chehab and his father and uncle Habib and Maurice Chehab belong to a Lebanese family and even Ahmad’s father Omar is from Egypt. They are depicted as irresponsible, immature, corrupt, hostile, and aggressive in *Terrorist* conforming to the popular stereotypes of Arabs. In spite of the fact that they are born Americans, Jack Levy does not recognise them: “These Arabs all pressure each other with Islam: How can you say no to the will of Allah?” (Updike, *Terrorist* 292) All
negative stereotypes about Arabs characterise the comment of the Secretary Mr. Haffenreffer. In his conversation with his under-secretary Hermione, Mr. Haffenreffer reveals his prejudices about the Arabs and the speakers of Arabic language:

I *hate* losing an asset. We got so few in the Muslim community, that’s one of our weaknesses, that’s how they caught us with our pants down. We don’t have enough Arabic speakers, and half of those we do have don’t think like we do. There’s something weird about the language—it makes them feeble-minded, somehow. Their Internet chatter—... What the fuck kind of sense does that make? (Updike, *Terrorist* 259)

Updike’s attempt to explore the theme of spiritual madness and disappointment through Ahmad, “a pretty typical” (Updike, *Terrorist* 83) radical Islamist does not go in vain. “With Updike’s considerable elan, overpowering style and yet sad finale, he depicts a moving picture of a quiet, polite and sensitive boy who finds his identity in a strong belief in Allah and an uncompromising faith” (Al-Leithy 204). In fact, Ahmad represents a typical middle class American whose father Omar, an Egyptian exchange student, has long since disappeared. He was born and grew up in a fading industrial town that is in the suburb of New Prospect in New Jersey. Ahmad, now, lives with his Irish-American mother Teresa Mulloy, who is deserted by her husband when their only child was three years old. Ahmad engages himself by doing a part time job to make use of the spare time during the period of his study at school. He is committed to Islam. Although Ahmad is brought up with great care by his mother in the absence of his father but still he has a greater admiration for his absent father. Ahmad, though “of mixed parentage and still fervent in faith, a faith chosen rather than merely inherited from a father present to reinforce fidelity”
His mother is Catholic by birth but has abandoned her religious faith. And it is her lack of religion that constitutes one among several other reasons behind Ahmad’s hatred for his mother. However, Ahmad has the desire to ‘find’ his father from his very childhood “not to press any claim, or to impose any guilt, but simply to talk with him, as two Muslim men would talk” (36). It becomes more clear through Ahmad’s reply to Jack Levy’s question if Ahmad would “like to be called” (36) Mulloy or Ashmawy. Ahmad opted for Ashmawy without any hesitation. Consequently, he converted to Islam at the age of eleven. Since then Ahmad believes in Allah firmly and “He [Allah] is in me, and at my side” (42). He tries to lead a pious life but can hardly avoid the sexual appeal of the girls of the Central High School, especially his classmate Joryleen Grant: “The tops of her breasts push up like great blisters in the scoop neck of the indecent top that at its other hem exposes the fat of her belly and the contour of her deep naval. He pictures her smooth body....” (9). The dichotomy between faith and the attractions of the world is Updike’s concern in such passages.

V

As a post-9/11 analysis, the novel Terrorist also needs a special mention, because body exposure and adultery in addition to other Western popular cultures can be seen as the essence of liberalism that radical Islamists see as the great wickedness of the Western lifestyle. It is clearly reflected at the very opening of the novel through Ahmad’s short monologue (in the hall of his school) about the dressing sense of the girls of the Central High school where he studies:

*DEVI尔斯, Ahmad thinks. These devils seek to take away my God.* All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their
soft bodies and alluring hair. Their bare bellies, adorned with shining naval studs and low-down purple tattoos, ask, *What else is there to see?* (Updike, *Terrorist* 3)

Through this short monologue, Updike tries to convey us the message about Ahmad’s dislike of the American way of life as well as his strict attachment to the religious dictates and values. Ahmad condemns such manner of dressing which according to him not only diverts/draws the attention of the “boys” who “look dead-eyed” but also “shifty eyes and hollow voices” of “the teachers, weak Christians and nonobservant Jews” very often “betray their lack of belief” (Updike, *Terrorist* 3). The only solution in this regard, Ahmad thinks, is awareness of the women. According to him the women should cover their body properly as specified in Islamic Shari’ah. Such step will help them from tempting others and can lead a more secure life. In this context, Ahmad cannot but speak out his little knowledge about the restriction imposed on women regarding the covering of their body in Shari’ah. He says to Joryleen Grant with great pride that:

> In the eyes of God ... as revealed by the Prophet: ‘Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity.’ That’s from the same sura that advises women to cover their ornaments, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not even to stamp their feet so their hidden ankle bracelets can be heard. (Updike, *Terrorist* 70-71)

This shows Ahmad’s willingness to stick to the path as instructed by Allah. Initially, he strives to suppress his carnal desires/sexual impulses for Joryleen to show his firm faith in Allah. He prefers to devote more and more time at the mosque in the study of
the Qurʾān to seek out comfort. However, he fails to stick to the ‘Straight Path’. “The world is difficult, he [Ahmad] thinks, because devils are busy in it, confusing things and making the straight crooked” (Updike, Terrorist 11). Subsequently, under the influence of “the sex-obsessed West” (71), Ahmad indulges in building a relationship with Joryleen.

Of a number of Muslim students at New Prospect’s Central High School, Ahmad’s spiritual consciousness stands out. Being the most religious student in his school, Ahmad tries to keep himself away from certain things which are forbidden in Islam. “His religion keeps him from drugs and vice, though it also holds him rather aloof from his classmates and the studies on the curriculum” (Updike, Terrorist 8). The religious bend of mind of Ahmad is reflected through his excessive involvement in every aspect of his religion. He refuses to abide by the advice of his teacher-cum-guidance counselor Mr. Levy at Central High School. According to him, Mr. Levy is not powerful enough to guide him: “Ahmad knows he must have a future, but it seems insubstantial to him, and repels his interest. The only guidance, says the third sura, is the guidance of Allah” (Updike, Terrorist 18). As a devout Muslim, he attends to every minute detail of the religious laws of Islam. And “Ahmad knows it is sin to be vain of his (Tylenol’s) appearance: self-love is a form of competition with God, and competition is what He cannot abide” (18). He further mocks at the attitude of those well paid teachers of the High School in their absence for their negligence towards the moral significance of things. They pretend to be virtuous, but actually “they lack true faith; they are not on the Straight Path; they are unclean” (3). Instead, they pay their keen attention to “the values they believe in are Godless: biology and chemistry and physics” (4). Ahmad, who has no friend and is subjected to maltreatment, thinks his teachers as “troublemakers, worldly and cynical and just in it for the paycheck” (85).
However, irony lies in the fact that despite his knowledge about “God is closer than the vein in his neck” (152), Ahmad fails to stick to the ‘Straight Path’. On the contrary, “he has risked Hellfire to accept her [Joryleen’s] invitation” (63) and reaches there at the church to listen her song. It shows his inability in taking firm decision and “Ahmad’s indecision is prolonged” (66). The confusion in his mind is further exposed a little later when he says regarding the restrictions imposed on seeing TV and films in Islam:

There is nothing in Islam to forbid watching television and attending the cinema, though in fact it is all so saturated in despair and unbelief as to repel my interest. Nor does Islam forbid consorting with the opposite sex, if strict prohibitions are observed. (Updike, Terrorist 70)

On another occasion Ahmad contradicts his previous opinion on the same topic and says to Charlie, “I do not find that television encourages clean thoughts” (Updike, Terrorist 172). This is how Ahmad’s interest in Western culture, however little, is reflected though Ahmad tries to show that he has least interest in it. But, we cannot deny the fact that Ahmad is moved by the term faith in God uttered by the “Christian imam” (57) during the time of congregation in the church. What he learns is that a strong belief in the God would help one to get God by the side whenever required. It is true that he is not influenced by the preaching of the Christian religion at the church but he has picked up the idea of unconditional faith in one God which strengthens his trust in Allah. He tries to obey the code and conduct of Islam but does not dare mix politics and religion. But gradually, there comes a drastic change in Ahmad’s latter life under the influence of his uncanny fundamentalist Arabic teacher, Shaikh Rashid.
In *Terrorist*, the Islamists especially Shaikh Rashid and Charlie Chehab raise voice and protest against the Western culture in particular and the American imperialism in general. To do so they have chosen jihad as an ideal option and pursued Ahmad to convert it into reality. Ahmad falls prey to this discourse due to his fanaticism and fickleness of character. Ahmad like Mohamed in “Varieties of Religious Experience” has given chance to others to dominate him. In this case Shaikh Rashid and Charlie Chehab mislead Ahmad from under the banner of religion. The constant motivation of the duo against the nonbelievers of Islam from the West in particular and the whole world in general has badly shaken Ahmad’s firm faith in Allah. Updike puts forward the conflict within Ahmad—his instability and uncertainty of mind. He is struggling from within and can hardly gather any courage to take future decision. But it is noteworthy that Ahmad surprises everyone especially his guidance counsellor Jack Levy through his decision of joining a job as a truck driver.

The biggest mistake that pushes Ahmad in troublesome condition is his shift from the college track to the vocational one. His passion for the profession of truck driving compels him to acquire his commercial-driver’s-license in Wayne, exactly two weeks after the completion of his graduation from Central High School. Since then he never looks back. He has been in New Jersey in the employ of the Excellency Home Furnishings and carried out the profession of truck driving. He is the most trusted employee who follows the instructions of the owner word by word. However “By choosing a jihadi foot-soldier born and raised in New Jersey, Updike seeks to make his terrorist a knowable and recognisable entity, an enemy of the state conceived and bread within it and who is not so unlike his adversaries” (Morley 255).
He is at once confident of truck driving profession but ignorant about the kind of work he is assigned to do. He has to carry risky materials which include: “... flammable gasses like hydrogen and poisonous/toxic gasses like compressed fluorine; there are flammable solids like wetted ammonium … and radioactive substances like uranium and corrosives like battery fluid” (Updike, Terrorist 74). This work in due course guides Ahmad to enrol him in a terrorist scheme. Ideologically he is committed to his work. He does it out of loyalty for his profession and fear of God. After all, he is now a changed young man who considers himself daring enough to enlist himself in the list of radical Islamist and seek jihad. And in Terrorist, Updike’s centre of attention is on the damned notion of jihad and martyrdom in Islam that show the way to altruism. In fact Shaikh Rashid is responsible for it. His advice compels Ahmad to become a truck driver. Ahmad does not dare defy the advice of his Arabic teacher. Like an adamant person, Ahmad supports this profession firmly and moves ahead following his imam’s advice, neglecting the prospect of his higher studies. He tries time and again to justify his decision of joining it. Contrarily, “he said the college track exposed me to corrupting influences—bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless” (38). In this context, in an interview Updike says to Michiko Kakutani that Ahmad is “more robot than human being” who “talks not like a teenager but like a terrorist in a bad action-adventure movie, or someone who has been brainwashed and programmed to spout jihadist clichés” (Kakutani). Though, Ahmad lacks the knowledge about the possible hazards of the profession of truck driving but he does not want to take any advice from his guardian counselor or any interference by anybody else in this regard except his Arabic teacher. He is thrilled about it and likes it because he comes across spiritual value in it:
Transportation is full of dangers that Ahmad has never before contemplated. It excites him, however, to see himself—like the pilot of a 727 or the captain of a supertanker or the tiny brain of a brontosaurus—steering a great vehicle through the maze of dire possibilities to safety. He is pleased to find in the trucking regulations a concern with purity almost religious in quality. (Updike, *Terrorist* 75)

Moreover, being influenced by his Arabic Teacher, Ahmad shows his lack of faith in the American administration. According to him it has materialistic outlook and is not conducive for spirituality. It does not matter which party holds political power: “It makes no difference which President is in. They all want Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism. But the human spirit asks for self-denial. It longs to say ‘No’ to the physical world” (Updike, *Terrorist* 72). This is how Ahmad protests Western imperialism. The same speech also shows Ahmad’s careless attitude towards the activities of this world, which provokes Joryleen to say to him: “You scare me when you talk like that. It sounds like you hate life” (72).

Despite the fact that the story of *Terrorist* revolves around two important characters: Ahmad and Jack Levy, the plot that strikes our attention most is the conspiracy of Shaikh Rashid and Charlie Chehab. After getting financial help and moral support from Charlie’s father Mr. Habib Chehab and uncle Maurice Chehab, the duo have prepared the blueprint of the terrorist attack under the Lincoln Tunnel. To the surprise of the readers Ahmad, the would-be operator/terrorist, is completely ignorant about heinous motive behind the plot. With the progress of the discussion, the readers will come to know to what extent these religious fundamentalists are successful in motivating Ahmad to accomplish their mission.
In *Terrorist*, Shaikh Rashid’s role is indispensable. He lives in a mosque located in the West Main Street a “hard-to-find place” (Updike, *Terrorist* 38) and performs the function of an ‘imam’. While teaching Ahmad the religious lessons and many things from the ‘Hadith’ and “the Book of Books” (6), the imam encourages the former to move forward with a ‘mission’ of mass destruction. Rather, he moulds the character of Ahmad into a radical Islamist. It is Ahmad’s strong belief in Islam that makes him helpless to his imam’s procedures of recruitment. His sole purpose is to strengthen the hands of political Islam. The imam has sowed the seed of political Islam in Ahmad at the very early stage of the latter’s life. At every opportunity, the imam emphasizes Ahmad’s lonely life and tells him that he is different from the fellows of the similar age group. The imam’s cynical attitude is reflected through his interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad’s suras allegorically. It generates a kind of doubt in Ahmad. At the same time it creates a sense of superiority towards his teacher. Sometimes during the teaching-learning process, “Ahmad does not like Shaikh Rashid’s voice ... It reminds him of the unconvincing voices of his teachers at Central High. He hears Satan’s undertone in it, a denying voice within an affirming voice” (6). The whole situation creates panic in Shaikh Rashid:

When the murmuring of the devils gnawing within him tinges the imam’s voice, Ahmad feels in his own self a desire to rise up and crush him, as God roasted that poor worm at the center of the spiral. The student’s faith exceeds the master’s; it frightens Shaikh Rashid to be riding the winged white steed of Islam, its irresistible onrushing. He seeks to soften the Prophet’s words, to make them blend with human reason, but they were not meant to blend: they invade our human softness like a sword. Allah is sublime beyond all particulars. There is
no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsistent; He is the light by which the sun looks black. He does not blend with our reason but makes our reason bow low, its forehead scraping the dust and bearing like Cain the mark of that dust. (Updike, *Terrorist* 7)

It is the profession of imam that restricts the common people to question the deeds of Shaikh Rashid. In addition to it, he makes the optimum use of his profession as an Arabic teacher. During the teaching-learning process, Shaikh Rashid tries to incite the students in general and Ahmad in particular against the ‘infidels’. On one occasion while discussing a verse from the third sura which goes like this: “Let not the infidels deem that ... shall be their lot” (Updike, *Terrorist* 76), the teacher puts the following questions to his students to arouse in them hatred for the nonbelievers:

The cockroaches that slither out from baseboard and from beneath the sink—do you pity them? The flies that buzz around the food on the table, walking on it with the dirty feet that have just danced on feces and carrion—do you pity them? (Updike, *Terrorist* 76)

What could be expected from the students who are only beginners? Naturally, their little knowledge and the obedience towards their teacher convince the students to believe what Shaikh Rashid teaches them. Getting satisfactory response ‘no’ from his pupils, Shaikh Rashid “a man slight and slim as a dagger, with a dangerous slyness about him” (Updike, *Terrorist* 145) further adds:

You want to destroy them. They are vexing you with their uncleanness. They would take over your table, your kitchen; they will settle into the very food as it passes into your mouth if you do not destroy them. They have no feelings. They are manifestations of Satan, and God will
destroy them without mercy on the day of final reckoning. God will rejoice at their suffering. Do thou likewise, Ahmad. (Updike, *Terrorist* 77)

However, all the students including Ahmad failed to understand the preaching of their imam. In spite of that Ahmad thinks it wise to obey his Arabic teacher and tries to suppress his doubts over the latter: “It seemed to Ahmad that, as with the facts of Paradise, his teacher resorted to metaphor as a shield against reality.... But it was not Ahmad’s role to argue; it was his to learn, to submit to his own place in Islam’s vast structure, visible and invisible” (Updike, *Terrorist* 77).

Due to Shaikh Rashid’s misinterpretation of the true concept of Islam Ahmad’s hatred for the “kafir” (Updike, *Terrorist* 51) increased. Ahmad is boosted up from within his soul knowing that “the inimitable work of God the Creator, *al-Khāliq*” which “alone grips the soul with its own spiritual substance: *Verily, were men and Djinn assembled to produce the like of this Qur’an, they could not produce its like, though the one should help the other*” (Updike, *Terrorist* 51). In fact, Islam is a religion of peace. It does not encourage hatred for the followers of any other religion. But, the imam has taught Ahmad to hate the nonbelievers. As a loyal student he follows what his Arabic teacher taught him. He considers all the nonbelievers surrounding him as devils and condemns them as “infidels” for “they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world, and in the corrupting diversions of the television set” (4). Moreover, while returning from the church choir, Ahmad says to Joryleen very proudly that: “My teacher at the mosque says that all unbelievers are our enemies. The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed” (68). This is how Ahmad is proud of his intended mission all in the name of religion. He further says to Joryleen that: “I am a good Muslim, in a world that mocks faith” (69).
Ahmad’s lack of proper knowledge about the Islamic Shari’ah in addition to his Arabic teacher’s deceitful advice, lead the former to mock at the nonbelievers of Islam. Subsequently, it reflects his prejudice against them. Islam, however, believes in universal brotherhood. The Holy Qur’ān states:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

During Ahmad’s visits to the mosque to attend his bi-weekly Qur’ān lesson with Shaikh Rashid, the latter's motive gets further exposed. Ahmad’s revelation about his desire for Paradise in front of his Arabic teacher makes the tasks of the latter easier. Shaikh Rashid creates more curiosity and interest in Ahmad, saying that “even if the dark-eyed houris are merely white raisins, does that lessen your appetite for Paradise?” (Updike, Terrorist 107) Though the concept of ‘houris’ in Islam is present but Shaikh Rashid uses the concept as a bait for Ahmad in order to give shape to his future plan. The ecstasy of Paradise excites Ahmad very much. He fails to hold his emotions under control. He repeats his wish for Heaven with an emphasis: “Oh, no. I thirst for Paradise,” (106).

A parallel can be drawn between Ahmad and Mohamed of “Varieties of Religious Experience”, who too is craving for Heaven. But their activities rouse some questions. For instance, Mohamed has visited the strip club a week before his proposed mission of hijacking. So far as Ahmad is concerned, there is no doubt in ‘his
yearning for purity’ to achieve his goal but he can’t resist himself about Joryleen: “He thinks of sinking himself into her body and knows from its richness and ease that this is a devil’s thought” (Updike, *Terrorist* 73). Ahmad has listened to his own voice against the will of Allah. He has welcomed Zoryleen a “whore” (228) on bed just the night before the day of his intended plan of suicide attack at the Lincoln Tunnel. The situation becomes ironical when the former says to the latter that:

I still hold to Straight Path … Islam is still my comfort and guide. But—... when I turn to Allah and try to think of Him, it is borne in upon me how alone He is ... Nobody thinks of God—... And to even think of such things, to try to make such pictures of God as a kind of human being, my master the imam would tell me as blasphemy, deserving an eternity of Hellfire. (Updike, *Terrorist* 225)

Ahmad’s choice of suicide attack as the means to become successful in his mission is also forbidden in Islam. The *Holy Qurʾān* states regarding suicide:

O ye who believe! eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: but let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual goodwill: nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful!

If any do that in rancour and injustice, —soon shall We cast him into the Fire: and easy it is for Allah. (4: 29-30)

Moreover, Allah, the Most High states regarding the killing that:

On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person—unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the
The irony lies in the fact that despite their involvement in consumption of alcohol and proposed plan of suicide attack to kill peoples, Ahmad and Mohamed are hopeful about their entry into the Heaven.

Both Ahmad and Mohamed belong to this world. But they are optimistic of their entry into the Heaven. Amid the harsh reality they imagine about the bliss and comfort of the Paradise—the houris, the “carpets and couches” (Updike, *Terrorist* 152), the flowing rivers and the gardens etc. This is how Louis Althusser’s ideology represents the imaginary relationship of ‘individuals’ to “their conditions of existence” (113).

Similarly, there is something about the way the novel *Terrorist* deals with ‘artifice and control’ that makes it peculiarly open to psychoanalytic interpretation and that is certainly to do with its focus on Ahmad, the protagonist of the novel. This reading can be taken using Lacan’s three orders of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. “The Symbolic order is where structuring of all kinds, particularly narrative and linguistic, takes place” (Barker 111). Paradise (which according to Islamic concept exist but in the world hereafter) for which Ahmad is passionately longing for reflects Lacan’s concept of Imaginary. Paradise itself is Symbol of eternity and “the dark-eyed virgins are symbolic of bliss one cannot imagine without concrete images” (Updike, *Terrorist* 71). Next, consideration is Real “which exists as a condition of
body, outside language” (Barker 112). This is what Ahmad yearns for. It is present in
the form of *shahīd*. Ahmad’s longing for *shahīd* through his proposed plan of suicide
attack on the Lincoln Tunnel cannot be totally achieved within language, but as
contemplation on something beyond comprehension.

To keep Ahmad engrossed, Shaikh Rashid goes on drawing the images of
‘houris’ time and again and reminds the former about the comfort of Heaven. The
imam says to Ahmad that:

> My own sense of it has always been that the houris are metaphors for
> bliss beyond imagining, a bliss chaste and unending, and not literal
copulation with physical women—warm, rounded, slavish women.
> Surely copulation as commonly experienced is the very essence of
earthly transience, of vain joy. (Updike, *Terrorist* 107)

Shaikh Rashid tries to convince Ahmad that the path to God is the Straight
one. No doubt in it. He further says that one should not keep himself away from it
even if his family comes his way as hindrance. But does the imam do it with a pure
intention? No. He does so as bait for Ahmad only to entrap the latter. It is an effort to
separate Ahmad from his mother so that the former might complete the assigned task
without the interference of the latter. However, irony lies in the fact that the imam
himself does not follow the same path. The way the imam has convinced Ahmad in
the name of jihad is, actually, misleading: “Well, may be because they distract you
from *jihād* from the struggle to become holy and closer to God” (Updike, *Terrorist*
108). Ahmad becomes emotionally charged up by the misleading words of his Arabic
teacher. He promises to his Arabic teacher that in order to enter “into Paradise ... I
look forward to it, as do all good Muslims” (108). To make things under his full control, Shaikh Rashid further cautions his student in the following manner:

I trust you will not be returning to the Kafir church in the center of town ... The unclean can appear to shine, and devils do good imitations of angels. Keep to the Straight Path—ihdinā’s-sirāta’l-mustaquim. Beware of anyone, however pleasing, who distracts you from Allah’s pure being. (Updike, Terrorist 109)

The imam-cum-teacher is ‘pleased’ to hear the information regarding Ahmad’s acquiring of ‘C’ rating licence. In order to take the advantage of it, Ahmad’s Arabic teacher lures Ahmad with the information that the Chehab family is in search for a youthful truck driver “with no unclean habits and firmly of our faith” (Updike, Terrorist 142). Initially, the proposal doesn’t evoke any positive response from Ahmad because he cannot drive out of the state or carry risky materials. But, the imam convinces Ahmad to join that job and help the latter in seeking it. At the same time Shaikh Rashid warns Ahmad saying that “appearances can deceive” (142). Through such a moral statement Shaikh Rashid not only misguides his students under the guise of an Arabic teacher but also misleads the people of his community under the guise of an imam.

Shaikh Rashid also plays a mischievous role in bringing Charlie close to Ahmad in order to make his task easier. Ahmad according to the imam would like Charlie because “He’s very American” (Updike, Terrorist 145). Does it not sound hypocritical?

Charlie Chehab “a man of many disparate parts”, (Updike, Terrorist 178) on the other hand, is a secret agent with a CIA who mixes freely with the Islamists. He
provokes Ahmad to move forward in preserving the interest of his community. He is Ahmad’s co-worker at Excellency Home Furnishings who hires him for a bombing plot. He is at once confident of and a sort of guide to the terrorist revolutionaries. He is not at all sorry for his mischievous plan. Rather, he is very anxious about the success of his future plan. When he finds the plot going against him, Charlie forced Ahmad to drive the truck loaded with huge explosive gadget and exploding it in the Lincoln Tunnel.

Updike introduces Charlie as “a thick-set six-footer in his middle thirties, his swarthy face deeply creased, with a broad and flexible mouth much in motion” (Updike, Terrorist 145-46). He looks after the business of furniture run jointly by Habib Chehab and Maurice Chehab, his father and uncle respectively in their absence. He does so not merely by monitoring if the workers are doing their work properly, but he works with them as a fellow-worker according to the demand of the situation. Mainly, his routine job is that of “selling merchandise and performing deliveries, but they [his father and uncle] wish him to play a more significant role in the office” (Updike, Terrorist 145). Ahmad starts liking the company of Charlie Chehab and reveals his spiritual desire in front of him while sharing their views with each other in clear terms that “I seek to walk the Straight Path” (148). But Charlie knows his job well. He leaves no stone unturned to divert Ahmad’s attention. Even after the joining of Ahmad as a truck driver, Charlie tries to convince the former continuously that the profession of a truck driver for him is far better than further study: “What the fuck *do* they teach you at school, Madman?” (179) In this way Charlie tries to create a kind of aversion in Ahmad towards higher education.

Charlie’s motive behind his excessive helpful attitude towards Ahmad is only to bring him under his control. Sometimes Charlie accompanies Ahmad during the time
of loading and unloading furniture even though the latter could ‘handle’ it by himself. Before executing his plan, Charlie wants to verify the outlook of Ahmad towards the Muslim brotherhood. That’s why Charlie expresses his opinion in front of Ahmad that: “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. Bigger, you better be better” (Updike, *Terrorist* 157). He says so only to provoke Ahmad’s inner thought so that the former can come to a sound conclusion regarding the latter’s attitude. However, such ‘political note’ seems to Ahmad “as strange, slightly out of tune” (157). Gradually, Charlie like that of Shaikh Rashid tries to generate the idea of jihad in Ahmad. Initially, Ahmad’s opinion regarding jihad simply reflects his knowledge of it and nothing more than that as he puts forward his view in the following words: “Jihad doesn’t have to mean war ... It means striving, along the path of God. It can mean inner struggle” (Updike, *Terrorist* 149). But, with the passage of time there comes a drastic change in Ahmad’s mind which is reflected through his personality. Ultimately, jihad becomes a passion for him. He says to Charlie: “Infidels do not know how to die ... True believers ... They know that Paradise awaits the righteous” (174). Charlie on the other hand, tries to convince Ahmad that he is fully committed to the thought of his own community and pursues the latter to do the same.

Charlie is, in fact, a great opponent of imperialism. He not only disapproves imperialism orally but also believes in action and convinces others to revolt against it. For instance, in order to convince Ahmad about the bad effects of the imperial dominance, Charlie tells him with great interest, the “patriotic tale” (Updike, *Terrorist* 179) of the war between England and America that took place during 1776-77. He has laid special emphasis on George Washington's campaigns. According to Charlie
George Washington was the great hero of that war, who had never moved backward like a crab neglecting his duty. Charlie tries to entrap Ahmad through his logic:

He [George Washington] was the Ho Chi Minn of his day. We were like Hamas. We were Al-Qaida ... He showed the world what can be done against the odds, against a superpower. He showed—and this is where Vietnam and Iraq come in—that in a war between an imperialist occupier and the people who actually live there, the people will eventually prevail. (Updike, Terrorist 181)

Charlie goes on explaining about that war in order to prove the then position of imperialist Britain which was similar to that of today’s America. So according to him, America should meet the same fate and, face the same consequence as England did at the end of that war: “The Americans fell back, but stood up to the British well enough to show the French they were worth supporting. And the Spanish and Dutch. All of Europe was out to cut England down to size. Like the U.S now ... History isn’t something over and done, you know. It’s now, too. Revolution never stops. You cut off its head, it grows two” (Updike, Terrorist 182). Such provocation of Charlie motivates Ahmad to a great extent. As a result of which Ahmad gathers a kind of ‘confidence’ and says that “these old revolutions ... have much to teach our jihad” (183). Like that of Shaikh Rashid’s appealing words, Charlie’s provocative words too act as whetstone and grasp Ahmad’s rational faculty. Ahmad emotionally says to Charlie that: “Already I have lived longer than many martyrs in Iran and Iraq” (175). Ultimately, Ahmad gives his consent that he is with the ‘jihad’: “How could I not be? The Prophet urges it in the Book.” Ahmad quotes: “Mohammed is Allah’s apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another”
(183). In the process, the feeling of Ahmad regarding the Muslim brotherhood and hatred for the others engrossed him.

However, Charlie’s comment regarding the collapse of the Twin Towers during the time of their visit to Jersey city disheartens Ahmad: “It’s nice,” Charlie observes, “To see those towers gone ... They were ugly—way out of proportion. They didn’t belong” (Updike, *Terrorist* 186-87). While Charlie is happy at the collapse of the WTC and unsympathetic towards the people who died inside it, Ahmad’s humane side is revealed about the whole incident. And here lies the contrast between the two characters. Though, Ahmad is proved to be a fanatic under the influence of Shaikh Rashid, Charlie Chehab, and Habib Chehab, he is not devoid of humane side. Imagining/recalling the incident of the collapse of the Twin Towers and the pathetic conditions faced by the people who were inside the building, Ahmad says to Charlie: “I pitied them. Especially those that jumped. How terrible, to be so trapped by crushing heat that jumping to certain death is better. Think of the dizziness, looking down before you jump” (Updike, *Terrorist* 187). In this context, Ahmad’s sympathy for the victims of the Twin Towers is justified. “Hurriedly” but cunningly, Charlie tries to wipe away the compassion for the “infidels” from Ahmad’s mind. He says to Ahmad that:

Those people worked in finance, furthering the interests of the American empire, the empire that sustains Israel and inflicts death every day on Palestinians and Chechnyans, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold. (Updike, *Terrorist* 187)

It shows Charlie’s strong rebellious character against the “kafirs” in his word. His ceaseless attempt of generating resentment in Ahmad as a replacement of innocence is
obvious throughout. In response to Ahmad’s query whether or not “some were Muslims” (Updike, *Terrorist* 187) among the victims of the terrorist attacks that collapsed the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, Charlie’s reply is not satisfactory. According to Charlie there must be the mentality of sacrifice in war. Charlie also condemns the corrupting influence of the empire over its people in general. America is not exceptional in this regard and he means it:

Ahmad, you must think of it as war. War isn’t tidy. There is collateral damage ... An empire sucks the blood of subject peoples so cleverly they don’t know why they’re dying, why they have no strength. The enemies around us, the children and fat people in shorts giving us their dirty little looks—have you noticed?—do not see themselves as oppressors and killers. They see themselves as innocent, absorbed in their private lives. Everyone is innocent—they are innocent, the people jumping from the towers were innocent, George W. Bush is innocent, a simple reformed drunk from Texas who loves his nice wife and naughty daughters. Yet, out of all this innocence, somehow evil emerges. The Western powers steal our oil, they take our land—(Updike, *Terrorist* 187-88)

Charlie further unburdens his envious feelings against the West from the core of his heart in front of Ahmad. He envies the Westerners because “they take from Muslims their traditions and a sense of themselves, the pride in themselves that all men are entitled to” (Updike, *Terrorist* 188). Charlie’s hard work does not go in vain as Ahmad agrees to take part in the jihad against the ‘infidels’ but “if God wills it” (189).
When everything is going in favour of Charlie and Ahmad is moving ahead like “a good brave kid” (Updike, *Terrorist* 189) with the plan of jihad, the question regarding the authenticity of “the contents of the ottoman” (196) arises in the latter’s mind. Out of suspicion, Ahmad enquires about the whole incident that took place a couple of days ago about which Ahmad himself is witness. Charlie, on the other hand, defends the suspicious incident. He says that that sort of thing happens very rarely, may be once in hundred times and that too has reason behind it. The money according to Charlie is delivered to those who “are true believers” and believe “in action”:

They believe that something can be done. That the Muslim peasant in Mindanao need not starve, that the Bangladeshi child need not drown, that the Egyptian villager need not go blind with schistosomiasis, that the Palestinians need not be strafed by Israeli helicopters, that the faithful need not eat the sand and camel dung of the world while the Great Satan grows fat on sugar and pork and underpriced petroleum. They believe that a billion followers of Islam need not have their eyes and ears and souls corrupted by the poisonous entertainments of Hollywood and a ruthless economic imperialism whose Christian-Jewish God is a decrepit idol, a mere mask concealing the despair of atheists. (Updike, *Terrorist* 198-99)

Various questions related to the ‘green American currency’ throw light on Ahmad’s curiosity to get exact information regarding the use of money. It hints at his pure intention in the profession he is involved. He does so also in order to avoid any adverse situation that might come his way. But it is too late for him because he is already well convinced by Shaikh Rashid and Charlie regarding Ahmad’s involvement in jihad. Now, what Ahmad can do is to believe in their words. However,
being entrapped by Ahmad’s query, Charlie clarifies the source of money and the use of the same:

The money comes ... from those who love Allah, both within the U.S. and abroad. Think of those four men as seeds placed within the soil, and the money as water to keep the soil moist, so that some day the seeds will split their shells and bloom ... These are important secrets that you have extracted from me. They are life-and-death stuff, Madman. I’m wondering right now if I’ve made a mistake, telling you all this. (Updike, *Terrorist* 199)

The intention of Charlie as reflected through the above quoted passage is very clear. He tries to give Ahmad the message that the latter too should contribute for Islam. Charlie’s hope becomes stronger after hearing Ahmad’s straightforward self-revelation: “I am with those ... who are with God” (Updike, *Terrorist* 200). The answer of Charlie to the final question of Ahmad “on these matters” (200) has great relevance in this context:

Like I said, there are always a number of projects under consideration, and how they develop is somewhat hard to predict. What does the Book say, Madman? *And the Jews plotted, and God plotted. But of those who plot, God is the best.* (Updike, *Terrorist* 201)

Like a naive person Ahmad believes in what Charlie says to him: “In these plots, will I ever have a part to play?” Charlie does not sit idly by asking Ahmad “one thing to keep in mind” that is about the coming up of the anniversary in the month of September (Updike, *Terrorist* 201). But he also shows his sincerity by ‘greeting’ him
on that particular day in September saying, “This is your lucky day, Madman!” (210) though “September brings with it an extra danger ....” (211).

Ahmad proves “to be an object of indifference” (Updike, *Terrorist* 213) to his mother through his denial of the “fishy” (212) thing that is going on at the furniture store. It shows Ahmad’s loyalty towards the owner of the Excellency Home Furnishings. It puts Ahmad in further trouble. Being aware of Ahmad’s weaknesses towards Joryleen, Charlie applies yet another trick to divert the former’s rational faculty. Charlie makes the arrangement of Joryleen’s meeting with Ahmad the night before Ahmad would go for action. He has done so only to numb Ahmad’s rational faculty. In fact “his [Ahmad’s] encounter with Joryleen had been arranged for the Friday before Labor Day” (Updike, *Terrorist* 229-30). Charlie’s mischief is known to the readers through Joryleen as she says to Ahmad that, “All I was told was to wait for this boy [Ahmad] that needs to be devirginated” (217). This incident clearly reflects Charlie’s disrespect for the Shari’ah of Islam. Despite the fact that fornication is one of the major sins according to the Islamic Shari’ah, Charlie has made such arrangement for Ahmad so that the latter might easily gets involved. Here the irony is Charlie’s pretention to be a true follower of Islam. He tries to present himself as religious and is abide by the words of Allah especially in front of Ahmad, but his action is reverse of what he actually tries to prove.

Charlie’s revelation of the fact regarding his meeting with Shaikh Rashid “over the long weekend” (Updike, *Terrorist* 231) in front of Ahmad shows the former’s sincerity to the proposed mission. As part of his responsibility, Charlie informs Ahmad that the imam would like to meet with the latter at the Islamic Center. Realising Ahmad’s negligence towards the issue, Charlie adds: “You can’t do just you and God, Madman. He sent His Prophet, and the Prophet created a community.
Without the *ummah*, the knowledge and practice of belonging to a righteous group, faith is a seed that bears no fruit” (231). To abide by Shaikh Rashid’s instruction, Charlie has left Ahmad at the mosque in due time fixed for appointment. But, before leaving Ahmad there Charlie wants to know whether the former is “sure” in his “mission”. Expectedly, Ahmad’s reply satisfies Charlie as the former says: “As God is my witness,”... “I burn to do it.” (242)

Shaikh Rashid’s “unusual fervor and ceremoniousness” for his student Ahmad on the latter’s arrival at the appointed place is subject to question mark: “Dear boy, I have missed ... There are too few like you ...You have travelled in the wider, infidel world—what our friends the Black Muslims call ‘the dead world’. Has it modified your beliefs?” (Updike, *Terrorist* 232) However, Ahmad is pleased to hear the praise from his Arabic teacher, which in fact is false. Accordingly, Ahmad reassures his Arabic teacher regarding his strong faith in Islam. He says to his teacher, “Sir, I am not aware that it has. I still feel God beside me, as close as the vein in my neck, cherishing me as only He can” (233). Earlier, Ahmad had said in front of Charlie that the former is ready to die for jihad. He sticks to his previous decision. He says to the imam that: “I will die ... if it is the will of God.” To which the imam says:

There is a way ... in which a mighty blow can be delivered against His enemies ... A way ... It would involve a *shahīd* whose love of God is unqualified, and who impatiently thirsts for the glory of Paradise. Are you such a one, Ahmad? ... Be honest, please. (Updike, *Terrorist* 234)

Though Ahmad has strong desire to participate in jihad but his lack of “warrior skills” (Updike, *Terrorist* 234) comes on his way as an obstacle. However, the imam flatters Ahmad in an encouraging tone saying: “It has been seen to that you have all the skills
you need ... We have, in our war for God ... ‘The Light’? ... ‘As for the unbelievers, their works are ... and with one another’” (234-35). The attack on the Lincoln Tunnel would be an “endless joy” for Ahmad’s Arabic teacher. His continuous incentive to Ahmad in this regard makes the latter’s will power stronger. It is evident from Ahmad’s eagerness to know the moment of his self-sacrifice. He asks his Arabic teacher, “When ... will my istishhād take place?” (236) The enthusiasm in Ahmad pleases Shaikh Rashid to a great extent. The flattery of Shaikh Rashid reaches its climax when he says to Ahmad that:

Your heroic sacrifice ... Within a week, I would say. The details are not mine to specify, but a week would approximate an anniversary and send an effective message to the global Satan. The message would be, ‘We strike when we please.’ (Updike, *Terrorist* 236)

It is clear from the above speech of Shaikh Rashid that a number of people are involved as far as the plot of bombing is concerned. But, he is playing a major role in it to strengthen the network of political Islam. We can sketch an image of the nature of the would-be bomb explosion from the imam’s speech to Ahmad. Hinting at the explosive loaded truck that has been chosen for the attack, the imam says:

A truck like it, which should give you no trouble in driving a short distance. The Excellency truck itself would of course incriminate the Chehabs, if any identifiable fragments remain. The hope is that none will. In the first World Trade Center bombings, you may be too young to remember, the rented truck was traced with laughable ease. This time, the physical clues will be obliterated—sunk, as the great Shakespeare puts it, full fathom five. (Updike, *Terrorist* 236)
In order to wipe away all worries of Ahmad, the imam reminds the former about the bliss of Paradise. When Ahmad is shocked hearing about the moment of the possible bomb blast, Shaikh Rashid “quickly” says to Ahmad that: “You will not be there to experience it. You will already be in Jannah, in Paradise, at that instant, confronting the delighted face of God. He will greet you as His son” (Updike, _Terrorist_ 237).

Shaikh Rashid plays yet another trick to verify the intensity of Ahmad’s decision regarding his involvement in the planned bombing plot. He pretends as if it doesn’t matter if Ahmad refuses to do it. In that case somebody else will replace Ahmad: “There are many others eager for a glorious name and the assurance of eternal bliss. The jihad is overwhelmed by volunteers, even in this homeland of evil and irreligion” (Updike, _Terrorist_ 237). But Ahmad sticks to his desire of paradise and does not want “others” to “steal his glory” (237). He wants to utilize this opportunity at any cost in order to enjoy the bliss of Heaven. Ahmad’s objection regarding his replacement makes his master happy but not fully contented. In order to get complete satisfaction the imam further says to Ahmad:

> Many study the Book [Qur’an]; few die for it. Few are given your opportunity to prove its truth ... If there is any uncertainty in your heart, dear boy, speak it now, without penalty. It will be as if this conversation has never taken place. I ask from you only silence, a silence in which someone with more courage and faith may carry out the mission. (Updike, _Terrorist_ 237)

Ahmad’s craziness about the task assigned to him is reflected through his protests: “No, the mission is mine, though I feel shrunk to the size of a worm within it” (Updike, _Terrorist_ 237). The Arabic teacher is overwhelmed with joy at his student’s
response and asks the latter not to reveal anything about the whole plot to anybody. He ‘concludes’:

You and I will not speak of this again. Nor will you visit here again. Word has reached me that the Islamic Center may be under surveillance. Inform Charlie Chehab of your heroic resolve. He will arrange that you soon receive detailed instruction .... (Updike, *Terrorist* 238)

Shaikh Rashid’s letter to Ahmad’s mother on behalf of his student which states that “I am spending the night with a friend” (Updike, *Terrorist* 267) gives a genuine insight into the true nature of the imam. Shaikh Rashid’s deceitful character is further exposed through his advice, rather a command to Ahmad that—“You will spend the night with a friend who will prove more true than any disgusting *sharmoota*. The eternal, inimitable Qur’an” (267). While Ahmad undergoes a mental agony thinking if he could achieve his target successfully by becoming an “efficient *shahīd*” (267), Shaikh Rashid, on the other hand, appeals Ahmad in the following words: “Is your faith still strong? ... With this glorious act, you will become my superior. You will leap ahead of me on the golden rolls kept in Heaven” (269). It is beyond Ahmad’s reach to judge the deceitful speech of his Arabic teacher. Contrarily, “his [Ahmad’s] fine gray eyes, with their long lashes, appeared to water and weaken as he looked down” (269). This preparation of Ahmad is “out of hatred of those who mock and ignore God” (270). According to the plan, Charlie would go together with Ahmad in the truck to a certain distance to the Lincoln Tunnel and “then I am on my own” (271). Ahmad does not bother even if Charlie does not accompany him. Once again the imam justifies the bombing plot which would enable Ahmad to enlist himself in the list of ‘*shahīd*’ and says to Ahmad that “nothing in our studies, I trust,
has led you to doubt the perfect and eternal nature of the Book of Books” (271). Under the influence of Shaikh Rashid Ahmad becomes so much strong and determined that the latter assures his Arabic teacher about his firm faith in the Qurʾān:

Though Ahmad had sometimes sensed that his teacher in his studies had been infected with such doubts, now was not the time to question him, it was too late; we must each meet death with what faith we have created within, and stored up against the Event. (Updike, Terrorist 272)

Shaikh Rashid reminds Ahmad about “the final cleansing” and advises him to lay emphasis on “the Holy Qurʾan”:

If your spirit were to weaken in the long night ahead of you, open it, and let the only God speak to you through His last, perfect prophet. Unbelievers marvel at the power of Islam; it flows from the voice of Mohammed ... though many in Mecca were quick to ridicule and revile him. (Updike, Terrorist 272)

Till now, Shaikh Rashid has done his part thoroughly by convincing Ahmad about the latter’s responsibility and is much relieved. But Ahmad, who takes the responsibility of exploding bomb bravely, is panicked at times due to his indecisive mind: “On Sunday night, Ahmad fears he will not be able to sleep, on what is to be the last night of his life.” (Updike, Terrorist 266)

In the mean time Charlie has made the arrangement for the meeting of Ahmad with “the two operatives” (Updike, Terrorist 247), who are chosen to train Ahmad the whole process of detonating a bomb. Though “it’s a little tricky”, Ahmad is not
worried about it as he says to Charlie that: “I have placed myself in God’s hand, and feel very serene. My own will, my own cravings, are at rest” (243). According to the plan Ahmad is introduced with the two technicians. The older of the two operatives, who is more “friendly” than the other, begins to explain to Ahmad how to explode a bomb in the following manner:

“This switch safety switch. Move to right”—snap—“like this, device armed. Then push button down and hold—boom. Four thousand kilos ammonium nitrate in back. Twice what McVeigh had. That much needed to break steel tunnel sheath. (Updike, Terrorist 248)

The targeted spot is Lincoln Tunnel already mentioned above. Like that of Shaikh Rashid and Charlie, the machinists too hate America extremely. They also want the end of the American imperialism. That’s why they “all fight for God against America” (Updike, Terrorist 248). After consulting the mechanists regarding the mission, Charlie gives every detail to Ahmad about the whole process of detonation of the bomb and guides the latter how to reach the place aimed to be blown up. He also hints at the possible reward from Allah for the huge destruction that would be caused due to the explosion of the bomb chosen for the purpose. Charlie says to Ahmad:

From Jersey side. Right-hand tunnel only one for trucks ... For you, no pain, not even panic moment. Instead, happiness of success and God’s warm welcome ... It’ll do a ton of damage, minimum. It’ll deliver a statement. It’ll make headlines all over the world. They’ll be dancing in the streets of Damascus and Karachi, because of you, Madman. (Updike, Terrorist 248-49)
The two technicians in the company of Charlie and Ahmad rejoice at the thought of the possible success of their proposed mission. According to them, the prominent Muslim figures like “Mubarak”, “The Saudi Princes”, and “Muammar al-Qadaffi” are merely the “tools” (Updike, *Terrorist* 249) of America. Interestingly, one of the technicians admires Osama bin Laden as: “Great hero … Cannot be caught. Like Arafat. A fox” (249). The other encourages Ahmad as he is “brave” and “his way is good. To be hero for Allah” (Updike, *Terrorist* 250). This is how the two operators also try to influence Ahmad against the Western imperialism. Charlie too, together with the two operators flatters Ahmad: “He [Ahmad] is a faithful son of Islam ... We all envy him, right? ... God Himself is simple, and employs simple men to shape the world ... We’re all tools. God bless brainless tools—right, Madman?” (250-51) Charlie reminds Ahmad once again about the September 11. He then says to Ahmad that there is golden opportunity for him to “push this button down in here down ... “Until ... Boom” (250)” to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel.

Training being done, Ahmad is on the verge of a difficult test to prove his loyalty and he does not want to disappoint his teacher as he says, “Master: I will not weaken.” (Updike, *Terrorist* 272) He struggles from within at that night thinking about if the huge task given to him would be done according to the plan. “Yes. Ahmad will be God’s servant. Tomorrow. The day which is almost upon him” (274).

Apart from Shaikh Rashid and Charlie Chehab, the other masterminds behind the bombing plot under the Lincoln Tunnel are Habib Chehab and Maurice Chehab. They are Americans but not by virtue of their heritage. They came to America from Lebanon as young men in the ’sixties. They invested their money into Excellency, which comprises of “inexpensive furniture, new and used, for the blacks” (Updike, *Terrorist* 145). With the passage of time it has proved successful. The two brothers
have little role so far as their direct participation is concerned in convincing Ahmad to commit such crime. Basically, they have provided money to make the plot successful. However little opportunity they have got, they utilize fully to convince Ahmad to mould his character like theirs. For instance, when Charlie introduces Ahmad with his father Mr. Habib Chehab, he tries to entangle Ahmad with his speech. Mr. Habib Chehab “a giant egg” shaped head and “hairless on top” (146) of it appeals to Ahmad:

America. I don’t understand this hatred. I came here a young man, married but my wife had to be left behind, just me and my brother, and nowhere was there the hatred and shooting of my own country, everybody in tribes. Christian, Jew, Arab, indifferent, black, white, in between—everybody get along. (Updike, Terrorist 146-47)

Despite the fact of Habib Chehab’s contribution in the form of monitory help to the proposed plot, he tries to present himself as a well wisher of America. It’s nothing but a trick. While talking about the prisoner at Guantánamo Bay, Habib Chehab ironically says to his son Charlie in front of Ahmad that:

They are enemy soldiers ... They are dangerous men. They wish to destroy America. That is what they say to reporters, even though they are better fed by us than ever by the Taliban. They think Nine-Eleven was a great joke. It is war for them. It is jihad. That is what they say themselves. What they expect, Americans to lie down flat under feet and make no self-defense? Even bin Laden, he expects being fought back. (Updike, Terrorist 149)

Shaikh Rashid’s cohorts - Charlie Chehab, Habib Chehab and Maurice Chehab are, in fact, unsuccessful Islamists who dare to violate the conventions and
normality of everyday social life through their heinous plot of bombing under the Lincoln Tunnel, but it is in vain. Ideologically, their positions are not clear.

It’s the early morning of the most awaited day that Ahmad wakes up and prays on the prayer rug” to begin with his preparation for “a long journey” (Updike, *Terrorist* 275). He leaves the room at seven-fifteen in order to meet Charlie at the appointed time at Excellency Home Furnishings. On his way, Ahmad contemplates that “*God giveth you life ... then causeth you to die*” (280). Arriving at the appointed spot, he finds that Charlie is not there nor is there any substitute for him. “He has become the surviving lone instrument of the All-Merciful, the Perfect. He has been provided with a truck the twin of one he habitually drives, to make his path straight and smooth. Tentatively, he sits in the driver’s seat” (284). He further recalls what once Charlie says to him: “The jihad and the Revolution waged the same kind of war, Charlie explained—the desperate and vicious war of the underdog, the imperial over dog claiming fouls by the rules he has devised for his own benefit” (286). Ahmad’s anxiety concerning his obligation is clearly reflected when he says, “In this devilish society there is nothing fit for a man in his last hour to hear” (286). He doesn’t feel any worry because of the absence of Charlie and is ready to face danger. Though the absence of Charlie at the appointed place disturbs his mind for a moment but he does not alter his decision. With the task in mind “he continues to steer smoothly, gliding the GMC 3500 through the curving connector onto Route 80 ... handles” (289). To Ahmad’s surprise, Jack Levy comes on his way as an obstacle.

VII

Ultimately, Jack Levy’s patriotism triumphs over the animosity of the religious fanatics. Jack Levy’s self observation helps him greatly in this regard. He
was curious about Ahmad since the time the former had taken the interview of the latter at New Prospect High School. Ahmad’s fear/ negligence towards higher studies which “might weaken his faith” (Updike, *Terrorist* 216) and decision of joining the profession of a truck driver creates doubt in Jack Levy’s mind. To Jack Levy’s surprise, this “dun-colored boy” (34) continuously argues “pursuing his own point” reflecting his grievances against the Christianity and the Jews for their past and present deeds and outlook towards Islam. Ahmad says in that interview:

> And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods ... Look at the history the school teaches, pure colonialist. Look how Christianity committed genocide on the Native Americans and undermined Asia and Africa and now is coming after Islam, with everything in Washington run by the Jews to keep themselves in Palestine. (Updike, *Terrorist* 38)

Ahmad’s open criticism of the culture and life style of the Americans surprises Jack Levy greatly. According to Ahmad “the American way is the way of infidels” and “it is headed for a terrible doom” (Updike, *Terrorist* 39). Moreover, Ahmad’s defending of his Arabic teacher makes Mr. Levy more suspicious:

> He [Shaikh Rashid] does not say, *America wants to take away my God.* He protects his God from this weary, unkept, disbelieving old Jew, and guards as well his suspicion that Shaikh Rashid is so furiously absolute in his doctrines because God has secretly fled from behind his pale Yemeni eyes, the elusive gray-blue of a kafir woman’s. (Updike, *Terrorist* 39)
Despite Mr. Levy’s advice to join the army in case there is crisis of job, Ahmad remains adamant: “my teacher thinks I should drive a truck” (Updike, *Terrorist* 41). Jack Levy’s conclusion regarding Ahmad’s future “that you have a great life, my friend” (43), thus, proves ironical at last.

With the passage of time Jack Levy’s intuition regarding Ahmad that “somebody’s putting pressure on Ahmad, for whatever reason” (Updike, *Terrorist* 83) proves right. They are none but “this terrible teacher” (88) Shaikh Rashid and his cohort who have ruined “a lot of inner-directedness” (83) that Ahmad possessed within him with a purpose to propagate political Islam. It worried Jack Levy greatly because “they have a kind of network” (166) which, is dangerous. Moreover, Ahmad’s late return from the office and sometimes being “preoccupied” (204) with thoughts is equally perturbing. Out of that concern Levy says to Teresa:

> All I’m saying is that kids like Ahmad need to have something they don’t get from society any more. Society doesn’t let them be innocent any more. The crazy Arabs are right—hedonism, nihilism, that’s all we offer. Listen to the lyrics of these rock and rap stars—just kids themselves, with smart agents. Kids have to make more decisions than they used to ... Nobody accepts responsibility, so the kids, some of the kids, take it on. (Updike, *Terrorist* 205-06)

The conclusion that Jack Levy had drawn after hearing the details about Ahmad’s behaviour from his mother is of great concern: “I worry about him. Something’s fishy with this furniture store” (Updike, *Terrorist* 208). Moreover Ahmad is one among the “high school and college kids” who make “mischief” to annoy their parents:
There’s this boy at the high school Jack has been advising. He thinks he’s a Muslim because his deadbeat father was, at the same time ignoring this hardworking Irish-Catholic mother he lives with ... They’re like Baptist fundamentalists, only worse, because they don’t care if they die (Updike, *Terrorist* 131).

Jack Levy successfully unravels the terrorist plot after seeking information from Teresa, Hermione and Beth in addition to his own assessment of Ahmad. As soon as Mr. Levy comes to know about Ahmad’s proposed plan of exploding bomb at the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River from his sister-in-law Hermione, he moves ahead to prevent it at all cost. He manages to reach the bomb-loaded truck being driven by Ahmad on the roadside before it could enter on the highway. Mr. Levy insists Ahmad to drop the plan of his suicide mission which could claim large number of lives: “My point is, Ahmad, you don’t need to do this. It’s all over. Charlie never meant for you to go through with it. He was using you to flush out the others” (Updike, *Terrorist* 292). But Ahmad remains resolute and tries to justify the action of detonating a bomb at the chosen place. According to him: “It would be a glorious victory for Islam ... It would slay and inconvenience many unbelievers” (292). While Mr. Levy is trying hard to stop Ahmad from detonation of the bomb, the latter counter argues with his guardian counsellor:

Who says unbelief is innocent? Unbelievers say that. God says, in the Qur’an. *Be ruthless to unbelievers.* Burn them, crush them, because they have forgotten God. They think to be themselves is sufficient. They love this present life more than the next. (Updike, *Terrorist* 294)
Such a mind-set of Ahmad infuriates Mr. Levy greatly because “that seems pretty severe” (294). Contrarily, Ahmad follows “as the note attached to Charlie said, He [God] will not deny us our recompense” (295) to convert his plan into action. Ahmad categorically mentions that it is the wretched condition of the Muslims in general and the West’s control of the Middle East in particular that leads him to move ahead with his destructive mission:

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 the 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. (Updike, Terrorist 295)

Ahmad’s fanaticism grasps his rational faculty to such an extent that he is highly optimistic about his entry into the Heaven through suicide attack, which in fact is forbidden in Islam as already mentioned above. His brimming overconfidence leads him to argue further with his guardian counselor: “Sir, I regret to say you will not live. In a few minutes I am going to see the face of God. My heart overflows with the expectation” (303). Mr. Levy, on the other hand, is furious about the behaviour of Ahmad. He is shocked to see the reflection of firm determination in Ahmad’s eyes and that too for destructive purpose. Out of frustration and helplessness, Mr. Levy angrily says to Ahmad to “go ahead” to:

See the bastard ... Go see God’s fucking face, for all I care. Why should I care? .... They’re embarrassing ... Once you run out of steam, America doesn’t give you much ... Go ahead, push your fucking
button. Like the guy on an aeroplane on Nine-Eleven said to somebody on the cell phone, it’ll be quick. (Updike, *Terrorist* 303-04)

Since the time Ahmad learns about Sayyid Qutub’s political philosophy from his Arabic teacher Shaikh Rashid, he has become a great admirer of him. Ahmad feels proud to reveal his knowledge about the Egyptian poet-cum-political philosopher who came to America “fifty years ago” and “was struck by the racial discrimination and the open wantonness between the sexes” (Updike, *Terrorist* 302). Inspired by Qutub’s political philosophy, Ahmad further criticises the Americans as the ‘infidels’ and says to Mr. Levy (while approaching the low point of the tunnel) that:

... no people is more distant than the American people from God and piety. But the concept of jāḥiliyya, meaning the state of ignorance that existed before Mohammed, extends also to worldly Muslims and makes them legitimate targets for assassination. (Updike, *Terrorist* 302)

Ahmad stops Jack Levy by grabbing the latter’s ‘hand’ at his pretention to blast the detonator and says: “Please, Mr. Levy ... It is mine to do. The meaning changes from a victory to a defeat, if you do it.” (Updike, *Terrorist* 304) Ahmad’s heart aches for the ‘dark-eyed’ ‘hūriyyāt’ having ‘modest glances’ (305) since he heard about them. Mr. Levy is worried about the possible “explosion” but to Ahmad it is merely “a pinprick, a little opening that admits God’s power into the world” (305). Ahmad argues that:

This was the will of the Beneficent, the Merciful, ar-Rahmān and ar-Rahīm, the Living, the Patient, the Generous, the Perfect, the Light, the
Guide. He does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills life. (Updike, *Terrorist* 306)

After all, Jack Levy’s intervention does not go in vain. The long heated argument between the two comes to an end as Jack Levy manages to stop Ahmad from detonation of bomb under the Lincoln Tunnel.

After examining thoroughly the conversation between the two principal characters—Jack Levy and Ahmad inside the truck during the time of the latter’s driving through New Jersey to the Lincoln Tunnel, the readers cannot but agree with Catherine Morley that:

*Terrorist*, by extension of its dialectic on faith, explores the nature of power and the idea of the act of terror as a fictional construction: not only Ahmad succumbed to the metaphors and symbols woven by his imam, it seems he has also been duped by a CIA trap, he has been taken in by a plot. His whole endeavour to blow up the tunnel was orchestrated not by a true believer in the Straight Path but by Charlie Chehab, an infidel, an enemy. (255)

VIII

Updike’s depiction of the rift between the West especially America which symbolises imperialism and the Muslim world that wants to bring an end to the ‘other’ is quite perceptive. In order to expose the animosity of one for the other through various characters, the writer has used the literary device of irony very effectively. It can be noted widely in case of Ahmad in *Terrorist* and Mohamed in “Varieties of Religious Experience”. Shaikh Rashid’s fanatical activities too are not
devoid of irony. Updike brings to the forefront the true nature of the imam in the text. Updike further hinted at the possible involvement of Shaikh Rashid to the incident of the demolition of the Twin Towers of the WTC. What the imam quotes from the Qur’ān is true without any doubt. There is also the concept of “jihad” (Updike, *Terrorist* 108) in the Qur’ān. But the imam-cum-teacher fails to explain it in clear terms as to when the jihad should be declared. He interprets it wrongly. Instead of guiding his students to the Straight Path in the light of the Qur’ān, Shaikh Rashid misguides them in the name of religion. The imam provokes the students against the “kafirs” or the non-believers of Islam wanting their end. Basically, the ambiguous teaching of the imam leads the students to the wrong track. Ahmad, a fickle minded/indecisive student falls prey to it and subsequently pays severely for it throughout. Thus, Shaikh Rashid is partly responsible for the “smoke pour from the two World Trade Towers” (112). Patriarchal tone is also echoed in the words of Shaikh Rashid, when he says to Ahmad that: “Women are animals easily led” (10).

As a novelist, Updike has tackled the theme of terrorism in his novel *Terrorist* but he does not sufficiently probe the outlook that leads the characters of his novel to opt for terrorism. Still the fine storyteller that he is, his narrative succeeds in presenting an important aspect of political Islam. The novel is not only topical but also rich in character analysis.
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