

## POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION: PAKISTAN VIS-À-VIS VIOLENT HUMAN HISTORY IN THE NOVEL *THE GOLDEN LEGEND* (2017) BY NADEEM ASLAM

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### Abstract

*This paper argues that Aslam's novel The Golden Legend (2017) is a notable step in taking hold of the politics of Pakistan's representation mostly dominated by the Western Academia. This text illustrates that violence is not only a phenomenon prevalent in contemporary Pakistan but it has always been present in all eras, societies, and geographical locations. This study discovers major historical connections and intersections, vis-à-vis Pakistan, in the formation of human history of violence as depicted in this narrative. A hermeneutic textual analysis of the novel will be conducted from a New-Historicist theoretical perspective in order to unravel multiple transnational layers of cruelty embedded in this work of fiction. The descriptive analysis of the historical instances, characters, literary interconnections and World Heritage Sites demonstrate that no countries, cultures, generations or ages are isolated from one another, since the history of human violence in all eras and geographical regions is interconnected.*

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Violence, History, Aslam, Extremism, Transnational, Global.

### INTRODUCTION

Globalism has made the entire world more aware and connected to each other. Mass Media has played an important role in turning the world into a global village. Now a single event in one country is accessible information to the entire world. Pakistan seems to be one of the most highlighted countries in the perpetration of violent activities. However, if closely analyzed, it seems the entire world is enshrouded in this raging storm of violence since the beginning of times. The paper hopes to contribute to ongoing debates about Pakistan's negative global image, international recurrence of violence over centuries through various brutal actions like wars, mob lurching, killing, rapes and book burning.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, Pakistan has been a lot in the news worldwide, however, mostly for all the wrong reasons most of the times. Pakistan is internationally notorious for terrorism, Muslim extremism, lawlessness, impunity, militarization, minority persecution and women rights' violation. A survey conducted in 2016 at Oxford University concluded that the three most common things which come to everyone's mind after hearing the name of Pakistan were "terrorism, Islam, and the Taliban" (Cheema, 2016). In this regard, some experts argued that Pakistan is either a "remarkably resilient" "failed state", or "a Clever Gambler" manipulating the entire world (Owen Bennet Jones, 2011, *BBC*). Furthermore, Mohsin Hamid, a very prominent fiction writer postulates, "Pakistan now is like a horror film franchise" (2013, *The Indian Express*). The three instances quoted above present a very dark and grim version of contemporary Pakistan. This paper is an attempt to unravel the truth about Pakistan's contemporary history vis-à-vis instances of world history quoted in Aslam's novel.

Pakistani Anglophone fiction has developed a penchant for tracing the significant transnational historical threads: be it *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Kamila Shamsie or more recent *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. Similarly, Aslam depicts the recent history of Pakistan as well as the entire world in his novel *The Golden Legend* (2017). According to David Waterman (2015), "...much of contemporary Pakistani fiction is historical fiction" (p. 5) "taking history with a capital 'H' into account, linking it to

the everyday...” (p. 17). Overall, the critics acclaim Aslam’s latest novel as an in-depth depiction of a bleak version of Pakistan (Feigel, 2017, *The Guardian*; Garmeson, 2017, *Financial Times*; Forbes, 2017, *Counter Punch*). However, the vision of the reviewers is a bit myopic as Aslam portrays the dark side of entire human history and not only of Pakistan.

Usually the analysis of the image of a country belongs to the domain of social sciences. However, fiction provides a distinctive perspective on the exploration of “everyday state” which is “ordinary, mundane and individually focused” (Cilano, 2013, p. 2). James Wood (2008), Professor of the *Practice of Literary Criticism* at Harvard University, reiterates that “fiction is both artifice and verisimilitude” (p. xiii). With reference to both these critics, this research paper analyzes Aslam’s novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) to unravel the comprehensive picture of Pakistan’s culture and society in the context of the ongoing global violence and aggression since the beginning of human history. Contemporary Pakistani writers like Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid and Nadeem Aslam have “forged a link between national and international dimensions of the socio- political scenario” (Kanwal, 2015, p. 41). This paper is an attempt to analyze the fictional artifice to unravel the epistemological truths about the recent history of Pakistan and the entire world as depicted in the latest novel *The Golden Legend (TGL)* by Aslam. In short, this study is a New-Historicist analysis of the latest novel by Nadeem Aslam which assumes that cultural productions of art like TGL are crucial to understand the repugnant hard core realities of human history and society.

Nadeem Aslam’s novels and short stories have been acclaimed both nationally and internationally, since he started writing 25 years ago. He has received compliments for his ethical, humanitarian and artistic abilities as a creative writer (Clements, 2016, p. 90; Chambers, 2011, p. 134; Upstone, 2010, p. 102). However, his novels also receive criticism as well for portraying a reductive image of Islam (Kanwal, 2015, p.177). The setting of his previously published novels is both Pakistan and Afghanistan. In his latest novel, however, he narrows down the setting for his novel to Pakistan, his homeland, which has become very notorious for religious and rule of law related violence. But he extends his theses on violence by referring to examples from history, divine manuscripts, hagiographical literature and contemporary history.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative inductive analysis of the various layers of the “thick description” of the “poetics” of TGL will be conducted within the framework of the critical paradigm of New-Historicism in the hope to “search for meanings” (Bressler, 2011, p. 133; Wake & Malpas, 2006, pp. 129-131; Tyson, 2014, pp. 288-289). In short, according to the critical tradition forged by New-Historic literary criticism, this paper will focus on the language and instances quoted in the text to unravel the culture and society depicted in the text. Initially, the novel will be analyzed in order to discover the various layers of violence immersed in the Pakistan of the novel. Additionally, the global and historical instances of cruelty on fellow human beings embedded in the structure of the novel will also be analyzed. Eventually, the study will be valuable for analyzing the epistemological construction of transnational history of brutality through statements of factual information related to historical instances of violence, literary references, cultural references and spatial configurations.

#### **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

*The Golden Legend (TGL)* has been strategically divided into eight books. It chronicles the stories of two women stuck in the vicious circle of national and international violence. The main characters of the text are Nargis, Aysha, Lily, Helen, Imran, Masud, who are living in the imaginary city of Zamana (most probably Lahore), though located in this novel in Pakistan. They are the inhabitants of Badami Bagh which was recently struck by a strange calamity which is further aggravating the violence in the vicinity.

This new catastrophe is the fact that the personal affairs of inhabitants are being made public over the loudspeaker of the nearby mosque by anonymous people (most likely a fundamentalist group). Nargis was born in a Christian family as Margret but later on she started pretending to be a Muslim when she became fourteen years old. Then, she got married to Massud, a Muslim architect. At the onset of the novel, Massud is killed by an American secret agent which is the first violent event of the novel.

After Masud's death, his wife Nargis is forced by a Pakistani intelligence agent to publically pardon the American spy who murdered her husband. Nargis refuses to relent but she is persecuted and threatened by the agencies till she consents to forgive the killer of her husband.

Two important characters of the novel are Nargis' servants, Lily and her daughter Helen. The text narrates that Grace, Lily's wife, has already been murdered by a Muslim. Meanwhile, another significant character, Aysha's husband has been massacred in a drone strike in Waziristan. Her brother-in-law does not allow Aysha to marry again because he believes that the wife of a martyr should not be permitted to do so. Lily and Aysha gradually get romantically involved. Unfortunately, their secret romance is broadcasted on the loudspeaker of the mosque. Since Lily (a Christian) used to enter the mosque in order to meet Aysha, he is convicted with blasphemy for entering the sacred grounds of the mosque. This charge of blasphemy leads the mob to torch Lily's house along with many other houses owned by the Christians of that vicinity.

As a result, Lily flees to save his life. His daughter, Helen, who is present at the home of Nargis when their house is burnt, escapes with Nargis and Imran (another prey of unprecedented aggression being perpetrated on Kashmir). Helen, Nargis and Imran run away from the carnage around them and stay hidden on a secluded tear-shaped island. Ultimately, Lily is trapped by police and murdered in a Police encounter, Nargis eventually exonerates the American spy who murdered her husband, and novel hints that in return of Nargis' pardoning of the killer, Imran and Helen survived.

The narrative portrays a multidimensional image of Pakistan, the global instances of cruelty quoted by the novelist and the analysis of national and international injustice and prejudice. Additionally, Aslam also presents interconnections of resilience of human beings from past and present. The questions this study addresses are whether Pakistan is the only country facing acute security and human rights violations or it's a universal phenomenon and whether Pakistan is just one piece of the jigsaw puzzle of a global pattern of violence in human history.

### ***Human Capacity to Inflict Violence on Their Fellow Species***

TGL is an amalgamation of reality and fiction. It is more of a collage of human cruelty perpetrated over the centuries. At times the novel seems like a journalistic piece of writing. Aslam (2017) confirms by saying in his interview about TGL, "Everything I write about is taken from real life". The novel portrays both hunters and the hunted. It undertakes the portrayal of terrorists, freedom fighters, Muslims, Christians, spies and fundamentalists. The novel refers to the actual religious persecution and mob lynching happening in Pakistan and global scenarios. In short, Aslam's work invokes the recurring patterns of global violence on the pretexts of wars, territorial disputes and religion.

Aslam chooses the country of Pakistan as the setting of his novel; maybe because it is the place of his birth. According to a review in *The Guardian* by Lara Feigel (2017), lecturer in English at King's College London, Pakistan is portrayed in TGL as a "dark and unsafe" place and "a landscape of irrational sectarian violence, rivalry and cruelty" in this novel where "the political sphere depicted is so horribly accurate in its violence and cynicism". The recent upsurge of violence, hatred and intolerance in the country might be another reason for his choice for setting. Pakistan is one of the most important countries geographically in world politics. Since Aslam is trying to trace the history of the relationship between human being and violence, this place is best suited for the exploration of the theme as Pakistan also shares

boundaries with India, China and Afghanistan. Aslam has used anecdotes and references to the violence perpetrated by all these neighbouring countries of Pakistan. Aslam writes in *The Golden Legend* (2017): “Everything this land and others like it were doing through was about power and influence. All of it. And these struggles of Pakistanis were not just about Pakistan, they were about the survival of the entire human race. They were about the whole planet”. (p. 40)

So, according to Aslam, every brutal act which Pakistan and countries like Pakistan are facing is aimed at gaining power and influence. He begins with the super power of the world and then quotes examples from all around the world in order to prove his point. Lily, an illiterate person in the novel, says, ‘America is a powerful country’, ‘one way or another it’ll get what it wants. I may be almost illiterate but I know that much’ (p. 42). Thus, he presents America in a tyrannous light. Moreover, it is a fact that since the September 9/11 attacks on America and Pakistan’s involvement in the America’s War on Terror, there is a higher rate of violence and terrorist activities in Pakistan (Burki, *Project Syndicate*, 2011; *Dawn*, 2011; Haider, *Pakistan Today*, 2012). American drone attacks infringe upon the sovereignty of Pakistan. On the account of increased involvement of American army and spies, Pakistan has had to face a rise in extremist activities. Thus, although Aslam’s plot is set in Pakistan, he establishes that violence is never limited to a single space- its causes and its effects both spread and influence world politics. This interconnection is significant since the perpetrators of world violence often also become victims.

One of the books, included in the book written by Massud’s father, is titled as “The Book of Warning”. Aslam writes about that fictional book that this book catalogues, “some of the mankind’s disastrous encounters, outlining, what happened when a people failed to value others, ignoring their rights to dignity. The mistrust. The deceptions. The disregard” (p. 245). It chronicles many instances of human hatred and corruption from human history. It narrates a 1771 letter in which Voltaire calls Turks a “scourge” which should be annihilated (p. 245). Later on the book describes Ibn Batuta’s mentioning of two idols- kept prostrate in front of Mosque Quwat ul Islam in Delhi to engender irreverence as “Everyone entering or leaving the mosque treads on them. The site was formerly occupied by a temple and was converted into a mosque upon conquest...” (p. 245). The third instance narrated in the book of warning is of historical human corruption. The book informs that “When the British landed in India, it contained twenty percent of the known world’s wealth. When they left 200 years later in 1947, only three per cent of the known world’s wealth remained” (p. 245). Aslam puts an end to that chapter of the book by narrating the most harrowing instance from recent human history. The author uses the statement as a punch line on the cruelty of humanity, “A survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bomb, Shigeki Tanaka, won the 1951 Boston Marathon. The crowd was silent” (p. 246). This statement in the novel is a statement on America’s nuclear attacks on two Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th August, 1945. The bombs affected 3,50,000 (Walker, 2008, p. 122) calculated population of Hiroshima and 2,70,000 people in Nagasaki (Walker, 2008, p.127). Because of horrendous and instant devastation, the death toll could never be estimated. The bombs totally destroyed the infrastructure and the nuclear radiation kept on affecting human beings many years after the attack (Walker, 2008, p. 127). The instance of nuclear attack on Japan was the worst example of human hatred in 20<sup>th</sup> century. On top of that, Japan was banned from all athletic championships. A survivor of that nuclear attack won the Boston marathon which is a poignant statement of defiance and resilience in the face of violence, defeat and destruction.

The prologue depicts Helen walking down inside the library at the home of Nargis and Massud. The library is a microcosmic representation of human history. This library contains a hamlet from the “Crusades” (p. 1). Crusades remind the reader of the vicious holy wars waged between Muslims and Christians 1095 onwards. Jean Richard (2001), a French historian who is considered an authority on the



Crusades, asserts that the impact of the crusades was felt for more than two centuries and even more. Moreover, he argues that the holy wars pose the question of “legitimacy of war” in human consciousness (p. 1). Furthermore, “In Christian-Muslim relations, memories are long and thus the Crusades, for example, still exercise a powerful influence, many centuries later, in some parts of both the Christian and Muslim worlds” (Goddard, 2006, p. 16). President Bush also referred to the word Crusades in his speech on Iraq at Cincinnati, on October 7, 2002 (*The Guardian*). So, the phenomenon of Crusades defines the century’s long hostility between Christians and Muslims which is even prevailing in contemporary times. The novel is a “lucid portrait of the conflicts pervading contemporary Pakistan”, “state intimidation and violent relations between Muslims and Christians” and the “depiction of the brutal exercise of power” (Garmeson, 2017, *Financial Times*). The novel reflects the mistreatment of religious minorities by the religious majority at many instances. For instance, the lynching of a Muslim in India for eating beef, forced conversions of Muslims from Islam to Christianity in Spain after reconquista and the atrocities which the Christian community has to face at the hands of Muslims in contemporary Pakistan.

American involvement in Pakistan's affairs dominates the narrative of TGL. Malcolm Forbes (2017), a senior book reviewer, reiterates that TGL “portrays a country in chaos and individual lives clinging together in freefall” (Counterpunch). Aslam’s novel spins its tale around one of the most popular American spy incidents in Pakistan, Raymond Davies case (2011). The novel narrates that an American man kills some people on a road and one of the main characters of the novel, Massud, dies in that shooting. Raymond Davis shoots because he is afraid for his own safety and is a victim of the “spy’s personal brokenness” which is a key feature of espionage fiction (Cilano, 2014, p. 30). This act of a spy’s paranoia is pivotal to the entire novel and sets the circle of violence in motion.

In the same way, the husband of Aysha, a character in TGL dies in “an American missile attack” (p. 85). According to Cilano (2014), the books talking about drone attacks are a form of cultural productions which “endow meanings to drones” (p. 77). In Aslam’s novel, drone attacks are both a sign of the infringement of Pakistan’s sovereignty which is affecting Pakistan collectively, as many fighters from Waziristan come to Zamana to escape drone attacks and spoil the environment there by promoting hatred and violence. The drones destroy the large social fabric of society as well as individual lives. Aysha’s husband dies and she has to live as a widow because her brother in law thinks that her husband was a martyr who died in a drone strike so the widow of a martyr should not remarry. Thus, one drone strike had a trickle-down effect on the entire society. Aysha becomes involved romantically with a neighbourhood Christian, Lily. As Aysha was daughter of the Imam of the mosque and Lily had to visit her in the mosque’s precincts, this was one of the reasons Lily was accused of blasphemy. Because of this accusation, entire Christian neighbourhood was burnt to ashes. Lily and his daughter had to run away and Lily was brutally murdered as a result. Characters complain that Americans are “no longer content in just killing us with drones, but want to kill us openly on streets” (Aslam 304). In short, two major tragedies of the main plot and subplot are set in motion by American involvement.

Aslam is of the view that the tyranny of the religious majority is inherent in human nature for the sake of material gains. Aslam refers to a real life event of burning of Christian houses by “mobs accusing Christian of blasphemy” (Aslam 116) in Pakistan in 2013 (Ali, *Dawn*). The novel also highlights the instance (Boyle et al., *Daily Mail*) which happened in Pakistan of Christian couple being “thrown into the furnace of a brick kiln by a mob, for blasphemy” (Aslam 116). Another instance of mob tyranny is quoted which happened in India in 2015, where “a mob of Hindu militants had beaten to death a Muslim man whom they claimed had eaten beef” (Aslam 232). It is announced from the temple loudspeaker that the man has eaten beef. In the same way, all the sins of people living in the vicinity are announced at the loudspeaker of the mosque. It is ironical that after the lynching, the meat was sent to a laboratory for the

examination that whether it was beef or not (*BBC India*). These two examples narrated in the novel highlight the atrocities committed in the name of religion perpetrated by the religious majority.

Moreover, TGL also highlights one of the most serious and disputed issues of our times. One of the main characters in the novel, Imran, hails from Kashmir and flees from an Islamic militants group because he does not want to be involved in the murders and violence anymore. Imran's life is painted "against the vast and violent backdrop" (178). Kashmir is described as a site of "vicious conflict" where there are reports of "Massive Human rights violations" (*Human Rights Watch* 1) including "killings, abductions, tortures and sexual violence" (Burke, *The Guardian*) and inhuman use of pellets on the masses (*BBC*) in Kashmir. This territory is an issue because the majority (almost 60 %) of Kashmir's population is Muslim and they either want "independence of accession" to Pakistan (*Human Rights Watch*, p. 1; *BBC* 2015). The novel describes Kashmir as "the victim of maps" (p. 337) over which Pakistan and India have had two wars and countless civilians and military men have died (p. 178). The novel describes the torture, abductions and killings of Kashmiris at the hands of Indian Army (Aslam pp. 178-184 & pp. 233-246). It also highlights the "mass graves of Kashmiris" (p. 236) and torture by "applying electric shocks" (p. 243). The presence of religious fanatics and freedom fighters has also been incorporated in the novel's narrative. Imran is a resident of Kashmir and his childhood is spent in participating in the freedom fighting activities against the Indian Army. Imran and the situation of Kashmir is a hint at the entire dictator regimes which have held an illegitimate sway over the people and victimizes them. The mentioning of issue of the Kashmir by Aslam is one of the most potent statements on the capability of humanity to inflict torture for the sake of acquisition of land at the expense of human lives and peace.

After 9/11 and Pakistan's involvement in the war on Terror, Pakistan faced a lot of terrorist attacks. In the novel, Aysha's brother-in-law is from Waziristan and is terrorizing the people in the vicinity. There is a long list of terrorist suicide bombings in Pakistan given by Aslam (p. 307). But one terrorist blast instance has been narrated in detail. Most probably, the Charagar mausoleum bombing in the novel refers to the bomb blasts at Daata Darbaar, Lahore. Daata Darbar was attacked, in 2010, by terrorists on the busiest day of the week, the way Charagar mausoleum was attacked in the novel. Thirty-five people died in the blast and 175 got injured (*Dawn*, 2010, *The Express Tribune*). The people who go to the mausoleum are not considered true Muslims by extremists. According to a report published in 2017, all in all, total nine terrorist attacks happened on various shrines and mausoleums all over Pakistan (*Dawn*, 2017). So, the fictional Charagar bombing gave immense pleasure to Aysha's brother in law because it forced the mausoleum to be closed down (p. 304). The terrorists and extremists believe, "Kill non-Muslims for not being Muslims. Kill Muslims for not being Muslims" (p. 299). So, the entire vicious circle of violence is shown to be continuous.

The world Aslam portrays in the novel is a world where "Cain was eternally pitched against Abel" (p. 146). At the end of his novel, Aslam quotes Hannah Arendt "It is true for the first time in history all peoples on earth have a common present" (p. 361) to give a statement on his novel. He makes it very clear that the historical content he has used in his novel is relevant to the entire contemporary world. This novel traces the common present of the entire contemporary world. The wars, atrocities, violence, murders, lynching (p. 116), house burning (p. 142) are shared by the entire contemporary humanity.

### ***Spatial Constructs-An Emblem of Human Treachery***

To further his point of interconnection of prevailing violence in the human history, Aslam has used many spatial constructs to invoke the persistence of bloodshed and torture in human history. The key spatial construct is created by him as the setting of his novel. He creates a fictional city called *Zamana* which is the centre of the raging violence storm. Moreover, he mentions the World Heritage Sites like

Cordoba Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Durham Cathedral and The Forbidden City. All these aforementioned architectural structures impinge upon the persistence of bloodshed, cruelty and treachery.

First of all, he creates a city named “Zamana” in his novel and uses it for the setting of all the atrocities being afflicted on human beings living there. Aslam writes that “In *Paradise Lost* Adam was shown Zamana from Eden, as one of the finest cities his sons and daughters would create on earth, the glory of mankind” (p. 122). In his novel, Aslam quotes lines 385-291 from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Book 10 and changes the word “Lahor” (Milton, 2001, p. 223) used by Milton for the word “Zamana” (Aslam, 2017, p. 122). There is a strong probability that ‘Zamana’ is a fictional name for the city of Lahore. However, this study contends that Zamana stands for the entire world. The word “Zamana” is an Arabic word which stands for the English equivalent word “period of time” (Wehr, 1979, p. 444). So, Aslam is not referring to the violence in Pakistan only. Nomenclature is the first hint at the impact of violence which is not limited to Pakistan but the entire human history. Zamana is a word which has its origin in Persian and then it travelled to the Turkish language. It is also a vernacular term in both Sanskrit and Urdu language. In the novel, there is also a “vela river” (p. 122). The word “vela” is a Punjabi word which stands for “time” (Hares, 1998, p. 428). Hence, many words in the novel suggest that Zamana is the epoch, age or time which is immensely brutal and vicious.

Aslam starts the narrative with a prologue which hints at the upcoming content of the novel. He starts tracing the history of humanity with the stories of prophets and Crusades. The novel’s prologue narrates the historically significant and symbolically relevant objects to the narrative pattern of the story like the wooden models of Hagia Sophia and Cordoba Mosque (p. 2).

Both these monuments have a history of religious persecution and enforcement of the religion of the invaders. Cordoba Mosque is located in Spain and was converted to a cathedral at the time of *Reconquista*. In the same way, Hagia Sophia was a church and it was turned into a mosque by Turkish invaders. Aslam writes, “When Muslim entered the Hagia Sophia in 1453, which at the time was a Cathedral,” they interrupted the priests during their service” (p. 21). Hagia Sophia was a sixth-century Greek Orthodox cathedral until 1453. After the invasion and conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, it was converted into a mosque. For 482 years, the building was maintained as a mosque. After the fall of the Ottomans, the secular modern Turkish state gave this building a status of museum in 1935 until recent times. Hagia Sophia has “an increasingly sensitive subject -- not just between Christians and Muslims in the region but also between secularists and Islamists within Turkey” (NBC, 2014; Moftah, 2015). Similarly, the controversy over Cordoba Mosque is still going on (*Independent*). After the defeat of Moors in Cordoba in 1236, Cordoba mosque was one of the few structures which survived. After various overhauls, Cordoba mosque was renovated into a cathedral. In UNESCO World Heritage site list it is listed as Cordoba Mosque but the Christian cathedral administrators deny the Muslim past of the architecture (Minder, 2014, *The New York Times*). It has “been the scene of centuries of tension between those who wished to preserve this monument of Andalusí (Spanish Muslim) art, and those who wanted it to have a purely Catholic appearance”. The controversy has aggravated in the current years “as the bishopric of Córdoba gradually squeezed out the Muslim presence in the equation” (Albert, 2014, *El Pais*). Thus, Cordoba Mosque and Hagia Sophia are two prototypes of a human history of wars in the name of religion which have been incorporated in Aslam’s novel to hint at the never-ending conflicts between Muslim and Christian community. The emblems of past enmity between Muslims and Christians are models of Cordoba Mosque and Hagia Sophia. Likewise the present day city of Zamana in the novel is no different than the past. The tradition of injustice and cruelty is still being practiced by inhabitants of Pakistan, India and Kashmir, America in the novel. Both Hagia Sophia and Cordoba Mosque wooden stand as immutable architectural emblems of Muslim-Christian enmity and encroachment.

Furthermore, scattered in the house of Nargis and Masud were replicas of “Durham Cathedral” (p. 8) which is one of the buildings listed in the world Heritage sites by UNESCO. Durham Cathedral is located in Durham, UK. This cathedral was used as a prison house for the prisoners of war. In 2015, two mass graves next to Durham Cathedral were excavated. Those graves contained the remains of Scottish soldiers who were taken prisoners in one of the most deadly civil wars of 17<sup>th</sup> Century in the reign of Oliver Cromwell (Brown, 2015, *The Guardian*). Aslam may be trying to hint that this world heritage site also inherited the legacy of human cruelty, bloodshed and mass slaughter. The Forbidden City is also a replica mentioned in the novel (Aslam, 2017, p. 8), located in China, is also one of the monuments listed as a World Heritage site. The construction of *The Forbidden City* was an attempt by Yongle, one of the most brutal emperors in the Ming dynasty, to “legitimise his claim to be supreme ruler of all China”. It is estimated that 2800 people were killed in his harem. In 1421, on his order all his concubines were “ripped and torn into shreds” in order to suppress a sex scandal which could deteriorate the majestic reputation of Yongle (BBC2, 2010). The use of *The Forbidden City* replica by Aslam reiterates the same age old heritage of violence and inhumanity among human beings. Thus, the collage technique used by Aslam indicates that the theme of violence in TGL goes beyond Pakistani territory to the world heritage sites of preservation.

### ***Discourse of Books***

Since the beginning of times, books have always faced the adverse consequences of wars, religious tussles and human conflicts. Books have been destroyed multiple times throughout human history. For instance, the burning of famous libraries in Alexandria in 48 BC (Fishburn, 2008, p. 2; Knuth, 2006, p. 1, Pindar, 2010, *The Guardian*), Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang’s mutilation of books in 213 BC (Fishburn, 2008, p. 30; Pindar, 2010, *The Guardian*), Savonarola’s book bonfires in Florence during 1497 (Fishburn, 2008, p. 13; Pindar, 2010, *The Guardian*), the “Nazi bibliocaust of 1933” (Fishburn, 2008, p. 28; Pindar, 2010, *The Guardian*) and the burning of National Library after American invasion in 2003 (to name a few). TGL also discusses a book written by Massud’s father and there is a portrayal of a book within the book. Just like Aslam’s novel, the book by Massud’s father is divided into many small books. During the course of the novel, the pictures in the book written by Massud’s father are shredded by an ISI intelligence agent as a warning to Nargis (p. 64). Throughout the novel, a “mutilated book” is mended by Nargis, Helen and Imran with a golden thread. This book becomes *The Golden Legend* according to the narrative of the novel. It is the symbol of permanence of literature or art, as well as a strong statement on the resilience of art, literature and books in the face of persecution, bloodshed and wars.

Books have always been one of the most significant recurring motifs in Aslam’s novels. Both in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and *The Golden Legend*, books are being hidden and mistreated. In *The Wasted Vigil*, the books are nailed to the ceiling and in TGL a multitude of books have been collected in Nargis and Massud’s house. In TGL, an ISI man always threatens Nargis in the study room and is surrounded by books. He shreds a book written by Massud’s father (pp. 64-65 & pp. 69). Dr. Clara Nubile (2018), from the English Department of the University of Mumbai, asserts that books play a very significant role by being potent symbols and metaphors which are political choices made by Aslam (p. 24). Books are “alive” and ultimately become actors which “unite what religious or governments divide”. She compares the act of sewing the book with the golden thread “is a way to repair history” (Nubile, 2018, p. 24). For instance, the shredding of the book in TGL is a threat to Nargis that she can be shredded like the book. The torn pages of the mutilated book remind Nargis of “the dead body of Massud’s brother, its countless wounds” (p. 65). Thus, the act of tearing a book apart and then mending it becomes a metaphoric act of both human stoicism and the immutability of art which includes threads from transnational strands. In



short, the novel reiterates the connectivity of all the books present in the world just like the inter-connection of violence and injustice in human history.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Aslam's *The Golden Legend* weaves the threads of human historical artifacts, culture, art, architecture and fine arts together in order to paint a holistic picture of the evolution of global violence since its inception. The novel presents a picture of a world where not only Pakistan, but each and every country is a partner in crime. One country and era's actions set the pace for the bloodshed in the centuries to come. The global history of human capacity to inflict and tolerate violence, mutilation of books and spatial structures associated with violence hint at a recurring pattern of interconnectivity and intersection of various geographical regions and epochs in the making of recent violence in history. The portrayal of historical records of violence in Aslam's novel might not present a complete picture but they are a significant microcosmic representation of the larger macrocosmic edifice of global discourses on the legacy of violence which the contemporary world has inherited.

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