Of Men, Machines and Apocalypses: Masculine Anxieties in Indian Speculative Fiction

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Introduction

The precise location of the attack determines which region of Bombay is destroyed. For example, an attack in the Fort area, centered around… Hutatma Chowk, could destroy large parts of the financial district… There are also very densely populated areas like Dharavi; if the explosion is targeted in this area, the number of casualties will be very large.

Bombing Bombay? (1999)

A ball of fire seemed to emerge from the point of impact and engulfed the skies and the earth. The buildings at the epicenter were wiped off the face of the earth…The ground in Lahore splattered with disorganized concrete…There was no sign of life, human, animal or plant.

Red Jihad (2012)

[O]ne can say with some certainty that the genre of the future-war narrative, both as an identifiable subtype of speculative fiction and as a source of political influence…arrived with the suddenness…of an exploding bomb

Rumors of War and Infernal Machines (2005)

The total annihilation of Bombay (now Mumbai) and Lahore in the aftermath of catastrophic explosions, thankfully still remain fictive speculations. Eerie similarities, however, between the apocalyptic futures envisioned by the Indian scientist M.V Ramanna in his hypothetical assessment of nuclear threat, *Bombing Bombay?* (1999), and by Sami Ahmad Khan in his speculative novel

Red Jihad (2012) are telling reminders of the blurry boundaries between destructive science, and the fictions that speculate about it. While exploding bombs embedded with catastrophic potential have remained central to our eschatological conceptualizations for more than a century, future war fiction—a key sub-genre of speculative fiction—and its obsession with apocalypse-inducing technologies illustrates importantly the nexus between gendered bodies and destructive military machinery. In underscoring that "future-war fiction, is, largely fiction for and about individuals who are gendered as 'men'" (Gannon 6), this article explores depictions of anxious postcolonial masculinity within the little-explored genre of Indian speculative fiction. Apocalyptic settings in these texts, I argue, provide a topos for enacting postcolonial masculine anxieties, which are subsequently countered through making male bodies contingent on the volatile performances of destructive military technology.

In acknowledging this relationship between male bodies and military technologies, my analysis illustrates that postcolonial masculine anxieties result in the foregrounding of certain forms of manhood in these narratives—as the hegemonic model—by making them contingent and analogous with the destructive capabilities of war machinery. In adopting R.W Connell's conceptualization of "hegemonic masculinity," I explore the reasons behind the emergence of postcolonial masculine insecurities, which, I argue, results from India's colonial history and its continued legacy within the subcontinent. Finally, my examination of representative Indian speculative texts, namely Mainak Dhar's *Line of Control* (2009) and Sami Ahmad Khan's *Red Jihad* (2012) emphasizes that making hegemonic postcolonial masculinity contingent on the destructive capabilities of military technology results in unstable and threatening masculine performances; much like the unpredictable nature of war machinery highlighted in these texts. Keeping in mind Gannon's assertion that there is "analytical value to using futuristic military stories as the means of discussing the relationship between…cultural reproduction and…the superpower state" (6), I point out that Anglo-American future war fiction exploits "military masculinity" (Jarvis 2) as the primary apparatus through which sovereignty and nationhood are expressed, thereby reproducing the ideologies of white colonial masculinity. Further, in looking at performances of hegemonic postcolonial masculinity within fictive spaces, I argue, that Indian speculative novels while adopting the conventions of Anglo-American future war narratives, concurrently critique the associations between militarization and hegemonic masculinity embedded in this genre.

The "Fuzzy" World of SF

In 2009, Science Fiction aficionado John R.R. Leavitt declared that it was necessary to celebrate November 18 as the "International Science Fiction Reshelving Day," as an act of resistance against "the misshelved genre books [that] are good enough to have escaped the genre section of the book store" (Canavan and Wald 238). Leavitt's contention and short-lived movement underlined a fundamental crisis plaguing this widely read and largely undefined genre: are classics such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* deliberately kept away from the "Science Fiction and Fantasy" bracket? While admittedly Leavitt's admirable and controversial venture failed to gather much steam, this unique effort organized deliberately on Margaret Atwood's seventieth birthday—presumably as a snide counter to Atwood's efforts of distancing her writing from her decidedly essentialist characterization of science fiction as "aliens spaceships and other usual things"—provided ample evidence of the protracted battle that exists in this community about the identity of Speculative Fiction and its literary relatives. Considering the debates that continue to rage within the academic and general audience about the nature of SF, it is unsurprising that speculative fiction understood to exist in the twilight zone between science fiction and fantasy as well as multiple other genres, has been both a misunderstood and an under-theorized area.

Understandably therefore, the realm of speculative fiction is a keenly contested domain. Competition amongst literary productions to be representative of this genre owes not a little to what Samuel R. Delany describes as the key issue with defining speculative fiction, since it is "one of the numerous terms that numerous critics for numerous reasons have decided is inadequate for the numerous things that fall under it" (149). R. B Gill postulates that while science fiction is dependent primarily on the rigors of the scientific method, speculative fiction challenges the reader's perception of everyday reality. In other words one of the defining characteristics of speculative fiction for Gill is that it "envisions a systemically different world in which not only events are different, but causes operate by logics other than normal ones" (73). Gill's intervention also raises some crucial questions about the market-driven nature of speculative fiction, which in his view is more of a commercial genre rather than a strictly literary classification. While not discounting the fact that speculative fiction has certain distinguishing characteristics, Gill emphasizes the need to uphold the currently existent "fuzzy definitions" of speculative fiction

since they allow us to "raise more ideas than a tighter classification would" (74). Gill's proposition, to allow a fuzzy definition of speculative fiction becomes especially important since there is a tendency amongst both readers and critics alike, to align themselves either against or in favor of Darko Suvin's categorization of science fiction; as the "literature of cognitive estrangement" (qtd. in Canavan and Wald 238). While Suvin's specific diktat about the constitution of science fiction may be quite helpful to derive a general overview of this mammoth genre, it also provides a lack of specificity about the literary attributes that are germane to this field. Not surprisingly the umbrella term SF—now understood to include speculative fiction, science fiction and different forms of fantasy—may quite well be the only way of acknowledging the intercontextual *plasticity* that these genres and subgenres entail. Even though a detailed overview that characterizes the varied and multiplicitious models of SF is beyond the scope of this article, for the purposes of my argument I will foreground an understanding of SF, which resists classification and where the "fuzziness works better than hard edges to describe complex relationships" (Gill 75). In acknowledging this fuzzy model that uses "SF" interchangeably for both speculative fiction and the arguably parent genre of science fiction, I will emphasize speculative fiction as the form of SF which offers:

> [C]himerical speculations…structur[ing] our collective imagination of what is possible. In this sense we might say that our most theoretical and anticipatory speculations are always 'inside' SF, whether, this relationship is acknowledged or not. Whatever happens, be it landing on the moon, destroying the climate, or electing the first African American President, SF always seems to have gotten there first—and often best. (Canavan and Wald 244)

Speculating Future Wars

The term "science fiction" coined by Hugo Gernsbach in 1926 was expressly influenced by post World War I scientific and technological demands, making it crucial to emphasize that science, technology and war have always been central to our understanding of SF. This is not in any small measure as a result of the fact that "the battlefield is frequently the stage upon which new technologies are first unveiled….consequences…and application…most dramatically and

graphically represented (Gannon 6). Therefore, the links between speculative fiction and destructive technologies are not merely "conjectures…about future war in general" (7) but rather a keen commentary on specific technological innovations of the past and the present that may radically alter human future. In such forms of SF, *science* does not become the sole receptacle in which to embed the successes of human civilization but rather an epistemological category, which needs to be critiqued " as a mode of perceiving and cognizing…social structures, relations and hierarchies in which scientific innovations [are] conceptualized" (Canavan and Wald 242). Therefore such an understanding does not speculate future wars as sites where progress in human civilization is measured, through the technological innovations on the battlefield but rather questions the narrative of techno-scientific capitalism, which results in apocalyptic technologies and the resultant catastrophes.

In understanding this idea of techno-scientific capitalism that lies at the heart of the modern technophilic super power state and is frequently the subject of speculative fiction, it is important to underscore the idea of technology as political discourse. While representations of technophilic futures in speculative fiction as the central structuring motif of human existence may often seem absurd, it may be useful to point out that the political power of Anglo-American nation states has been historically predicated on their comparative technological superiority. Joel Dinerstein notes:

> Technology has long been the unacknowledged source of European and Euro-American superiority within modernity...It is not social justice or equitable economic distribution that will reduce hunger, greed, and poverty, but fables of abundance and the rhetoric of technological utopianism (569).

More importantly military technology has traditionally functioned as the primary site for the manifestation of hegemonic white masculinity, since dominant practices of whiteness are intrinsically mired within the technological developments that emerge from such martial structures. Cristina Masters asserts that technology becomes the constituting ideology for white masculinity to the extent that both "whiteness" and "masculinity" become the structural mechanisms that order social, political and cultural discourse. This is especially relevant to future war fictions where technophilic superpower states reinforce the idea of military technology—a symbolic referent for white masculinity—as the ordering device for society.

Considering the self-reflexive relationship between military technology and white masculinity, these speculative narratives therefore become reifications of "traditionally [white] male roles, activities and interests, thereby showcasing and celebrating the patriarchy that pervades superpower political practices and governmental structure" (Gannon 8). Of course the idea of international relations and political discourse as being decidedly masculine is not a new concept. Charlotte Hooper in her incisive study *Manly States* emphasizes that "[t]he world of international relations appears to be a truly man's world, both through the predominance of men in practice and through the 'masculinist underpinnings'…whereby success is measured in terms of the masculine virtues of power, autonomy and self-reliance" (1). Therefore functioning under such a discursive model of international politics it is not surprising that attempts made by any emerging postcolonial superpower toward global dominance must be intrinsically connected to developing a technophilic, virile and masculine body politic: one that deconstructs colonial discourses about subordinate native masculinity while simultaneously challenging the dominant Anglo-American model of hegemonic white masculinity. As my analysis below of Dhar's *Line of Control* (2009) and Khan's *Red Jihad* (2012) illustrates, these speculative texts narrativize the national cultural imaginary of postcolonial states such as India, a country which manifests its ambitions of being a technophilic superpower through aggressive performances of the indigenous militarized male body. Moreover, I argue, these fictions simultaneously illustrate that any postcolonial enterprise that is modeled on the preexistent associations between hegemonic white masculinity and military technology is paradoxically bound to reproduce the limiting discourses of neocolonial techno-capitalism, which they hope to counter.

Postcolonial Masculinity (ies), Apocalyptic Anxieties and Indian Speculative Fictions

Existing under the broad umbrella term of gender studies, *masculinity* is often essentialized as a construct that needs explication only to uncover the machinations of patriarchy, which has historically neglected females and denied feminine subjectivity. Such a reductive notion of masculinity is frequently justified in view of claims like that of Michael Kimmel, "Isn't virtually every history book a history of men?" (1). However, Kimmel's argument must be seen in conjunction with his subsequent rejoinder that the patriarchal bias that equates *man* with *human* in these narratives has ensured that "such works do not explore how the experience of being a *man*, of *manhood,* [has] structured the lives of men who are their subjects" (author's emphases; 1).

Kimmel highlights that while discussions about gender relations correctly emphasize civilizational histories as being phallocentric, such discourses are often limited as they fail to acknowledge the ideologies of masculinity that produce such patriarchal narratives as well as the self-reflexive relationship that these structures share with the activities and experience of men.

Crucially, in the Indian context masculinity becomes a key category for social and historical analysis due to the intersections between ideas of nationhood and maleness within colonial discourse. Manifested skillfully through discursive tropes such as Lord Macaulay's "unlearned native" or Rudyard Kipling's "half-devil-half child," the colonized male subject needed to be represented as inferior to the white colonizer, in order to justify imperial presence within the Indian subcontinent. This meant that instead of acknowledging the multiple models of indigenous masculinity and femininity existent in India, colonial ideologies labored to create monolithic and reductive structures of native masculinity, legitimizing the white patriarch as the hegemonic model of masculinity.[1] As Dasgupta and Gokulsing note in the introduction to their book *Masculinity and its Challenges in India* "Masculinities in the colonies were created and perpetuated as a contrast to the colonizer's own masculinity" (8). Such a binary model of perceiving the colonized male subject, coupled with the fact that "masculinity, unlike femininity, is most often unseen…owing to its normativity" (9) meant that the postcolonial male subject is constituted through an essentialized but conflicted value system. On the one hand is the legacy of colonial discourses, which "represented [the postcolonial male] with no agency, whose subordinate presence renders him powerless" (9) while on the other are the anti-colonialist hypermasculinized narratives of the Indian freedom movement that looked upon Indian male subjects as the saviors of their symbolic *motherland*.

Unlike speculative fiction from the Anglo-American sphere where future war narratives have traditionally been based on masculine-value systems functioning around the "weighty [and gendered] triad of ….warfare…new technology and political drama"—thereby reinforcing the "authority and structure of the superpower state" (7)—Indian future war fiction encounters many more challenges in adopting such a hypermasculine value system. Postcolonial speculative fiction[2], which emerges from the traditions of Anglo-American future war fiction is confronted with the difficult task of adopting the technophilic nature of these genres while being careful to avoid reproducing the ideologies of neocolonial techno-capitalism that are an intrinsic part of this genre. Both *Line of Control* and *Red Jihad* are distinguished by their apparently paradoxical

structure: where the narratives are based on aggressive and threatening masculine performances, which are mirrored on military technology while at the same time interrogating such a contingent association. In doing so, they deconstruct both the idea of a hegemonic masculinity that is dependent on structures of militarization as well as the ideology of progress plaguing postcolonial superpowers, which is modeled on Anglo-American technophilic nation-states.

Sami Ahmad Khan's *Red Jihad* (2012), envisions an Indian subcontinent in the year 2014, where the nuclear-capable states of India and Pakistan are in a diplomatic détente with each other. This peaceful accord has been reached through Pakistan achieving a full-fledged democratic government, which has seemingly gained control over the radical elements affecting the stability of the region. However, this fragile peace is broken by the machinations of a Pakistani jihadi leader, Yaseer Basheer who enlists the help of an Indian Naxalite commander, Agyaat. Together, their plan is to infiltrate a secret military base in India, the National Missile Research Centre[3], and to apparently use an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) named *Pralay* against its (Indian) creators. Even before moving into the intricacies of the plot, it is vital to underline the diverse narratives of power and masculinity that are at play here. The core plot of the text that envisions a future where the Indian state is under threat from a nexus between Islamic Jihadis and Maoist Naxalites eerily reflects the *realpolitik* situation, where these two ideological structures purportedly pose a credible threat to the stability and strength of the fledgling postcolonial Indian state. Thus, the portmanteau term *Red Jihad* manifested in the male bodies of the Jihadi leader and the Maoist Naxalite, fuses into a single structure, the two forms of marginalized (and radical) masculinity that pose a threat to the decidedly masculine Indian body politic.[4]

A brief prologue that initiates the novel chronicles an American fighter jet bombing a village in Afghanistan with a large civilian population. Frazer, the white male fighter pilot who believes that he is promoting "peace, freedom and democracy" by bombing innocent civilians (7) functions presumably under the "War on Terror"[5] narrative of George W. Bush that justified achieving an American neo-colonial model of "democracy" in non-western states through military aggression. Frazer's sense of selfhood is tied intrinsically to the state-of-the art F/A -18 E super hornet jet that he flies, which gives him "greater accuracy…and a psychological edge" (1), evidencing his enmeshment within the structures of American hegemonic militarized masculinity. This model also lends him a sense of apathy for the destructive job he carries out as he is able to balance his "conscience with duty" waiting eagerly for his day to be over so that he can catch his

favorite show, *The Simpsons.* The failure of aggressive male performances that are dependent on machines is made apparent as Frazer and his radar system mistake a stone thrown by an Afghani boy for a "handheld grenade," thereby carpet-bombing and completely destroying a civilian village. The irony is explicit, as the militarized white male ensconced within this highly sophisticated piece of machinery and representing the very pinnacle of Anglo-American progress is unable to distinguish a harmless projectile from a destructive bomb. Frazer's inability to apply his human instincts—that would have allowed him to perceive the stone for what it was—due to his slave-like dependence on military technology—drives home the structuring motif of this narrative: that threatening male performances contingent on destructive technology are bound to be catastrophic failures.

The profile of this American jet pilot while seemingly unrelated to the overall plot of *Red Jihad* is vital, as it delineates the template of white militarized masculinity that is the ordering mechanism for failed postcolonial male performances in the novel. Such influences are made apparent in the character of Indian soldiers such as Lieutenant Colonel Ankit Yadav who epitomizes the postcolonial militarized male. Yadav is a conflicted character; shown to be a keen lover of literature who reads *Pride and Prejudice* while at the same time dispassionately reflecting on the futility of tribal protests against the missile complex. His attitude of nonchalant irreverence toward a tribal man who self-immolates in protest against the missile complex—encroaching on a tribal reservation—evidences Yadav's enmeshment within the model of dehumanized and apathetic militarized masculinity. Much like Frazer in the prologue, Yadav's physical movements are in unison with war machinery namely the "5.56mm MSMC, an INSAS sub-machine gun, slung over his left shoulder." (13). The INSAS rifle produced by the Indian Small Arms System—a symbol of indigenous military technology—combined with the postcolonial manhood of Yadav becomes a representative structure for the purportedly "great Indian dream" (17) of achieving global dominance through technophilic superiority. However, keeping in tune with the critique of militarized masculinity that permeates Indian speculative fiction, Yadav is deeply skeptical of the Indian military-industrial complex that he both embodies and perpetuates. In specifically disavowing the politically created nexus between the national security apparatus and the ideals of economic development Yadav acknowledges how the "great Indian dream" is predicated not on human development but on the successes of the "missile tests" and the allied feats of male military personnel, both of which he oversees.

Yadav's actions and attitudes reflect the comments of the cultural historian Jon McKenzie, who claims in *Perform or Else* (2001) that contemporary human performances in the twentieth century are predicated on the ideals of "[t]echno-performance… [which] emerged in the US since the Second World War-…[and] the formative stages of Techno-Performance were engineered within the American Cold War apparatus…the military-industrial-academic complex" (1). McKenzie illustrates that meta-models of technology such as computer guided missile systems emerging from the military-industrial complex became the template, which continues to define the way technology percolates from military apparatuses into the civilian sphere. This notion of techno-performance that evaluates the success of human actions by modeling them on "machinic systems" is a key component of militarized masculinity and is found extensively represented in speculative fiction. In emulating technical systems as the paradigm for human and more specifically male performances, the ideologies of militarized masculinity (emerging from Techno-Performance) result in the production of "sociotechnical systems" (1), which constrain and resist the natural predilections of human selves. Such reduction of human bodies from desiring bodies to socio-technical systems that are only judged on their efficiency with certain assigned tasks, results in dehumanized structures as reflected in this genre of postcolonial speculative fiction.[6]

Pertinently, while Yadav's characterization in this novel reflects a straightforward relationship between the hardened male body and the efficient war machines, *Red Jihad* also offers the reader other models of postcolonial militarized masculinity. These figures who do not carry out martial tasks, however shore up their hegemonic masculine capital, through emulating the practices of militarization. This other spectrum of postcolonial masculinity is embodied in characters such as A.A. Suryakant, head of the missile development division at the National Missile Research Center and an alumnus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology-Kharagpur. The bespectacled Suryakant is the stereotypical scientist figure with "cocked head…tongue protruding from between his teeth… [while] solving a complex problem" (22) who harbors many insecurities about himself, including the inability to converse fluently in English. While an unwavering patriot who genuinely wants to contribute to the scientific progress of his country, the reader is also made aware of Suryakant's aggressive martial attitude which believes that "only with *military* self-reliance could the foreign policy of a country be truly independent, and only with such a policy could there be economic development" (my emphasis; 24). Through

Suryakant's character *Red Jihad* highlights the critical role played by the *scientific* Indian citizen within the technophilic narrative of progress envisioned by postcolonial nations like India. While the intrinsic link between science and the project of Indian modernity has been well-established (Vishwanathan 1988, Srivastava 2007, Prakash 1999), the gendered politics of this venture needs to be reemphasized here. As Srivastava underscores:

> The project of the transformations of the [colonized] native to the [postcolonial] citizen was, of course, a gendered one and science and reason played a particularly important role in defining the contours of modern subjectivity in India. The national heroes of postcolonial modernity were typically, men […] (33)

This endeavor to promote the project of Indian modernity through the achievements as well as the embodied selves of male scientists is, of course, not surprising since it addresses two of the fundamental postcolonial anxieties; namely about native masculinity and native science. Due to the systemic elision of native scientific achievements from colonial discourses as well as the constant subjugation of native masculinity, the hyperliterate male scientist citizen lays claim to representing the true pinnacle of the postcolonial nation's success, as well as its immersion within modernity.

However, this paradigm of the hyperliterate Indian scientist who has presumably managed to overturn the stigma of backwardness associated with colonial science is still not emancipated from the insecurities of postcolonial masculinity. Suryakant is characterized as constantly fretting over his "baby," the *Pralay* missile due to the fear that the government would be unable to appreciate his genius and pull the plug on his project. His apprehensions are that such a move would be catalyzed by "a babu with absolutely no idea of how much time it took to build a new missile" (Khan 25) since his intellectual executions were often undervalued within a militarized complex that valorizes aggressive physical performances. While one would assume that the intellectual scientific masculinity embodied by Suryakant would be at par with the militarized masculinity embedded in Yadav—as they both exist to buttress the military-industrial complex—such is not the case. Therefore, scientific male bodies in *Red Jihad* constantly mimic the ideologies of militarized masculinity in order to achieve the desired hegemonic model. In case of Suryakant and the other scientists at the missile silo, this aspiration is manifested in their obsession with the

popular combat game *Counterstrike,* which "techies loved…because it gave them a chance to kill each other in various shooting games" (25). Sami Ahmad Khan's portrayal of the way non-militarized bodies simulate the practices of militarization through violent (albeit virtual) performances provides a crucial indication of what constitutes hegemonic postcolonial masculinity within fledgling technophilic postcolonial nations. While reflecting their counterparts from the Anglo-American sphere where white militarized masculinity becomes the dominant paradigm, postcolonial hegemonic masculinity in *Red Jihad* combines the Foucauldian traits of the hardened and disciplined soldier's body with the intellectual prowess of the scientist. Such a combination serves the dual purpose of apparently countering both the colonial legacy of *weak* native masculinity while also embracing the paradigm of militarization, which is seen as crucial to carrying forward the narrative of postcolonial progress through techno-capitalism. This ideology is aptly demonstrated when Suryakant expresses his understanding of the *Pralay* program, "The directive from the Ministry of Defence was clear; urgent. Build. One Missile. Sleek. Shiny. Kick Ass. Now" (Khan 25). This phallic object, an obvious symbolic referent for the militarized male body, represents all the aspirational characteristics of postcolonial hegemonic masculinity.

Unsurprisingly and keeping in tune with the critique of militarized masculinity in this narrative both Yadav and Suryakant meet with violent deaths at the hands of the Jihadi and Naxalite insurgents. Their deaths and the capture of the Indian missile base along with the nuclear-capable missile *Pralay* sets off a chain-reaction in the Indian subcontinent. The mask of civility that had been apparently assumed by both the Indian and Pakistani military establishments comes off as they prepare for an apocalyptic nuclear fight to annihilation. In a reversal of the usual *realpolitik* scenario within the subcontinent, the Indian—not the Pakistani—government is overthrown by a military coup. The volatility of militarized masculinity is underscored as the Indian army chief General Malhotra gains control of the political establishment, which he fears is getting "too soft" and is resultantly afraid of retaliating against Pakistan. (69). This masculine anxiety of getting "too soft" and arguably "feminized" catalyzes Malhotra's decision to subvert the political leadership, which is led by the Indian Prime Minister Bipolab Roy, a "Feluda-loving"[7] Bengali intellectual. Crucially, the continuous struggle in the narrative between volatile militarized masculinity and other forms of manhood—namely intellectual reasonable masculinity epitomized

by characters such as Bipolab Roy—underscores again and again the problematic nexus between technophilic capitalism and the militarized postcolonial male.

The narrative, however, takes a dramatic turn when the missile *Pralay*[8]—deliberately programmed to have an unpredictable trajectory—headed initially toward Amritsar in India changes course and destroys Lahore. This event leads to a realization in both the Indian and the Pakistani military establishments that a nefarious third-party had all along been plotting this event to rekindle hostile relations between the two South Asian super powers. This realization prompts the Indian army chief General Malhotra to hand back power to the deposed Prime Minister with the assertion that only the "ideals of democracy" (Khan 146) invested in reasonable figures like Bipolab Roy could bring back peace to the Indian subcontinent. With General Malhotra's explicit statement acknowledging the futility of his coup (and the overall failure of hegemonic militarized masculinity) co-operation reassumes between India and Pakistan, as the two countries decide to launch a joint operation to capture the culprits (Yaseer Basheer and Agyaat) who had catalyzed this sequence of apocalyptic events. While Agyaat is killed, Basheer manages to escape and meet his leader "Sheikh," now discovered to be none-other than Osama Bin Laden, who had apparently faked his death in order to avoid the American search for him. This reunion although is short-lived as the submarine on which Basheer meets Osama is destroyed with the resultant death of Osama and the capture of Basheer by the joint India-Pakistan operations team. The captured Basheer is surprisingly soon taken away from custody in a "suspiciously hush-hush manner" by an unmarked helicopter. In a final twist, it is revealed that Yasser Basheer is actually a senior American and white military officer who had been deployed undercover in order to "capture the man…we have been hunting so long…the real one" (259). The American military establishment objectively purvey the results of their massive and elaborate operation, which as per their expectations had reestablished the conditions for American political and military dominance in the Indian subcontinent.

While the fictive liberties taken by Sami Ahmad Khan often border on incredulity, the *realpolitik* implications of this narrative can neither be discounted nor ignored. The revelation that the apocalyptic skirmish between Indian and Pakistan had been devised by the US in order to fulfill its military goals underscores the continued influence of American neocolonial imperialism within the Indian subcontinent. The events of this speculative novel, while fictional reflect the continued

intervention of American military-industrial complex—manifested here through the symbolic figure of Yaseer Basheer—and its efforts to discursively and physically manifest American dominance globally, which Hazel Carby aptly summarizes as "Americanism":

> an aggressive planetary dominance abroad supported and promoted by an unlimited, self-righteous arrogance at home, both of which result in an unleashing of violence against people and the environment unprecedented in world history (12).

This notion of subcontinental powers like India and Pakistan being pawns in the larger global ambitions of Western technophilic states (such as America) is also the structuring motif in Mainak Dhar's *Line of Control* (2009). Dhar speculates a future where a terrorist regime allied to Al-Qaeda—led by another Osama-like figure called the "Emir" has gained power in Saudi Arabia and has decided to use its oil wealth and technological apparatus to spread the ideology of *jihad.* Emir through funding and manipulating a military leader in Pakistan named Illahi, who overthrows the democratic Pakistani government, plans to catalyze a series of covert and overt attacks on India, which would ultimately lead to a nuclear showdown in the subcontinent. Although the plot structure of *Line of Control* is significantly less complicated than *Red Jihad,* the main characters in both novels have a striking similarity to each other. The Indian Prime Minister in *Line of Control* is the erudite and cultured Vivek Khosla, who prefers reading Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* to the daily intelligence reports his job requires him to survey. His demeanor and attitude is in sharp contrast to his Pakistani counterpart, Illahi, a battle-weary military veteran and follower of the Emir's *jihadi* doctrine; one who envisions military supremacy as the only way of gaining political supremacy in the subcontinent. However, this apparently simplistic construction of Illahi's character is soon complicated as the reader is made aware that Illahi is a terminal patient of cancer, who is averse to exposing his physical invulnerability. Illahi is constantly plagued by his desire to become "the greatest national hero Pakistan ever had" (Dhar 15), which feeds his insecurities. Finally, his anxieties also seem to emerge from the fact that he has no children or a family, which makes him perceive the nuclear annihilation of India as the only legacy his masculinity is capable of accomplishing.

Illahi, however, is not the only postcolonial figure battling inner and outer demons in this narrative. The Indian section of Dhar's narrative is focused primarily on the character of Colonel Dev Chauhan, a respected officer in the Indian army as well as a tactically-sound tank commander.

Dev is introduced in the narrative as he leads his tanks battalion in a mock war-exercise against another army tank battalion. With machine-like precision Dev is able to maneuver his numerically disadvantaged tank battalion and gain victory. He is characterized by his aggression as the end of the exercise comes with Dev's assertion that even though, "[i]t had only been a mock battle…to hone their skills…in a real war, the losers would all be dead" (Dhar 82). It is clear from his monologue that the "tall and strapping" Colonel Dev Chauhan who is a specimen for *manliness* is deeply invested in the ideologies of militarization as well as the ideals of techno-performance. His penchant to perceive training exercises as the sites to hone his own efficiency as well as of the fighting machine (to which he is constantly attached) signals his inability to perceive the larger narrative of war, which is predicated in real life and in this novel on the aggressive and often irrational ambitions of nation states. Dev's perception of his own self and his masculinity is consistent with what the philosopher Bonnie Mann (2014) describes as the *ontological weight* of gender:

> [i]n the sense that it anchors one's existence…one's sense of belonging to a community and to a world, and one is unmoored if it is undone. This man [sic] may be *lost to himself* if it is shattered (author's emphasis 1).

Mann's contention is that gender cannot be understood as a "fixed biological thing… [or] a psychological structure…[or] a social thing…[but] a *lived reality*," which carries with itself an ontological baggage that cannot be shed without some form of upheaval. Reading Dev's character through Mann's lens it is clear that Dev carries within himself the ontological weight of hegemonic militarized masculinity, which he is duty-bound to perform through aggressive and belligerent performances. These machine-like performances are not without its side effects as Dev is shown to be suffering severely from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Dev's PTSD results from an incident where he was unable to save the subaltern army-men under his command from a burning tank. This past incident is shown to give him nightmares as well to the constant questioning of his own validity as a military man. As a third generation army-person Dev's anxiety clearly results from the notions of militarized masculinity that he possesses, which predicate that he should be devoid of any form of "weakness," especially emotions. Dev's character is an apt example of the psychological and physical pressures of hegemonic militarized masculinity which lead to similar cases of PTSD across the world. Contextually, Sandra Whitworth remarks:

In the United Kingdom, an estimated ten percent of troops airlifted out of Iraq between January and October 2003 primarily suffered from psychological trauma (Turner et al, 2005). In the United States, disability claims due to PTSD have skyrocketed, with some 34,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan treated at Veteran's Affairs facilities diagnosed with PTSD (Corbett, 2007; 46)…One psychiatrist has recently claimed, by contrast, that the US Department of Veteran Affairs has allowed a "*culture of trauma*" to blossom within its bureaucracy (my emphasis 1).

Line of Control highlights that this "culture of trauma," which Dev Chauhan is a victim of, emerges from the complex nexus between the expectations of militarized masculinity as well as the emerging postcolonial nation-state. Significantly, while the martial and aggressive performances of Dev Chauhan are mostly expected due to his enmeshment within the structures of militarization, what stands out are the aggressive performances of the non-militarized/civilian males in this narrative. Much like the scientist Suryakant in *Red Jihad*, *Line of Control* is also replete with male characters who revel in mindless and presumably uncalled for acts of violence. Epitomized through the communal riots that are catalyzed by right wing Hindu fundamentalists in India, who decide to persecute Indian Muslims to retaliate against Pakistani aggression, violent civilian masculinity is at par with militarized masculinity in this speculative novel. Of course the thematic similarities between *Red Jihad* and *Line of Control* are palpable here as the perception of India as a masculine Hindu body politic, which is constantly under threat from other forms of masculinity or femininity is again brought to the fore.

Contextually, a distinguishing feature of both novels is the glaring absence of female figures. While *Red Jihad* has a complete absence of any female character either as a main or a subordinate figure, *Line of Control* has one token female figure; Pooja, who is a TV journalist with a media house. The absence of female characters is generally a problematic aspect of SF— especially future-war fiction—since the "other-ing" of femininity functions as a key strategy for masculinizing the fictive topos. One of the reasons attributed for this anomaly is that technophilic future states, which are predominantly the landscapes for speculative fiction have been pre-coded masculine due to the self-reflexive relationship between masculinity and technology. Again, the cultural equation drawn between masculinities and technologies is not arbitrary since "powerful technological roles are predominantly occupied by men who thereby have a disproportionate

influence in shaping new technologies" (Lohan and Faulkner 835). However, due to the critical trajectory undertaken by the representative postcolonial speculative fictions discussed here[9] it may be surmised that the lack of female characters drives home a larger point about the discriminatory nature of the military-industrial complex. The reciprocal relationship between gender and technology found manifested in speculative fiction is best summarized by Jennifer Terry and Meldodie Calvert:

> We could define gender itself as a technology according to the following propositions: Gender is an organized system of management and control which produces and reproduces classifications and hierarchical distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Gender is a system of representation, which assigns meaning and value to individuals in society, making them either men or women (5-6).

The introduction of the singular female character, Pooja, significantly, also helps to underscore the volatility of hegemonic postcolonial masculinity in *Line of Control* as she is often at the receiving end of masculine aggression. In her role as a media personnel working primarily within the military-industrial complex Pooja is continually subjected to the male gaze, which fails to perceive her as a working professional and voyeuristically objectifies her as "slim body, chiseled body and long and black hair" (Dhar 16). A specific episode in the novel particularly underscores the relationship of hegemonic postcolonial masculinity with female bodies, when Pooja is unfortunately surrounded by a violent mob of four males during the communal riots. The naked sexual aggression exhibited by the male rioters during this event provides a telling commentary on contemporary postcolonial manhood. Plagued by colonial insecurities and religious dogma, a large section of postcolonial males continue to perceive the female body as a site for inscribing their maleness and presumably gain access to the hegemonic masculine paradigm.

Although Pooja is able to escape largely due to her quick thinking and the fortunate arrival of a colleague, this fictive event vitally illustrates both the volatility and the fall out of postcolonial manhood that seeks to emulate the ideals of white militarized masculinity. Even though the characterization of Pooja—predominantly within the 'female-victim' paradigm does leave a lot to be desired—she also acts as a vital deterrent to the juggernaut of hegemonic militarized masculinity in this narrative. It is her prowess as a reporter through which she makes the political establishment aware of the specific male characters, who had fomented communal discord by

misinforming the Indian populace. More importantly, a romantic relationship that ensues between Pooja and Colonel Dev Chauhan when she is asked to report on the war frontier results in Chauhan disavowing the model of hegemonic militarized masculinity within which he was entrenched. Dev's romantic involvement with Pooja humanizes him, as he becomes self-aware of his status not merely as an aggressive and efficient military machine but rather as a desiring human being.

Much like *Red Jihad*, *Line of Control* also concludes with an utter failure of hegemonic militarized masculinity. The machinations of Emir and his minion Illahi are discovered and foiled by discerning and reasonable figures in Pakistan, echoing similar characters in India who are able to combat the mindless communal violence being performed again by male characters. Pertinently, the influence of the American military-industrial complex is a key motif within this narrative as well: a potential Pakistani nuclear attack on India with an American-made aircraft is thwarted when the Americans remotely activate the fail-safe option, which they had installed foreseeing such apocalyptic emergencies. Moreover, the political dialogues about exercising nuclear options that take place in both India and Pakistan in this novel are shown to be heavily reliant on the USA-USSR paradigm of deterrence during the Cold War. Evidenced particularly in an exchange the Indian prime minister Vivek Khosla has with his trusted aides, the novel continually stresses the continued legacy of Cold war discursive structures within the Indian subcontinent: "Come on, nukes are for deterrence—that's what the Cold war was all about" (Dhar 251).

Even though fantastical texts have been a part of postcolonial and more specifically the Indian narrative tradition, the genre of SF remains a largely unexplored terrain. In comparison to the Anglo-American canon, where SF has been a distinct genre with some very distinguishing characteristics the lack of SF scholarship in the Indian sphere does make it a major challenge to locate the features germane to this domain. However, as Samit Basu an acclaimed Indian SF writer remarks, this "lack of stereotypes" (para 1) about what should constitute Indian SF does present both the audience and the writer with new opportunities. The texts that have been discussed in this article, while focusing mostly on the socio-political realities of the Indian subcontinent perform the herculean task of both adopting and challenging the global paradigm of SF. In critiquing the assumptions of both Anglo-American future-war fiction and the limiting gendered discourses of postcolonial *development*, Indian speculative fiction becomes a site of difference, opening out multiple possibilities for writers and critics alike. As Maurice Blanchot asserts the realm of SF

offers us futures with "unprecedented problems and unforeseen solutions" (382), where apocalyptic settings keeping in tune with the Greek etymology of the word do provide us with a literal "uncovering" of both humanity and technology (*apo*-un, *kalupsis*-cover). The onus now lies on us, as to how to we deal with the revelations made in them.

Notes:

[1]   This marginalization of native masculinity is consistent with Connell's hypothesis, where she asserts that in every societal structure, some forms of masculinity are more valued than others. This form of masculinity accrued with the greatest social capital is usually the hegemonic model of masculinity for that specific era or location. It is important here to underline that normative models of hegemonic masculinity are not always expressed in society through a direct manifestation of power—such as violence—but mostly through "cultures, institutions and practices" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

[2]   It is important to note here that the category "postcolonial speculative fiction" is a rather contested and debated term. Scholars have argued that since the terms "science fiction" and "speculative fiction" have a distinct colonialist history associated with them, they should be discarded in favor of a new term, one which specifically describes speculative literature from postcolonial nation states. Others have pointed out that since the tradition of speculative fiction was present in many colonized nations much before it became a popular genre in the Anglo-American sphere, there is indeed a need to take back the signifier by attaching it with emerging postcolonial speculative texts. As Jessica Langer notes that the power of postcolonial speculative fiction lies in its ability of not shying away from "colonial tropes" but rather "hybridiz[ing] them, parody[ing] them and/or mimic[ing] them against the grain in a play of Bhabhaian masquerade" (Langer 4). Many recent works including the texts discussed in this essay along with those anthologized in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2004) and *We See a Different Frontier: A Postcolonial Speculative Fiction Anthology* (2013) accomplish this task by using Anglo-American tropes, which are then subverted and made to accomplish decolonizing objectives.

[3]   Modeled presumably on the Defense Research Development Organization

[4]   The notion of India as an essentially masculine nation where the larger nation is composed as a sum total of the male figures in the country is not a new concept. Sanjay Srivastava notes, that the project of Indian postcolonial modernity has been a set of Five Year (Hero) Plans much like the Five Year Economic Development Plans launched by the Planning Commission of India in the post-independence era. Srivastava points out that the masculine "hero" figures who have emerged under the FYP Hero plan embody are unequivocally heterosexual, and their manifestation has been through multiple embodied selves such as the Bollywood hero or the scientific intellectual. Of course the common threat that all these "hero" figures have hoped to counter is the "self-image of effeteness" that came to be "widely accepted among nineteenth century (Hindu) intelligentsia" (35). Therefore all these "figures"—the newest manifestation of which is the militarized postcolonial male as seen in these speculative works—aim to counter the anxiety that "Indians lacked manliness" (35).

[5]   Bonnie Mann (2011) notes that in the post 9/11 era, this purported "War on Terror" was synonymous with the project of "reassert[ing] US national manhood that had played an important part in US politics since the humiliating defeat of the Vietnam War and that was reinvigorated by the events of 11 September 2001" (22).

[6]   Manuel De Landa in his incisive study *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, notes that such reciprocal relationship emerging within Anglo-American military-industrial complexes has given rise to the ideology where "humans [are always already seen] as no more than the pieces of a larger military-industrial machine: a war machine" (3). In looking at war-games, which simulate martial situations that have no historical precedent—such as nuclear war—De Landa remarks that the human participants in these exercises are continuously expected to minimize expected errors and thereby become more machine-like in their demeanor. De Landa's hypothesis written by keeping the Cold-War in context holds especially true for the current mode of technological warfare through unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and drones. Prospective military drone-controllers train themselves by practicing their skills on seemingly video games based in military settings. Additionally, the popularity of these seemingly innocuous military games amongst the civilian population where the gamer's gaze imitates the drone's eye and vice-versa provides a striking example of our enmeshment within the military-industrial complex.

[7]   A popular Indian detective series written by Satyajit Ray.

[8]   While the missile named Pralay is a fictionalized artifact in this novel its etymological roots presumably lie in the real-life *INS Pralaya*, a missile boat of the Indian Navy which served in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971. More importantly, the word Pralay which in Sanskrit and Hindi connotes "catastrophe" is a double entendre: signifying the apocalyptic nature of the weapon as well as the volatile nature of Indian militarized (and hegemonic) masculinity, which is contingent on this war technology.

[9]   Since they do make an attempt to interrogate the accepted traditions of Anglo-American future-war narratives.

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