

**Resonance of Truth and Light in Zia Haider Rahman's**  
*In The Light of What We Know*

**Prattasha Hayat**

**MA in English**

**Student ID: 2015-1-93-012**

**A Thesis submitted to The Department of English**  
**of**  
**East West University**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**  
**Masters of Arts in English**

**January 2017**



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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this work has been written entirely by me except for the references and quotations, which I have acknowledged duly. Additionally, I have maintained all academic ethics and integrity while preparing this research.

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ID: 2015-1-93-012

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Course: ENG 599

Course Title: Dissertation

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### **Approval of Supervisor**

I certify that this dissertation satisfies all the requirements as a dissertation for the degree of Masters of Arts in English.

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## ABSTRACT

*In The Light of What We Know* engages issues like individual choice, class, identity and nationality in the social, economical and political context of our dynamic contemporary world. Concentrating on a single man's journey to chase an unachievable illusion of the ideal, Rahman's story revolves around Zafar. Perceiving the shift in social agencies, Zafar opens our eyes to facets of our mundane life that we take for granted through his painful reflection of self denial, self loathing, mimicry, self destructive tendencies and violence. Unhypocritical in celebrating the imperfections in the individual the inquisitive and overachieving Zafar thus becomes the champion of everyman in the quest of life. As he surpasses the perfect diasporic character being interpellated and manipulated by the societal institutions, we witness the revelation where even knowledge fails to grasp the truth and hope fails to endure. Thus men left with insurmountable raw emotions in their ruinous retribution speak through the voice of the Parrhesiastes Zafar, and demand a conscious effort to achieve an enlightened understanding of the self and the time for the dream of a reality less bloodthirsty.



## INTRODUCTION

Contending the proverb “Ignorance is bliss”, Zia Haider Rahman in his monumental novel *In The Light of What We Know* epitomizes the modern man’s search for the light of knowledge in a confusing and unintelligible surrounding. Through the journey of his protagonist Zafar, Rahman seeks the solution to the puzzles that baffle the information laden citizen in a postmodern setting. Epic in both scope and ambition, this exceptional novel exposes the modern world of technological advancement with its wealth of knowledge laid bare. Yet meaningless to the average citizen as living in their boxed up narrow lives they lack the enlightenment to discern the true meaning and significance of that light of knowledge. Shown in the gradual exposition of the evolution of one such modern subject Zafar, as he goes on a lifelong search for truth and substance we learn the necessity for a solid understanding of the self in relation to its surrounding. Reflecting this view Rahman says that “The only answers each of us hears are to the questions we are capable of asking” (98). It makes it apparent that only after the journey for knowledge begins can we hope to become worthy of earning that illumination.

Thus as we begin to view the man in context of his environment we find that a person is shaped by the time and place he lives in and the people he encounters. Therefore even the most horrendous act of an outraged individual, namely terrorism, in form of lone wolf or Jihadi attacks can be traced back to the societal system of promoting and endorsing hatred and violence towards people. Such brazen exploitation of the herd mentality of individuals despite human intellect and potential for infinite goodness is the prime focus of Rahman’s novel. So, Rahman shines light on those aspects of life that often go unnoticed or ignored and introduces his simple yet tangible hope for a brighter future when much publicized War on Terror continues to cause

more bloodshed. Awestruck at the dreadful indifference of the societal being he explains that when the ordinary people keep their eyes closed to the evil they are capable of, they make the ground for it to turn into an pandemic. He says “The regular Joe doesn’t care so long as he gets his mortgage or loan. Don’t they say that all that evil needs is for good people to do nothing?” (65). Therefore it becomes evident that only through conscious culturing and nurturing of an enlightened understanding can we bring a change in ourselves that can free us from witnessing humanity’s descent as the nightmarish acts of brutality continue to threaten to engulf us. In three chapters corresponding chronologically to the theoretical backdrop of George Lukacs’ *The Historical Novel*, Homi K Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, Michael Foucault’s *Fearless Speech* this thesis in its limited ambit hopes to draw a synthesis with the evolution of the individual portrayed in Zafar to the pressing demand for a deeper understanding of the self and the time leading to the proper practice of the necessary truth in personal as well as greater political life embodied in the act of Parrhesia.

*In The Light of What We Know* depicts Zafar as a man with a confession. A man from the “corner of the corner of the world” he comes from nothing and makes himself what he had aspired. Born into a social class of “economic migrants who travel(ed) to the west” (155) for better prospects and opportunities in life he came to be well versed in the ways of the world as is a necessity to cope or to survive for most of the people. A typical character, representing the life of “regular folks,” he shows that people naturally grow up knowing full well that the world is unfair (212). With every step and every choice he shows that when people get battered they come to taste the crudeness of the system they are bound to in family, society or nation. This same view is reinforced through repeated encounters and as a result the hope for anything better than the unfair is lost. Thus ordinary citizens like Zafar come to shape their expectation of the

world from their world perception and accordingly tailor their way of speech and conduct to avail themselves the opportunities to reach their desired goals. So the interpellated subjects thus conditioned to limit their own hopes suit the places assigned to them even when it is unfair or unjust because they have already given up the trust in better. As such we find Rahman through the narrator saying “Trust is a slippery word” (206). However, it is only their inclined familiarity with customs and designated places that make them the slave of their roles. Here Zafar marks himself the exception as a man who dares to look for the right questions to get to the answers he desires. As someone who is “quite unafraid to approach people and make his own introductions” (166) we find him capable of cruelty, manipulation or even candid frankness, yet always acutely aware of himself and his position in relation to any surrounding. Like a veteran soldier he plays by the rules of the system with the equipments which are sure to carry him to his destination. Though he himself doubts and contradicts the power of the will against the overwhelming current of the world order to create a place for the self, his efforts make him the best manifesto of this irony of human will and its effect, which “only sharpens our interests” (68). Even amidst all trials his persistence for clarity and patience for letting himself change to adapt at the face of depressing odds are what make him shine brighter in his alien surroundings.

Equipped with above average intellect and an obstinate demand for words, reasons and explanation to satiate his inquisitive disposition, Zafar establishes that it is possible to go beyond the boundary of expectation and limitations that our society forsakes its operant to. In Rahman’s words “Common social position is a glue that binds people; it fixes you into a broader scheme of family and friends and like-minded persons” (100). Spoken diplomatically, such pragmatic remark wields in it the base, distinction thrust upon people to separate them in the bias of class, creed or race. In the present democratic society where class is not only a part of the individual, it

is the individual “it’s the eyes with which (people) see the world” (214), it is made impossible to break out of the decorative, generic snow globe which captures us and binds our possibilities as mere show pieces to ensure each piece completes its expected duty. But the existence of the possibility of the contrary is only revealed to the person if he is willing to look into the mechanics that control his actions or the truths he trusts as true to base his outlook on. So Rahman asserts that “*In order to catch even a fleeting glimpse of the world, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it*” (215, italics in original). In such unveiling the “impossibility of correcting the misconception of illusions and the questions of authority for truths” Rahman broaches the issue of the established and the change that becomes the demand of the time (215). With such informative yet highly philosophic way of approaching every topic introduced in the book, Rahman through his ultimate social survivor Zafar proves the premise that this world is built on transcending the barrier and such a goal is not beyond the ability of the ordinary everyman.

At the same time the philosophic manner in which Rahman introduces the issues trailing all the leads to his focal points of arguments or explanation make it apparent that the subjects of his main concern are not merely limited to the philosophic realm but has a very real presence in the life of man. Ordinary men who are deeply influenced by such forces as religion, nationality, history, education system, economic system and national or global politics are acquainted with these facets. The problematic part is that the people so thoroughly conditioned take them as absolute and never entertain the need to inquire the lengths to which they themselves are liable for allowing such abstract yet powerful forces to develop an overbearing presence in social structure as well as their mental structure which end up restricting their potential for growth, change and improvement. Feeling “compelled to re-evaluate things, things taken as given, the

most basic things – the role of love, the meaning of work, the progress of a day and a whole life” it dawns on them that they are “ *no longer at ease in the old dispensation*” (91). Yet that same belief later distorted and taken too rigidly becomes the noose strangling them. Looking into such deep rooted inclination to bondage Rahman explains “they (Human beings) *need* to believe something” (207). Therefore seeking to chase away the shroud of darkness that limits our vision and perception Zafar becomes the ideal character construct illustrating the unyielding hope that strengthens the individual to defeat his flaws and accomplish the unthinkable.

With a predominant aura of clear human interest thus the storyline runs into different direction making it easier to comprehend the complex web of often extraordinary issues that go hand in hand with the ordinary life of the ordinary people. Plotted on the consequent years of September 2001, this novel by merit of its broad spectrum of intensive analysis asserts itself as a highly politicized work bearing some strong and firmly built world view. In multiple snippets and episodes it portrays an edgy but well rounded picture of the postcolonial politics in the global era of violence and invasion in the name of peace. Sometimes in close reading, broad reflections, tangents or deviations the central story reveals to us the intricate workings beneath neo-colonialism, liminality, transnationality, world politics, war, aggression and terrorism in the lives of people like Zafar, the Narrator, Emily, Colonel Sikander Ali Mushtaq, Suliman or Crane. Such individuals coming to us with their different stories and vastly different background having a marked influence in their mental make-up and ways of life make their clashing perspectives or contrasting motives that much realistic and relatable. As such, history, the true purgatory of time, no longer remains a mere monotone backdrop for a protagonist but becomes a real existence of man’s despoiled environs.

Taking George Lukacs' central ideas of man in relation to history, becoming the visage of a time carrying the marks of a total system from *The Historical Novel*, this research attempts to attain a wider perspective to appraise Zafar as the spokesperson of Rahman as he brings to question the doubt and uncertainty created by the opulence and opportunities of our life. Also through Lukacs we find "the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them (*Historical* 24). Manipulated and interpellated, the Narrator, discloses that being exposed to a mix of various combinations of faith, culture, economic milieu, political influence ultimately leads a person to a standpoint that is unclear. Not being sure of where they stand on any issue including their identity, ideals or outlook, they cannot progress on any endeavor in a real sense. Instead they settle for the well trodden path to attain material success that is preached to them as the interpretation of having lived a successful life. This being only able to bring satisfaction till a certain point soon exposes the clever deception working within the consumerist societal system. As we find the Narrator, apparently a successful man in all of life's avenue admit to himself,

Having seen that my own choices had taken me into a loveless, childless marriage, not to mention the materialism that never seemed enough, having made choices that mysteriously failed to express my innermost longings, I believed that in Zafar's life I might learn something of how things could have been, for worse, if not better. (67)

Bringing out the failures or glitches in a seemingly perfect and unified life of an average man Rahman discloses how such mismatch of effort and achievement forces one to evaluate his life in a new light. Here comes the interest of the ordinary men in the deeds of the extraordinary heroes. Such heroes who took a slightly different approach to life than the common man and by virtue of

his exceptional effort had become a source of inspiration and illumination to others and thus remain the examples to be followed. Similarly, having faced the discrepancy in the equation of his own life, the narrator turns to the life of his friend to find out where he himself went wrong.

Still, as the governing agencies of a nation monitoring or supposedly monitoring its people, takes their efforts to result in a dead end, it can and does in reality make the ordinary law abiding citizen diverge from their faith in the justification of the authority. As we find in Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of the concept of Knowledge in a postindustrial society, where knowledge has and always will be equated with power "The definition of knowledge is determined by intertwining forces of power, authority, and government... In an increasingly transparent society, this leads to new questions: Who is authorizing the authority figure? Who is watching the watchers?" (Miemis) Such confusion resulting in rage coupled with ignorance, lack of effort to uncover the fact, preyed on by shadowy forces seeking to gain their own agenda are capable of bringing about acts of extreme aggression even among the tamest of population. Such extremist standpoint and worldview that results in hostage taking or suicide bombing has in fact in the recent years plagued our lives. Even in a setting apparently calm and working symmetrically within its parameters such threats do arise, endanger and many times claim the lives of innocent bystanders. But it happens only because of the gap left in peoples' understanding of their own role in democracy and the lack of clarity and answerability in the governing forces of the nations and its subservient organizations. All these factors find their place in the postulations of Rahman substantiated through the logic of Lukacs in the chapter extensively.

Next basing on Homi K Bhabha's notions of cultural hybridity, postcolonial nationalism, liminal identity from *The Location of Culture*, this thesis focuses on Zafar's quest for finding

who he is, where he belongs and how far he can go. Taken seriously these questions bring him nearer to facts about himself and the world he lives in. Appearing simple and naturally arisen questions about the individual and his purpose prove to be the most vexing yet yielding demands of this literary work. They not only make the reader question their set ideals but also the conditioned psyches that make them do so. Also the answers acquired at the end change his, as well as our understanding, of the journey itself.

Therefore drawing from Michael Foucault's conception of Parrhesia from *Fearless Speech* we delve deep into the rabbit hole where Rahman deciphers how, with a newfound, hard-wrought understanding of his inclination and actions Zafar braves the necessity of making it known to others. The concept of Parrhesia as handled by Michael Foucault stands for free speech or fearless speech where the Parrhesiastes who practices Parrhesia is the individual to expresses his mind or opinion. *In The Light of What We Know* clearly exposing the drawbacks and loopholes in a man's knowledge demands the answer of how much an individual knows of the Truth to speak of it as True and how far that knowledge can carry him. And in this process of Parrhesia the subject, Zafar, finds in himself an illumination that in turn grants him the perspective to determine the *truth* or being worthy of the *truth*. So through the progression of the story and the gradual revelation of the facts till reaching the culmination we witness a marked evolution in Zafar's understanding of the limitations of his learning and his hope for himself. In this context he notes, "The imaginary ideal human being, the one I believed I could conceivably be, is an unreachable person whom I could only wish to be, unreachable in any circumstance." Here his confession becomes his final stand against the bafflement that thwarts his resolve, strength and possibility to make peace with his own being and his gains and losses chasing the hopes and dreams he had held genuine and dear. Such self doubt and notion of a wasted life



proves to be the perfect components to make any social outcast or self-made outcast an emotional tinderbox ripe for manipulation. As such only after the man gives voice to *the Truth* he was made to silence by the instruments of the system he is a part of, he can earn the will to move on from his illusions that impeded his vision. Thus marking the length of maturity his journey has brought to him in perception as well as expectation coupled with the Illumination of newfound light of truth and knowledge, Zafar marks the beginning of a new journey for new hope where the potential and soul of the human being refuses to rot and stagnate in its bounded confinement.

## CHAPTER 1

## Truth that Lies Somewhere Else or Darkness below the Horizon

Men, the makers of history, are as much part of history as history has a part in their making. A story of such men in irreversible connection to their turbulent time and age, the novel *In The Light of What We Know* demonstrates a concentrated focus and heightened sensibility to take into perception the contemporary issues. As such Zia Haider Rahman, a distinguished author, with the capability of tying in the events displays through the words of Zafar, his protagonist, how such cause and effect play a part in the typical life of the societal being as well as the global current. Synthesized with the pivotal points of *The Historical Novel* by George Lukacs here the evolution of Zafar, as we take a deeper look into the workings of the forces around him, establish him as a typical hero worthy of representing his time and age. *In The Light of What We Know* is a quest for the illuminating light of knowledge where man only finds himself in a maelstrom of questions awaiting answers. Devoid of any voice of their own, such societal beings keep content to be told what to believe or what to do even when they are doubtful of the inherent reasons for it. Almost breathing with life, this novel deals with such issues of momentous significance along with their disclosed and hidden agenda. Most often than not, as also true of real life, such issues do not appear in all their variant facets to the onlookers who can see and are shown only the tip of the iceberg. But it is this proneness of such men to take a substance at its face value that makes them the perfect subjects or typical characters capable of representing the ordinary life of the ordinary people. Zafar, coming from a mass of such ordinary people is the key character who endeavors to open our eyes to the illusion of the celebrated cycles of history amidst our limited knowledge.

Rahman together with his unique understanding of historicity and an overachieving aim of representing the historic spirit into the literary framework fashions the typical hero whose life becomes the silver screen projecting the ebb and flow of many a major historic intervention. As the agent who eventually emerges into the social realm of discourse Zafar's journey thus becomes the journey of exploring the questions that can reveal to him as well to us the meaning and destination of a life well spent. In this context Rahman states in a straight forward tone,

We don't want (our lives) to stand for nothing. So we dive headlong into becoming heroes, becoming the big swinging dick on Wall Street or rock star or the hot-shot human-rights lawyer. Which is about making our lives stand for something that our intelligence can grasp, saving us from confronting what we fear might be true – or what we would fear if we gave ourselves the chance – namely, that we're accidental pieces of flesh, mutton without meaning. (73)

We hear in his word the fear of unused potentials but greater still is the fear of resigning himself to the dark void of despair at the meaninglessness of the world he perceives from his environment.

According to Lukacs, as well as representing the life of the common people such work of literature “in order to fulfill its mission . . . must have popular appeal” (Shaw). However “popular” here requires a depth and intensity of the subject matter. Consequently, *In the Light of What We Know* is in total sync with the ideas of Lukacs as Rahman instead of looking into the trend or fashion of the time casts an introspective glance into the lives of man in relation to themselves and with their society. In this regard Lukacs says, “An analysis and critique of this literature is as much an analysis and critique of the typical forms of the historical novel of our time as a self criticism in the widest sense and in most cases this is so in a more or less conscious

fashion” (*Historical* 263). As the story of Zafar progresses we find him questioning the role of the societal beings in the wheel of the system they keep in motion. Emphasizing on the duties and obligations of a man as a social instrument he reveals the relations of man to himself that is left ignored. Here Zafar’s anxiety of losing his “self” comes to him as the first step to confront his true self, not the self in connection with others and his responsibilities but to the demands of his soul. He says “I used to be skeptical of medication, afraid I would myself, lose what is me” (446). But it is this complete awakening of this inward self that makes the hero of the historical novel capable of enshrining the essence of his era making himself apart from the others who “in their relation to one another carries a negation of the interior view. (It stresses) that literature can and should only deal with the introspective” (Burgum 71). Because it is the deep understanding of the notion of his self that gives him the space to become aware of his connections to his society. In the following lines we find Zafar after a lot of difficulty coming to terms with his “self”.

This self *seems* nearest when I force my consciousness inward, when I compel it to focus, and then it rises like an apparition. But if it is at its most material when I’m conscious, then that self can never sustain a continuous being because any stretch of consciousness, of awareness of self, is cut short by the intervention of all that needs doing in a minute, let alone a day, curtailed by the steady demands that render us unconscious of self and commit our body to this or that task at hand, to prepare supper or calculate a price for an exotic derivative instrument or pay a bill or do the laundry or draft a legal memo or tend a crying infant. (446)

This realization not only makes him aware of his own entity in the realm of his circumstances but how it binds him to the events taking place around him. In this respect he embodies “the

specifically historical, that is, [the] derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age” (Lukacs 19). For Zafar this insightful understanding is directed towards the historic events of 1971 Liberation war, its consequences, the 9/11 terrorist attack that changed the world’s perspective to equate Muslims to terrorists, the following economic crash that greatly affected the life of many including Zafar’s parents’ and the narrator’s. By extension the humanistic missions for war ravaged Afghanistan are also a consequence of the attack. So he comes to grasp how he goes to a warzone as a human rights lawyer with the intention of “doing good” but comes out a chess piece in dirty war game. Because this very realization makes the being notice that “experience such as this are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this enormously strengthen[s] the feeling, first that there is such a thing as history, that is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual” (*Historical* 23). In retrospect all of these come to dictate the direction of Zafar’s life.

In the course of the novel despair may come into focus in the writings of our author but Rahman is never utterly pessimistic. Even the lowest points of negativity in the story, are immediately followed by an action that urges us towards a positive direction. Asked in an interview about his views on the “human relationship and international relations” (Joyce Carol Oates) at the conflict ridden present he states that though it is very difficult to be an optimist when it comes to politics and international relations as “venality and the crooked timber of humanity” seems to be our root attribute, there still may be hope for our long term future as we continue to try to be better by “organizing our institutions in such a way that makes it harder for people to behave badly, organize the world in such a way that the incentive is to live at peace...despite the scant evidence” (Ekattor media limited). It not only makes the relation

between a man and his environment the centre of the discussion but also brings into focus the historical and political background of the novel that covers a large span of time, ranging from the incidents of the 1970's to 1990's and finally the 21<sup>st</sup> century or more precisely the highly politicized years after the 9/11 terrorist attack and their global consequences.

With earnest efforts of breaking out of the seamless oppressive ideology of the bourgeois writers as Lukacs proposes should be the mark of any great historic novel capable of attracting its readers, Rahman brings to us the untold sides of the celebrated history supported by facts and historic documents that cover many of the footnotes of this novel. Lukacs says that "the great mission of true literature is to awaken men to consciousness of themselves" (*Historical* 39). Similarly in the novel we find Rahman focusing on the Liberation War of 1971 which is an aspect of pivotal importance because it brings to focus the meta-narratives existing in the shadow of the grand version of the history. Despite the much celebrated grand narrative of the 1971 war, the still undisclosed or rather deliberate "neglect of evidence, on basis of sentimental predilection" kept out of the popular circle of discussion thus become a natural extension of the people's life (Burgum 71). It shares a fundamental relation to the novel as well as the very essence of its protagonist Zafar, as we come to learn that Zafar's mother was a birangona and he was born of the atrocities of war later taken away from her to London. Stressing on our tendency to overlook the implicit facts beneath the popular belief, Rahman states "We accept premises more readily than we should. False dichotomies are the stock of politicians, only because too many are ready to accept the premise as given" (297). As such what tailored and well worn information do get their time in the spotlight is because they stand to make one or some other group of people beneficial through their existence. Zafar in his meticulous notes and conscious effort to stay true to the fact from his notes, tape recorders and his overall disposition makes it

apparent that in placing our trust in what we experience we are more likely to be biased by our own predisposition. As such he discloses why we should employ the device of reasoning and caution as to avoid the miscalculation of falling victim to our own illusion.

*In The Light of What We Know* as a true representation of the historic spirit in the form of the novel does not give us the incident of the society to cast a glance at the probable future but looks at the evidence already present. Not limited to the interpretation of an isolated point in time it shows that in treating "the present as history," present is the outcome variable of its past, "a truly historical vision sees the past as the necessary precondition of the present" (Groot). In turn this representation ties the link between the events of significance in life of its characters as well to the greater perspective. As Lukacs says "It expresses genuine problems of the highest possible level, digs down to the deepest root of human suffering, feeling, thought and action" (*Historical* 213). As such even when Zafar is at the epicenter of the war and has his whole life defined as a direct result of it, we hardly see him romanticize his dark history. On the contrary when faced with this issue, his grief, anger and dissatisfaction finds better and more natural outlet in his meaningful silence. Even talking of this painful chapter of history while bearing his personal wounds he is most rational and prone to accept the issue head on. In the delineation of the story we also come across the Narrator's parents, both of whom while being Pakistani by birth and nationality, do not hesitate to accept the shameful truth of how West Pakistan sought to suppress what they saw as a "rebellion" in East in 1971 (216). The narrator describes the conscious protest of his family to the Pakistani military's suppression in this way, "The war of 1971 and the holocaust of West Pakistani's conduct in East Pakistan, his criticism of his homeland, the ostracism and then my parents' disengagement – all of this was a history of personal suffering that my father carried with him" (216). In fact it had made even the narrator "shed the scales of

phony patriotism” (299). This constant belief in an ideal and carrying it out in the conduct of life is what Rahman mourns most in the postmodern subjects. In this respect, as Lukacs brings out the divergence of the synchronic society to the diachronic society, the narrator’s parents, as the representative of the first generation emigrants with a stronger tie to their native soil stand in total contrast to the post modern generation or in this particular case the second generation emigrants like the Narrator or Meena.

Rahman through Zafar shows how people in fear of the dubious motive behind the evidence disregard the content they are given. As such, too unsure of what to believe or for the very fear of being manipulated, they choose to adhere to the trend or the popular propaganda. Even when all the information is within their reach waiting to be pieced together they do not make the effort to look for authenticity. He says “This is how fear works. It transforms our perceptual field. It changes how we allow ourselves to experience the world – in order to circumvent the fear” (247). As one such key character the narrator brings these marked discrepancies amidst the many similarities between himself and Zafar into the ken of the reader and in doing so acts as a foil of Zafar. He says “ In Zafar, I had always perceived a stance towards the *world* – that he had a stance while others seemed to me to hold merely attitudes to people they met...I had never really considered my own stance, or whether I even had one, how I stood in relation to the world” (92). It again makes us realize how, being devoid of originality and fundamental ideas such people rather opt for being told what to do and follow like mindless drones. Even the conspiracy theories that are propagated are lies and are so common an occurrence that people have stopped paying any notice to them. In Zafar’s words “I think conspiracy theories are lies...propagated by a shadowy international force (360).” Nevertheless Rahman does admit that unlike in a perfect synchronic system of society like an equation of



arithmetic there remain other factors that can upset the balance and change the outcome of the problem at hand. He agrees, “This is not mathematics, in which contents stand and fall by itself, but the world, in which authority and motive matter” (540). So even when people may choose to respond to new ideas or give voice to their own ideas in the system of democracy, as the motivation behind the actions remain undisclosed it is impossible to ascertain the *truth* in a clear sense.

Again the resourceful information and excerpts from original historic documents that Rahman inserts into the pages of the story also lay weight to the demands of his discussed notions. In this respect the excerpts from Zafar’s notes from Christopher Hitchens’s book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* stand as “the most public and most strongly worded demarche, from State Department servants to the State Department that has ever been recorded” (153). Again Rahman phrases it as “truth of the matter” and gives us the justification of why the US had not intervened to stop such gross suppression of democracy saying “The Americans were relying on Pakistan as an intermediary, even as the slaughter was raging” (218). These meta-narratives that are denied their existence from the public eye still remain in their entirety but are drowned out by the repeated declaration of the popular history that quite ironically change with the turn of the persons in the seat of power. Yet even that too is a part of our lives, our history. As stated by Jarome De Groot “All of life is historical or steeped in the process of history” (1813). In great sadness for the repressed freedom of speech in the current political societies, Rahman thus comes to call the motherland, Bangladesh that he holds as a very dear and special place in his heart as “the land of the dead” where we have “two ladies fighting it out on the political stage... both stand[ing] in the shadow of death, rely and claw their legitimacy on the claim that they inherit the mantle of the dead” (Rahman). Taken to the point of commodification for material gain or

personal and institutional claim to power, such ideas or notion of greatest sacrifice lose their original significance and enormity and become the tools of the living. So Rahman aptly writes “Truth is the casualty of war, slaughtered by victors and vanquished alike” (219). As such the person in the higher social status becomes always the one to ascertain the truth for all others to oblige. If failed to oblige they are either ostracized like the Narrator’s family or forced into exile like Zafar’s. In such social context *truth* truly loses its value and History is rendered down to a mindless obsession with a bunch of “pre-formed images...while the truth lies elsewhere”. In the end the human being is left in a pendulous state between baffled hopelessness of the present he is a witness to and the illusory claims of the prospects of better life somewhere else that is yet beyond his grasp.

## CHAPTER 2

## The Place of Origin or Point of Departure

A person at any given point in life is faced with choices. At such crossroads of life the choices bring to the clueless individual two options, option of going forward or option of staying stuck in their current situation because going back in life is never possible. These simple yet daunting challenges in their basic duality of essence make its maker the person he wishes to be. And with each right or wrong choice the individual on his way to materialize who he thought he wanted to be kills one life for another or makes adjustments of his wishes and ideas of his ideal self. Rahman says, "A decision amounts to cutting off all options but one... It kills all the lives we might have had, destroys all the worlds we might have known" (491). However, it so happens that if and when these choices get increasingly difficult for the man to make and again and again he loses his drive to continue on his journey, at one point he starts to question whom he set out to be in the first place. Anxious of the worthiness of such tiring and perilous journey some even loose heart and lose sight of their ultimate goal and make themselves comfortable where ever life makes them end up. In the novel the game of 'Twenty Question' played by the narrator and his father is similar to this dilemma of life. Here the objective always remains, to find out 'who you are' with the help of said twenty questions in a very limited time. Rahman phrases it like, "Who are you and what do you want? Some people spend a lifetime trying to answer these questions. You, however, have thirty seconds" (270). This simple yet interesting game is in a most interesting sense a very accurate projection of the journey of a man's life trying to find his self amidst a vast ocean of possibilities and probabilities with just the aid of some footholds which in forms of our birth, family, parentage, class, friends, well-wishers or enemies become our starting point or the factors that hold the power to change the whole equation of our life. Quoting

Rahman “you could think of the people you meet in your life as questions, there to help you figure out who you are, what you’re made of, and what you want. In life, as in our game, you start off not knowing the answer” (271). These questions may prove to be incentives or impediments but whom we choose to be is not rested on these alone but on our individual choice and how we choose to navigate ourselves around and through the blizzard of questions we need to face our entire life.

These divergent choices in their variety show that when one choice or possibility becomes impossible for us and we part with one hope, it is upon the individual to find the strength in himself to make the less likely choice and venture into the untrodden territories. However going into new and novel direction, as interesting as it may pose to be, requires on our part a clear understanding of a breach from the past or our previous self. If and when one is unable to do that these preconditions instead of being an advantage lag us behind with their dead weight. For Zafar, a man in search of a clear break from his past it comes as a herculean burden. As the narrator says, “This, then, is how I understand him now: a human being fleeing from ghosts while chasing shadows” (16). Nevertheless where in spite of the heavy burden or truer still because of the weight of the burden weighing Zafar down, in all his life’s avenues he gives that much effort and dives headlong into any situation with courage for the better. Zafar relates to this continuous labor of a lifetime posing it in a question to the Narrator saying,

I have more fight than anyone needs...I’ve come a long way, from a mud hut in the rainy season in a part of the world you only know as a basket-case of misery. I spent a year of childhood in the basement of a derelict house in two rooms and an outside lavatory and when I try to remember the kitchen, I can only picture the half that didn’t have rats. I’ve grown up in some of the worst projects in London. I’ve been kicked and spat at because

of my race, I've had teachers send me to remedial classes because they thought I was stupid when I was just silent, I've been beaten black and blue my whole short life and I've made it here. Have I got the fight? You tell me. (279)

But in the case of the Narrator whom we find in a juncture of his life cornered by the adverse situations and unable to find any reason to move forward all his choices seem to question him of the worthiness of his life. As he says, “an untested life (that) can lead some people into a kind of moribund discontent that cannot easily be shaken off” (40). In such clash of ideas and ideals trying to figure out the true identity of the persons they thought themselves to be these two protagonists, Zafar and Narrator not so much in difference but in choices made or left unmade become the alternate reflection of one another. From this quest of finding their destination, with the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's critical notions of the ‘liminality’, ‘in-between-space’, ‘beyond’ and ‘third space’ from *The Location of Culture*, we gain an introspective look into their lives as they come to terms with issues like home, identity, hybridity, nationality or allegiance.

Our birth or more precisely the social class of the family we are born into designates ourselves to the choices or options we are given in life. To that effect, even before we start at the rat race of life's competition our roots map out a whole future ahead for us. Then when we do enter the competition we come to know in every step just how and where we are bound to the preconditions of our social class. For some like the Narrator, Emily or Crane it acts as the accelerating factor for what they stand to achieve or shall go on to achieve. But for one like Zafar it works as a pre-constraint denying him avenues of choice. Having a direct relation to the man, shaping up his interpretation, outlook, personality class takes on the role of the agent of all powerful fate. Acting like the invisible links of wireless network it creates “connections without

material ties, without constraints that hold you in place, ethereal vines that reach out to you, tethers for the rootless” (326). But once conscious of its traces of power it falls on the individual to either conform to the vision or act against it in order to determine his aspirations and realize his version of himself. The Narrator never weary of the presence of the power of social class avails all it provides to him, his privileged education, connections to powerful people in elite circles of the society, partnership at the law firm to the very house he with his wife leisurely lives in. Yet at one point after Zafar’s return he is forced to look upon his relatively trial free life in awe if not guilt saying, “A heroic life, must be a life tested and strained and overcome. I have never had such a life” (40). Then, Emily with her British aristocratic background, a tendency to excel and dedication to achievement uses class to its full extent to realize her ambitious endeavors. As says the Narrator, “Emily saw her relationships and exchanges with people purely through the prism of function” (167). She never fails to display this same ambivalence in her ways of conducting herself. Even in her queer attitude to address Penelope as “Mother,” this coldness and cruelty blaming her for her parent’s divorce is put on display for everyone to grasp.

Yet for Zafar his notion of the social class he was born into are mingled with his bleak and stifling memories of his childhood home. All his conscious efforts to outstrip himself of a distressing past, of his ‘home’ came to be the source of much of his smothered pain, anger, rage, shame and anguish. This, we find in his every move in the novel speaking of his self conceived lesser identity. As Bhabha explains, this consciousness of the domineering presence of the notion of social class is what sends the individual on his search for ways to break out of the hegemony and establish if not reinvent for himself a new position or identity. To quote,

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions - of race,

gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical, locale, sexual orientation -that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. (*Location 1*)

Even though in course of time when he actually succeeds in creating a rift between his past self and his present self he cannot help admitting the irony of this perilous attempt as he says, “for nothing has ever so teased our lustful hubris as the power to understand and alter what we are” (129). Ultimately all he achieves to forget the past becomes the very reminders of his denied self. Even before he comes to know of his true parentage as a bastard child of the 1971 Liberation war of Bangladesh, of having his root elsewhere than the dingy London apartments with his so called parents, he had an understanding of there being something grossly amiss.

For Zafar’s parents who took him from Bangladesh at the age of five, the war and in relation its tainted memory of unspeakable pain in the very presence of Zafar’s existence was the stuff of nightmares. Even though they survived the war and left the country, the inhuman cruelty and atrocities of war they had to witness haunted them forever. In fact surviving the war unscathed where so many people so dear to them had to go through hellish pain and those who survived had to bear the heinous wounds impossible to erase or withstand, made them feel sharp pangs of guilt every living moment of their life. They became the parents of Zafar but Zafar remained to them the reminder of their guilty conscience. The war gained the Bengali freedom and the right to proudly say, “I’m Bangladeshi” still for Zafar, uprooted at childhood, the ambitious idea of recreating through memory “an ark from which a whole world could be recreated” (85) proved false at the root. Thus the homeland Bangladesh without politics he imagined as an adolescent in Britain remained in reality “a remote part of the world – remote from (him)” (85). Yet at domestic life in his home in Britain he comes to face many unvoiced incongruities in his relation with his parents. In small matters of everyday life to life altering

decisions there always remained a huge gap between the parents and Zafar. Even in his college years this sense of separation is easily noticed by his close friend, the Narrator. The narrator phrases this eerie sense of segregation in the lines saying, “An air about him left one with a sense not to pry, an understanding that he would share only what he volunteered” (181). His way of presenting or rather avoiding the disclosure of his parents to other circles of his life like his friends at Oxford speaks of his definite estrangement from them.

Seemingly very kind to raise him as their son his foster parents never in reality made any effort to reach him with their words or deeds. As the narrator testifies “his parents had never asked him if anything was troubling him, never asked what the matter was. He had wondered in later life if that was...because, despite picking up something they could not bring themselves to ask” (293). Zafar recalls that there was never any ‘Thank You’ spoken in his home and asking questions was an act of aggression or disrespect. And whenever he tried it to address his mother’s kindness he was met with her irritation at the western custom, unusual to them. It made him feel their acts of parentage as duties than manifestation of genuine unconditioned filial love as he expresses his heartfelt envy at the Christian notion of genuine love from God. He states,

I think the woman who had raised me, who had provided a family for me, however flawed that family was, was offended that I had turned the web of duties, into mere exchange of favors,...duty and obligations that reinforced the bonds within the family...strong enough to endure hardships. (157)

From here we witness the clear strife of Zafar’s mind where neither of the places, Bangladesh or London, made him feel at peace. As this ‘in-between-space’ became more prominent even Zafar could no longer ignore its existence and effect on their relationship and “sensed that in the emotional gulf between me and my parents there lay some other meaning” (43). Relating to



Homi K Bhabha's notion of displacement where he shows us the importance to think beyond the immediate subjective narrative and realize how these moments or continual process enunciate a distinct cultural difference as he says, These 'in between spaces' provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (*Location 2*). Still a child with pure heart he even blamed himself for their neglect, silence and unjustifiable anger as seen in many child or adolescent victim of an abusive family. His genuine pain and fear finds expression as he says, "I consciously thought that...I had brought upon my parents some grief to warrant their treatment of me – to warrant the violence" (45). Half of what he remembers of his childhood home is to only deny the existence of the other half infested with rats and grits of life. But even that life was not an easy achievement. In fact his father an immigrant in London had fought hard to avail even those odds for his family. Working as a waiter and a bus conductor he took it as such blessing that he "believed he had no entitlement to his anger at life's inequities, since his life was the envy of many of those he had left behind in Bengal" (53). A misfit in his own family the feelings of alienation drive him to seek out his 'identity' apart from the 'home' that held no love or place for him.

So when they send him, a twelve year old boy alone from London to Sylhet, Bangladesh without any explanation or reason he really finds it as an act of kindness on their part. There in hope of finding himself, looking for some discernible clue like the ancients who joined the cluster of stars into shapes to evoke a pattern or a sense of meaning, he "became convinced that there was meaning [t]here, awaiting [his] return, meaning [that]...suddenly made sense" (59). Yet that meaning in form of kinship that he had sought for so long only vexed him because even though they all looked like him that place was "neither home nor foreign to (him)" and he

remained only “a traveler whose world moved about him” (59). As such the continued silence and unintelligible behavior of his parents from childhood, act as the source of his frantic search and final desertion of his journey towards the hope of belonging. Failing to fit himself in either place he decides to create a place for himself in the society where his unhappy home or shameful past would never reach him. His efforts were for making a clear break and attain the status of “post” that draws a total separation from past and indicates the advent into future. But his efforts at attaining the unattainable ‘identity’ made him wiser as he comes to face the fault in his premise and remains in the ‘beyond’. As Bhabha explains this notion and its symptoms on the mental make-up and outward behavior of the man like Zafar as,

An exploratory restless movement [where we] find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion, and exclusion [where] there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction. (*Location 1*)

In this sense with Zafar’s sense of ‘identity’ in flux he tries to utilize whatever means he had to create a space for himself to fit in. Education became his first tool to attain power, position and success in life. Zafar uses education to elevate himself in social class. But the censoring eyes of the society always keep him aware of the gulf between the identity he discovered and the identity he yearns for himself. So it is only natural that he falls in love with the idea of Emily and her celebrated lineage as his only means of deliverance. Rahman keeps no secret that to Zafar Emily was not only a woman but an idea and an ideal he was in love with. But pursuing Emily makes him confront the loopholes in his hope.

## CHAPTER 3

## “Shadows in the Cave” and the Parrhesiastes’ Truth

Unlike social novels which show a distinct interest in the vices of the society taking on the role of a critique to point out its follies and what they bring about with loud noise aimed to jolt the audience to take note, *In the Light of What We Know* can be more likened to a Bildungsroman that focuses on the evolution of the prominent character’s personality and moral growth. Here the protagonist’s development of his identity or self and his role in the world, gives a well rounded perspective of the environment and social structure he comes from. Zafar, the protagonist of Zia Haider Rahman, functions in the same way. Through his constant need to proceed despite many hurdles and setbacks, he finally comes to learn of his true self. Though what he set out for turned out to mislead him, making him self- destructive and unable to reconcile to his own fatal actions, in the process he at least learns what he is capable of and how far he can go. This self awareness in the psyche is the mark of his evolution of character through numerous trials and errors of life which make him the perfect mouthpiece of the author as a Parrhesiastes to give voice to the ‘Truth’ that was suffocated. His journey may have been of chasing shadows or moving in circles as he recognizes, “the furthest reaches of what we can ever know fall short of the limits of what is true” (9). Nevertheless it shows his strife for progress towards the illuminating light of truth. Here he proves that knowledge can get a man only so far if he does not have and cannot develop the insight which true knowledge, the key to power, demands. In this respect Rahman says, “Knowing how things are doesn’t make you see them correctly, doesn’t stop you from seeing things incorrectly. Stare at the image as much as you like, it’s all in vein. It will never surrender the truth, not to your naked eyes; you have to go in armed with a straight edge” (206). It shows that only having the facts at hand do not make a

person comprehend their significance. As such only knowledge cannot help people break out of their illusion, for that they need illumination of truth and the courage of the Parrhesiastes to give voice to the truth disregarding the dangers the act of speaking up entails. Grounding on the concept of 'Parrhesia' from *Fearless Speech* by Michel Foucault here we endeavor to uncover the meaning and necessity of Zafar's confession on the whole integrity of the novel as an act of atonement as well as warning.

The Parrhesiastes in the character of Zafar, by virtue of his relation to the truth is a relatively disempowered agent in the social realm of discourse. Integrated into the equations of democratic dealings of discourses on power and he is the representative of a person standing up against a superior power. And because "domination is a general structure of power" Zafar's journey is a continuous attempt for making a shift in his social status to elevate himself from the position of the repressed to the celebrated (Bang 3). Nevertheless it is Zafar's awareness of having the notion of the workings of power and domination that makes him aspire to change his position. Because even if he ignores the influence of such power and how it limits his ability to go forward in every sphere of his life will remind him of its presence. As such Zafar is well aware that even when his social strata works on his disadvantage he cannot simply ignore or deny it but has to find a way to transcend. This view of his, regarding the utmost necessity of clarity of perception in the real life of the ordinary man, is reflected as he quotes from A. E. Houseman "The house of delusions is cheap to build, but drafty to live in, and ready at any instant to fall; It is and it must in the long run be better for a man to see things as they are than to be ignorant of them" (89). In every aspect and encounter of his life we find this notion of inferiority working within him regulating his voice, manner and conduct. It is evident in his consciousness of people pronouncing his name wrong as "Zephyr" where we find him again and

again being uber conscious of the error that once let go uncorrected cannot be brought up again (229). Despite his restrained mannerism and patience, the reaction of other people as they asked him 'where was he from' to which he replied "I was born in Bangladesh" made him feel for the umpteen time an inexplicable yet interesting irritation.

He exerts more and more effort to fit into the surroundings no matter how alien they seem to him. Whether in childhood, youth or as a working adult this attempt often betrays his longing for blending in. He phrases such relations to his surrounding saying, "I (was) merely *among* them but not *of* them" (233). While studying at Oxford his tendency to sneak into the post room at the dead of night to steal a peek at the yellow folded notes pinned at the cork board for other students just to know about the lives different from him, places or faces he had never seen before but could conjure up with perfect art of a romantic painter, borders on criminal if not psychotic. With childlike innocent curiosity and longing, he looked at the messages left for the students by their family members, inquiring of their whereabouts or inviting them to visit soon at the break time. None of them were meant for him and that made it all the more tantalizing. As his parents could never be bothered to care enough to sent message to him he could not but wonder matching the faces he saw in the day with the unknown names he saw in the notes at night enchanted and envious of their "carefree optimism attached to lives unimpaired by need, for what could trouble someone" (173). Those single lined notes brought to Zafar worlds of stories adorned with "thronging clamor of sound...the private communication of love" which he never found in his own life (173). This complex consciousness of a self depreciating presence that Zafar brings upon himself is the inherent reason of most of his motivation. Again it exposes to us that this rift between his aspired identity and owned identity continually creates in him a dissatisfaction that gradually borders on rage and hate.

The very awareness of the truth he holds, truth about himself, makes Zafar take note of his social position and how he is being differentiated or discriminated against in any context. In this respect he easily connects his own suppression to the suppression of the war ravaged Afghanistan and gives voice to his pain in the line, “I had in me a thought, not yet an intention, but a question... a thought as powerful as an idea born in oppression: Who will stop these people?” (34) Looking at the oppressive forces of powerful social agents in forms of nation or class he instinctively wonders about their controlling presence and how their very existence is the only authority that decides to make the subject superior or inferior. This becomes the focal point of the thought of parrhesia that endeavors to look into the social structure where Foucault questions, “on the basis of what practices, through what types of discourse have we tried to tell the truth about the subject... the truth about the mad subject or the delinquent subject?” (The Courage of Truth). As such which ever part of the world he travels to, the understanding of the notion that he is a subject of the dominion of truth and power bound by its inherent laws does not leave his mind. So he clearly expresses “This part of the world is just another chessboard, as I would be just another piece, but that is the way of this history, from one dark stretch of road onto another” (35). Therefore focusing on the discourse that exerts its power on the subject, Zafar’s knowledge of the inherent rules of the system and intention to make it work on his own advantage in establishing him as a member of the superior class exposes the basic flaw in making himself inferior. Then as much as he wishes and tries to blend himself with Emily and her social circles, he brings upon himself the curse of the ‘diasporic South Asians’ or ‘the babu’ who can be likened to “A coconut. The South Asian who has become white in all but skin color” (355). It again stresses on the fact that as much as people like him despise the subjugation, in this respect the two hundred years suppression of the South Asians by the British, ultimately they themselves

aspire to be just like them if not of them. It brings to question the idea of ‘unity by exclusion’ where a group may find temporary alignment of interest yet still be inherently very dissimilar. So Zafar confesses to the truth he holds and his social connection to that truth. It is at once of the relationship of the society to Zafar, the individual and Zafar, the representative of a class bringing a cluster of issues fitted into one.

Dealing with the notion of ethical self formation of man, the theory of Parrhesia shows how the individual subject like Zafar is molded through his relationship with the Truth and in turn made worthy of the Truth. As we are brought along his journey from humble beginnings to the birth of his aspirations and hope of finding a place to belong we come to understand the gradual development that his character has gone through. In fact it is the gradual progression of the character that works behind his evolution and enriches him. So when we find Zafar at the very start of the novel we notice in the reaction of the Narrator the definite signs of change that their period of estrangement has brought on Zafar. However, more than the outward changes, the inward or mental maturation to grasp the entirety of knowledge that Zafar’s progress has endowed him is the main focus of his confession. When he attempts to narrate the whole story of where he had been and how he had come to the narrator’s doorstep leading up to the revelation of his shattered dreams, it shows in him a maturity of thought and concept reflected in his explanation of life. When Zafar was a child and the only time his parents had given him a birthday present, a book showing the differences of Islam and Science, he finds it full of wrong premises. In the case of the narrator this notion of Islam and by birth inheriting the forefather’s religious belief seemed like something they only ‘do’ not believe. Again we find a young Zafar, curious of the reasons and intentions behind the social as well as ritualistic practices of life like praying five times to God, questioning the validity of such practices. As we see him say, “I used

to think, that Islam wasn't there for me when I needed God" (181). But it is much later in life that through experience and enlightened understanding he comes to understand the meaning of the rituals and the significance of them in the persons' life. As wounded and made humble by the defeat of his lofty notions of finding a home with Emily, he finally comes to understand how practice precedes belief and is therefore a necessary accessory to reaching the desired destination. As such he comes to terms with religion that in the past only baffled him and views it in his most depressing point in life as the crutch that "allows us to carry on the business of living, half-hobbling but better than without it, while taking the weight off the wound to aid the process of healing" (183). Thus once he who believed that he was abandoned by an unintelligible God and his baffling rituals finds in himself the lack of effort to "discover Islam." Though he admits it would have been a huge effort to discover the real meaning of Koran, Hadith where Islam had been always there to offer him help, discarding the twisted and contaminated interpretation. It vows for his understanding of the fact that real meaning is not always apparent on the surface and for one to avail the meaning or truth requires much effort and self regulation through the hardships of life.

Furthermore, Zafar's confession in the form of parrhesia, works as an act of self cleansing that has a cathartic effect on his psyche. Termed by the Narrator it seems "like dressing for wounds" (322). So with valid significance on personal as well as in the political sphere of life we find him in a "game of life or death" where exposing the truth always invites a degree of danger as the speaker bears a social rank always below the interlocutor, sharing a relation of trust and respect. So by exposing the truth as the Parrhesiastes, Zafar puts at risk their relation built on mutual understanding that made the revelation possible. Here the role of the listener, who accepts the truth spoken to him, is of guiding the soul of the person bearing his truth in front of him. As



such the person in this “polyvalent” role must be indispensable for telling the truth having a bond capable of understanding the inherent meaning of the confession and in turn giving spiritual guidance or of responding to the matter at hand. This uncertain, rather vague and variable character, whom we find in the person of the Narrator, is thus the real and effective partner for Zafar’s Parrhesia. Zafar as a chronicler of the events of his own life also stresses on the importance of the Narrator as his listener saying “Has it occurred to you that you might actually be the person to whom I have to say what I’m saying? ...You have a role, centre-stage” (322). In fact, it is their shared relation that makes the narrator the perfect listener and writer of Zafar’s story. Because other than Zafar giving voice to his own thoughts and secrets the narrator as his listener also plays an active part in the story. Zafar does not want the narrator only to write his story but more importantly he just wants the narrator, the person who has been the closest to him, after Emily and his parents all of whom were nonexistent to him now, to listen to him. Because he, who had been there with him experiencing many events, who shared a similar but not identical circumstances could at least be able to draw a parallel or contrast to justify his motivation if not to pity him the choices he made. All Zafar wanted to do was to put down the burden of the truth wrought through pain and blood too heavy for him to bear along any longer.

By being there for Zafar to confess the narrator not only helps him find redemption from the atrocities that even Zafar’s mind needs to hide from, as in the depth of those memories lay buried unspeakable horrors but stands as a testament of the death of his precious hopes, dreams or will to live. Furthermore listening to the revelation also carries the risk of changing his world where he had always felt inclined to force people around him into boxes of categories imposing on them his own expectation. As such we discover soon that this revelation far from being free of risk poses the question of personal betrayal capable of destroying their mutual bond. The

Narrator's betrayal of Zafar by having slept with Emily poses the threat to their friendship. And as Emily terminates the pregnancy it marks the end of Zafar's hope for a future with Emily, of belonging. What emotions and visions the unborn child had taken away from Zafar left him unable to forgive the betrayal either by Emily or the Narrator. Because the non-existent child held to Zafar a precious dream that "would fill (him) with love. In the daydream [he] felt wanted, cared about, [he] felt thought of (498)." The child had meant the world to him but that was not what Emily wanted. However despite the personal risk of ruining a friendship there also remains the revelation of greater political relevance in Zafar's speech. Thus through the stories of Afghanistan, Pakistan and by extension of events, Iraq, the writer opens up new grounds for the exploration of the intricate dealings between subject, power and discourse in light of Michel Foucault's conceptions of parrhesia and democracy.

Rahman, telling us the story of Zafar's journey from hope to hopelessness gives us many situations and circumstances that are conscious if not deliberate criticisms of the contemporary social system as well as political system in relation to the global economic hegemony. In a sense it allows us to construct Zafar's illumination on the inner workings behind the weaponizing of terror, manipulation of a collective sentiment and finally the war for peace as ethical Parrhesia in the framework of 'counter conduct' in a system of democracy and not as a betrayal to his country or duty. It unravels the possibility of the influence of the Parrhesiastes' exposition to bear effects on the "forms of political engagement... facilitating a more robust democratization of the liberal state regime" (Mills 1). Also being firstly and fundamentally a political notion it is aptly employed to fulfill its core function of criticism. This criticism is as much of the interlocutor or the speaker himself as of the global issues like war, terror and missions for assistance. Thus the

shaft of sharp criticism pointed at the powerful nations and their defunct practice of democracy is clearly perceivable in *In The Light of What We Know*.

Starting with the 9/11 terrorist attack of 2001 Rahman shows how it ultimately opened the path for the US led invasion of Afghanistan making it “a staging post for a war to avenge the destruction of the towering icons of America” (346). He shows how it all ultimately comes down to “the private goals of beasts, each alpha male, from the Blairs and Bushes to the Cheneys and Rumsfelds, consolidating his power and securing his personal, material future with the unthinking frightened herds following” (347). Thus bringing into question “The price of patriotism” (349) Rahman shows how in the era of electronics and information technology massive scale drone attacks are used to wipe out thousands of innocent lives in name of peace. But it also makes evident the fact that behind all of this remains the reign of the Economic powers of the whole world that functions in oil or in other word the power industry and despite knowing the fact of the matter there is no hope for change. With people writing reports and big humanistic organizations such as United Nations conducting fact finding missions or assistance mission into Afghanistan no efforts were spared to work for the so called betterment of the war ravaged Afghans. But what the war had done to them could not be undone by the outsiders only motivated by their own private interests. So, all of the “plans of the provisional government, the plans of the NGOs, great plans for the poor Afghans, the poor bastards” (244) could not save the Afghans from being beleaguered, from being dealt such a dreadful fate. As such Zafar’s presence in Afghanistan working in a proclaimed ‘humanitarian interest’ as one of the numberless advisor “like stray dogs in Mumbai” (19) for a reconstruction agency at the department of the new Afghani administration, the episode with the climax of his confession or defense that runs as an undercurrent throughout the entire length of the novel, unfolds how these

agencies as eyes ears or hands of people and nations in possession of power and wealth, work from within and about the system with vague and undisclosed purposes.

Rahman, in the novel, shows us that the unique ability of humanity is to comprehend the world in its entirety despite its enormity. Quoting Albert Einstein he writes “The very fact that the totality of our sense experience is such that by means of thinking...it can be put in order...the eternal mystery of the world is in its comprehensibility” (150). For Zafar this realization comes much too late in the form of his recognition of the current of events of his life overpowering his will and their effect in directing his course of life. When he finally does admit to the governing ripples leading him to unintended by lanes, he finds that the unspoken complaints, untended wounds over a long period of time has ripened and created a putrefying mess of his reasonable rational mind. Not as an immediate reaction to any one event, but all he had to repress in his memory from his conscious mind, all the indignity and indifference he had to suffer in childhood for having no other choice and in adulthood for the sake of his grand hope of finally belonging, accumulated into a solid entity and made him disinterested in his life. When urged by Penelope, who once being in the same position recognized the signs in Zafar and tried to help him from inflicting harm upon himself, he finally agrees to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Viller. He finds it very hard to admit that he was chronically depressed which left him unable to sleep, eat, read or live a normal life. This chronic depression is where a man with a nauseating feeling of worthlessness as a result of a failed endeavor, or bound in a cycle of seemingly meaningless chores of daily life finds himself segregated from the rest of the world and little by little shuts himself up from all his roles and responsibilities. Next limiting his human interaction and communication to the outside world of his apartment finds himself wallowing in hopeless despair is a condition that most if not all of us have gone through in our life at some point. Because as modern man we

cannot even think of wasting our potential and take on more than we can bear to make our life stand for something meaningful but all attempts do not result in success. But for Zafar even harder than the acknowledgement of all his emotional baggage, was the recognition that the cold attitude of Emily towards all his feelings, hopes, his very existence was the trigger causing his lapse from regularity. His pain is plainly visible as he says, “when your human functioning has been reduced first to wretched indifferences and then to worse, when the thoughts that gather around you, that are your own...to a bare-knuckle alley-fight...there is suffering”(445). Then finally finding himself gazing at his kitchen knife and letting his mind run wild his survival instinct comes to save him from a self destructive choice and he admits himself to the hospital seeking help to save him from himself. It is then, when he finally stopped fighting and it became clear that ignoring the hurt or hiding the wound of the battlefield of the mind was something he had been doing from long before. And all those scars had left him full to the brim with hate, rage and purposeless raw emotions scratching beneath the surface to find an outlet.

The unraveling of a mind is real and as much possible to be brought about just as it is possible to make a mind or in other words nudge a person in a certain direction, towards a certain action. Though we do not find Emily manipulative in the grand sense of a Shakespearean villain, nevertheless she plays a lead role in unwinding Zafar’s mind. Even when he could not voice his question or tell his parents the clash of ideal he felt towards their view, the anger had started to build up. One summer vacation working at the restaurant with his father to save up for college he finds himself boiling with anger at the hypocrisy of his parents. He was aware of their ways of never explaining their decision and took it as their individuality as human beings liable to some personal flaw. Yet he could not reconcile himself to justify their actions as he writes, “the only anger I was aware of in those days was my father’s, my mother’s too as she goaded him on, and

that I had always been holding back...within me a rage was building, gathering mass and momentum from the varieties of injustice, with each humiliation” (154). Too used to repressing all his negative emotions since childhood, interpellated and manipulated in the hands of men in superior seat of power like Colonel Mushtaq, Zafar’s violation of his ideals and principles finally disillusion him. Thus hurt and stunned at the cruelty of the suicide bomb attack that claims the life of many innocent people at café Europa along with Crane as mere war casualty he finally snaps. Here we find him the perfect chess piece played by the system where the individual with hopes, integrity and ideals cannot but “acquire the psychological means for wrecking utter violence” (155). So the fury, as he pieces together all the information he had already within his reach and finds the involvement of Emily in manipulating him breaks all his inhibition leading him to the unspeakable act of aggression that draws a violent end to his relationship with Emily and his long nurtured vision of life. As he phrases it, “I have been full of anger my whole life...only because the anger had yet to find expression” (526). It bears witness that what he reflected to the world his whole life was only the calm before the storm where man still hopes for things to go better, hopes to endure and continue until he is pushed beyond his limits.

Zafar as the subject of the truth giving voice to the truth or Suleiman through his act of violence in the name of supposed patriotism are not isolated individuals but rather a part of a whole system that creates the environment or tampers the conditions within the construct to make the individual go “off the rails”. As such in acts of self incriminating or posing aggression towards his fellow men such persons in and of themselves are not the root of the problem. Rather it falls on the flow of contemporary world politics combined with people’s condition of lives that leave them with no option but to act in defiance of their governing system prone to partiality or inhuman treatment of its citizens, in hope of creating anarchy or commotion to disrupt the

current making others take note of the value of their 'counter conduct'. This act of defiance prevalent and as old as the history of government indeed can come in many forms depending on the subject's mental stability, intellectual clarity and the condition of the construct he is a part of. In this respect Mahatma Gandhi's non violent resistance in Satyagraha to oppose the oppression of the British Empire on the Indian people was also a counter conduct that not only created a legacy of peace but led to the independence of the India. So was Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience or in the much recent years Edward Snowden's information leaks, all of which started from defiance to take on injustice and ended without bloodshed of the innocent. Nevertheless the defiance in the acts of a terrorist or suicide bomber is also sprung from a sense of injustice bearing a truth or a parrhesia which is a cry for help to the whole world. Such acts of unspeakable horror despite their blood lust carries the slightest hopes of reconsideration on the part of the people in power for the reconstruction if not a total change of the system that had failed its 'radical' subject and could not integrate such suicide bomber who was not born a suicide bomber, into a peaceful, just and transparent democratic social rubric. Thus as explained what should be our point of focus is "on the basis of what discursive practices was the speaking, laboring and living subject (is) constituted" (Foucault). It raises the question till what point we credit acts of the citizen as patriotic or treason and for what purpose. Therefore though in the final violent outburst or desperate act of wrath, Zafar "do[es] that which in lucidity we would surely conclude could only bring about a fall from grace, a fall from which no penance could raise us" (548). Even then Zafar the individual do not credit the whole responsibility of the act as he is an integral part of a larger political realm of discourse that maintains a direct influence on the subject and therefore neither can be viewed as totally separate entity.

As Rahman phrases it, chess pieces are only bound by the apparently seen or unseen rules of the board and must play their allotted part. So pushing all the blame on the individual, namely a Jihadi or a lone wolf after the catastrophe, brings little to no real solution to the grave problem. In this respect Rahman making Zafar, the individual in question, confess his truth, how his choices and life had brought him to his pressure point making him capable of atrocities beyond his sane mind, in the form of ethical parrhesia brings together the problematization of truth. This marks the novel *In The Light of What We Know* simultaneously as a revolutionary discourse with criticism of present society, a philosophic discourse that reflects on human finitude and critiques all that exceed the limits of human finitude, a scientific discourse that finds the holes in existing knowledge, popular prejudice, dominant institutions and their practices (The Courage of Truth). However in the reality, where the individual in acting against the flow of the popular culture bring to light the view from the other side of the general discourse and acts as the Parrhesiastes bearing the danger of disobedience most often incur the wrath of the authority and end up silenced by means of swift *Justice* in the name of cross fire, abduction or terms we are familiar with as 'gum hotta'. Yet this recognition of danger and speaking in face of danger is still an integral and important part of Parrhesia in relation to the structures of the Government and is too often an utmost necessity for ensuring the proper practice and function of political power which governs all our lives.



## CONCLUSION

In the concluding pages of this thesis we come to perceive how an overwhelming intellectual accomplishment, *In the Light of What We Know* dealing with a plethora of widely varying interests has brought us an enactment of our present world, a curious mixture of class, race, color, belief or ideals. Tied together in perfect sync with the leitmotif in Kurt Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem it leaves us with an open ended question for meaning and significance where our vision, perception and understanding always remain wanting. With pivotal importance to the storyline and as the base of focus of this research, Zafar becomes the perfect South Asian character construct. Well informed, well versed and far from being the 'naïve informant' searching his place in the social and political hegemony, he comes with an inquisitive and enlightened world view which reveals to us the ambiguity in our basic social construct. Matched with a listener in the character of the Narrator, both of them form an interesting equation where through the exposition of the events of Zafar's life and the Narrator's reaction to them, we come to rethink, re-evaluate and sometimes awe at our notions that are taken for granted in our everyday life. Thus aided with Rahman's philosophic reflection and introspective glances as I have tried to explore the meaning and praxis of many an inter-class and intra-class relations displayed in the novel while pulling in issues that shape the individual and his expectations. However it ultimately validates the realization that despite the personal evolution earned through the most conscious and earnest efforts of making sense of our lives getting distracted or derailed is always a frightening possibility where an open and understanding presence of family, friends and a society can lead back the individual to an enlightened reasoning.

Concentrating on the connection between historicity and the historic being this research has looked into historic events like the liberation war of 1971 and the terrorist attack of 9/11 2001. Bearing momentous significance in life of its survivors they represent an idea or are fitted to an ideal. They shape the popular vision and in time evolve with the flow of power. As such corresponding to Rahman's novel this research has attempted to reflect how the individual like Zafar, bound by their hopes and aspirations in the hands of great power, become aware of the traps of illusions and the consequences of disillusionment. Questioning the legitimacy of truth it shows that despite depressing plenitude of hoax and convoluted information searching for the truth about the self or the man as an integral part of his time and society, gives the individual a fighting chance at survival from self doubt leading to self destruction.

Drawing from George Lukacs' *Historical Novel*, here the average man, Zafar or the Narrator by means of their lives stand as the mirrors of their time. Reflecting their hopes, dreams and aspirations they bring to us how the individual subject in his journey through life is shaped by the constraints of the society and in turn are made to symbolize said constraints in their chosen ways of life. Next basing on Homi K Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* this research has looked into the journey of a man in search of his identity and home while bringing in focus issues like liminality and nationalism that adds layers of meaning to his never ending endeavor. Finally with the notion of Parrhesia that influences the personal and the political life of the social being in connection with the contemporary culture of hate and intolerance, from Michael Foucault's *Fearless Speech* this thesis has looked into the root causes behind gruesome acts of inhuman barbarism in forms of terrorism and mass murder in name of twisted and abused idea and ideals. So exposing such workings beneath the system of society, nation, education, economics and world politics which govern our lives we ascertain in the journey of one man a

much greater and universal concern. Therefore with a beautiful yet unsettling culmination we cannot but anticipate and inquire of the still unsaid.

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