



RESEARCH PAPER

Deconstructing West's Historical Universalism in Siddique's *Snuffing out the Moon*: A Spenglerian Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research article employs Oswald Spengler's critique of Western universalism to examine Osama Siddique's *Snuffing Out the Moon* (2017). It seeks to uncover the novel's repudiation of the Enlightenment universalism, which conceives historical progression as linear, homogeneous and universal. Siddique's novel problematizes the Enlightenment conception of linear development of civilizations, which is frequently adopted to legitimize imperialism and hegemony. The research elucidates how the novel challenges the dominant Eurocentric model of history and delineates non-Western histories through their autonomous trajectories. In dismantling the West's historic universality claim, Siddique (2017) resists the dominance of Western narratives and retrieves non-Western histories, cultures, and epistemologies through his multitemporal probing of sociological, cultural, and historical milieus. The novel disassembles Western universalist history by discounting its Eurocentric, linear accounts and foregrounding non-Western civilizations' cyclical and multifarious trajectories. It not only undermines the hegemonic narratives but also recuperates the agency and survival of non-Western societies and presents a profound counterpoint to the presumption of Western historical universalism.

KEYWORDS Western Universalism, Civilization, Cyclical History, Enlightenment, Spengler, *Snuffing Out the Moon*

Introduction

Emerging in the 17th -18th century Europe, Enlightenment universalism articulates the philosophical stance that the notions of science, reason, and progress are universally valid. Without regard to specific cultural, geographic, or temporal frameworks, this philosophy argues that human nature, morality, and rationality are universal. Operating within the paradigms of this ideology, Enlightenment thinkers developed notions of human progress, historical evolution, universal human rights, and government systems. Universalism frames human history as a linear teleological process that moves inevitably towards modernity, reason, and democracy. This framework asserts that all civilizations follow a uniform pattern of development, with the West serving as the norm and model for them. Non-Western civilizations are reduced to primitive, backward, and static entities and given a peripheral status, while the West enjoys an unchallenged centrality. This hegemonic framework erodes the authentic trajectories of the divergent civilizational paths throughout world history. Samuel P. Huntington (1996) thinks that universalist assumptions further the imperialist agendas and breed cultural conflict rather than fostering a unity through diversity. They facilitate a manipulation of history and suppression of authentic modes of progress. These paradigms often legitimize colonialism,

historical and cultural erasure, and global power imbalances that position Western civilization at the pinnacle of the global hierarchies.

In his paper on *Relativism, Universalism, and Pluriversalism*, Olanipekun (2025) argues that Western universalism serves as a tool for cultural domination, erasing the diversity of traditions. He writes:

The universalizing discourse of modernity imperils the survival of other ways of knowing and being, embracing the ontological fact of pluriversality impels a corresponding rejection of epistemologies, discourses, and political projects that view the world as knowable and governable from within any single system of knowledge. (p. 6)

Olanipekun's observation resonates with Spengler's (1918) theories, which caution against the imposition of epistemologies advocated by Enlightenment universalism. He warns that universalism erases native cultures and leads to the emergence of authoritarianism, a phenomenon Spengler (1918) calls Caesarism. His theories destabilize the presumption of a single path to modernity and promote a recognition of multifaceted civilizational experiences not bound by a Western-envisioned model of development. His theory of cyclical history presents a radical alternative to Western universalism. In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler (1918) critiques Western historiography's linear approach to history, which assumes that all civilizations are headed towards a common, modernized destiny. He contests this view by asserting that each civilization follows its organic cycle of birth, prime, decay, and ultimate disintegration. His philosophy rejects the trajectory of universal progress in favor of a theory of cultural morphology, which entails that each civilization has its own distinctive spiritual and cultural constitution that informs its course of history.

Osama Siddique's debut novel, *Snuffing Out the Moon* (2017), is a multilayered book with its polytemporal structure, geography-based continuity, and cyclic vision of human history. It interrogates and critiques Western universalism through a multilayered and cyclical historical narrative spanning various epochs. The novel features storylines from six distinct historical periods, in which situations and characters subvert and displace the universalist assumptions about human progress and civilizational trajectories. Siddique's cyclical presentation of history prompts readers to question the recurring cycles of civilization's rise and decline, thereby defying the Eurocentric perspective of inevitable progression. Siddique's narrative critiques the linear historical model of advancement toward Western-defined modernity, instead favoring a cyclical one. Siddique's novel counters this hegemonic narrative and contends that the portrayals of figures like Buddhamitra and Mir Sahib in the novel indicate the legitimacy of non-Western epistemologies and historical trajectories.

Literature Review

Despite *Snuffing Out the Moon's* (2017) rich and multifaceted mapping of the historical, cultural and intellectual heritage of the region which forms part of modern-day Pakistan, citable criticism of the novel is quite sparse. Bisma Tirmizi (2017), in her *Dawn* review, "Emerging from the Eclipse", writes that Siddique's novel interlinks six stories of various historical periods. According to Tirmizi (2017), "The different plot lines are almost akin to six different short stories, linked by time, humanity and the omniscient moon" (para. 2). This structure captures the fluidity of historical narratives and highlights the cyclical pattern of human experiences. Siddique fleshes out these characters so richly that readers can form instant emotional connections as they grapple with their own world beset with political strife, social mores, and religious hatred. The novel serves as a counter-

narrative to Western knowledge and understanding of South Asia by reintroducing readers to their region's ancient civilizations and cultural heritage. It depicts the effect of historical turmoil, including the process of colonization and modern political upheavals. According to Tirmizi (2017), the novel invites readers to think about the depth of the region beyond the events of the last 40 years.

The Nation's Mohammad Ali Khan (2017) praises Siddique for facilitating his readers travel seamlessly from the past to the present and future. Khan (2017) says Siddique portrays a spectrum of chronology where the reader is "willingly teleported" (para. 2). He also asserts that "the readers' journey is not simplistically linear Time is circular in the novel and so is the readers' journey" (Khan, 2017, para. 2). According to him, the main question which has been probed in the novel is pattern of stagnation/evolution in human history. He further suggests that the novel delves into the decay of civilization, whether threatened by natural disaster or by illusion of progress masking a deeper stagnation. Khan (2017) also praises Siddique's attention to the minutes and technical correctness, which can be observed in "the immaculate description of clothes, the variations in language and its nuances, [and] the different cultural and political contexts" (para. 8).

In her *Friday Times* review titled "A Night at the Museum," Sumaira Samad (2017) observes that the novel weaves a "a world of the oppressed and the oppressors, of dreamers and schemers, adventurers and philosophers, of architects and priests, ... soldiers and colonial administrators, freedom fighters and usurpers, futuristic ultra-rational technology-worshippers and also, the survivors of the old ways" (para. 10). She opines that the novel is a tour de force which traces the historical sedimentation of civilization in our soil and restores our authentic sense of history by removing the layers of historical untruths. Samad notes that Siddique's unique narrative structure expertly brings the ancient civilizations to life. She notices that by "digging deep into our collective past, Siddique tries to unfold layers of cultures and civilizations that remain half-discovered in our soil and in our minds" (Samad, 2017, para. 2). According to her, Siddique intricately builds the world of the novel by delineating the forces that shape history and portraying the institution which either corrupt or crush the characters in the novel.

David Waterman, in "Snuffing Out the Moon: Kino/Bio-Politics, Movement and the State of Exception" (2020), examines the novel through the context of migration across the six epochs using Nail's concept of Kinopolitics (politics of movement) and Foucault's biopolitics. He argues that these multitemporal story line places exile, movement, and migration not as an incidental occurrence, but as constitutive of social and political structure. The novel shows how different mechanisms of control, like religion, law, or technology, operate across the six epochs. The opposition to these mechanisms creates a space of resistance and revolt. Waterman (2020) locates a recurrence of Agamben's "state of exemption" in the novel, which is a perpetual mechanism to consolidate power. Blurred lines between legal and illegal allow the sovereign entities to reduce human beings to mere life, granting "both to protect life and to authorize a holocaust" (Agamben 1998, p. 3). Waterman (2020) highlights that the novel criticizes how narratives of history have always been conceived from the view of dominant players, thus bypassing the histories of the masses. The essay finds connections between historic and futuristic epochs and emphasizes that the regulation of movement through the methods of kinopolitics and biopolitics is the persistent and prime form of social control. From Foucault to Agamben to Nail, Waterman (2020) deploys an interdisciplinary lens to reinforce his argument that migration, exile, and collective amnesia have been consistently imposed by sovereign power, whether it is through religion, law, or technology.

Snuffing Out the Moon (2017) has been sparsely examined through various lenses by the critics who have probed its circular and cyclical portrayal of history. However, scant attention has been paid to its divergence from Enlightenment's universalist construction of history. This research fills this gap by foregrounding a non-universalist reconstruction of history in the novel. This research negates universalism by positioning localized and culturally specific versions of history as its counterpoint to Eurocentric historical paradigms. Therefore, it employs Spengler's (1918) theoretical framework to illustrate how Siddique (2017) invalidates the Western project of historical and cultural Enlightenment.

Material and Methods

In *The Decline of the West* (1926), German historian, philosopher, and cultural theorist, Oswald Spengler, reconceptualizes history as a series of culturally distinct life cycles, offering a radical critique of modernity's faith in progress. Rather than viewing history as a linear progression of constant improvement, as claimed by Western epistemes, he argues that all cultures follow their distinctive paths and courses. He advances cultural and historical relativism and thus rejects universalism. According to Spengler (1926), universalism entails that specific values, beliefs, or practices are imposed by dominant cultural power to assert and maintain historical superiority. It empowers the West to claim superiority by asserting its history, culture, values, democracy, human rights, and economic liberalism as universally applicable and valid. As Guénon, (1927) suggests, West's modernity project is premised on "priding themselves... on their historical knowledge" (p. 10). Therefore, universalist historical knowledge attempts to impose one uniform model, a monolithic agenda of historical culture, on different civilizations, employing a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Seeking to impose cultural homogenization, modernity's universalist assumptions force non-Western societies into conformity, rendering local cultures inferior as their languages, rituals, and beliefs lose vigour and are replaced by a hegemonic set of value. Therefore, homogenization leads to the elimination of diversity, which erodes any semblance of culture and historical uniqueness.

Spengler (1918) claims universalism relegates cultural expression to shallow, utilitarian forms. He contends that the homogenizing impulse of universalism saps the unique artistic and spiritual essence of the various cultures and turns them into compliant agents of the Western hegemony. According to Guénon (1927), these hegemonizing and universalizing impulses erode spiritual wisdom and indigenous identity, and strip away the distinctive moral and spiritual architecture of civilizations. He calls it the "beginning of the end" (Guénon, 1927, p. 99). Spengler (1918) believes that a living culture has a rich inner life and metaphysical orientation. Universalism strips away the metaphysical depth of civilizations by imposing its set of secular and materialistic values. As societies become standardized by universalizing norms, they lose the religious, spiritual, and philosophical foundations that define them. Consequently, what Spengler (1918) calls spiritual exhaustion pervades. This spiritual decay is the phase of civilization rather than culture, wherein the inner life of societies crumbles.

In *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Guénon (1927) points out that "all Eastern ideas are completely alien" (p.98) for European epistemes. By imposing its so-called universal values, the modern West seeks to convert traditional societies into relics of the past. Tallman (2013) asserts in this regard: "Modern universalism, a product of the Enlightenment, is a hegemonic project that makes absolute truth claims for all cultures of the world and measures civilization in relation to its own narrow conception of reality" (p. 9). The influence of the geography-centered ideology of universalism has been disastrous for the cultures of every nation and continent. The decline of indigenous truths, wisdom, creativity, and other ways of imposing relations with the world has produced a dangerous

uniformity of one absolute truth. As a result, indigenous knowledge systems, developed in their specific cultural and ecological contexts, appear outdated or irrelevant. Therefore, they are placed at the margin of the dominant universal model, which tends to erase unique cultural insights, traditions, and ecological wisdom that do not fit into this model. This process produces cultural amnesia and undermines communal bonds and identities around these practices, leading a society to lose contact with its historical and cultural essence. Thus, Spengler (1918) asserts: "Each culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay and never return" (p. 21). Therefore, culture in the Spenglerian sense refers to the fluid, spiritual, and artistic phase in society's life cycle where unique values, symbols, and traditions evolve and take root. Thus, cultures develop their distinctive souls, reflecting certain historical and environmental conditions.

Spengler (1918) claims that universalism interrupts organic civilizational growth by imposing foreign values, which nip their creative impulses in the bud. According to Spengler's theory, civilization enters a stage of decline wherein the organic growth of culture is no longer visible, and society becomes increasingly mechanized and materialistic. Therefore, the mechanized and materialized world is the product of universalism. Guénon (1927) suggests that the decline of spirit and spiritual tendency advances the growth of materialism because "superiority [in European sense] exists only from the material point of view" (p. 92). According to him, this decline steers society away from a high, pure, spiritual principle. Universality solidifies where cultures are homogenized under a singular scheme to make societies operate efficiently rather than creatively. The image of unified humanity constrained in one uniform framework of democracy, science, and progress, is an illusion born out of Western chauvinism. Spengler (1918) insists that the desire for uniformity serves as a projection of the Faustian ethos on other civilizations, resulting in a loss of cultural vibrancy and the birth of an empty, spiritually barren civilization wherein, above all else, mere survival takes precedence over cultural or spiritual richness.

Spengler (1918) argues that "West Europe is treated as having a steady pole" and "cultures are made to revolve around this pole" (p. 17), thus giving rise to the Ptolemaic system of history where the West is the pivot. Instead, Spengler (2018) proposes a history model that gives no such privileged position to a specific civilization. He calls it the Copernican system where "cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, Arabs, and Mexico [are]-separate worlds of dynamic being" (Spengler, 1918, p. 18). His model champions cultural equivalence and authenticity, whereby each culture transitions into civilization owing to its unique spirit and trajectory. Contesting the universal model of historical interpretation, Spengler (1918) asserts that history is "an ordered presentation of the past" (p. 15), but its order should be organic rather than imposed. He views history as a dynamic living essence that defies Western universalism's singular and static logic. Spengler's (1918) repudiations of the Western-centric view of history are rooted in this dynamic conception. This conception warrants a history of "totality and not a selected part" (p. 14). Accordingly, Spengler (1918) breaks with Western conventions that claim a single standard for historical meaning.

To counter universalism and to make every history count, Spengler (1918) proposes the notions of cultural morphology and cyclical history. Joll (1985) is of the view that Spengler was concerned about the so-called "grand sweep of history" and to prevent it, he proposes to go beyond the vision of "historical provincialism" (p. 103). This approach involves the study of cultural morphology and the cyclical view, which can prevent this limitation. Spengler's (1918) theory of cultural morphology describes cultures as organic entities that go through life cycles: "Every culture, every adolescence, maturing and decay... has a definite duration" (p. 109). Every culture develops uniquely, experiencing

its childhood, maturity, and old age, after which it declines and gives way to the succeeding one. According to this framework, cultures are living organisms that experience growth, maturation, decline, and death. In *The Myth of Eternal Return*, Eliade (1954) labels these patterns as archetypal cycles of human history.

The theory of cultural morphology enables us to locate and place the unique and dynamic morphology, or form and structure, of every culture in its proper historical context. Toynbee (1987) identifies 26 civilizations in history and locates recurring patterns of rise and fall, echoing Spengler's (1918) view that civilizations cannot sustain themselves indefinitely. Like Spengler, Toynbee (1987) also rejects the notion of continuous and linear progress, which forms the bedrock of the Western universalist model of history. In *A Study of History* (1987), Toynbee proposes that civilizations are like individuals that pass through a cycle of birth, growth, and decay. Culture, thus, is a historical organism with its unique soul and a peculiar spirit. Spengler (1918) posits a model of history that is cyclical. According to Joll (1985), Spengler's civilizations have a "pattern of growth and decay" (p. 95). In his opinion, Spengler believes that history is not linear but rather cyclical, and that cultures do indeed come and go in a rather predictable manner. Cultures undergo a life cycle like any biological organism. Each phase of their life is driven by an internal necessity that determines the course of the culture's development and changes over time. Joll (1985) interprets Spengler's theory of rise and fall by asserting that "the stages through which each culture passes are the same... content of each is unique" (p. 96).

The cyclical notion of history entails that human civilization evolves through recurring patterns of rise and decline, rather than a linear trajectory of unending progress. Guénon (1927) shares Spengler's (1918) cyclical view, where it "starting from highest... tends necessarily downwards" (p. 8). Furthermore, Guénon (1927) states that every civilization has its rhythm, unique cycle, and inevitable decline, which is marked by the deterioration and loss of its spiritual essence, which is triggered by "progressive materialization" (p. 8). Joll (1985) further argues that "history constantly repeats itself... the same cycles time after time" (p. 96). Therefore, we cannot comprehend our civilization except in comparison with previous and with contemporaneous ones. This theme of civilizational progress is very dominant in Toynbee's writings. The phases of culture's cycle, according to Spengler (1918), are to be compared to the year's season cycle: spring is the time of growth for a young culture, summer is when it comes to full bloom and spreads, autumn is when it reaches the high point of cultural achievement and self-consciousness, while winter marks decline because of loss of its spiritual vitality.

Results and Discussion

Subverting the Grand Narrative of History and Universal Assumption of Historical Inevitability

Snuffing Out the Moon's (2017) polytemporal narrative scheme contests and destabilizes West's historical universalism. The novel disrupts Eurocentric historical narratives of inevitability and progress by decoupling the non-Western civilizations, like the Indus Valley, Takshasilla, Mughal India, colonial India, and modern Lahore, from the so-called universalist assumptions. In dismantling the West's historic universality claim, Siddique (2017) resists the dominance of Western narratives and retrieves non-Western histories, cultures, and epistemologies through his multitemporal probing of sociological, cultural, and historical settings. The novel disassembles Western universalist history by discounting its Eurocentric, linear accounts and foregrounding non-Western civilizations' cyclical and multifarious trajectories. It not only undermines the hegemonic narratives but also recuperates the agency and survival of non-Western societies and presents a profound

counterpoint to the presumption of Western historical universalism. Siddique's six-era story from ancient Mohenjodaro (2084 BCE) through to a dystopian future (2084 CE) actively resists the idea that history ends in Western modernity. Every timeline is grounded in its cultural and historical background, dispelling the notion of a singular trajectory.

The first of Siddique's six distinct historical civilizations is the Indus Valley civilization, centered on Mohenjodaro. Mohenjodaro is a "city of bricks... of bricks kiln-fired and sun-baked... [of]shades of brown interspersed with the green sunken gardens and groves of trees" (Siddique, 2017, p. 3). To the east, the river marks the city's boundary. Cultivated fields and alluvial plains stretch into swamps and barren spots. Beyond these cultivated fields is a receding jungle juxtaposing human aspiration and nature's unobtrusive persistence. The city is depicted as a success of human creativity with its planned layout, acropolis, and cultivated fields. Mohenjodaro, thus, stands in contrast to the Western idea that advanced societies need hierarchical government systems to accomplish such urbanization. Compared to most Western civilizations, which tend to build monumental structures to represent power, authority, and religion (such as the Parthenon in Greece or Roman temples), Mohenjodaro does not show overt evidence of elite class differentiation through monumental architecture. Mohenjodaro and its great essence was the "glorious abode of industrious people. ... It was a triumph of man over the fickle and predatory nature" (Siddique, 2017, p. 5). No palaces exist, and the so-called "Great Bath" is perhaps a communal ritual area, not an elite privilege.

Spengler (1918) believes that "civilization is the inevitable destiny of culture" (p. 31). Therefore, civilizations are distinct, with their cultural life cycles. No civilization, including the West, can have universal validity. Western universalism tends to market its economic, political, and cultural systems as the 'end of history'. Siddique highlights that civilizations such as Mohenjodaro prospered without these systems through their own distinctive "never-ceasing marvels" (Siddique, 2017, p. 5) and other avenues of human progress. The text testifies to the individuality of every civilization's path, precluding the truth of one universal model of advancement. It implies that diversity in cultural and spiritual structures is necessary for the richness of human history. The effusive spirituality of Mohenjodaro, represented in the dance of the girl, "unornamented... girl was humming to herself as she flitted like a small bird" (Siddique, 2017, p. 6) and the union of art, nature, and human expression, represents a cultural identity that is different from the materialism and intellectualism that characterize the forward march of Western historical progress.

The spiritual and social life of the city destabilizes Western universalist assumptions about individualism and secularism, which revolve around ideas of personal improvement, competition for individual success, and the accumulation of wealth. This image challenges the spirit of individualist Western modernity. Western universalism assumes that religion is a matter of an individual's personal relationship with divine or state-sponsored religious institutions. Mohenjodaro and the Indus Valley Civilization, on the other hand, seem to have evolved a more communal in their approach to spiritual life. The absence of grand temples, the use of the Great Bath for communal practices, which is also "centre of all water-based ceremonies" (Siddique, 2017, p. 137), and an absence of priestly control and central religious authority point to a distinct spiritual model that fails to map onto Western history's narrative about religion interfering with state formation. Mohenjodaro is, however, an example of a highly developed civilization that does not conform to many of the assumptions that Western universalism holds about history. Its organization of society, feats of technology, religious heritage and systems of urban development suggest quite another set of values and priorities that challenge the assumption that Western models are the only viable path for human evolution, with their focus on individuality, control hierarchies and imperial momentum. The novel's

delineation of the Indus Valley civilizations aligns with Spengler's (1918) critique of the Western universalist construction of world history, where "Indian and Classical man formed no image of a world in progress" (p. 15).

Siddique's Takshasilla storyline can also be read as a repudiation of Western universalism in the light of Spengler's cyclical theory. It can be read as a critique of the Western interpretation of the decline of civilizations, which, as Spengler (1918) argues, begins through excesses of material advancement and spiritual shallowness. Takshasilla civilization offers a different perspective on life based on intellectual depth, spiritual energy and integrative learning, where the mind knows itself because it is put together along with the soul that enlivens it. Takshasilla, located in the valley "bounded on three sides by the lower hills of Himalayas" (Siddique, 2017, p. 15), claims to be one of the most famous learning centres ever built in ancient history. It is located in the Gandhara region with its "fertile and lush lands, for it is fed by a river" (Siddique, 2017, p. 16). It has "great stupa of Dharmarajika, which was the pride of Takshasilla" constructed through the "perfected skills of magnificent Ghandharan artists" (Siddique, 2017, p. 128). As a great pilgrimage city, it is popular among scholars of diverse tastes, including Greeks, Central Asians, Chinese and Indians, as the "grand stupa.. a magnet for devotees from far and wide" (Siddique, 2017, p.128).

The Takshashila center of learning does not represent a single culture or school of philosophy. It adopts a pluralistic approach and creates a diverse intellectual environment focusing on "fervent devotion and deep meditation" (Siddique, 2017, p. 14). This is a direct contrast to the Western impulse to encourage a universal system of thought through democracy, capitalism, or scientific rationalism and impose these values on other peoples as the optimum style of governance and intellectual life. The curriculum at Takshasilla is highly interdisciplinary, spanning subjects including Buddhism, Hindu philosophy, military tactics, medicine, and mathematics, as "the monasteries and their groves also became centres of learning" (Siddique, 2017, p. 24). The scholars are encouraged to develop a localized, integral comprehension of the world. They do not adhere to the dogmatic tradition, which shows how they craft their own set of values that lack any trace of universalist grand narratives. The monks also carry "glorious insights of our Lord Buddha" and "illustrious traditions of this grand monastery of the unparalleled Takshasilla" (Siddique, 2017, p. 22). The education also lays emphasis on the awareness of "what is happening beyond the walls of our monastery" (Siddique, 2017, p. 23). These details enable the novel to hint at an alternative epistemological tradition which defies Cartesian dualism, often typifying Western universalism. The emphasis on developing worldly wisdom in tandem with spiritual growth runs counter to the Western emphasis on fostering economic, technical and industrial growth. The Bhikkhus in the novel profess their philosophy: "We are simply humble Bhikkhus; who possess no power, no gold and no fields of ripe corn... who meditate and pray... who wish for nothing but moksha from this world" (Siddique, 2017, p. 125). Thus, the novel foregrounds this preference of the spiritual over the material as the central motif of learning in Takshasilla.

The storyline, which is set in the Mughal era Punjab, describes the Shah Rah-e-Azam (Grand Trunk Road), "wide and well-kept road" (Siddique, 2017, p. 118), as the catalyst for cultural diffusion and economic expansion. Manmohan from this storyline seeks to walk this road to escape his stifling poverty and achieve upward economic and social mobility. Jahangir rules Manmohan's world as "a great patron of the arts, sciences and is quite the nature lover" (Siddique, 2017, p. 116). His musings upon his legacy show a profound connection to the historical and cultural identity of his empire. In contrast to the Western expansionist ideologies and universalist goals, Jahangir neither aims to export Mughal ideals to the rest of humanity nor judges his empire on universal, external

standards. Sikandar-e-Sani recalls: "I wonder whether anything else can catch the mighty Mughal's fancy. Remarkable expertise in arts of administration, finance or war; peerless scholarships in any of the arts and sciences... and bringing forth of unusual plants and strange animals" (Siddique, 2017, p. 179). None can read these abilities, talents, and attributes better than Jahangir, whose interests remain grounded in the specific experience of his civilization rather than in a universalized quest for dominance or ideological conformity.

Western universalism in the colonial Punjab storyline is problematized through the mindset of British officers such as John Cunningham. British officers are convinced of their own cultural superiority and view themselves as the harbingers of civilization in India. Cunningham's offhand remarks about dragging a prisoner back to Anarkali to be executed as "bloody niggers are rising" (Siddique, 2017, p. 192) indicate his ignorance towards the cultural and moral values of the native population. His emphasis on efficiency and upholding order echoes a colonial worldview that assumes Western governance, law, and social order standards to be universally applicable and superior. The British actions, such as rebel executions, are legitimized by the colonizers as a fulfilment of their moral obligation to civilize the inferior native population. This echoes the historical colonialist justification for colonialism as a civilizing mission. The text aligns with Spengler's (1918) constructs, which refute the West's universalist 'centre of gravity' argument by debunking the assumed universalism of Western colonial thought. The British in text have been depicted as illusionists who "created the illusion of an empire to please the eye and gladden the heart" (Siddique, 2017, p. 194). This official Western universalism, placing Western values as the universal norm, is legitimized through the Enlightenment rhetoric. However, the novel emphasizes how the land occupied by the British is a culturally rich one. Lucknow is celebrated as the "city of aesthetes," and Punjab is lauded a land known for its "spiritual poetry and its love for poets" (Siddique, 2017, p. 36).

In *Snuffing Out the Moon* (2017), Siddique depicts Western universalism as an oppressive force that aims to enforce one superior worldview upon the pluralist cultures of India. The chapati movement perplexes the British officers because it does not fit their logical explanation. They cannot comprehend or define this local resistance in Western terms, and their failure to grasp it proves they are culturally disconnected. Sepoy Prakash Singh comments that "the firangi isn't emotional like us. His dharam is only paisa" (Siddique, 2017, p. 103). It reveals the intentions of the British, who, under the garb of their civilizing mission, seek to exploit the resources and people. The British officers also represent the dehumanizing element. Cunningham's derogatory comment upon the 'chee-chee' (a euphemism for the native person who runs a magic lantern) reveals a Eurocentric colonial mindset: "They are a most disorientingly diverse lot. Just this morning I came across a chee-chee who operates a magic lantern" (Siddique, 2017, p. 189). It reinforces the idea that universalist assumptions driving the colonial machine view native cultures as disordered and chaotic. The colonials view resistance figures as mere impediments to be neutralized. The lack of understanding by the colonial officers regarding the cultural worth of the rituals and belief systems of the natives comes to light when they ridicule the spiritual and cultural rituals around death and treatment of prisoners.

Aminuddin Ameerzada, a lawyer in Lahore's "old Walled City" (Siddique, 2017, p. 49), is representative of Westernized legal thinking rooted in reason, codebooks, and personal ethical decisions. His compulsive quest for moral correctness, seen in his fastidious gathering of legal references and paperwork, is an outright reflection of Western Enlightenment ideals of identifying knowledge, law, and justice with reason and human agency. He is consistently inclined to collect, document, archive, and legalize information. His act of constantly clutching some "slip of paper in trembling hand"

(Siddique, 2017, p. 396) depicts his compulsive desire to save and manage legal information. This behaviour exhibits adherence to the Western ideal that the written word and rational knowledge are the ultimate sources of justice and truth. His blind adherence to the Enlightenment values, faith in the European interpretation of law and reason, his penchant for technocratic perfection and his belief in the authority of the written texts combine to ensure his abject failure in a non-European context. According to Spengler (1918), the horizon of thought sanctioned by universalism “does not extend beyond the intellectual atmosphere of Western man” (p. 22). The situation in which Aminuddin’s legalism leads to his physical and mental breakdown demonstrates the drawbacks of Western ideals when applied strictly in situations that call for more cultural sensitivity, understanding, and compassion.

The legal system, to which Aminuddin adheres, represents Western bureaucratic hierarchies. With their supposedly rational foundations and universality claims, such systems cannot engage with non-European moral and material conditions in the case of Rafia Begum’s legal battle. The failure of the legal system to provide justice for Rafia reflects the inability of Western universalism to fulfil its objectives outside a Western framework: “the past five years or so, since she had first started coming here” (Siddique, 2017, p. 47). The law framework in the book is depicted as alienated from the local context, and the quest for justice is more of a matter of power and manipulation rather than fairness. “A heartless lawyer in a heartless court has broken many more mortals than any quantity of sticks and stones” (Siddique, 2017, p. 280). The novel portrays the court proceedings as slow, where “judge was replaced by another man” (p. 48) and punctuated by case files going missing. These inefficiencies and the emphasis on personal connections discredit the Western notion of a rational, impartial legal system for everyone, emphasizing the discrepancy between Western ideals and practices on the ground.

In the futurist storyline of the novel, Western universalism has been critiqued as technological colonialism. Systems like the AMPS (Airborne Monitoring and Patrol Scooter) employed by the Water Conglomerate with “various cameras and other surveillance equipment” (Siddique, 2017, p. 59) represent a belief that Western technology is the panacea for everything. These systems are employed as instruments of control on Regressives, who are “people who were widely described as nothing but pathetic and forgettable debris of previous eras” (Siddique, 2017, p. 78). The tools symbolize a technologically built system of thinking, imposing cultural forms and even spiritual beliefs from above. Futuristic surveillance technologies, such as AMPS, maintain dominance by eliminating dissent. They are used to “Hunt Down and Kill” (Siddique, 2017, p. 78), a process Prashanto satirizes: “How civilized it sounded” (Siddique, 2017, p. 80). The surveillance and technological control mechanism is symptomatic of Western governing systems and their economies of efficiency, order, and rationality over human relations and cultural autonomy. Read through Spengler (1918), this situation operationalizes the concept of Western civilization’s “Faustian” soul. He describes Western civilization as having a “Faustian” soul, a drive for expansion and control. Universalism brings this Faustian worldview to all corners of the Earth and eradicates the local philosophies that contradict such a paradigm.

A criticism of Western universalism’s materialism can be inferred from the portrayal of the Conglomerates’ obsession with technological domination. This domination is justified as “civilized tyranny” (Siddique, 2017, p. 227), which advances the society through “advantageous trade, cash crops, raw materials, cheap labour, oil and gas, precious minerals or even territorial domination of the periphery, [and even] the fresh water” (Siddique, 2017, p. 255). Prashanto, in the futurist storyline, questions the enlightenment ideals that attach progress and prosperity to the pursuits of knowledge. His

comments reveal the power imperatives behind the imposition of the universalist knowledge: "What is about knowledge that ultimately leads to destruction, turning Men into demons, the perpetrators of holocausts, cleansing and genocide" (Siddique, 2017, p. 231). This directly critiques the hegemonic mechanism that dichotomizes people into "us and others" (Siddique, 2017, p. 229). The Regressives with "primitive appearances" (Siddique, 2017, p. 61), who are linked more spiritually to the land, resist the destructive materialism and Faustian dynamic of technological and economic domination. Western universalism tends to express itself in terms of freedom, democracy, and equality as a universally applicable end. However, as Spengler (1918) suggests, they are employed as means of domination against those who do not subscribe to them. The Regressives, who resist adhering to the Conglomerate way of living, are cast out. They "disappeared from popular consciousness" and these "fast declining and already primitive species with nothing left common with those who lived in the Conglomerate's urban centres" (Siddique, 2017, p. 77). Under the pretext of liberation, the hegemonic forms of governance, culture, and spirituality are imposed upon them.

Civilization as Cycle: Disrupting the Myth of Linear Progress

Oswald Spengler's (1918) cyclical theory of civilization is a plausible and compelling theoretical model for explaining the rise and decline of civilizations. Rather than proposing a linear course toward advancement, the novel envisions one in which the inexorability of circular history reigns. The collapse is not defeat but transition, transformation or metamorphosis. By applying Spengler's (1918) theoretical paradigm to six different storylines, a pattern of cyclical rise and fall is evident, powerfully refuting the Western universalist model of inevitable progress.

Western universalism represents history as a steady movement from "primitive" or "backward" societies to "advanced" ones. The phase of the Indus Valley civilization, which the novel delineates, hints that civilizations have divergent patterns of historical and cultural evolution. This depiction discredits Western universalist trajectories in many ways. Siddique's Mohenjodaro cannot be comprehended through the Eurocentric development frameworks as it exhibits its own path towards societal and cultural refinement. With its focus on material progress and institutionalization of religion and politics, it is in transition from the spiritual stage to formal institutionalization. The transition from spiritual to institutional signals a weakening of cultural energy and a downward spiral into decay. This pattern subverts the Western universalist assumption that civilizations progress through the advent of institutionalization and sovereignty of rationality. While the city makes outstanding strides, it increasingly loses the creative and spiritual richness that defined its previous eras. On the contrary, the Western model of unending advancement assumes that cultures always get better with time.

Takshasilla also follows the cyclical path, symbolizing a civilization in its early to mid-cultural stage. Its intellectual and spiritual richness, based on Buddhist asceticism and educational pursuit, represents the peak of cultural energy. Knowledge is not sought mainly for power but for liberation. Teachers and students dwell together in a shared spiritual ecosystem, and the monastic order remains in some ways porous and decentralized. This stage in Spenglerian framework represents the cultural summer, in which the spirit of civilization remains alive and active, energizing its institutions as well as its worldview. But as Takshasilla grows older and the threats from outside appear, the internal cohesiveness disappears. the civilization enters Spengler's (1918) "Winter" mode: that is how "the wheel of time turns", where "every epoch must come to an end" (Siddique, 2017, p. 126). The horde at the gates does not merely symbolize destruction; it heralds the rise of a new cultural cycle to displace the old, as Spengler (1918) foresaw. Siddique's

portrayal of civilization by comparing the "civilizational existence nothing more than the tiresome sequence of horde after horde" who came "only to be replaced in turn by the next series of marauders" (Siddique, 2017, p. 311). Thus, these hordes hint towards a plural culture rejecting linearity.

The Mughal Empire era represents Spengler's (1918) autumn stage, the cultural peak that marks the beginning of decline. Sikander-e-Sani represents the last stage of civilizational idealism, imagining justice and moral greatness. In contrast, Mirza Ferasta Beg represents the beginning of cynical pragmatism, where he "diplomatically expressed the desire ... to make their own way to their destination" (Siddique, 2017, p. 118). In his musings, Emperor Jahangir sees the waning spirit of civilization. The symbolic bells of justice and the grotesque Chor Minar help demonstrate how symbols of virtue and authority, once full of life, have degenerated into empty rituals and control mechanisms showing "heads of men" (Siddique, 2017, p. 123), ultimately offering justice. This stage is meant to subvert the Western linear idea of progress by showing that even at their peak, civilizations are already on a path to decline.

The eventual breakdown of the institutional and technological hegemony of the Water Conglomerate in the futurist storyline echoes Spengler's notion that civilizations crumble when they are depleted of their vitality. This era highlights the end of the civilizational cycle, also alludes to the sowing of seeds of the new. Technologies such as AMPS, intended to keep things in order, fail. The Regressives return once more, embracing their spiritually based lifestyle and repudiating the soulless materialism of the Conglomerates. Their return demonstrates that civilizations may collapse, but the heart of cultural and spiritual life can return in new forms. "Many empires have come and gone, nothing remains of them" (Siddique, 2017, p. 126). This is the indication of a cyclical movement of time where things are interlinked and are supposed to happen in a cycle again. This era definitively rejects Western linearity in asserting that history repeats, does not evolve, and that authentic renewal lies not in modernity but in return to the spiritual and communal origins.

Lastly, the dystopian future in *The Water Conglomerate* completes the loop by describing a world in which technological domination, materialism, and social surveillance have achieved their peak. It can be viewed as Spengler's (1918) 'Fellah civilization', "the most external and artificial states" (p. 31), which is the final, most barren expression of civilizational cycle, ruled by systems, not souls. The Regressives, who inhabit the edges and fight the technological regime, reprise Spengler's (1918) theory that even in devastation, fragments of the first culture persist in isolated individuals or subcultures. The fixation on progress and control only hastens collapse, demonstrating that machines cannot control history. The regression of the future society to authoritarianism, repression of dissent, and dependence on empty rituals of surveillance proves that history does not move in a straight line; it loops, folds, and returns to its origin. "A new yug starts... this too is the end of an age" (Siddique, 2017, p. 427). This speculative world is no utopia born of progress, but the necessary terminus of a civilization that has lost its soul.

Conclusion

When considered together, these epochs of history, Mohenjodaro, Takshasilla, the Subah Punjab (Mughal Empire), the Punjab (British rule), Lahore Punjab, and the Water Conglomerate, are a rational sequence that is consistent with Spengler's (1918) cyclical theory of history: "Ultimately time had to follow some course, if not linear than cyclical, but a course nevertheless" (p. 173). The novel hints that each of these epochs follows a distinct stage in the birth, maturity, and death cycle that all civilizations pass through. Far

from portraying history as the endpoint of a unilinear march, these ages suggest that civilizations rise and fall according to their own internal logic. It aligns with Spengler (1918), who contests the Western universalist assumption of progress, reason, and cultural primacy. Instead, it asserts the distinctiveness of each civilization's path and the inevitability of its collapse. From this perspective, the novel establishes itself as a critique of modernity, requiring that actual knowledge of history rests not in the prophecy of one future but in the acknowledgment of the recurring patterns to which all civilizations are subject.

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