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PLAYSCRIPT

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Lawrence in Lahore: The Lost Years

ABSTRACT

Lawrence in Lahore: The Lost Years *invites us to read South Asian history through its complex imbrications with discourses of gender, race, sexuality and imperial politics, foregrounding their neo-colonial and imperial afterlives. In doing so, the play advances a progressive project of a radically queer aesthetic and ethical vision that gestures towards a future liberated from the constraints of a politically stagnant present. A femi-queer tragicomedy,* Lawrence in Lahore *presents itself as a subcontinental reimagining of* Casablanca, *replete with song and dance, and contributes to scholarship in gender and sexuality studies, history, cultural and postcolonial studies, as well as theatre and performance studies.*

KEYWORDS

femi-queer
historical farce
Empire
spies
South Asia
Middle East

SUMMARY

Our three-act play, entitled *Lawrence in Lahore: The Lost Years*, is a deconstructive femiqueer South Asian *Casablanca* replete with song and dance. The play focuses on the little-known years of British intelligence officer T. E. Lawrence's life after the First World War. A decolonizing spy thriller of our times, it begins

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with the Paris Peace Agreement, where Prince Feisal of the Hejaz learns of Lawrence's treachery resulting in the loss of Palestinian autonomy to European imperialist designs and then follows Lawrence to Lahore on the eve of Indian independence from Britain, showing his possible involvement with events in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Our play concludes with the revival of Great Game politics in the region, connecting the dots between South Asian history and the Middle East through the figure of Lawrence.

Blurring fact and fiction, history becomes a carnivalesque farce, as Lawrence's his/story is countered by her/story of young Akbar Jehan (later First Lady of Kashmir). Serving as romantic and political foil to Lawrence, cross-dressing young Akbar Jehan (modelled loosely on the late-nineteenth century Swiss-Russo spy/writer Isabelle Eberhardt) ends up challenging and deconstructing several interlocking issues around gender, sexuality and Great Game politics. Audiences are drawn into Lahore's famed Arab and Nedou's Hotels, sites of a web of interconnected intrigue spanning the colonial, postcolonial and neo-imperialist eras right up to our contemporary moment of current events unfolding in Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, India/Pakistan/Kashmir.

Opening with a humorous decolonial prologue set at the *Paris Peace Conference*, our Act 1 then moves on to imagining the little-known latter years of British intelligence officer T. E. Lawrence's life after the First World War. There is historical evidence that, posing as Airman Shaw, Lawrence got himself posted to the Royal Air Force (RAF) base in Karachi, India, in 1927, several years after he failed to secure a united Arabia for his 'friend' Prince Feisal of the Hejaz. There is also evidence that he then got posted to Miranshah, a small outpost on the border with Afghanistan, and visited Lahore's famed Nedou Hotel during the politically volatile years leading up to India's independence from Great Britain, involving its partition into the nation states of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan in 1947. Rumours claimed as fact by British-Pakistani historian Tariq Ali in his book *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (2002) involve Lawrence's secret marriage to the daughter of the owner of the Nedou Hotel, a young woman by the name of Akbar Jehan, whom he soon divorced once he was ordered to leave the country by the British government due to embarrassing stories that began appearing in the British press, claiming he was in the Afghanistan region to foment trouble at the behest of the British government.

The play ends with his departure from the subcontinent on the eve of Indian and Pakistani independence, playing with disguises (including that of a Sufi holy man) to the very end.

Given the ongoing genocide in Gaza that is the result of events set in motion 100 years ago,[1] our play is prescient in its timeliness, a must-watch for history buffs and theatre-goers alike.

1. See Khalidi (2020).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Character	*Description*
T. E. LAWRENCE/PIR KARAM SHAH/T. E. SHAW	British spy, responsible for instigating the Arab Revolt of 1916. Goes in disguise as PIR KARAM SHAH, a Sufi spiritual leader and as T. E. SHAW
EMIR FEISAL	Son of Hussein Sharif of Mecca, expected to be given Syria as his kingdom after the First World War

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Character	*Description*
LORD CURZON	Viceroy of British India
GEORGES CLEMENCEAU	Prime minister of France
LLOYD GEORGE	British prime minister
WOODROW WILSON	US president
GERTRUDE BELL	British spy
MADAME DUMONT	French, wife of the French prime minister Clemenceau's Assistant District Commissioner (ADC)
RAF OFFICER	
WAITERS/OFFICERS	
ZAIN AND ALI	Arab (Kuwaiti) brothers who own and run the Casablanca-type Arab Hotel of Lahore
EMISSARY	Works for King Amanullah of Afghanistan
CHAI BOY	Delivers clandestine messages, serves tea to customers and keeps an eye out for police raids
AKBAR JEHAN	18-year-old woman, occasionally cross-dresses and falls in love with LAWRENCE
MIRJAAN	AKBAR'S Mother, works alongside her husband in their hotel
HARRY NEDOU	AKBAR'S father, owner of famed Nedou's Hotel of Lahore
PATHAN AND AFGHANI COMRADES	Comrades of LAWRENCE
BHAGAT SINGH	Indian firebrand revolutionary hero, agitating to get Brits out of India
FOLLOWERS OF SINGH	
YOUNAS	An elderly man who works as a sous-chef
SPY HANDLER	British, could be a middle-aged man
ABDUL QADEER (AQ) KHAN	Kashmiri Resistance leader, who was killed as a martyr in 1931
PERFORMERS/GOAN DANCER/SINGERS/BAND MEMBERS	
BACHA SAQA	A local Afghan rebel leader, in his 30s
MULLAH I LANG KHURD	Another rebel leader
HEAD OF BRITISH POLICE CONSTABULARY	British, set in his ways
EDOUARD DALADIER	Leader of France
RAMSAY MCDONALD	Leader of Britain

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Character	*Description*
FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT (FDR)	US president
TARIQ ALI	British-Pakistani historian, approximately 75 years of age
YOUNG FEMALE STUDENT	A student in her 20s

PROLOGUE

Setting

The play moves from Versailles Palace, the venue of the Paris Peace Conference, *in 1919, to the Arab and the Nedou's Hotels in Lahore, the scene of the burgeoning Indian independence movement between 1929 and 1936. It concludes at the Avari Hotel, where the Nedou Hotel once stood, on the eve of the new millennium.*

Paris Peace Conference, Versailles, 17 January 1919, the day before the official conference is to begin.

In the palace ballroom on the eve of the conference are three of the 'Big Four' who will decide the outcome of the conference and push through the Treaty of Versailles, which will carve up the Arab areas of the former Ottoman Empire into British, French and Russian spheres of influence. Three of the 'Big Four' present are the Prime Minister (PM) of France, GEORGES CLEMENCEAU; the PM of the United Kingdom, David LLOYD GEORGE and the President of the United States, Woodrow WILSON; PM of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando is absent.

T. E. LAWRENCE, bedecked in Arab robes (thobe) in white and gold, accompanied by EMIR FEISAL, son of Hussein Sharif of Mecca, enters to plead the latter's case: to be given Syria as his post-First World War kingdom, as originally promised to him by Britain in return for his help in defeating the Turks.

Also present: LORD CURZON, Viceroy of British India; British spy GERTRUDE BELL, and various other officers and their wives, including MADAME DUMONT, wife of French PM/ADC Georges Dumont. Well-heeled waiters milling about, serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres to the guests.

Against the far wall, a big map of the Arab lands as carved up according to the Sykes-Picot agreement.

LLOYD GEORGE: (*Puffing on cigar*) Well, thankfully, despite the embarrassment those Bolsheviks caused us by leaking our agreement to the press last year, the Triple Entente has won the war against the Ottomans, and…

CLEMENCEAU: *Oui, oui*, thanks to us (*LLOYD GEORGE glares at him and coughs loudly*) – well, I mean, both of us – we managed to defeat Germany and Turkey, *dieu merci*! And now we have a clear path to our territories in Arabia… *mais, ou est Vittorio*?

LLOYD GEORGE: I'm told he sent his regrets; he had to have his *riposo…* you know the Italians… they've slept their way through the war!

(*They both laugh.*)

LLOYD GEORGE: (*Looking at the map on the wall*) I'm glad to see the Acre-Haifa zone is clearly marked for British control, which…

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CLEMENCEAU: (*Interrupting him*) …gives you access to the Mediterranean. France has been magnanimous to the British indeed!

LLOYD GEORGE: Clemenceau, old chap, we've acceded to your demand for control over Damascus and the Levant, an area we had promised to Emir Feisal. So you shouldn't be complaining!

CLEMENCEAU: It is not a complaint – yet! But there is a big problem I foresee in this map…

LLOYD GEORGE: And what's that?

CLEMENCEAU: (*Twirling his drooping moustache*) As you can see, only Western Syria and Lower Mesopotamia are defined as French areas in this map, leaving the question of who will gain control over Damascus, *un peu ambigu.* I fear your Arab lover, 'El Aurens', will make things difficult for us Frenchmen.

LLOYD GEORGE: Oh, I don't think you need fear anything from Lawrence… he has done the work we needed him for. He led the Arab army of Emir Feisal to victory at Aqaba. He even paid the ultimate price a man of honour can pay in that sordid Turkish den when he was caught and ra…

Heads turn as FEISAL and LAWRENCE enter, both men wearing splendid Arab thobes and headdresses; collective gasp. LORD CURZON, Viceroy of India, accompanied by GERTRUDE BELL and MADAME DUMONT (beautiful wife of CLEMENCEAU's ADC Georges, walks up to where CLEMENCEAU and LLOYD GEORGE (LG) have been standing and chatting).

LORD CURZON: (*To CLEMENCEAU*) Well, Georges, *je suis desole,* but despite our best efforts, we haven't been able to prevent those two from showing up here to plead the Emir's case for Syria.

CLEMENCEAU: This is outrageous! (*Turning to LG*) Georges! I thought your aides had stopped their train into Paris…

LLOYD GEORGE: I'm as surprised to see them here as you are…

MADAME DUMONT: Oh how dashing Captain Lawrence looks!

LORD CURZON: Colonel Lawrence now…

MADAME DUMONT: *Vraiment*? Oh my, *quel beau* colonel…

(*The men all look at her*.)

CLEMENCEAU: (*Making a mock bow to MADAME DUMONT)* Glad our Frenchwomen find the Colonel's looks so pleasing – but what does England intend to do? Surely (*turning to LORD CURZON*), you will not grant them audience to make their case? Remember, we still hold the Mosul oil concessions…

LLOYD GEORGE: I say, Clemenceau, are you threatening to withdraw the concessions? Britain will not stand for such…

MADAME DUMONT: Shhh, messieurs…. I want to listen to the Colonel…

LAWRENCE: (*Clinking an empty wine glass*) Gentlemen, ladies, I want to take this opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the son of Sherif Hussein of the Hejaz, the true

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king of Arabs, descended directly from the Prophet Mohammed….

(*Rustling, some protesting voices, including those of LORD CURZON and LLOYD GEORGE, saying: 'I say, Lawrence, this is hardly the time or place…'.*)

WILSON: Oh, let the chap speak, after all, this is in line with my presidential proposal for self-determination for all peoples: the United States of America supports freedom for all peoples….

(*LORD CURZON smirks, CLEMENCEAU rolls his eyes… MADAME DUMONT starts a round of clapping, cheering Lawrence on….*)

LAWRENCE: (*Smiling*) Thank you, President Wilson, Madame. My government had promised the Emir and his people all of Arabia in return for his services. The death rattle of the 'sick man of Europe' would have kept on rattling had it not been for Feisal's Hijazi Bedouins.

(*Appreciative laughter, clapping.*)

CLEMENCEAU: (*Aside to LG*) I hear your spy is quite obsessed with Bedouin men!

LAWRENCE: …and Feisal concludes his opening remarks to you all by stating that

(*The following speech should be read out by LAWRENCE in English, with a simultaneous overlay of it being recited in Arabic by FEISAL.*)

'All of Asian Arabia – the Hejaz, Najd, Transjordan, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia – should be granted independence – and we should be one nation as we are inseparable both geographically and racially. We have no problems with the Balfour Declaration… I support Jewish immigration into Palestine, as Jews are our cousins… there is room in Syria for us all. But we stand opposed to a Jewish state. The Semitic race of Jews and Arabs is a one and indivisible race'.

(S*miling, LAWRENCE presents EMIR FEISAL to the crowd, which has burst out in loud applause*.)

WILSON: Wonderful speech! We in America are so fascinated by your exploits, Colonel Lawrence… you are the uncrowned king of the Arabs undoubtedly…

FEISAL: (*Turning in anger to LAWRENCE, whispers in Arabic.*) What kind of joke is this? The uncrowned King of Arabia? Is this a publicity stunt for you or is our cause, the Arab cause – going to get a fair hearing? Bah… (*storms out, followed by a visibly guilty-looking LAWRENCE).*

(*GERTRUDE BELL runs after him.*)

CLEMENCEAU: There goes El Aurens, your uncrowned king of the Arabs…

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LORD CURZON: *Mon ami,* don't worry; you get your French mandate in the Levant and Syria, we get Mesopotamia, Palestine, and access to the Mosul oilfields. Lawrence, with his archaeological and military genius has helped serve ALL of our interests in the region. So let's not be too harsh on him. My India will certainly be easier to rule with control of land routes all the way from Palestine to the Persian Gulf.

LLOYD GEORGE: And pitting the Sauds of Hejaz against the Sharifs of Iraq will also keep us all in business for a while!

(As CLEMENCEAU, LLOYD GEORGE and CURZON laugh and shake hands, congratulating each other on stage left, BELL and LAWRENCE hold the following conversation on stage right.)

BELL: Listen, dear boy, we all think Ibn Saud is a better leader for the Arabs. He is a true believer who will rally them with the Wahabi network. Feisal is, well… a bit too civilized…

LAWRENCE: (*Laughs bitterly*) Oh, so we need the primitives, do we now, to help us maintain control over other primitives?

BELL: Don't take it so hard… maybe there is a consolation prize in all this for your beloved Feisal… maybe even for his brother Abdullah, once the new borders are drawn. Secular Arabs on one hand, and the truer 'souls' of the Arabian desert on the other! That will keep a balance of power in the region….

LAWRENCE: (*Impatiently*) You really don't get it. I had wanted to unify all of Arabia under Feisal. My dreams of adventure are the deeds of an Empire built to last! You are all so short-sighted.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Setting: *RAF Depot, Drigh Road, Karachi, January 1927; Airman T. E. SHAW in the operations control room, writing a letter. An RAF officer enters the room.*

OFFICER: What are you up to, Shaw? This is not a desk job – what are you writing?

SHAW: A letter, sir.

OFFICER: A letter? To whom? A sweetheart back home? Somehow I didn't peg you as a romantic!

SHAW: No sir; an ordinary man like me cannot afford romance.

OFFICER: Well, then to whom is this letter addressed? To your grandmother?

SHAW: No sir, to my Mother.

OFFICER: Really? Well, let's see (*snatches the letter and reads it out loud*):

'The Depot is dreary, to a degree, and its background makes me shiver. It is a desert, very like Arabia: and all sorts of haunting likenesses (pack-donkeys, the colour and cut of men's clothes, an oleander bush in flower in the valley, camel-saddles, tamarisk) try to remind me

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of what I've been for eight years desperately fighting out of my mind'.

What the hell is this gibberish? You a poet or something?

SHAW: No sir, no poet; not even a something; I'm just an airman trying to let his Mother know he is all right.

OFFICER: I don't buy it… are you trying to hide something? What's all this about Arabia? You been there? In the War?

SHAW: Sir, this is all my imagination…

OFFICER: You're imagining donkeys and the cut of men's clothes? Why not some naked Bedouin beauties? Now *that's* imagination for you! I am – I mean, *it* is getting hot in here… you get back to work Airman Shaw. That's an order! (*Walks out*.)

SHAW: (*Goes back to writing his letter*) 'Our beds are narrow and close together, our cooks awful; our life harried by orders'.

(*Officer returns with a telegram in hand and throws it at SHAW*.)

OFFICER: Your request for posting to Miranshah airbase has been approved. You are to report immediately to Lahore headquarters. Now pack up your belongings and make sure to pack your thobe – what the hell is that? I'm not interested; just pack up, as the Andover leaves early in the morning. I knew there was more to you than meets the eye.

(*Throws him a dirty look*.)

SHAW: (*Resumes writing letter*) I must sign off now Mother, as I've just been informed of my new posting. You may still write me at my current address, AC2 Shaw, RAF Depot, Drigh Road, Karachi, as I will not have a regular address for some time. New challenges await me!

(*We see him smile for the first time*.)

End of scene.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Setting: Arab Hotel, Lahore, 1927.

On one side of the stage, there is a table of poets and writers, drinking chai and reciting Urdu poetry; there is middle eastern music being played by a live oudh player; he is playing the Marxist anthem and reciting some Arabic resistance poetry softly by Abu Salma, a Palestinian poet whose poem of the 1936 revolt will be recited by the oudh player in Arabic; one of the visiting Arab poets is translating the lyrics into English; he is wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh in red. Mixed with this music is Malka Pukhraj (recorded) singing Urdu poet Akhtar Shirani's poem (who frequented Arab Hotel in the late 1920s): Lyrics: 'Woh kehtain hain ranjish ki baatain bhula dein'

On the other end of the stage, in a darkly lit corner, a man enters wearing Afghani clothes, his face partially covered by the end of a turban, brought in by ZAIN wearing a thobe. ALI is seated at a table also in a thobe, hair uncovered, with a belt to

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which is attached a dagger which he touches from time to time. AKBAR JEHAN (who is dressed in drag in an Arab thobe and keffiyeh wrapped turban-style to hide her gender) is sitting with ALI.

ZAIN: This man says he has a message from Kabul (*joins the other two at table and sits*).

MAN: I am the emissary of Ghazi Amanullah, Malik of Afghanistan.

AKBAR: (*Authoritatively*) How do we know you are who you say?

(*Man shows a seal from the court; they all examine it one by one and nod approvingly*.)

ZAIN: So… what is the message?

MAN: (*Turns to AKBAR, bowing*) I am honoured to meet the son of Prince Abdullah bin Sharif, brother of King Feisal of Iraq.

AKBAR: (*Gestures to ALI*) Meet Ali, Prince of Arabia.

(*ALI now takes control*.)

ALI: Proceed with your message.

MAN: His Excellency the Emir conveys his greetings and deep appreciation for the invaluable support given by your *inqilabi* network to our struggle against British imperialism and their lackeys.

ALI: We also have great admiration for Ghazi Amanullah's policies of progressive reforms in favor of the people of your country. We are impressed by the courage he has shown in his battle against the regressive forces of the Shinwari tribes instigated by the British.

MAN: I may be allowed to assure you, Prince Ali, that our king is determined till the end to protect an independent and progressive Afghanistan. But I am here to warn you about another matter, Prince. There is a British spy in your midst who may be sabotaging not only our cause but also the Palestinian and greater Arab struggle dear to us all as well.

ALI: A spy! How is this possible?

MAN: Prince Ali, we have information that he has reached your inner ranks.

AKBAR: Our inner circles!

(*The Arab brothers and AKBAR look at each other in surprise.*)

ALI: How reliable is your source?

MAN: Most reliable sir. It is Haj Amin el Husseini, the great leader of the Palestinian resistance.

(*CHAI BOY comes up to the group*.)

CHAI BOY: Sahibs, the Police are outside, asking for the Afghan.

ALI: (*To ZAIN*) Take him out from the back door; hurry. Fi Amanullah brother.

MAN: Fi Amanullah Prince Ali, sir.

(*ZAIN takes him outside.*)

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AKBAR: Who could this spy be? We have to find out…
ALI: And find him soon!

End of scene.

ACT 1, SCENE 3: T. E. LAWRENCE MEETS AKBAR

Setting: Lahore, 1928, Nedou's Hotel.
Characters: LAWRENCE, His Pathan friends, HEAD OF POLICE, Bhagat's comrades, HARRY NEDOU, MIRJAAN, AKBAR JEHAN, Customers, staff and musicians.

A Goanese singer is singing and some couples are on the dance floor. AKBAR JEHAN, in her teens, wearing western clothes, is at the counter, while MIRJAAN, her Mother, wearing a Kashmiri phiran frock, is in the kitchen and appears now and then at the kitchen window, which opens into the dining hall, to speak to AKBAR.
LAWRENCE (TEL) is sitting with some Afghani friends and discussing in Pashto the situation in Afghanistan under King Amanullah.

MIRJAAN: (*To AKBAR*) Who is the royal-looking Arab, Akbar?
AKBAR: Don't know, Ammijan, but he is handsome, isn't he?
MIRJAAN: Concentrate on your work, daughter. And keep your eyes and ears open. These are tense times. They just caught a communist spy from our premises last week. What we don't want is another spy scandal here!
AKBAR: Come on, Mother, does he look like a spy?
MIRJAAN: Don't go by appearances. Haven't you heard of that Lawrence of Arabia? How he remained undetected as an Arab and helped in the collapse of the Khilafat?
AKBAR: (*Laughing mischievously*) Don't tell me he is Lawrence, Mother. Next you will say he has come to destroy the British Empire. And who knows, he might even end up helping us Kashmiris!
MIRJAAN: (*Scolding tone*) Akbar!
(*NEDOU comes to them.*)

NEDOU: Guests are calling Akbar. Mirjaan dear, the orders! Akbar, attend to the Arab.
AKBAR: Who is he Baba? An Arab prince?
NEDOU: A customer, daughter. That's who he is… we don't ask for a profile from our customers. Now go and serve the table.
(*AKBAR gets food tray from MIRJAAN and goes to TEL's table.*)

TEL: There you are. You took a long time to bring my omelette.
AKBAR: Sorry, sir. The Portuguese omelette takes time. My Mother's speciality!
TEL: But I asked for a Spanish omelette, young woman.
AKBAR: It is a Spanish omelette, sir, but a Portuguese recipe. Anything else sir? Drinks?

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TEL: You know we Muslims don't drink, dear girl. What's your name?

AKBAR: (*Coyly*) Akbar. Akbar Jehan. I am the owner's daughter, sir.

TEL: Ok, owner's daughter! Well, let us find out if your Mother's omelettes are as good as you say… (*looks at her more closely*). Aren't you a bit young to be up so late?

AKBAR: I have just turned 18.

TEL: Well, congratulations. Well done. Now run along. We men have some business to discuss.

AKBAR: (*Hiding her annoyance and her growing interest in TEL*) Yes, sir. Please call if you need anything.

(*AKBAR withdraws. TEL resumes conversation with his friends. They are speaking Pashto.*)

AKBAR: (*To MIRJAAN*) He asked my name, Ammijan.

MIRJAAN: Never give your name to strangers. Hanging around with those Arab brothers has made you too immodest!

AKBAR: Well, according to Baba's account, you gave him your name in the very first meeting you had in Kashmir.

MIRJAAN: That was destiny, my dear. Look, Table 7 is calling.

([*BHAGAT SINGH (BS)] enters with his comrades, raising slogans of* 'inqilab zindabad' *and 'Down with Imperialism'. Everyone is rattled. NEDOU tries to stop them.*)

NEDOU: Sir, you can't raise slogans in the café. We don't indulge in politics here. Do you have a reservation? See, rights of admission are reserved.

BS: Are you a lackey of the British? Do you ask for reservations from all your customers, or only from us Indians? Do you also display boards outside saying, 'Dogs and Indians not allowed'?

NEDOU: I did not say that. We have a vacant table, Table 6.

(*BS looks around suspiciously. TEL keeps calm and carries on, eating his omelette. BS stares at everyone.*)

NEDOU: What are you looking for?

AKBAR: Would you like to order something, sir?

BS: Yes, we would like to order the spy! Is it on the menu, Miss?

AKBAR: No sir, we don't serve that dish.

BS: But you do serve the Empire! (*Addressing the customers*) Our apologies for disrupting your peaceful evening in here. But you must know there is no peace out there, in His Majesty's India. Only yesterday, our beloved Lala Lajpat Rai ji was brutally murdered by the Police.

(*Signals his comrade to give a song to the orchestra. The orchestra starts playing a revolutionary Indian song.* ['Sarfroshi ki tamanna ab hamaray dil mein hai / Dekhna hai zor kitna bazoo-i-qatil mein hai'])

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NEDOU: My dear son…

BS: I am no son of a British lackey! I am the son of the fettered *Bharat Mata* – soon to be freed! *Inqilab, zindabad!*

NEDOU: Please, I asked you to stop all that…. Besides, the man who ordered the lathi charge is the Police Chief, Superintendent Nicholson.

BS: We will get him soon, too. Right now we are looking for the spy. We know he is here.

NEDOU: No spy here, as you can see. They are regular customers.

BS: They are all your regular customers? Him… and him… and him?

(*In the meanwhile TEL quietly leaves for the toilet. BS looks at the customers from one table to another and stops at TEL's table.*)

BS: Where is the Arab? Where did he go?

TEL'S FRIEND: He went to the toilet, I think.

BS: (*Draws his gun*) You fool, go and find him. He is the spy.

(*BS friend goes and comes out with TEL's Arab garb in his hands.*)

BS: I knew it; he is the one. Where has he gone? Look in the store, in the kitchen. Quick.

(*BS Friend checks in the store and in the kitchen. MIRJAAN is cooking with a terrified face and TEL is helping her, wearing a Chef's cap.*)

BS: (*To NEDOU*) He seems to have vanished! Who was he, your regular customer? Who was he, I say? (*Points the gun at him.*)

NEDOU: Why don't you ask his friends?

(*BS turns to find TEL friends gone as well.*)

BS: Let us go after them. The spy must not get away (*to the orchestra*). Keep playing the *inqilabi* song.

(*BS and comrades run out. Orchestra keeps playing the revolutionary song. NEDOU signals them to stop.*)

NEDOU: (*To other dinner guests*) I sincerely apologize for this disruption. These are difficult times, as you know. Please carry on dancing.

(*Orchestra resumes the waltz. NEDOU looks in the kitchen. AKBAR is looking dazed. MIRJAAN is silently crying.*)

NEDOU: Relax, my dear, they have gone.

AKBAR: (*Whispering, signalling towards the kitchen*) But he is still here.

NEDOU: Who? (*Peeps in the kitchen and looks at the Chef)* Who are you? Where is Younas?

(*TEL opens the closet. YOUNAS comes out. NEDOU removes his gag.*)

YOUNAS: I am sorry sir. I was taken by surprise.

NEDOU: (*Looks at TEL closely. Exclaims in astonishment.*) You… you are Lawrence!

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AKBAR: (*Shocked*) Law… rence. *The* Lawrence? (*She pretends to swoon in TEL's arms.*)

NEDOU: Stay away from my daughter, Lawrence.

TEL: Shaw. Airman Shaw, sir. How do you do? I beg your leave. May I jump out of your window, if you don't mind, sir….

(*AKBAR straightens herself and grins coquettishly at him.*)

TEL: The omelette was delicious, Miss Akbar Jehan. And a very happy birthday to you!

(*TEL jumps out of the window. MIRJAAN stares at AKBAR.*)

AKBAR: (*Grinning slyly*) I love that spy.

End of scene.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

A few days later, Nedou's Hotel, AKBAR JEHAN is in her bedroom. The clock strikes midnight. The Arab brothers, ALI and ZAIN, are hiding in the closet; TEL enters through the bedroom window in safari fatigues. AKBAR JEHAN is pacing nervously.

ALI: (*Speaking from inside closet*) Is he here?

AKBAR: Not yet (*resumes pacing*).

ZAIN: (*From closet*) Is he here now?

(TEL's face appears in the window.)

AKBAR: (*Startled*) Here he is (*goes to open window*).

TEL: (*Tipping his cap and clicking his heels*) Where are they?

AKBAR: In the closet of course.

TEL: I think it would be better if they came out.

AKBAR: Not yet; we cannot take any chances (*starts frisking him, slowly*).

TEL: (*He squirms*) You're taking an awfully long time, my dear…

AKBAR: (*Gives him a mischievous look, and calls out to the brothers*) He's clean. You can come out now!

ALI: Why did you want to see us, El Aurens?

ZAIN: Or should we call you Airman Shaw?

TEL: I have an urgent message for your uncle, Emir Feisal, King of Iraq.

ZAIN: Why? Haven't you hurt him enough?

TEL: His life is in danger; trust me.

ALI: You've already betrayed him and the Arab cause; why should he trust you now?

TEL: It was I who was betrayed at Versailles! And I am now determined to make amends. That's why I am here.

ZAIN: Oh really? So tell us, what is this urgent message for our uncle?

(*LAWRENCE looks around furtively; AKBAR gestures they are alone.*)

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AKBAR: No one can hear us.
TEL: The Emir is planning to meet Ghazi Amanullah in Bern…
ALI: Yes, yes, we know that…
TEL: But what you don't know is that there is a plot to assassinate them both.
ZAIN: What? By whom? Why now when all has been settled?
TEL: The era of the Triple Entente is over; there are new players in the oilfields.
AKBAR: But why Amanullah?
TEL: He stands in the way.
AKBAR: Of what?
TEL: Of containing the Soviet Union, of course.

(*They begin to understand, and look at each other in some alarm.*)

ALI: We think he may already have left Baghdad…
TEL: You have to stop him. You must!
AKBAR: What are you two waiting for?
TEL: *Imshi, imshi*…
ZAIN: Let's hurry, brother; we should dispatch a special messenger at once….

(*AKBAR opens window, looks out to make sure coast is clear; gestures to them. They quickly jump out. LAWRENCE and AKBAR JEHAN look at each other.*)

AKBAR: I hope they get across the message in time…
TEL: (*Removes his hat, sits down and smiles.*) I'm glad I was here in time.
AKBAR: In time to warn them…
TEL: In time to see you, my dear Miss Akbar…
AKBAR: (*Surprised*) Whatever do you mean?
TEL: I had heard Kashmiri women were beautiful, but I was misinformed.
AKBAR: Excuse me?
TEL: No wonder they call Kashmir paradise on earth. Where else would one find a boyish *houri* like you?
AKBAR: Yes, like boys, we *houris* can fight like tigers to defend our homeland! Want to try?

(*LAWRENCE smiles; grabs her fists, she resists, they both tumble onto the bed. Door suddenly bursts open; Enter MIRJAAN and NEDOU with some hotel guards; AKBAR tries to sit up, looking sheepish.*)

MIRJAAN: How could you let this man in to your bedroom? And through this window? What is he doing in your bed? (*Slaps AKBAR.*)
NEDOU: Listen, White Man, do you know our tradition? If a man is found in bed with a *Na meharam* woman, he has to marry her – or he is a dead man!
AKBAR: But Abba, it's not what you think…
MIRJAAN: *Khabardar*! You have no more right to speak! You and this man together have brought dishonour to our family name.

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NEDOU: Either marry my daughter, scoundrel, or prepare to die! You have five minutes to decide, understood?
(*Guards keeping their guns pointed at LAWRENCE, retreat with the parents. LAWRENCE and AKBAR JEHAN are left alone in the room.*)

End of scene.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

TEL: (*With a twinkle in his eyes)* So, my *houri* or should I say tiger – shall we die fighting or get married?

AKBAR: Do you find this a laughing matter? If we don't marry, they will surely kill us both. That is what they call honour killing…

TEL: Strange concept of honour; in my country our honour lies in battle, not the bed.

AKBAR: (*Looks at her watch*) We've got three more minutes.

TEL: So then we better hurry up. Akbar Jehan, will you accept my hand in marriage? (*Goes down on one knee.*)

AKBAR: I accept (*smiles*).

TEL: WHAT???

AKBAR: You thought it was a joke, I mean it.

TEL: But, but why? Why would you ever marry a British spy?

AKBAR: (*Turning serious*) Because we have a serious purpose in common.

TEL: (*Looks surprised*) Well, I understand we both want to save Feisal, but…

AKBAR: It's much more than that and you know it. We here need your government's support not only for the Arab cause but also for our own independence in India, Kashmir and Afghanistan. It is all interconnected, and our moment of liberation is here! You didn't think I had fallen only for your good looks? (*Smiles at Lawrence flirtatiously.*)

TEL: That's a rather tall order, young woman! Do we have to marry in order to achieve that goal?

AKBAR: Do we have a choice? (*Looks at her watch.*) 1 minute left.

TEL: It won't be a traditional marriage, you know.

AKBAR: (*Smiles*) Well, ok – but I do expect flowers, you know!

TEL: (*Looks around, picks out a rose from a nearby vase and presents it to her.)* To my Kashmiri Rose!
(*They lock eyes and smile. Door opens, guards and parents enter.*)

AKBAR: We are ready (*smiles at LAWRENCE*).

End of Act 1

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ACT 2, SCENE 1

Arab Hotel. Celebration of the marriage of AKBAR JEHAN and LAWRENCE; a belly dancer is dancing with a sword on her head; gifts are being presented to the couple, with AKBAR JEHAN in her usual masculine drag. All of a sudden, there is a commotion and a tall man covered in dust wearing a Pathan headdress and a mask jumps in the side window. Everyone scatters, collective gasps. ALI and ZAIN pounce on the man and remove his mask.

ALI: (*Forcing the man to sit on diwan holding dagger to his throat*) Who are you? Who sent you here?

ZAIN: Come on, out with it? What is this all about? Brother, shall I slit his throat?

TEL: Wait a minute; let's all calm down. (*Turns to his wife*) Put away your dagger, Akbar. Let's just find out what this man has to say.

EMISSARY: I have brought a message.

ALI: For whom?

ZAIN: From whom?

EMISSARY: Honoured sirs, the message comes from Hazrat Pir Karam Shah of the Hindukush.

AKBAR: From a Hindu?

EMISSARY: No, no! He is a respected Islamic leader of the great Islamic Jihad United movement against the infidel King Amanullah Khan.

ZAIN: How dare you call Amanullah an infidel; now I am really going to slit your throat (*pulls out his dagger*).

TEL: Hold your horses! (*Turns to the emissary*) What makes you call him an infidel?

EMISSARY: Because he has turned against his own people and also the people of Arab lands by making a secret treaty with the communist Soviet Union.

AKBAR: What nonsense! Amanullah is a great patriot and beloved of the people. He has always been on the side of the downtrodden and against the imperialism that has ensnared us all, Turks, Arabs, Indians…

EMISSARY: But sir, here is the proof (*LAWRENCE and AKBAR JEHAN exchange looks, grinning at the success of her ruse).* You see the seal of Amanullah on the one hand, and next to it is the seal of the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Kazakh Socialist Republic, Eltay Ernazarov.

TEL: (*Reaches over and grabs the paper; reads it out loud*) It says here there is a plan to eliminate and remove all Arab leaders of Iraq, Jordan, the Levant and Hejaz. And indeed, the seal looks authentic! You all recognize Amanullah's seal, and I can tell you this is a Soviet seal.

EMISSARY: And furthermore, there is a plan afoot to remove Amanullah which has the wide approval of all the tribal leaders signed in blood. Look! (*Everyone looks.*) And they have all taken the *baith* (oath) to be loyal to Pir Karam Shah.

(*Everyone looks aghast, loud moans, cries of 'What's going on here'.*)

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ZAIN: (*Yells out)* Who the hell is this Pir Karam Shah?
TEL: I wonder (*smiles slyly*).
(*CHAI BOY comes running, breathless.*)

CHAI BOY: Sirs! Police is here looking for the spies. Everyone, run!

End of scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Freemason Hall in Lahore. Lots of security is seen. LAWRENCE enters after the security check; looks around. Walks to a booth. Sits with back against SPY HANDLER, who is also British.

HANDLER: Did the show go well, Shaw?
TEL: Yes, pretty well, Monkey Paw.
HANDLER: Did they take the bait?
TEL: Yes, despite the wait.
HANDLER: So what will be the outcome?
TEL: Amanullah's emissaries will no longer be welcome.
HANDLER: So how's life with your Kashmiri Rose?
TEL: It's okay, I suppose.
HANDLER: I'm afraid it's coming to a close.
TEL: Oh, so its time already?
HANDLER: Yes, tonight. So be sure to stay steady.

End of scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

AKBAR JEHAN is pacing in her room, addressing both a thobe and an RAF uniform belonging to LAWRENCE, hanging on separate hangers on two ends of the stage. She addresses one, then the other, as if they were being worn by a flesh-and-blood character, trying to figure out LAWRENCE's true identity.

AKBAR: So who are you, *El Aurens?* Are you still in love with your Arab boys? Or is it the lure of the desert that you miss? Here I am, the rose of Kashmir, wilting away for lack of touch, a gendered script I reject, while your camels stand ready for another adventure in the sands. (*Turns to address uniform*) And you, Airman Shaw – you vanish in thin air, where is it that you go, we were supposed to be in this journey together, saving our lands and leaders from the enemies of our freedom. You said you would help me, help us, help our cause, but I cannot tell if those promises were real or just a mirage….
Who are you, where are you O *el Aurens*, Shaw, Prince of Nowhere?
LAWRENCE: (*Jumps in through the window and plucks a rose from the vase and presenting it to her as if nothing is amiss.)* A rose for my rose.
AKBAR: Stop, please. Tell me, where have you been these past 6 months? I thought we were partners but you tell me nothing any more. I can't stand it!

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LAWRENCE: Trust me, please, just a little while longer. I did not want to endanger you in this new mission.

AKBAR: You don't seem to get it, do you? I'm not just a spy's helpmeet, I'm also a full-bodied wo/man of flesh and blood, I have desires. I want you, Lawrence – or whoever you are right now. But I don't think you desire me, not even when I dress as a man. Is it me or is it women or women who want to be men you don't fancy? Why did I allow myself to think you had changed?

TEL: What nonsense you talk, my Kashmiri Rose. Look, I've brought you your favourite cherries.

AKBAR: Ah, I see, you've been in the North, haven't you?

TEL: I'm sorry darling, we will talk about all this next time, I must dash now.

AKBAR: Wait, where are you off to? When will I see you again? (*LAWRENCE jumps out the window.*)

TEL: I'll be back very soon my dear wifey!

End of scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

MIRJAAN, HARRY NEDOU and AKBAR JEHAN are in the restaurant kitchen making packets of supplies for Kashmiri resistance fighters in Jammu and Kashmir.

NEDOU: (*Counting cash*) Well done, Mirjaan; our Kashmiri brethren will appreciate this support from their Lahori sisters and brothers.

MIRJAAN: But Harry, I don't understand why we are sending dry food supplies to Kashmir, our land of milk and honey? What do they need dried dates and *gur* for?

AKBAR: *Ammijan,* these dry rations are for our underground resistance fighters.

MIRJAAN: Oh, I wasn't aware we had a guerrilla movement already underway in Kashmir.

AKBAR: No, *Ammijan*, it is a popular movement but because of widespread arrests going on, the leadership has to hide in safe houses. We need to make sure they get enough food supplies to keep them strong.

NEDOU: Yes, Mirjaan, Akbar is right. But this is all that you need to know. Our guest from Kashmir is about to come soon, don't pester him with your questions.

MIRJAAN: Oh, yes! Let me quickly remind our cook to check that my *wazwan* is ready for our special Kashmiri lunch. I want to make sure our esteemed guest sees that we Kashmiris of Lahore have kept up with our traditions!

(*She steps out; Harry turns to AKBAR.*)

NEDOU: Daughter, how are the arrangements for the evening fundraiser coming along? Did you manage to get the Kashmiri artists we wanted?

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AKBAR: Don't worry, *abbajan*, everything is ready, we will have a houseful of supporters for the cause and even a group of Kashmiri youth will join the cause as volunteers; our guest will be proud and happy to meet them.

MIRJAAN: (*Re-enters*) Akbar, I need your help in the kitchen (*both women exit*).

SERVANT: (*Enters) Mujahid i Kashmir*, Jinab Abdul Qadeer Khan has arrived.

NEDOU: Show him in. (*Goes to receive him at door*.)

(*Enter AQ KHAN. The men hug.)*

We are so pleased to welcome you, our dear friend and leader. Welcome to Hotel NEDOU's.

AQ KHAN: Thank you brother for your hospitality and support; as you are well aware, we need all the help we can get.

NEDOU: Yes, we have been hearing reports of the Dogra atrocities. How bad are things?

AQ KHAN: Things are quite difficult, and the Dogra attacks are becoming increasingly more ruthless. We have to ensure that the British don't back them and provide any kind of logistical or military support.

(*MIRJAAN and AJ enter, with sherbet and dry fruits on tray. They exchange salaams*.)

AQ KHAN: I understand congrats are in order.

MIRJAAN AND HARRY: (*In unison with some reluctance*) *Shukria*.

AQ KHAN: So will I have the honour of meeting this son-in-law of yours as well? Is he here?

MIRJAAN: (*With some bitterness*) He is hardly here.

NEDOU: Actually, he remains away a great deal on business.

AQ KHAN: What is his business, if I may ask? Does he support our cause?

(*Everyone looks at each other uncomfortably.*)

AQ KHAN: Well, never mind; maybe I'll meet him another time.

AKBAR: (*Changing the topic)* Well, let's show you all the goods we have managed to collect for your important cause, which is also ours. Free Kashmir!

Raises her fist and says: *Hum kiya chaahtey hein?*

(*Everyone answers: Azadi!*)

AQ KHAN: Well, that's just wonderful! Kashmir needs brave and passionate young people like you, Akbar *khatoon!*

MIRJAAN: Why don't you take some rest and freshen up, dear sir, before lunch; our servant will show you to your room.

SERVANT: (*Clicking his heels and coming to attention.*) It will be a great honour sir! We are with you heart and soul.

AQ KHAN: Thank you, thank you, and thank you sister; it was a challenging ride, playing hide and seek with the British soldiers on the lookout for me. I need rest indeed because from here I have another daunting journey up north to mobilize more support.

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NEDOU: Yes, do please take some rest. Then after lunch, we will be hosting the fundraiser that Akbar has worked very hard to organize.

AKBAR: I hope you will be pleased with our humble efforts, sir.

AQ KHAN: *Shukria*! I'm sure I will – now, I beg your leave.

(*AQ KHAN leaves. MIRJAAN, HARRY NEDOU and AJ all sit down in silence for a few minutes.*)

MIRJAAN: *Kamaal hai*! Our son-in-law is missing on such an important occasion. What are we supposed to tell our guests about his business trips? What are we to say to anyone about him and his business?

AKBAR: Writer? Trader? Adventurer?

MIRJAAN: Be serious. This cannot go on. You need your husband by your side. Our beautiful daughter has been married these past six months now, and where has this son-in-law been all this time? We have barely seen him. *Kiya ho raha hai beti?* What is going on? Are you two even married in the true sense of the word? (*Glances over at her husband in knowing way.*)

AKBAR: (*Unhappily*) *Ammiji!* Don't you think this is a private matter between Lawrence and me?

NEDOU: *Arrey*! Since when is a daughter's happiness a 'private affair'?

MIRJAAN: I agree. I don't understand it; why is your husband never around? What is going on? We also need our son-in-law around. Your father needs him to help with his business… this is not right at all. Something must be done about this situation.

AKBAR: I know, *Ammiji;* do you think I'm happy at my husband's disappearing act? He has important work to do, I realize that, but I thought we were both going to do it together… instead, he leaves for long periods without telling me where he is going or what he is doing and I… well, I just can't stand it anymore (*squares her shoulders; looks angry*).

NEDOU: *Buss*! That's enough, beta. We won't stand by while this man abuses us all with his disappearing act. Akbar, you must get him to return and we will have to have a serious talk.

MIRJAAN: I agree! As long as our daughter also is in agreement. We can't have her wasting her life waiting for a man who never comes… ask him to return home immediately.

AKBAR: (*Looking embarrassed and angry*) I don't know how to get in touch with him.

NEDOU: (*Smiles)* I have my ways.

End of scene.

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ACT 2, SCENE 5

Fundraising Gala a few hours later the same day, at NEDOU's Hotel. People sitting at tables, eating, drinking, chatting; waiters milling about.

SERVANT: (*Announces*) Presenting Kashmir Azadi Troupe!

(*Enter singers and dancers and musicians; they put on a song and dance show.*

A basket is passed around and people at tables put money bills, and women start taking off jewellery and placing it in the basket.)

SERVANT: Everyone rise to welcome *Mujahid i Kashmir* Jinnab Abdul Qadeer Khan.

(*Guests rise, clapping and raising the slogan:* 'Hum kiya chaatey hein? Azadi! Azadi'. *AQ KHAN enters smiling, thanking everyone, gesturing to them to sit down.*)

AQ KHAN: *Aziz Behenoan aur Bhaiyon,* Muslim sisters and brothers! I am so touched by your greeting and your generosity for our cause. The time has now come when we should not meet force by great force to put an end to the tyrannies and brutalities to which our Kashmiri brethren are being subjected, but we must oppose the rule of the Dogras by pressurizing the servants of the Raj to desist from supporting them in any way. That is your role here, to keep putting pressure on the British not to support Dogra rule, and to mobilize as much support for us as you can and which you have already done to such a great extent. We must rely on our own strength and wage a relentless war against oppression by our joint efforts; we in Kashmir have no machine guns. But we have plenty of stones and brickbats. *Hum kiya Chaahtey Hein: Azadi!*

(*Applause; people give him a standing ovation, chanting,* 'Azaadi Azaadi, Freedom!'.)

End of scene.

ACT 2, SCENE 6

Setting: NEDOU's house in Lahore, 1929.
LAWRENCE sitting in the drawing room with the Nedou's family around him. The atmosphere is tense. AKBAR in a saree, sitting with a determined expression. LAWRENCE is wearing Pathan clothes, a turban and a long beard.

NEDOU: You have no choice, Lawrence. (*LAWRENCE gestures*) Yes, yes, Shah, Shaw. (*He gestures again*), whoever you are. You have to sign the divorce papers.

TEL: I told you, I don't want to. I have already had my share of scandals.

MIRJAAN: But it has already become a scandal, at least in our family.

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TEL: I still love her, *Ammijan.*

MIRJAAN: Good lord, you have been married to my daughter for nearly a year and you have hardly touched her. Do you call it marriage? Do you call it love?

TEL: Say something, Akbar. Say you don't agree with this proposal. First, they forced me to marry you when they found me in your room that night, and now they are forcing me to divorce you. Don't you have any opinion on the matters relating to your marriage?

AKBAR: (*Angrily*) Marriage, what marriage? You disappeared even on our wedding night. I never knew my husband's true identity. Mrs Lawrence or Begum Shaw? Was I married to a sympathizer, or a spy? You would disappear for weeks and months and reappear in a new guise – like this ridiculous beard – along with some suspicious visitors from Waziristan or Kabul. And…

(*Suddenly the wrestler GAMA PEHLAWAN and others enter, wearing wrestling gowns and displaying medals and ornamental clothing. GAMA looks at LAWRENCE.*)

GAMA: (*To LAWRENCE*) Hey you. Do you know who I am?

TEL: Yes, I know you. You are Gama Pehlawan, All Indian Wrestling Champion.

GAMA: Champion of the World, *Rustam-i-Zaman*, in fact.

TEL: Are you here for a fight, Gama?

GAMA: Yes.

TEL: Here in Lahore?

GAMA: Yes, here… at Nedous.

TEL: Really, at Nedous? Where is your opponent?

GAMA: He is right in front of me. Come on, Lawrence *Pehlawan* of Arabia. You may have beaten many Turkish *pehlawans* by deceit and crookedness. But you can't trick a *Rustam-i-Zaman* Gama. Come, shake hands.

(*One of GAMA'S boys becomes a referee and makes LAWRENCE shake hands with GAMA and presents plate with earth to both. GAMA removes his gown, dips his hands in the earth and challenges LAWRENCE, who is flabbergasted. He looks at AKBAR, who smiles mischievously, and somewhat sadly.*)

TEL: What are you trying to do, Gama. This is no place for a match. And I have no reason to fight you.

GAMA: But I have. You have tricked my niece Akbar and have insulted the Nedou family. I have reason. Come, you coward. What kind of a man are you, Lawrence *Pehlawan* of Arabia or are you a Champion of the Eunuch *pehlawans*!

(*GAMA grapples with LAWRENCE and throws him on the ground. LAWRENCE is shocked and beaten to the ground.*)

GAMA: (*With his knee on LAWRENCE's neck in a gridlock*) Bring the divorce papers. (*Papers are given to GAMA.)* Now sign these, Eunuch. (*Asks AKBAR*) Bring the pen. (*To LAWRENCE*) Here, and here.

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(*She tells GAMA where LAWRENCE is supposed to sign. GAMA forces LAWRENCE to sign. And then let go of him. LAWRENCE is almost choked.*)

TEL: Is this the way to get divorce papers signed? And by the way, they need to be attested by a magistrate.

GAMA: If we can get your signatures, we can get theirs too. Okay, sister MIRJAAN? Let me know if you need my services again.

MIRJAAN: May God forbid, brother. (*To NEDOU*) Now you can tell son Abdullah to come with the *barat* from Kashmir after *iddat* period.

GAMA: Good bye. Boys, bring the ex-husband along.

(*GAMA'S boys lift LAWRENCE and carry him out. AKBAR starts to laugh hysterically. All are surprised.*)

AKBAR: I hate that spy!

End of Act 2

ACT 3, SCENE 1

In December 1928, LAWRENCE, dressed as a cleric named PIR KARAM SHAH, is addressing a local Jirga Council of Elders in Eastern Afghanistan, home of the Shinwari tribe. He is speaking to them with his back to the audience, who does not realize that PIR KARAM SHAH and LAWRENCE are one and the same till the end of the scene. Also present are BACHA SAQA, a local Afghan rebel leader and Abdul Qadeer (AQ) Khan.

LAWRENCE: *Bradraan I Millat I Afghaniya*! Respected Elders of the brave Shinwari tribe! This infidel king, Amanullah Khan, is not only a threat to Afghan traditions of *nang-e-namoos*, but he has sold our country to the godless Russians and apostate Turks! We have just yesterday captured these two *badbakht ilchis* of that dog Amanullah. They were carrying secret documents from him to the communist leader Joseph Stalin, inviting Russian troops to prop up his faltering rule. In return, he has given a solemn promise to support Russian plans to topple our Muslim Arab brothers in Hejaz, in Iraq, in Syria. But thanks to the *ghairatmand* Afghan mujahideen who are true Muslims, this traitor has been exposed. His days are numbered, my friends. Now it is for you brave Shinwari lions to lead the last push and bring down this *kaffir* regime and liberate Afghanistan, under the leadership of our valiant commander, Bacha Saqa! *Naara e takbir, Allah ho Akbar*!

(Slogans: '*Naara i Takbir: Allah Ho Akbar! Bacha Saqa Zindabad! Down with Amanullah!' Karam Shah turns to face the audience; we see now that it is Lawrence in the guise of Pir Karam Shah*).

(*BACHA SAQA, with MULLAH I LANG KHURD; plus ABDUL QADEER KHAN OF KASHMIR, appear.*)

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LAWRENCE: Welcome, Mullah I Lang Khurd, we admire your father's bravery in leading the Khost rebellion, which gave a crushing blow to Amanullah's regime; and of course, our future Emir Bacha Saqa is here with us to make sure that our plans succeed. And may I introduce to you all our brave friend of the Kashmiri independence movement, Abdul Qadeer Khan.

(*Everyone shakes hands – LAWRENCE signals to assistant, who brings a large map which he unfolds on the ground in front of the mooras; he also hands over a long stick to LAWRENCE.*)

LAWRENCE: Gentlemen, please note we are here in Jalalabad and Kabul is up on this side. Our *lashkar* will move through this corridor, past the Lataband pass in the mountains and after crossing the Karkacha hills, we will meet with our allies from the Yousafzai tribe and encircle Kabul city with our combined strength.

BACHA SAQA: Our allies inside Amanullah's army will be awaiting our signal to start the mutiny and open the Koh-e-Sher *darwaza* of Kabul's Bala Hissar fort in the south to let us in.

MULLAH I LANG KHURD: If the communists invade from Tajikistan to help Amanullah, how will we hold them off?

LAWRENCE: (*Pointing to map.)* We will blow up the bridge in the north at Pul-e-Charkhi, here, and the path of the communist forces will thus be blocked, don't worry.

BACHA SAQA: And the Turks? They already have military advisors lined up to assist Amanullah.

LAWRENCE: See, here, there is only one way for them to enter, which is via Iran's borders with us. But we have an agreement with the Shah of Iran that he will not let them through. And we have to ensure that the Khyber Pass remains under our control so that the British forces can support us as needed.

BACHA SAQA: *Vah*, Pir Karam Shah, you seem to have thought it all out clearly. I kiss your hand in allegiance.

LAWRENCE: But remember! The real force that will ensure our victory is the might of Islam and the hatred of the true Mujahids against the kaffir Amanullah regime and his infidel foreign backers. The flames of this Muslim fire must be continuously fanned.

MULLAH I LANG KHURD: We have already sent messages to all *dar ul alooms* and imams of mosques to accelerate the anti-secular Amanullah sermons.

LAWRENCE: Well done! Fi Amanullah!

BACHA SAQA: Amanullah? Did you say Amanullah? I think you mean better! May Allah be with you! (*Everyone laughs, they depart*).

LAWRENCE: (*Signals to assistant*) Bring in our visitor from Kashmir.

(*Enter QADEER KHAN.*)

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LAWRENCE: Apologies for making you wait; but as you know my services were engaged in the *Loya Jirga.*
Now tell me, why did you request this urgent meeting?

AQ KHAN: *Asalam o alekum Pir sahib*. I have come with an urgent appeal. Your Muslim brothers and sisters in the enslaved valley of Kashmir need your blessings. Your tours of our *dargahs* have inspired the masses in the past. Now with the launch of the new and decisive phase of our resistance movement for Kashmiri independence against Dogra rule, it will be most helpful to our cause if you return and visit all the major *dargahs* and mosques of the valley to advise the *mutawwalis* and *imams* to give us their full support.

LAWRENCE: Our mission in Afghanistan will soon reach a successful conclusion. I promise to return to the beautiful valley of Kashmir then. In the meantime, I hope you will put some effort to seek the help of the British Raj. You have many supporters already in Lahore, I believe? I heard that you were able to raise many funds during your recent visit there to the Nedou's Hotel.

AQ KHAN: Yes, indeed, the Nedou's family are all great supporters of our cause. I was most impressed by their daughter's dedication.

LAWRENCE: (*Smiling*) And did you also get to meet their new son-in-law?

AQ KHAN: Unfortunately no; I was told he was away on some business. But I certainly hope to see him during my next visit there.

LAWRENCE: *Inshallah*!

(*Handshakes*).

End of scene.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

In December 1929 at the Arab Hotel, people are enjoying themselves. ALI and ZAIN are sitting at a table smoking hookah and drinking Arabic coffee; a dancer is swaying sinuously to music in the background; occasional claps.

ZAIN: Why did she have to get married to that Sheikh Abdullah? And leave us and our struggle for Arab freedoms?

ALI: Don't be silly, brother. She belongs to the Kashmiris and she is fighting side by side with her husband, and focusing on the rights of Kashmiri women. And don't forget – all of our struggles are interconnected. She knows this; she is with us in our struggle.

ZAIN: You are right, brother; I just miss her so much; she was our third brother, wasn't she?

ALI: Indeed, indeed. But what about our cousin Brother Feisal? Have you heard that he is now accused of

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selling the Palestinians out to the British by agreeing to the Balfour Declaration?

ZAIN: They are wrong, brother Ali! Feisal has always been a pan-Arab nationalist. He always registered his reservations to this declaration, saying he only accepts Jewish immigration, but never a Jewish state.

ALI: Yes, but he must be in ever greater danger; the Zionists and their backers will never let him rest in peace.

ZAIN: Thankfully we have been able to foil two plots against our cousin's life, one with the help of Amanullah's emissaries, and the other because of Lawrence's intelligence. Although we still have not received news from Bern (*looking worried*).

ALI: That reminds me, where is our British double agent? We haven't seen him since he and Akbar gifted us this photo of him in full Arab regalia as a thank you gift; I wonder what guise he wears now? It seems he has had a hand in Amanullah's overthrow.

ZAIN: I always suspected he was hostile to our Indian communists!

ALI: Well now we have Comrade Bhagat Singh hiding in our basement; ha, we are never far from the communists, it seems!

ZAIN: And that chemistry student – what was his name? Khurshid something… er….

ALI: Anwar, I believe.

ZAIN: Oh yes! Why does this chemistry student keep on visiting Bhagat Singh? What can the two have in common?

(*BHAGAT SINGH enters.*)

ALI: Speak of the devil… there he is, I suppose even communists have to eat! (*The brothers grin at each other.*) *Marhaba* Comrade, how goes the revolution? We haven't heard about the activities of your Socialist Republican Party in some time now.

BHAGAT SINGH: Oh, don't worry, comrades! You will hear about it very soon enough, with a bang!

(*Loud bang; police officers run into the room with their batons, bayonets, rifles, accompanied by shrieks, yells, thuds. BHAGAT SINGH escapes through window.*)

HEAD OF POLICE: Where is that terrorist, Bhagat Singh?

ALI and ZAIN: (*In unison*) We don't know; he is not here.

HEAD OF POLICE: Don't tell lies; we have evidence that you have been hiding the killer of our Superintendent Saunders. I give you one last chance to turn him over. We have reason to believe not only have you helped this traitor but you are supporting and funding terrorists from Palestine, Kashmir and god knows where else.

(*Another policeman arrives, breathless; he is holding a box of explosives he has found in the basement.*)

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HEAD OF POLICE: Ah! Look at this! Explosives? So you have a bomb factory in the basement? Men, arrest these Arabs!

(*Policeman tries to arrest the brothers; Ali fights back and attacks the policeman with his dagger; HEAD OF POLICE tries to shoot him but ZAIN intervenes and is shot instead. ALI grabs a ceremonial sword hanging on the wall, and raising the slogan, Tahiya Al Huriya! Tahiyaal Falastine! Rushes with sword at the HEAD OF POLICE. All the policemen pounce on him, and kill him. As he falls, he reaches out to touch the framed photo of LAWRENCE on the wall, leaving bloodied hand print on LAWRENCE's portrait. Palestinian song by poet Ibrahim Tuqan, 'Mawtini' plays.*)

End of scene.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

World powers, represented by leaders of France, the United Kingdom and the United States, in the same conference room of Versailles where the prologue started. The three leaders are seated around a conference table and a wall map of the world is facing them with the Middle East and Asia highlighted. It is September 1933.

ADC of the British PM enters and whispers into the ear of the PM.

RAMSAY MCDONALD: (*To the others*) Gentleman, your attention please. I have just been informed that Feisal, King of Iraq is dead.

(*Map of Iraq lights up*.)

EDOUARD DALADIER: Long live the Balfour Declaration! Now Iraq and Syria are finally under the French Mandate. *Felicitations mes amis!*

FDR: The biggest enemy of the Zionists is no more; supporters of Israel will be relieved.

(*Map of Erez, Israel, lights up.*)

FDR: And Afghanistan is under Islamic rule! The Soviet plans have been thwarted with Amanullah's exile.

(*All three leaders bang the table, and shout, 'Hear! Hear!*'.)

MCDONALD: British Raj is now secure in India! Especially after the hanging of Bhagat Singh.

(*All three leaders bang the table, and shout, 'Hear! Hear!'*.)

MCDONALD: And Kashmir is at peace now with the execution of Abdul Qadeer Khan! Long live paradise on earth!

(*All three leaders bang the table, and shout, 'Hear! Hear!'*.)

DALADIER: We have learnt our lessons through the World War and despite suffering huge losses, so many killed, so many injured, but we are finally at peace! Civilization has won the day! Europe has won the day! *Vive la Paix!*

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FDR: Carpe Diem!
MCDONALD: Peace to the world!
DALADIER: Let's raise a toast *mes amis*; we have had our differences, but now we must enjoy the fruits of peace together. Join me in raising a glass to Fraternite!
EVERYONE: To Fraternite!
DALADIER: *A la Liberte*!
EVERYONE: To Liberty!
DALADIER: *A l'egalite*!
EVERYONE: To Equality!

(*Champagne bottles are uncorked by each of them. Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' plays loudly as they thump each other on the back and raise their glasses.*)

End of scene.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

In the Kashmir Valley, dargah of Hazrat Bal. Surrounded by barbed wire and Dogra soldiers with their backs to the shrine, holding their guns. Sufi chanting is in progress in full swing, and some devotees are doing dhamaal in their red phiran frocks. PIR KARAM SHAH can be seen to one side swaying his head; some devotees come up to him for blessings. He sprinkles rose water on them. Lots of Kashmiri rose petals being showered on him by the devotees. Sheikh Abdullah and his wife, AKBAR JEHAN, are standing apart to one side, observing the scene unfolding in front of them. One of the female devotees, noticing who has come into the shrine, walks up to them with a garland of roses and puts it around AKBAR JEHAN'S neck, while a male devotee tries to put another garland around Sheikh Abdullah's neck, who thanks him but refuses. Both the devotees take Abdullah and AKBAR JEHAN to meet with their pir/saint, PIR KARAM SHAH (PKS).

Devotees give rose petals to both husband and wife to shower on PKS. They are reluctant to do so but look on. Then, as the ritual showering of petals continues, PKS opens his eyes, and recognizing who is in front of him, is startled and stands up.

Gazing into AKBAR JEHAN's eyes, he offers her a rose from the flowers scattered around him.

AKBAR JEHAN: (*Leans over*) Thank you, Pir Karam Shah, or should I say….

(*Loud swirls of devotees engulf them and dance in ecstacy, shouting 'mera Shah tera Shah', Karam Shah, Karam Shah. PKS is separated from the couple, who stand on one side of the crowd, and he on the other. AKBAR starts caressing the rose petals in her hands, with a nostalgic look in her eyes; then she crushes the petals in her fist.*)

End of scene.

ACT 3, SCENE 5

The play ends with Pakistani-British historian TARIQ ALI being interviewed by a young student of history on the endless Great Game.

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TARIQ ALI: In response to your question, young woman, Afghanistan emerged in the middle of the 18th century as a tribal confederacy with a strong king at its head. Coveted by the Russian tsar and British viceroy alike, its impassable topography and its people's fighting spirit enabled it to avoid occupation by either colonial power.

STUDENT: But sir, what about the long-lasting effects of numerous 19th-century interventions in Afghanistan by colonial and imperial powers?

TARIQ ALI: Well, the Great Game of diplomacy and espionage between Russia and Britain led to the Durand Line – which was designed to make sure that Afghanistan could not be used to attack the British colonial empire in India – and the Brits succeeded in that mission – at least for a while.

STUDENT: What happened next?

TARIQ ALI: Then Second World War took place, unleashing unprecedented levels of destruction and suffering. It also led to the 1947 Partition of India. Indeed, many of the colonies of European empires were 'liberated' but never achieved real freedom. Those wounds are still festering today in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq… thanks to the new imperial power – the USA – that succeeded, or should I say, began to work in cahoots with, the former colonial empires.

The Great Game carries on….

STUDENT: But must we all play it, sir? What about free will?

TARIQ ALI: Well, that is a question for the philosophers; I'm just a historian….

End of Act 3

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Fawzia Afzal-Khan is professor and distinguished scholar (2009–10) at Montclair State University. She is a self-described 'scholar-activist', engaging her scholarship and performance work in the service of social justice. She is currently a visiting professor of gender and sexuality studies at Princeton University. She previously held a visiting professorship of the arts at NYU Abu Dhabi (2016–18) and has taught at higher education institutions in her native Pakistan. She is the author of several books, including her most recent, *Siren Song: Understanding Pakistan through Its Women Singers* (Oxford University Press, 2020). She is currently working on a monograph for Palgrave Macmillan, tentatively entitled *Muslim Drag: A Genealogy of Queer Performativities in Pakistan*. She is a contributing editor at *The Drama Review* (*TDR*) and maintains a blog at https://www.travelingfeminista.com.

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Shahid Nadeem is one of Pakistan's leading playwrights and director of Ajoka Theatre, Lahore. Holding a master's degree in psychology from the University of the Punjab, he began writing as a student and became a committed playwright during his political exile in London, contributing to Pakistan's dissident theatre movement. He has written over fifty original plays in Punjabi and Urdu, along with several adaptations of Brecht, and has worked with Pakistan Television in senior roles. He later served as international campaigns coordinator and Asia-Pacific communications officer for Amnesty International, and has been a fellow of the Getty Research Institute, International PEN (United States), and the National Endowment for Democracy. A member of the Theatre without Borders network, his plays have been widely performed and published in Pakistan and India, staged internationally in venues across London, Glasgow, Denmark, Washington DC, Oslo, San Francisco, Santa Monica, New York and Chapel Hill, and translated into English by Oxford University Press.

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