

**TRAUMA, IDENTITY, AND POST-9/11 GROWTH: CHANGEZ'S
JOURNEY FROM ASSIMILATION TO ALIENATION IN MOHSIN
HAMID'S THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST**

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the post-9/11 traumatic growth of Changez, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist". In the light of the close reading of the novel, this study explains how the sense of belongingness, identity of Changez, and change of his identity is directly due to the traumatic experience, but at the same time appears to be a growing sense of belongingness to his Pakistani identity. Placing the strong influence of the 9/11 on the identity of Changez and his response in the key of the changes in the relationships, values, and beliefs, this study offers a critical examination of the long-term role of traumatic events on individual identity and specifically addresses the problem of complexity of identity development in a globalized and culturally mixed world. In the analysis of the character of Changez, this thesis utilizes the psychoanalytical theory and various psychological defense mechanisms developed by Sigmund Freud, used by Changez to cope with different psychological pressures. The methodology used for this study is qualitative in nature. Lastly, this thesis deals with the traumatic growth of Changez after the events of September 11.

Keywords: *Defense Mechanisms, 9/11, Changez's identity, Trauma, Post Traumatic-Growth, Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is unfortunate that we reside in a world where media almost everyday report terrorist attacks. The terror attack on Twin Towers in New York City that took place on 11th of September, in the year 2001 is one of the major tragedies in recent times that still occupy a great place in the mind of literary writers. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack, numerous literary works have been published, predominantly focused on the victims or the terrorist from a Western perspective. However, Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers unique insights into the experiences of individuals affected by Islamic fundamentalism.

This study focuses on the protagonist Changez from Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* who is affected by the tragic event of 9/11. The story is completely written in the form of an extended dramatic monologue; in a first point of view, in which the main character Changez narrates and shares his experience about his time in America to an American tourist in a local café in Lahore, Pakistan. The researcher in this thesis examines the psychological pressures

and the identity issues that Changez experienced in the aftermath of 9/11 attack and identify the key factors that leaves Changez suspicious about his real identity. Identity development of Changez refers to the transformation of his attitude towards America. Initially in the novel if we look into his psyche, he used to be very much influenced by the American society. He was a lover of America, when he first arrived in America, he expresses his emotions as, “a dream come true”, for him (Hamid 8). He adopts the ways and norms of the American, he considers America, as his new home, but what happened to him in the middle of the novel or what psychological pressures does Changez face in the aftermath of 9/11 that not only changed his perspective about America but also compelled him to even quit his position in Underwood Samson and returned back to Pakistan. Later in the novel when Changez rises his voice against American hypocrisy they even labelled him as Anti-American, and that’s what this thesis aims either to explore the transformation journey of Changez from the core lover of America to becoming a threatening Activist to the American politics, and to examines the underlying issues and factors that leaves Changez confused about his identity and eventually compelled him to leave America. The analysis also reveals how living in America as “the other” could affect one’s identity, both consciously and unconsciously.

This novel follows the story of a Pakistani young man named Changez, who went to America on scholarship and confronts a range of complexities and identity crisis after the attack of 9/11 on Twins Tower. The other motive of this novel is to deal with the clash of civilizations; however, this novel can also be seen through post-colonial perspective since it highlights the fundamental issue, which is the clash of civilizations and identity crisis caused by the British colonization of different parts of the world. Because of the clash of civilizations these days, it’s a tremendous issue confronted by nearly each single individual among the nations of the colonized countries that they are not certain whether to decide to go which way, which path should they take, or whom should they follow. They are in the deep phase of ambivalence; having blended sentiments or conflicting thoughts about British powers. They are confused between whether to love or hate the colonizers, whether to adopt or reject the British culture. Their minds and psyche are poorly exploited by the British powers through imperialism and cultural hegemony and that’s the reason why they feel extremely separated in their mind and they are unaware and ignorant of their possess culture and traditions. Same is the case with the character Changez, the speaker and the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, who suffered twice, initially from colonization, eventually from the tragic event of the 9/11, 2001 in America. Changez is a 25-year-old young man who is graduated from Princeton University, one of the prestigious and top-notch universities of America with full-financially funded scholarship and eventually he went and worked in a rich company named Underwood Samson. Since Changez had spent some of his life time in America and during this time he had been through various critical situations especially, a tragic event of the nine-eleven 9/11, when two of the buildings of the World Trade Centre was tragically attacked causing thousands of casualties in America, left his psyche badly affected and drove him to struggle for his real identity and belongings. Throughout the novel Changez can be seen confused about his actions and identity because on one side he is a Pakistani and love its culture and traditions but on the other side he loves America and talks much about American society and its culture which leaves the readers also confused about the confusing behaviour of Changez. The novel continuously challenges classification of identity while simultaneously affirming them (Woltman 2). Identity here does

not refer to any nation rather it refers to the inner self, inner mind of Changez, which can be analyze and understand properly through psychoanalytical theory.

Research Objectives

- i) The primary focus of this thesis is to examine the psychological pressures Changez has confronted post 9/11 in America and its consequences on him as an individual.
- ii) To investigate, the underlying factors that contribute to change the protagonist Changez's ideology and his attitude towards America.
- 3) To explore the themes of otherness, ambivalence and mimicry and its role in shaping Changez's identity.

2. Research Questions

- 1) What psychological pressures does Changez face in the aftermath of 9/11 in America?
- 2) How do the experiences and the traumatic event of 9/11 affected Changez's identity and drive him from lover of America to an Anti-American?
- 3) How themes of otherness, ambivalence and mimicry are depicted in the novel and what role do they play in shaping Changez's identity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The identity formation that Changez, the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," experiences after the September 11 attacks is vastly different. This paper will examine how Changez's identity will change in accordance with the political climate following the 9/11 attacks, highlighting tensions that develop between his Pakistani heritage and his American aspirations. Initially, Changez defines himself as a proud Pakistani and a successful immigrant well entrenched in American society (Hamid 12). He is the cosmopolitan ideal, embracing Western values and trying to be successful as a working professional in a prestigious valuation company. But as Islamophobia and xenophobia intensify, the sense of belonging for Changez is disrupted.

There exist some researchers who have critiqued Mohsin Hamid's book "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" from different angles. Humaira (2010) discusses the problem of identity crises that immigrants do not retain their original identity when they migrate from their original nation and are not able to create a new identity in their adopted nation. She also discusses the way the identity of Muslims is created based on their religious interaction and Pakistani citizenship [1].

Khwaja (2007) talks of how the novel foregrounds the fear and threat perceived by Americans and Muslims and the fragile dynamics between the two communities [2]. Anderson (2009) provides a brief summary of the novel, with emphasis on the transformation of the protagonist after 9/11 and shared perceptions and prejudices common in a globalized world [3]. Shirin (2012) discusses "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and another post-colonial novel, "An American Brat", in relation to the ideas of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha. She describes how in both works, the two main characters face split identities and the tension between their inner and outer selves. This refers to how people present themselves in public or social settings [4].

3. METHODOLOGY

Creswell (1994) categorizes research methods into two distinct approaches: quantitative method, which is used to collect statistical and numerical data, where is qualitative method that focuses on gathering theoretical and non-numerical data to gain

insights into people's experiences, perspectives and behaviours. It involves collecting and examining text, images, and observation to understand phenomenon in a more-depth and nuanced way. This thesis follows the qualitative method with the analytical descriptive method. The Psychoanalytical theory of personality by Sigmund Freud and various psychological defense mechanisms has been used as a tool to analyze Changez's personality development.

The analysis has been done doing close reading of the novel, applying psychoanalytic concept to understand Changez's identity development. Identification of themes like othering, identity crisis, belonging and the impact of 9/11. The answers to the research questions have been given by analyzing novel.

The psychoanalysis refers to the process of investigating human personality and personality development of the human based on the psychological condition of the human psyche. It helps us to evaluate the personality of the person and to know more about someone's mentality. Preliminarily, it was frequently practiced in the medical field with psychological patients in order to treat them well, as well as to understand their behaviours, thoughts and emotions by inspecting their unconscious desires, conflicts and childhood memories.

In examining the character's psychological growth, the psychoanalytic theory offers a fantastic foundation. Our early relationships with others and the way we resolve internal conflicts, which are a component of our mental development, shape us as human beings, according to psychoanalytic thought. Freud, a neurologist from Austria, is credited with creating psychoanalysis. According to him, there is an illuminating part of our minds that is constantly at work influencing our thoughts, feelings, and actions. (Juma).

Sigmund Freud further categorized human mind into mainly three phases which consist of conscious, preconscious and unconscious mind. He further asserts that human mind possesses conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires and memories. According to Sigmund Freud, the conscious mind is well-aware of the present sensation, memories, thoughts and emotions. It exists as the tip of the iceberg. The bigger side of the iceberg always remains under the water and thus remains unseen. Similarly, under the conscious mind, a preconscious mind carries the oppressed memories that can be brought easily into the conscious mind at any time by just forcing the mind to think deeply. Through Freud's point of view, it can be acknowledged that these two parts are the smallest parts of the mind. The larger part is the unconscious of the mind. All the thoughts and emotions that we are unaware of them and are not easily available at our conscious level, such thoughts, memories and emotions associated with trauma and conflicts usually lies at the unconscious level of the mind.

4. DISCUSSION

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 mark the decisive turning point in Changez's life. What had once seemed a coherent trajectory of assimilation into American society begins to fragment under the weight of trauma, suspicion, and alienation. Mohsin Hamid presents Changez as a man forced to confront the fragility of the "American dream" when it collides with political upheaval and cultural prejudice. By a psychoanalytic lens, specifically the theorems of trauma, othering, and unhomeliness, one can delineate the psychic disintegration which drives Changez from his American ambitions and finally toward re-alignment to his Pakistani heritage.

As Berman observes, trauma serves as a primary force in deforming identity, typically causing people to question their standing in the world and reassess their objectives (Berman 1-2). For Changez, the trauma of 9/11 works in oppositional ways. When he first sees the attacks on TV while on a business trip in Manila, he is shocked to discover that he is smiling: "I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (Hamid 48). His momentary reaction of enjoyment disturbs him, since it announces unconscious resentment against the very country whose values he had adopted. This is a moment of psychic dislocation: the unconscious breaks through, revealing tensions that were masked under his act of assimilation. The psychoanalytical interpretation here is important. The enjoyment Changez experiences is not sadistic jubilation but instead a symptom of his conflictedness, the emergence of repressed inferiority feelings, resentment, and alienation. Freud connects such a moment with the "uncanny," the moment when the repressed or unconscious surfaces unexpectedly into awareness. For Changez, the assaults compel awareness of his conflicted allegiances. He is no longer simply a Princeton alumnus or corporate analyst; he is also Pakistani Muslim whose identity cannot be wholly absorbed into the American self.

Whereas if the trauma of 9/11 awakens repressed tensions, the experience of othering consolidates them into lived reality. As Olson notes, individuals are typically defined by visible difference, and these differences become intensified in times of crisis (Olson 10-11). Following the attacks of 9/11, Changez is subject to exactly this process of othering. Upon his return to the United States from Manila, he is arrested at the airport, strip-searched, and treated with distrust despite his fluency, educational background, and professional achievement (Hamid 50). His friends turn on him, not even waiting for him after his public humiliation at the interrogation. What was previously a secure identity as an assimilated immigrant is abruptly shattered, as he comes to understand that appearance trumps achievement in America's racialized order.

Hamid shows how othering destabilizes Changez's sense of self. Prior to 9/11, his Pakistani background had been a background fact about which nothing significant turned on him in the meritocratic existence of Underwood Samson. After 9/11, it becomes the only marker against which he is measured. He is glared at by strangers on airplanes, called names as a "fucking Arab," and subjected to surveillance and suspicion (Hamid 62). Psychoanalytically speaking, this is the intrusion of the "Other" into the self. Changez becomes estranged from himself, reading his identity through the aggressive stares of the people around him. His earlier imitation of American standards is no longer able to conceal his otherness.

But Hamid does not leave Changez hung up forever in alienation. The same forces that shatter his identity also trigger its reformation. Trauma is the site of sublimation: the humiliation and resentment he feels are redirected into political critique and intellectual action. Observing American soldiers invade Afghanistan, Changez finds himself aligned with the Afghan people more than with his American colleagues (Hamid 65). He is concerned about his family back in Pakistan during the India-Pakistan crisis and resentful of America's "stringent neutrality," which goes in favor of the stronger force (Hamid 91). Each one of these experiences converts his loyalty away from America and towards Pakistan. The turning point is in Venezuela, where Juan-Bautista reminisces about the janissaries. Changez sees that he,

too, has been working for an empire against his cultural family. It is this realization that solidifies his decision to quit Underwood Samson. In psychoanalytic terms, it is the moment of catharsis, conscious rejection of the demands of the superego placed by the host culture. By refusing to go on acting, Changez takes back his agency.

5. Conclusion

As the analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid shows, the main character of the novel, Changez, is facing an extreme psychic change due to the trauma of the September 11 attacks. First, Changez makes use of the defense processes of identification and mimicry to integrate into the American community and achieve the American Dream. Nevertheless, the 9/11 experience can be viewed as a turning point which revealed the weakness of his combined identity and initiated ambivalence and alienation. Using a psychoanalytic approach, this paper reveals that though Changez made active attempts to embrace the Western way of life, including mannerism and speech patterns, he was influenced by the concept of othering even prior to the attacks which preconditioned his identity crisis in the future. The 9/11 trauma served as a trigger of post-traumatic development, as it was necessary to change the pro-American worldview into reconsidering his Pakistani identity. This change is finally represented by the fact that he decides to grow a beard and quit his job in the corporate world at Underwood Samson to go back to Lahore. This study places the perspective of the marginalized by global politics in the forefront, making the construction of identity in the global world a delicate and continuing process prone to the influences of culture, politics and personal trauma.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of the research, some directions of future academic research can be proposed:

- **Comparative Post-Colonial Analysis:** Future research would build on this study by comparing the experience of Changez with other post-colonial protagonists of the 21st century literature to find out whether the clash of civilizations is still a popular theme in the current analysis of migrants.
- **Broadening of Psychoanalytic Frameworks:** Although the paper is based on the defense mechanisms, such as repression and denial, the future research can be utilized based on the Lacanian theory as well as the Jungian archetypes analysis to examine the so-called shadow-self that arises after 9/11.
- **The Gendering Effect:** A niche analysis may explore the nature of Erica as a mental allegory to the United States where her mental degradation is likened to the increasing disappointment of Changez to the American country.
- **Narrative Structure and Agency:** Scholars can adopt a formalist perspective to analyze the dramatic monologue form of the novel, in which the silence of the American listener gives Changez the power to take control of his narrative again.

Influence of Corporate Globalization: A deeper exploration of the Underwood Samson approach to valuation as an analogy of neo-imperialism would offer increased information about the compromise of global capitalism and personal identity.

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