

Interrogating Religious Fundamentalism and Islamophobia in Moshin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract

In *Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere*, Tabish Khair points out that there is a significant difference between war on terrorism and what is often assumed as the war on terror. The two are often mistakenly supposed to be equivalent which is rather an epistemological fallacy. In other words, Khair endeavours to put forth the difference between terrorist and terror. The fight against the two is not the same thing. Countering and annihilating the terrorist is in every way justifiable by various machineries of the State but in the words of Khair “to wage war on ‘terror’ is to reduce human in all of us”. The war on terror aims at annihilating the terror. The word terror is an adjective, hence a feeling or a perception, whether genuine or fictitious harbours in the mind of the ‘Self’ and thus the object or the source of terror becomes the ‘Other’ needs to be feared and thus must be annihilated. In the words of Khair, “the war on Terror has reconstructed and revived some colonial and pre-colonial notions of racial and religious otherness” (3).

Keywords : Postcolonialism, Otherness, Islamophobia, Fundamentalism

In *Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere*, Tabish Khair points out that there is a significant difference between war on terrorism and what is often assumed as the war on terror. The two are often mistakenly supposed to be equivalent which is rather an epistemological fallacy.

In other words, Khair endeavours to put forth the difference between terrorist and terror. The fight against the two is not the same thing. Countering and annihilating the terrorist is in every way justifiable by various machineries of the State but in the words of Khair “to wage war on ‘terror’ is to reduce human in all of us”. The war on terror aims at annihilating the terror. The word terror is an adjective, hence a feeling or a perception, whether genuine or fictitious harbours in the mind of the ‘Self’ and thus the object or the source of terror becomes the ‘Other’ needs to be feared and thus must be annihilated. In the words of Khair, “the war on Terror has reconstructed and revived some colonial and pre-colonial notions of racial and religious otherness” (3).

Thus, the war on terror seen in this light is to fall back upon the discourse of Self and Other where the other is always an entity which causes trauma, anxiety, terror and threatens to malign the purity of Self and thus the Other is either perceived as absolutely negative and thus a thing to be loaded or annihilated or the Other is something which can be remedied as endeavoured by Prospero in regards to Caliban in *The Tempest* into Self-same. So, denying the otherness of the other and treating it ambivalently as either negative emanating from the apparent difference and endeavouring to reduce the other into self due to essential sameness has been a core essential feature of European ethos which is reflected in conceptual form in western philosophy and practical terms in its political endeavours such as colonization. Thus, the motive and the root of war on terror can be traced back to the colonial discourse of Self and Other. Khair observes:

In colonial terms, these relations to Otherness defined the difference between the approaches of the civilizing or evangelizing gentleman, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ‘school’ that posited non-Europeans as basically unmitigated/lurking cannibals (waiting to jump out of the skin of European acculturation at any moment and gobble up Europeans) or introduced homilies such as “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” (4)

Many well-known writers like Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan and Martin Amis who have tried to deal with the theme of the war on terror especially after 9/11 incident have designated terror in a completely negative light as something evil or an illness to be cured. This leads to the othering of the terrorist. Like the colonial other he is perceived in the dichotomy of sameness and difference. He is either seen as brainwashed and perhaps need to be mainstreamed or as completely outcast and evil. Finding problems with the approach of war on terror is in no way defending or sympathizing with the terrorists. They must be dealt strictly as per the policies the States but to engage in the colonial paradox of self and other while dealing with terrorist and designating it as the war on terror is surely problematic with serious consequences. On one hand, the ‘othering’ of the terrorist theoretically makes impossible on the part of the establishment states to eradicate it as the other is considered in the postcolonial discourse as an invincible and necessary part of the Self and thus becomes inevitable for the self to assert its own identity and exclusiveness. On the other

hand, the discourse of the war on terror also needs an ‘other’ who is the object of terror from which the Self needs to be terrified of and this tendency may lead to the creation of imaginary terror objects or others. For instance, Islamic fundamentalism is considered a source and cause of terror for the West and also the world. So, this may lead to perceive every Muslim who can be identified as one either by their appearance or by their strict routine adherence to the principles and practices of their religion as an object of terror and hence a terrorist. So, Khair rightly points out that “both in literature and world, the battle against terrorism is not the same as a war on terror” (173). The concept of ‘War on Terror’, especially in the context of post 9/11 has been in many ways been the cause of religious ‘otherisation’ of Muslims which further leads to ‘Islamophobia’ and stereotyping of Muslims as potential fundamentalists or terrorists. For even the West to win over the battle of terrorism it needs to differentiate it from the war on terror. Instead of ‘othering’ and stigmatizing a specific community, it needs to come out of its entrenched notion of modernity which has been based on the dichotomous relationship of self and other, it needs to Levinas’ words enter onto an ‘ethical relation’ with the other where the other is perceived as a ‘possibility or a concern’ and not merely as something negative.

There are few texts which tried to differentiate between the notions of battle with terrorism and war on terror and tried to complexly understand the notion of terror and fundamentalism by not blatantly designating them as something evil. One of those texts is Moshin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Moshin Hamid is often categorized under the sub-genre of 9/11 fiction but the novel in many ways departs from the other novels of the same sub-genre in the way it forces the readers to think beyond the binary categorizations and also beyond the barriers of language. In doing this it challenges the very premise upon which entrenched version of modernity is based that is duality or contradiction. The genesis of such duality can be traced in oppositional relation of mind and body, which in the colonial discourse reshaped itself to the distinction between self and other and in this post-liberal age as it is claimed by the postmodernists that the age of grand narratives are over and celebration of the free play of meanings is emphasized beyond any fixity, even now the world is stuck in several dualities and stereotypes like either a Muslim can be good only when he is secular or if he is overtly religious then best he can be is a fundamentalist and if worst then a terrorist. This echoes the ill-famous statement of Theodore Roosevelt in context of native American Indians that “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn’t inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian” (quoted in Gossett 238)

Some of the prominent novels dealing with the theme of the war on terror, Islamic fundamentalism falling under 9/11 sub-genre are John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), Don De Lillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Alexie Sherman’s *Flight* (2007), Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*(2005), Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*(2006), Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*(2006), and Amis’s “The Last Days

of Muhammad Atta”(2006). Many of these novels tend to deal with the theme of the terror but fail to differentiate the fight against terror with a fight against terrorism. As per Robert Eaglestone, the last three works tend to designate terror as evil or a kind of illness. This tendency to where one fails to differentiate between terror, terrorism and terrorist is to fall in the trap of the colonial discourse of self and the other where the other either needs to be ostracized or rectified.

The paper seeks to explore how the novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Moshin Hamid while delving with the issue of ‘Islamophobia’ also interrogates the concept of fundamentalism. Further, the paper aims to highlight how the ‘war on terror’ ends up creating a neocolonial discourse of self and other, leading to the ‘otherisation’ of a particular religion. Again, the paper explores how the novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, far from being a reaction and overt criticism of Islamophobia is a novel which may seem a thriller to a naïve reader but complicates the concept of being an ‘other’ and its relation with ‘self’ by moving beyond the dichotomy and judgment of not only good and evil. It speaks in a language that challenges the readers to delve deep and excavate meanings from the gaps and silences ingrained in its narrative.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist deals with the story of Changez, a dynamic, enthusiastic and smart young Pakistani guy who after graduating from Princeton University, works for a prestigious top firm by the name of Underwood & Samson. He hails from Lahore in Pakistan and belongs to one of those elite families who over time and due to internal feuds are no more affluent like earlier times. The novel vividly portrays how Changez, earlier being ambitious, full of aspirations to rise high, thoroughly identified and cherished the American way of life ingrained with the spirit of professionalism and freedom, undergoes a huge transformation especially after the tragic incident of 9/11 which not only shatters his American dream but makes him acquainted with the hollowness of the same. The novel, on the one hand, exposes the hypocrisy of neo-liberal culture of America which is far from being bereft from discrimination and stereotyping is more ingrained in it and on the other hand and problematizes the notion of fundamentalism and in a way reveals the fallacy of associating the term commonly with religion. In other words, the novel tends to question whether fundamentalism is only an element ingrained in religion or to what extent the individual or societies, regarded to be secular and liberal are capable of promoting fundamentalism. How far stereotyping can lead to the demonization of the other? Again, how such propaganda is in itself a fundamentalist endeavour while it accuses the other of being the same? So, the novel is not a story of a person who is forced to become a fundamentalist due to adverse circumstances. Far from that the novel complicates the concept of fundamentalism and challenges the reader to critically delve not only on the notion of fundamentalism but also question who is the real fundamentalist in the novel and also whether all human beings at some level or another become or always within one’s self a fundamentalist at least in a reluctant manner. Tabish Khair points out in his *Reading Literature Today*, “Hamid’s use of ‘fundamentalism’ is not smeared with a broad brush, painted so liberally that it

cannot be used to understand, analyse or, for that matter, narrate”. (53)

The novel goes on to highlight how othering an individual or a community as fundamentalist based on stereotypes can lead the self to itself become a fundamentalist. Thus, the problem of fundamentalism owing to which the West stereotypes and stigmatizes the Muslim community leading to its otherisation, actually not only displays the fundamentalist side of the West itself but ultimately brings fundamentalism at the centre which the West intended to marginalize and overpower. So, in other words, the novel hints at the futility of the concept of the war on terror as it ultimately brings back terror at the centre.

The title of this novel is itself a kind of paradox in itself as generally being a fundamentalist is associated with aggressiveness where one forcefully and at times even vehemently asserts his or her identity as a fundamentalist but here use of the adjective 'reluctant' in the title indicates passiveness. In other words, it indicates that may be due to circumstances one chooses reluctantly to become a fundamentalist. It further means that fundamentalism does not occur naturally to that person and might be adopted passively as a kind of strategy to counter something some other hegemonic or fundamentalist idea.

The main character of the novel, Changez is a person who before the 9/11 incident cherishes every part of his stay in America, specifically in New York as he achieves tremendous success in his education and career along with name, fame and wealth. He acknowledges that such kind of growth and prosperity emanating out of a high degree of professionalism can be gained for a talented person like him only in America and could never have been possible to achieve back home in Pakistan. As the unnamed narrator in *Fighting Islamist Terror from Missionary Position*, Changez too is not a religious kind of person and being a Muslim is not an essential part of his identity as far as his personal choice is concerned. However, the subtle level of discriminations that he experiences while being in America before the 9/11 incident and the drastic changes that happen at the political level in America and the world post 9/11 incident deeply affect the psyche of the common Americans as a result of which Changez witnessed a sea of change in the attitude of people towards him followed by discriminations at the overt level. This also affects Changez deeply which leads him to become more conscious of his Muslim identity about which he was previously not much worried and unlike the unnamed narrator of *How to Fight Islamic Terror from Missionary Position*, Changez starts to assert his Muslim identity and begins to feel frustrated, suffocated and difficult to adjust in the so-called secular and liberal environment of America as he comes to terms with the hollowness inherent in the notion of the American dream. Unlike the unnamed narrator of *Fighting Islamist Terror from Missionary Position*, Changez is unable to bear and adjust himself amid islamophobia stereotypes, stigmas and the discriminations that he and his religious community had to endure after the 9/11 incident in America and decides to leave America and go to his home country, Pakistan and make the young lot aware of the biased policies of America against the Muslims in the name of countering terror.

So, the character of an unnamed narrator in *Fighting Islamist Terror from Missionary Position* and that of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both are Muslims who settle in the West away from their homelands, the former in Denmark and the latter in the USA and both feel at the beginning pretty comfortable in their respective multicultural milieu but as their life unfolds both get affected with the problem of Islamophobia, emanating from stereotyping of the Muslims as either fundamentalists or terrorists especially due the post 9/11 scenario. The difference lies in their reactions in regards to the Islamophobic attitudes of the people around them and in their endeavours to cope or adjust with the subtle and overt levels of discriminations and stereotypes that they and the other people of the Muslim community have to face and endure.

The unnamed narrator though cannot be categorised within any fixed framework as his stand is not so obvious and he himself a very thoughtful person and undergoes the process of internal reasoning throughout the novel, but still he is one who believes that religious identity of a person need not be overtly asserted in a secular and multicultural society like Denmark. He has such kind of opinion on the one hand because he is himself personally an atheist due to which religion is not an essential part of his identity and on the other hand due to a sense of insecurity which makes him conscious of not only his own Muslim identity but also views other Muslims around him like Karim with a tinge of suspicion as they keenly indulge themselves in religious activities and can also be publicly identified as Muslim due to their physical appearance. This sense of insecurity in the minds of people like the unnamed narrator is due to the blatant islamophobic attitude of the western media which in biased manner stereotypes mainly religious-minded Muslim as fundamentalist and a potential terrorist. So, the act of suspecting Karim as being a terrorist though in a way points out the narrator's stereotypical stance towards the religious-minded Muslim and also exposes the hollowness and hypocrisy ingrained in western secular ethos which claims itself to be liberal and multicultural but also this act of suspicion on the part of the narrator at a personal level is more due to his insecurity and fear of being equated and suspected as a fundamentalist due to his Muslim identity. This highlights that the narrator for being a hypocrite in a crude sense is conscious and always in alert with his own religious identity though personally, it is not a matter of much importance to him. So, people like him need to constantly undergo the trauma to prove their belief in secularism as being a religious-minded Muslim is often associated with fundamentalism. Thus, the 'war against terror' has been instrumental in augmenting trauma and terror in the life of common people irrespective of their religion either in a way being suspicious of others or being conscious and fearful of being stigmatized of one's own identity.

Though the cause of Changez's identity crisis in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is similar to the cause of the unnamed narrator's being alert and conscious of his Muslim identity which is the islamophobic and stereotypical attitude of the Western establishment, media and even its common citizens but the difference lies in the way it affects Changez and how he reacts to the same. Unlike the unnamed narrator, Changez is aggressive in the sense that he cannot

accept how the Muslims are being treated especially after the 9/11 incident. While on the one hand, the unnamed narrator even while increasing stereotypical portrayal of Muslims, is in favour of abiding by the multicultural ethos of the Denmark society even though it on many occasions both overtly and covertly disfavours a particular community but on the other hand, Changez, after he begins to face discriminations and witnesses, change in the attitude of the people and more anguished over the way innocent Muslims had to face discrimination and are being framed and harassed as potential suspects as per the new terror law, makes him realize of how he and many Muslims and other minorities like him was never considered to be an integral part of American culture and equality and liberty for them was only a facade. He perceives this feeling of reality as an injustice which makes him anguished from within and in a reactionary way begins to assert his Muslim identity though he hardly feels any internal connect with his religion. He begins to grow a beard even after being warned by many as it may cause unwanted trouble for him. He takes advantage of his privilege position as an employee of a big firm as he understands that he cannot be troubled like ordinary Muslims, so growing of beard on his part is a way to irk the Americans who have a stereotypical and biased attitude towards Muslims. So, his growing beard is an instance of an assertion of identity amid an identity crisis. So, by the grown beard, he presents himself before his American colleagues an image of Muslim which they stereotypically associate with fundamentalism. In other words, it is a common stereotypical assumption to designate all Muslims possessing beards as fundamentalists. Thus, Changez though reluctantly but deliberately chooses to become a fundamentalist to counter the fundamentalism of the West. This act on the part of Changez is an instance where an individual is forced to assert his religious identity as he feels being marginalized and stigmatized due to his being sidelined based on religion. This echoes the apprehension of Ashis Nandy that when religion is sidelined or relegated from the public domain, it tends to enter from the back door. Again, as during the process of colonization, secularism was adopted as an ideology of the State to diminish or end the role of religion in politics which emphasized also upon the privatization of religion which ultimately led to the institutionalization of religions in form of an ideology to challenge and counter the ideology of the State. So, Changez's assertion of his religious identity far from being his natural attribute or love for his religion is an ideological reaction to counter the hegemonic and stereotypical ideology of entrenched western modernity. So, stereotyping a particular religion in a so-called secular and liberal society provokes the members belonging to that religion to counter the stereotype with enhanced rigidity and fundamentalism which ultimately leads to bringing the worst out of both secularism and religion and diminishes the possible good values and essences present in both. Thus, Habermas has rightly observed in his "Notes on Post-secular Society" that how growing negligence of religion has led to the resurgence of religion, before designating this resurgence merely as an instance of fundamentalism but it must also be seen as a reaction to counter the fundamentalist attitude of the Nation-States in diminishing the space of religion though it no way means to underscore or justify the element of fundamentalism within a religion.

Changez, unable to cope and withstand the discrimination, no longer can relate himself with the American ethos as earlier he used to do with ease. Thus, his American dream gets shattered as he understands its inherent hollowness. The disillusionment and the crisis of identity faced by Changez are aptly observed in the following lines in the article “The Reluctant Fundamentalist sees a Flawed American Dream- Lead to an Identity Crisis” which states, “But post-9/11, the playing field changes, as does the ever-so-aptly named Changez himself. And as he watches his American Dream explode before his eyes, Changez finally confronts who he is and shifts his gaze homewards.” (Larushka n.pag)

The unnamed narrator while realizing his mistake of suspecting Karim, chooses to adjust as per the multicultural ethos of Demark but Changez decides to return to his homeland in Pakistan as he no longer wants to serve for a nation which stigmatizes the people belonging to his religion and not only uses the people like him only to fill their coffers but also takes advantage of a nation like Pakistan to fulfil its own political goals. Changez in a sense feels anguished that why he took so long to decide between leaving America and going back to his homeland. He says: “It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision” (156). In Pakistan, he takes up a job at a local university where one of his main endeavours lies in making the young students aware of the biased and discriminatory policies of America. Saeed Ur Rehman in his article, “Success of Understatement” points out, “Changez does not withdraw from his Western life because he has found religion as a zone of ultimate comfort but because he is not happy serving a civilization which does not respect his culture of origin and because the USA is a shallow country” (quoted in Kiran 37).

Changez in the novel suffers from an identity crisis as he is caught up in between two extremes. On the one hand, he at the beginning is fascinated by the American way of life especially with New York so much that he feels like a New Yorker. He even confesses that “moving to New York felt—so unexpectedly—like coming home” (32). While on the other hand later especially after the 9/11 incident he does not feel a sense of belongingness and also feels guilty of coming to terms with this feeling quite late. In other words, he views that he should have left much earlier. So, Changez, even before his ultimate realization to leave America, constantly struggles with his hybrid identity as he tries to adjust himself in the American culture while conferring to its ethos but always suffers from a lack and sense of non-belongingness. He expresses this sense of flux within his identity as one of the reasons for being unable to communicate with Erika, his beloved as he did not understand where he exactly belonged. He expresses this conflict within as he says, “It occurred to me that my attempts to communicate with her might have failed in part because I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequence; I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither—and for this reason, when she reached out to me for help, I had nothing of substance to give her” (148).

Changez's earlier sense of appeal and fascination for American culture are the elements of his American Dream. Being a top student at the Princeton University and later being recognised as one of the best employees of the firm in which he worked, he started believing that he can fulfil all his dreams in this land of immense opportunities where real talent always gets its due. Due to his hard work and talent, he is appreciated by his colleagues and seniors. Changez relishes this feeling as he admits: "I was aware of an advantage conferred upon me by my foreignness, and I tried to utilize it as much as I could" (42). At this stage, Changez understands that his respect and high position is no doubt owing to his hard work and talent but still is aware that in the eyes of Americans he is not perceived as being alike but rather as an "exotic acquaintance" (2). It is the exotic otherness of Changez in his appearance and capability to surpass the Americans professionally is an aspect for which he becomes for the Americans not only exotic but also an enigma, something which augments desire due to unconventional attraction but cannot be completely accepted, assimilated or identified as same. This psychological state of sameness and difference where the other is perceived becomes an object to be desired and loathed simultaneously is typical to the ambivalent psyche of the colonizers. Moreover, the exotic interest towards Changez on the part of Americans in a way represents how artefacts, literature and indigenous knowledge systems ingrained in the religions and cultural conventions of the orient appealed to the colonizers. Changez though being aware of this ambivalent attitude of the Americans tries his best to fit into the scheme of things and also in a way enjoys his own hybrid state by mimicking the American lifestyle to the best of his ability. Moreover, Changez's fascination towards the materialist and flamboyant sides of American life is evident when he admits that "I was, in four and half years, never an American; I was *immediately* a New Yorker" (33). This fascination for New York City, in particular, is due to its high-speed lifestyle full of freedom and material; comfort which he lacked back home in Lahore owing to due to the poor financial condition of his family which was once elite and also due to the politically unstable plight of his country, Pakistan.

Jim who is Changez's boss at Underwood & Samson understands the ambivalent feeling of Changez. He says: "You know where that comes from?... It comes from feeling out of place" (23). Again it is Changez's colleague Wainwright who is close and emphatic to him warns Changez from letting himself lose too much in the glitter of life in New York. He says to Changez: "Beware of the dark side, young Skywalker" (21). He being a sensitive American and empathetic towards Changes tries to make him aware of the flip side of the glitter, charm and freedom claimed as essential embodiments of the American ethos.

One of the reasons that led to Changez's disillusionment apart from discrimination and other stereotypical perceptions of the people was the failure of his love relationship with Erica. American dream for Changez was not only associated with the achievement of his professional success and identify himself as a New Yorker and leading a flamboyant life full of material gains but his hope to win the love of Erica and live conjugally with her was also an integral

part of his American dream. Erica becomes the love and passion of his life. His endeavour to win over the love of Erica despite being aware of the fact that she has unable to forget her childhood love Chris who died due to cancer is a reflection of his will to fit in American culture and identify himself as a New Yorker though he is well aware that at best he would always be an exotic other for them. So, his love and passion for Erica and his desire to belong and adhere to the American way of life runs parallel to each other and hence inseparable parts of his American dream. Thus, Erica in a way represents America and Changez's relationship with Erica in many ways complements the relation of Changez with America. In both cases, the result is disillusionment and non-fulfilment for Changez. Changez for both Erica and America remains an exotic other who can be appreciated and even loved and treated with sympathy or respect but cannot be accepted or assimilated.

Erica and Changez for a brief period can fulfil each other's lack. On the one hand, Changez tries to fill the void of Erica's life, caused due to the demise of his boyfriend Chris whom she is unable to forget. This is evident when Changez asks Erica to imagine himself as Chris to free her from guilt while making love to her. The invisible presence of Chris always remains between Changez and Erica as she is unable to forget her boyfriend and thus the relationship between Changez and Erica is unable to flourish independently without the overwhelming presence of Chris which prevents Erica to love Changez exclusively. On the other hand, the presence of Erica and her company along with the professional success at the workplace and overall the flamboyant lifestyle of New York leads Changez to become oblivion of his Pakistani identity. The company and affection of Erica make Changez always feel like home. So, Erica was both family and home for Changez in America. The disillusionment of Changez heightens after the 9/11 incident not only due to the biases and discriminations of America but also due to bewilderment through which Erica undergoes as the 9/11 incident creates a deep impact in her mind. Changez reflects about the condition of Erica as he says, "The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. I did not know if the same was true of me" (82-3).

Her growing hysteria about Chris ultimately leads to her fall out with Changez and her probable death by committing suicide. So, with the loss of her beloved, Changez finds no good reason for him to prolong his stay in America. So, for Chris, Erica is not a mere representation of America but beyond that as her affection for Changez in whatever form was not a pretence or facade like the glittering life of New York.

While chasing his American dream, though Changez tries his best to fit in the American way of life but his upbringing back home and values at times came in conflict. He, previously ignored it did not mind much as he gathered his sense of belongingness from his passionate love for Erica and the glittering life of New York but slowly he began to come to terms with the subtle and even blatant sense of discrimination inherent in American society based on race and religion

which initiated his mental crisis and gradually began to suffocate him. Moreover, while adjusting to the American way of life, Changez feels a strong sense of inferiority complex due to his belonging to a nation which is criticized and often ridiculed owing to its several socio-economic and political problems. The inferiority complex was so high in him that he even felt ashamed to be identified with a nation which was struggling on several fronts due to its own political instability. While on his tour to the Philippines, he feels that how he is not treated in the same way as the White Americans as a result of which he tries hard to assert himself being an American to earn the same privilege and respect. He even goes to the extent to have a feeling of crisis due to his foreignness. The same kind of feeling of insult and being out of place haunts him when he visits Erica's father who takes a sadistic pleasure in bashing Pakistan for its problems. Changez feels deeply insulted and ashamed of belonging to a country which is so much looked down upon due to its political and financial instability. But this feeling of shame is accompanied by anguish and pain in the way his country and culture has deteriorated despite having a glorious past. Such a complex feeling reflects his love for his nation and culture. Changez asserts:

“This, I realized, was another world from Pakistan; supporting my feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known. . . . Often during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. They did more than trouble me; they made me resentful . . . for me to be ashamed. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed” (34).

This persistent sense of passive insult resulting in shame and the subtle level of discriminations that he had to endure even after stretching his limits to fit as per the ideal of the American ethos, gradually leads to his disillusionment with the American way of life along with a growing sense of anger and aggression. Thus bearing the brunt of insults and his feeling of shame, emanating out from his sense of inferiority complex, being part of a culture and a country looked down upon and considered inferior, leads him to realize that all these stereotypical endeavours on the part of the Americans are meant to assert their supremacy over other cultures which they do by denigrating the culture of others while trying to hide its hypocrisies. This realization makes Changez not merely reactionary or aggressive but he can restore a sense of belongingness and connect with this own country and culture.

Changez's disillusionment with his American dream and realization of its inherent hollowness gains impetus in his business trip to Manila in Chile. Hamid through the portrayal of the character of Changez not only wants to highlight the stereotypical and islamophobic vendetta of the American establishment but

also exposes the neo-imperialistic endeavours of the Capitalist economy. The hegemony of the free market Capitalist system is highlighted through the portrayal of big multinational giants like Underwood and Samson, whose sole focus nothing else but profit, a term which has been the core philosophy of Capitalist economy. The exclusive focus on profit being the prime feature of Capitalism is based upon creating the need as highlighted by Adorno and devaluing the human essence in treating human beings merely as consumers of the commodities. This attribute of industrial and neo-liberal Capitalism has been a core principle upon which the idea of Western modernity is based. Again, this exclusive focus on the phenomenon of profit on the part of neo-liberal Capitalism even at the cost of misery of the workers and other vulnerable classes is linked to the colonial act of privileging of the Self over other which is another core phenomenon of Western ethos, the roots of which can be traced back to Descartes' privileging of mind over body. Moreover, to carry on with its imperialistic mission of colonizing the other cultures, the West needed an ideology with which it could assert its supremacy over other cultures resulting in both economic and imperialistic gains. This need led to the rise of modern nation-State with secularism as its ideology which led to the marginalization of religion as an entity which has no role beyond the private domain. Thus, the core principles and values of colonialism, secularism as a State ideology and neo-liberal capitalism with its exclusive focus on profit accompanied with the exploitation and marginalization of the others is the result emanating from the choice to focus on the instrumental form of rationality while neglecting its communicative which has been an exclusive feature of Western modernity.

Thus in the novel, Hamid reveals how fundamentalism is a feature not restricted to religion. Fundamentalism is an attribute which is ingrained in the exploitation and marginalization of others which Hamid highlights in the novel is ingrained in the policies of both American establishment and multi-national firms like Underwood & Samson. 'Focus on the fundamentals' as the core slogan of the Underwood & Samson 'is itself endowed with ironic connotations. This exclusive focus on the basic of the finances which cannot be compromised at any cost even if needs to the random firing of employees while disregarding their welfare is nothing else but a blatant fundamentalist attribute. Changez recalls in his own words this principle of 'focus on the fundamentals' as he utters, "*Focus on the fundamentals*. This was Underwood Samson's guiding principle, drilled into us since our first day at work. It mandated single-minded attention to financial detail" (98). So, there is hardly any idealistic difference between American State and the big Capitalist giants like Underwood & Samson who are both fundamentalists in their approaches to fulfil financial and imperialistic gains.

It is while during his stay in Manila that Changez began to seriously feel disillusioned with the hollowness of the American way of life. Belonging to a culture where elders are treated with respect, where modernity is not in leading a secluded bohemian self-centric life, where there does not exist strict binaries between professional and personal, where objectivity and subjectivity get overlapped in each other and most significantly emotion and reason are

inseparable from each other, Changez finds certain things in American ethos which are in sharp contrast with the values in which he has grown up. The so-called professional norms which discourage any form of subjective association and demand to maintain objective neutrality is reflected in the manner in which the aged workers are treated with command and disrespect by the American colleagues of Changez in Manila. Changez is not able to relate with such objective professionalism as in his culture elders are always treated with diligence and respect even in the professional setups. Changez recollects by saying: “If English had a respectful form of the word you—as we do in Urdu—I would have used it to address them without the slightest hesitation” (98).

Moreover, it is his meeting with Juan Bautista that opens the blinkers of Changez and transcends his state of disillusionment and identity crisis into an assertion of his identity. Juan Bautista is in charge of the publishing company where the team of Underwood and Samson pays their visit. Bautista was soon able to figure out the psychological distress of Changez. While conversing with Changez he informs him about Janissaries who was a section of fearless warriors of Ottoman Empire. These Janissaries were Christian born children who were abducted during expeditions and were trained to be turned into fearless soldiers who were used later to fight and carnage their people of Christian origin. This allusion opened the eyes of Changez and cleared all his doubts and identity struggles emanating out of conflicts between two cultural extremes and he realized his plight similar to that of Janissaries as he is working for the financial advancement of a nation which has been responsible for portraying the stereotypical image of Muslims being potential fundamentalists or terrorists. Moreover, he feels bewildered with himself as he further realizes that how can he serve a nation which has been responsible for the mayhem in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Again, it is the entrenched diplomatic ties with America which have been responsible to a large extent for the political instability of Pakistan.

His sense of resentment and disillusion with America gains tremendous impetus in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. After hearing the news of demolition of twin towers, the immediate and spontaneous reaction of Changez was in form of a gruesome smile. He confesses: “And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (72). He makes clear that the reason for his smile after such horrific incident is not in any way being a supporter of such heartrending violence and it was not that he was non-empathetic to the loss of innocent lives but he was in a way satisfied with the symbolical overtones of this incident as it symbolically revealed that audacity and hegemony of American establishment are not infallible even though the gruesome act in itself cannot be justified. He says, “I was not at war with America. . . . I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?” (73).

Such a kind of complex feeling hidden within the smile of Changez was emanating from a sense of justice in the form of retribution that is hurled on America for the sins it has committed by waging wars and intruding in the

internal matters of other nations for its own imperialistic and economic gains, resulting in the destruction of their culture and economy and killing of millions of innocent people. Thus, though the act of 9/11 incident is an instance of the most gruesome form of terror for Changez, this act of terror is a reaction to the persistent acts of terror and injustices committed by America over the years as it has been instrumental in intruding in the internal matter of the countries and forcing them to abide by its policies. Thus, America has been instrumental in creating its own Frankenstein. So, the war on terror has been a justification on the part of America to veil its acts of terror. Changez tells to his American counterpart that, “Your country’s constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role” (156)

After the 9/11 incident, the hollowness and futility of liberal and democratic ethics of America were blatantly exposed. Sending troops to Afghanistan in the name of fighting terror not only led to the killing of thousands of innocent Afghani civilians but one of the main motives behind this as per many analysts and scholars was extracting of resources and to strategically control the South Asian region. Moreover, racial discrimination, stereotyping of Muslims as fundamentalists or terrorists and arresting and detaining of any Muslim based on mere casual suspicion became hysterically absolutely common in America in the aftermath of 9/11 incident. Changez’ Muslim identity and his beard was the cause of his brief detention and interrogation by the officials at the airport while on his return from the trip of Manila. Again, due to his high position he in Underwood & Samson, his plight was better than other common Muslims but none the less he still has to face abuse and insults in the public area from unknown people and within the space of Underwood & Samson he became the object of whisper and gossips and he could feel how his colleagues were avoiding him. So, due to blatant discrimination, mental anxiety and insults that Changez and the entire Muslim community had to endure especially after the 9/11 incident were simply intolerable on the part of Changez ending his strong infatuation with the American dream and thus he finally decides to glance homewards and go back to his roots to escape from a discriminatory environment which he once cherished and was proud to be part of.

On his arrival to Pakistan, Changez was struck and disheartened by the ravishing and poor plight of his country. The condition in Pakistan was in complete contrast to that in America where material comfort was one of the top priorities with which became also ingrained in his habit. A country like Pakistan which struggled hard economically to make ends meet, lavish material comfort for its ordinary folks was a distant dream. Changez says:

I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls. The electricity had gone that afternoon, giving the place a gloomy air, but even in the dim light of the hissing gas heaters our furniture appeared dated and in urgent need of reupholstery and repair. I was

saddened to find it in such a state—no, more than saddened, I was shamed. *This* was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness (124).

This feeling of shame and inferiority on Changez's part was more a kind of lamentation for the poor plight of his nation and its people. Changez realizes that he has been throughout same as the Jannisaries as he has been till now serving those who have been to a huge extent responsible for the sorrow plight of his people and country. The blatant discrimination and abuse which he had to endure in America along with anguish he feels for the mistreatment faced by the people of his own culture and religion leads him to become reject of the American way of life and contrarily creates a deep sense of bonding and belongingness with his own native country. He perceives that his stay in America has been futile and he repents that it has taken so long for him to realize this. He says: "It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision" (157).

Thus, Changez finally leaves his job at Underwood & Samson and joins a University at Lahore as a Professor where he tries to make the young students understand the futility and dangers how Pakistan needs to disassociate itself with the policies and grants of America and endeavour to stand on its own feet by strengthening its cultural roots and indigenous economy. America's endeavour to involve Pakistan in the war of terror against Afghanistan in exchange of financial grants is a ploy on the part of America to fulfil its own imperialistic goals. Thus, adhering to American policies would never lead to Pakistan's stability and in no way would ensure peace in South Asia.

Thus, leaving America and the job at Underwood & Samson by Changez is in Tabish Kahir's words is "a movement away from these financial fundamentals and back to the recent history of powerlessness and resentment" (54).


The novel's uniqueness and departure from the other novels of the 9/11 sub-genre lie in the way it problematizes the relationship between the self and the other. The narrative structure of the novel is in the form of a dramatic monologue where Changez mostly speaks while his American counterpart is the silent listener. Hamid here reverses the context by giving voice to the other whose inability to assert itself and speak has been highlighted in both colonial and postcolonial discourse. Here, till the end of the novel, it is unclear whether they are in casual conversation where Changez like the Coleridge's ancient mariner (Khair) tells his story hoping that the listener at the end would be enlightened with a realization he wants to convey or whether underneath this casual conversation they are waiting for the appropriate moment to slay the other and thus fulfil one's mission. This apparent suspense is not for mere thrill and he inconclusive ending is loaded with meanings which are left for the readers to explore as this endeavour would require to shred one's possible prejudice and explore possible interpretations beyond the binary of good and bad attached with the conventional discourse of self and the other.

The novel further highlights that how the relationship between the self and the other is full of complexity and ambivalence as both Changez and his American confidante converse like friends where Changez speaks his mind and can articulate his most complex feelings to a stranger while he patiently listens but at the same time it is clear that they are unable to trust each other. This ambivalent and complex relationship between self and other where there is both desire and mistrust, resulting in the denial of recognition and co-existence is the basic principle upon which Western modernity rests. Thus going beyond the limits of language (Khair), the novel blurs the space between self and the other in a way that it becomes impossible for the reader to discern between Changez and the American confidante who is the self and whom to designate as the other. Here, depending upon the point of view each can be self or the other or both. Thus, throughout the novel in Levinas' words, the other remains irreducible and an essential part of the self. Moreover, the novel complicates the plot by raising the question as to who is the real fundamentalist in the novel or whether all are fundamentalists in their way.

Again, the novel does neither merely only aim to highlight through the story of Changez the struggles faced by the Muslims in regards to their identity especially after the 9/11 incident to augment sympathy for the Muslim community nor does it endeavour to create sensationalism by presenting a tale of the clash of civilizations. Though it is obvious that the themes of struggles of Muslims due to their stereotypical portrayal and neo-imperialistic intent of the West do get reflected in the novel but the originality and uniqueness lie way in which Hamid presents these themes without getting entangled in the category of binaries or the common postcolonial endeavour of the essentialist assertion of cultural identity by creating the same colonial hierarchy of denigrating one culture at the cost of another. The novel echoes Habermas' theory of resurgence of religion in his essay "Notes on Post-secular Society". The novel explicitly reveals how the current worldwide resurgence in religion especially the fundamentalist side of it, especially after the 9/11 incident, is owing to the exclusionary principles inherent in western secularism and multiculturalism which is instrumental in augmenting racial, cultural and religious stereotypes and also validates violence and annihilation of even the innocents in the name of the war on terror. Thus the novel exposes how instrumental form of rationality has become the fundamental premise of western modernity which debars any space for communication and co-existence. Thus, in the novel, Changez's return to his homeland after realizing the hollowness of American dream and its materialistic soulless culture symbolically represents his quest to make his culture and land modern not by merely imitating the western models of progress and development but rather finding alternative paths to progress and modernity that is specific and appropriate to the local needs of a particular culture.

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