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**Lacanian Psychoanalytical Study Of Changez: The Protagonist Of The
Reluctant Fundamentalist**

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Abstract

Abstract:

This study seeks to offer a Lacanian psychoanalytical insights into Changez, the protagonist of novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. This study applies key concepts from Jacques Lacan's theoretical framework exploring Changez's psychological transformation through the lenses of the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order, highlighting his shifting sense of identity in response to cultural displacement and ideological clash. Initially linked with the Symbolic order of American capitalist success, Changez gradually witnesses alienation from it that leads to rupture that exposes the instability of his Self. The study further investigates the role of desire, the gaze, and the "Other" in shaping his subjective Self, particularly in the view of post-9/11 socio-political scenario. The paper, through close textual reading, argues that Changez's journey mirrors a struggle between conflicting identities and hidden desires, finally revealing the fragmented nature of the Self. The research highlights the relevance of Lacanian theory in understanding identity, power, and psychological conflict in current postcolonial literature.

Keywords: Lacanian Theory, Psychoanalysis, Identity Crisis, The Other, Desire, Symbolic Order, Postcolonial Identity, Psychological Conflict

1. Introduction

Changez, the central character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* behaves and acts predominantly to the dictates of his psyche. As the story moves forward, the psychological motives of character reveal what he really aims at and wants to materialize as his ultimate goal of life. The study of his psyche seeks to have a worthwhile understanding of the novel's protagonist. This paper aims to carry out Lacanian psychoanalysis of Changez to see as to how his internalization of certain factors make him behave, act, pursue and materialize his dreams and achieve his goals. It is intended to understand and judge the protagonist's approach to life, motivation for his action and fulfillment of dreams and desires, and their ultimate consequences to him—what he loses and gains.

The novel deals with Fundamentalism which is the hot issue of post 9/11 tragedy. The main character seems Fundamentalist as apparently suggested by the title itself. Thus, it is obviously understood that the issue of great interest and curiosity from the point of view of examining how the psyche of an apparent fundamentalist works, how he wishes the things to be, and what motivates him to behave as he thinks, does and endures. Considering the nature of issue, its effects and implications at global level it would definitely be worthwhile and publicly important to come with certain findings and understanding of inner working of the mind of such character through the specified psychoanalysis from the perspective of selected novel. Simply, this study aims to get considerable understanding and insight into various psychological aspects of this character by its psychoanalysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Reluctant Fundamentalist has attracted vast readership novel internationally. The

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novel touches the theme of Fundamentalism which afflicted the globe with its destructive and devastating effects reviving crusade-like terrible clash of civilizations. The alarming phenomenon of extremism and terrorism are labelled to be the outcome of fundamentalism. The insecurity, devastation and havoc wrecked internationally by extremism and terrorism were its products. Hence, the fundamentalist attitude and approach became the matter of serious debate, discussion and the matter of in-depth exploration in academia and literary world of the time. Authors around the globe came up with their writings, scholars with their research, politicians with their strategies and lawmakers with their legal provisions to address the issue of fundamentalism which, either directly or indirectly, paved the way for extremism and terrorism. In order to get understanding of this phenomenon and to deal with it well learned people in the field of social sciences contributed and are contributing to get deeper insights into them.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MOTH SMOKE

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* attracted a great of attention. Mohsin Hamid is one of Pakistani origin. His main character, Changez belongs to Lahore, Pakistan a country, Fundamentalist, next door neighbor of Afghanistan and had rather still have grains of fundamentalism inside, instantly drew the attention of almost every listener. Hence, the novel has been widely read, reviewed, criticized, and critically analyzed around the globe.

A scholar, Dr. Muhammad Ayub Jajja, conducted research on *Reluctant Fundamentalist: A quest for Identity* (A research paper published in Journal of search Humanities) suggesting that People from developing countries imitate American Culture in order to be accepted there, but since they are treated inferior, they embrace fundamentalist views in the face the mighty America that has amused the status of neo-colonial power. The paper touches identity crisis of Changez in a foreign culture of glamour and wealth but with equal intensity of racial and cultural discrimination. Similar aspect has been touched in the paper *Identity at stake in Mohsin Hamid's Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Humaira Tariq; university of Punjab, suggesting Identity Crisis as the core issue of the novel. A thesis *Identity Crisis as reflected in selected works: The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid and The Black Album by Hanif Kurieshi* again discusses the issue of identity crisis with respect to fundamentalists, extremist fanatic approach to affairs of life by the protagonists of the novels.

In Seminar (2011) on terrorism at Jutus Liebig University Giessen, Germany; Prof. Dr Greta Olson touches the identity and Identification in Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* as the essence of the novel. Helendra, a scholar presenting thesis in university, Islam Negeri, Jakarta has conducted research on *A Post-colonial Analysis of the main Chracter in the Novel: The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2002) by Mohsin Hamid*. This scholar has also touched the aspect of main character's *Hybrid Identity*.

The issue of Identity stands at the center of most of the research papers and thesis discussed above and studied by me because of my limited access to the research studies on the novel and related topic of my studies. The protagonist's Crisis, core issue, major concern etc rest mainly with identity syndrome as contained in the text or brought out by the research into it.

However, this paper is intended to deal with Lacan's psychoanalysis of the

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protagonist's behavior, vision and achievement of his goals as set by him. This psychoanalysis intended here is will offer insights into character as whole. The main character of the novel, Changez, who is the narrator of the story himself greatly reveals his inner thoughts and motives through his own description and dialogues with the stranger whom he assumes to an American "on mission" in Pakistan. Changez believes the stranger to be a law enforcing agent who comes over there with certain target. Despite the fact that stranger is uncanny, Changez narrates to him almost everything lying in his head and heart. The detailed description of Changez's experiences, whims, wishes, feelings, emotions, views and thoughts provides readers with abundant stuff to psychoanalyze his character to with due approach, depth, breadth and certainty. The exposition of Changez by himself and revelations about himself let the reader and researcher find much that may be of use to him/her for what s/he is looking for. Thus, the character's self-revelation through his own dialogues and descriptions has been fully availed for this psychoanalytical study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research in Literary works, generally follows descriptive designs. This paper also follows the same focusing on elaboration of the text references and literary illustrations.

3.2 Research Methods

The research in the paper has been conducted through close study and in-depth reading of the selected novel and related studies. This study has touched reviews, research papers, research thesis, and reliable internet material etc for the collection of material relevant to and required for the purpose of this study.

3.3 Analysis and Interpretation

The research is based on the analysis of the main character in the novel. This psychoanalysis is aimed at seeking interpretation of the novel's the protagonists inner realities and his actions which appeared in the course of the movement of the story, the analysis and interpretation are mainly grounded in evidence from text of the novel, their in-depth understanding, interpretation and analysis.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

4.1 Changez's Quest for the Restoration of former Family Status

The novel: *Reluctant Fundamentalist* probes into the deep recesses of the mind of its major characters, particularly its protagonist namely Changez, who is deeply caught in desires that lead him to unknown extremes. What afflicts him seriously is the loss of status that his family enjoyed formerly. In his words, "I did not grow up in poverty. But I did not grow up with a poor boy's sense of longing, in my case not for what we had had and lost" (Hamid p 7).

Changez is not poor but he is craving for what has been lost before. He runs after the lost power, glory, riches and status his family once enjoyed. Perhaps we

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currently lack wealth, power, or even sporting glory commensurate with our status (Hamid p 101). Such loss haunts his imagination and proves to be his Achilles heel. He cannot abandon it. Instead, he struggles to repair his loss, even though he has to cross proverbial seven-seas and reach America—the Land of opportunities—as they say.

From Lacanian Psychoanalytical approach, Changez is drawn to "Imaginary order" which is obviously the former status and glory of his family which gives him the sense of fullness, completeness and delight. Changez struggles to restore himself to the "Imaginary Order" of his family's lost grandeur, wealth, power and elite status. In the quest of the restoration to previous state, he uses his entire energy and intelligence and to certain extent feels himself to have achieved his target but it is for himself only, not for the entire family which leaves him desperate again. The partially satisfied longing does not bring enough satisfaction to his uneasy soul, so he keeps his struggles going on ahead.

4.2 Unstable Identity of Changez in American Culture of Diversity

Despite being one of the brightest, most diligent and promising youth, Changez fails to enjoy stable identity in American conflicting cultural diversity. Here again, Changez seems to be drawn to Lacanian "Imaginary Order" of his original culture to which belonged as a matter of fact. The conflicting values of American culture reminded him again and over again of his own culture deep-seated presence in his heart and mind. His own cultural values and norms are "Imaginary Order" for him, which lie in recesses of his head and heart but simultaneously he is attracted towards glamour of American life-style. Thus, he is torn in two halves and loses the stable identity which leads him to crisis in future life.

One may take it in the way that Changez after arriving in America and in the process of getting settled himself in the diverse culture moves from "Imaginary order" to "Symbolic Order" in terms of cultural values and stable identity over there.

In Lacanian Psychoanalytical approach, while in Symbolic Order, one quits Imaginary Order. Thus, in entering the Symbolic order, one enters the world of lack and loss. We have exited our Imaginary Order of the World in which he had the illusion of fulfillment and control (Lois Tyson P.30). The loss of stable identity is the result of his movement from his original culture to foreign culture of conflicting diversity. Changez tries hard to adjust himself in the new diversity of culture but he could not succeed to his desire. The event of 9/11 widens the cultural gap which brings out clashes of civilization. Naturally Changez faces hurting discrimination on racial and cultural grounds. Thus, his loss of stable identity surfaces prominently, which leads him back to love of Erica which keeps him pulling towards her. Thus, loss of stable identity pushes him to develop split personality leading to other crises in his future life.

4.3 Loss of Erica: An Irreparable Loss for Changez

From amorous and self-complacent point of view, Erica was "Imaginary Order" for Changez. Her feminine charm, her physical attraction, her sweet company, enviable station of life and friendly attachment to Changez delighted him beyond anything else. He felt himself being in paradise in the company of Erica. However, Erica had her own Imaginary Order to which she was irresistibly drawn, which detached her emotionally from Changez. She loved a dead person; her infatuation with deceased Chris was

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unbreakable and eternal.

Both physical charm and friendly attachment with Erica led Changez to fall in passionate love with her. He loved her immensely but failed to arouse the similar, or even a partially similar emotion of love in her.

Erica's Imaginary Order was Chris, which Changez could not replace despite display of his boundless love and care for her. The failure of Changez in getting similar emotional amorous and sexual response led him to his breakage with Imaginary Order which he had developed in the company of Erica. The breakage threw Changez in the Symbolic Order of loss of company, intimacy, and love of Erica. The illusion turned into disillusion as he found that Erica has lost her life for psychological imbalance by being eternally in love with a dead person. Changez, as well, lost his balance of emotional life on account of similar psychologically destructive behaviour. He refused to marry anyone, as Erica had done. Infatuation of being drawn to Imaginary Order proved fatal in both cases.

Changez continued to fall prey to psychological disorder such as regression: he resorted to extremist views and approach of life which resultantly led him to ultimate crisis and eventual doom.

4.4 Disillusionment of Faith in America as Dreamland

Changez had previously visualized America as a dreamland. He moved to America to see his dream of restoration of his family to their former status of wealth, power and glory come true. Despite, his outstanding success in academic career and job with Underwood Samson, Changez found all this illusion of outward glamour which blurred his eyes superficial but inwardly the matter was other way round. During early times, Changez was fascinated with American advancement and progress, as he says, this I realized, was another world from Pakistan; supporting any feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced species had ever known (Hamid p 38).

He enjoyed seeking education and doing job in America. However, after 9/11 things changed radically when he found the US and her citizens reacting with the madness showing terrible discrimination on racial, cultural and religious grounds. Such discrimination disillusioned Changez. He was categorically disillusioned with the idea of considering America as dreamland; land of opportunities and of dazzlingly bright prospectus. He had always thought of America a nation that looked forward, for the first time he was struck by its determination to look back (Hamid, p 131).

America and her citizens appeared Changez neo-colonial imperialism that exploited others, especially weaker ones, to thrive itself and maintain the status of sole superpower. She only promoted her vested-interests and served her selfish purposes. The US is not a torch-bearer of humanity, but it is self-serving nation and country, in fact, an imperialist state. I had always resented the manner in which America conducted in the world (Hamid, p 177).

Such state of affairs led Changez to embrace Fundamentalist views and act accordingly. Thus, he decided to withstand imperialistic motives of the America by refusing work for its nefarious designs and take up the cudgels against it by whatever possible means he had available with him. He says: "It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of discrimination, the only surprise was that I had recognized so much time to arrive my decision."

The Loss of faith in America as land of dreams to materialize, opportunities to

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thrive and lead ambitious life was smashed to pieces after know-how of its imperialistic motives and exploitation of the talent, mental and material resources of the poor nations. The loss turned a bright promising enlightened Changez into The Reluctant Fundamentalist.

4.5 Sense Otherness in Changez

Changez had adopted American lifestyle adopting it to be the culture where he imagined to be living if as he really belonged to that culture. He moved about in elite class clubs, attended the elite class parties and usually visited the places of posh areas where he used to find himself in the fitness of every social and culture situation. He enjoyed being the part of those cultural and social circles. At the time when was well-settled with his job and American colleagues, he seemed to truly belong the American culture and society.

However, until he did not pay heed to differences and variations, things were pleasant to him. Since he began to realize the differences of where actually belonged to, he found himself split into two halves. His personality was split. After the catastrophic event of 9/11, Changez came to know by the behavior of entire American society, that he was an alien on an alien land in alien culture. He developed an intense sense of otherness. He found himself unbalancing to American culture and society which left his personality shattered to pieces which remained uncollected till the end. It was basically the product of the sense otherness in American culture and society.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Changez, the protagonist of the novel, found himself in Imaginary Order or the state of fullness, completeness and delight in terms of his former family status and company of Erica but their loss led him to Symbolic Order which brought him into touch with deprivation and anguish. Besides, the disillusionment of Changez with America as land realization of dreams and achievement of prosperity led Changez to fundamentalism with its dire consequences. The study comes to conclusion that psychological impact on views, attitudes, behavior and life of Changez motivated him to act brilliantly at first, but regression led him to adopt fundamentalist views. Psychoanalysis of Changez reveals that a particular psyche internalized by the character determined both—bright and dark—the courses of his action and life.

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