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## **Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: Redefining Fundamentalism in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)**

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### **Abstract:**

This article is based on a study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a novel by a Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid. The novel is based on the story of transformation of an expat Pakistani living in New York from a true cosmopolitan to a nationalist. The article will explore the crisis of identity suffered by the protagonist in a new land where he reached as an immigrant student and worker. However, he experienced a resurgence of nationalist and patriotic sentiments within him as 9/ 11 happened in 2001. The force of American nationalism that was imperial in nature, resulting in the invasion of Afghanistan and Iran, triggered resentment in the protagonist who decided to leave America and went back to the country of his origin, Pakistan. During his stay in America, the protagonist redefined fundamentalism as an imperial tendency in the American system while rejecting the accusations hurled towards him of an Islamic fundamentalist. The article will explain that there is a loss of cosmopolitan virtue in the post 9/11 era and the dream of universal peace and harmony is shattered due to unbridled state ambitions to invade foreign territories. The article will conclude with the assertion that the loss of cosmopolitanism and reassertion of national identities give way to confrontation and intolerance destroying the prospects of peace and harmony in a globalized world.

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**Keywords:**

cosmopolitanism, 9/11, nationalism, imperialism and fundamentalism.

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The literature produced today needs a reliable framework to build a new relationship between the human subject and the modern theories and approaches to understand the human condition. In the modern times such a discourse is much needed as there is an ongoing conflict and crisis of harmony between individuals, nations and communities. In postcolonial literature there is a persistent attempt to overcome and replace the colonial experience by something more native and indigenous. These literatures often aim to frame the individual in relation to his community, its past glories and the possibilities of an imminent future.

The national vigour that stems out of a desire for native and indigenous forms of expression experiences an inherent contradiction. On one hand it aims to be progressive and innovative, on the other hand it opposes the notions of progress due to an anti imperialistic stance. Within the colonial discourse the othering of non European races was conspicuous and was sufficiently reflected in forms of expression and literature. In the postcolonial discourse, it is therefore important to rationalize the difference of race, culture and class otherwise it will breed the same oppression against which it reacted. There is a need for a reconciliation between individual and collective. The interpretation and reflection of human condition should aim to reconcile the oppositional gap between globalized enlightenment project and the regional specifications of nationalism. There should be a reconciliatory effort that should not homogenize the differences, instead it should create harmony between the diverse and heterogeneous forms of culture, identity and place.

In Pakistani English literature there is a conspicuous surge of the reconciliatory process where the gaps and divisions such as nationals and cosmopolitans, locals and expats, modern and traditional cultural forms are recurrently discussed. The litterateurs aim to transform positively the divisive reality. They attempt to achieve some coordination between the private existence and the global, institutional apparatus of world systems.

Pakistani literatures in English are important as they resist effectively any claims of self defining separatist nationalism as well as the imperial assertions of

colonialism. The collective objective of Pakistani writers in English is to reconcile the national and global. They recognize indigenous as well as the international trends. They capture in their writings the mobilizing energy that has a tendency to register the sense of collective belonging as well as recognition of the cultural difference and diversity within the national unity. It is not only a process of borrowing from and inspired by the British literary tradition; it is recuperation from the imperial wounds caused by linguistic imperialism.

In Pakistan, writers of English literature are often in a complex situation as Diaspora living in metropolitan centres such as New York and London and writing in English about their homelands. Nevertheless, despite their settled presence in European and American cultural centres Such as London and New York, they scrupulously express a fascinating awareness of their national belonging. One of these postcolonial writers is Mohsin Hamid (1971-) who articulates the experiences, the aspirations and the dreams of people suffering under competing trends of globalization and nationalism. These oppositional trends within which an individual exists can be framed as a continuation of imperial and neo-colonial practices and therefore need close analysis and consideration.

### **Displacement and Diaspora**

Mohsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* delineates a picture of subjective experience framed through the realm of imagination, perception, cultural hybridity and national fixation. The novel is set partly in New York and partly in Lahore. However, Hamid dexterously creates new scapes and new spaces in his narrative that characterize the global and local and are almost glocal in composition. The modernist and postcolonialist consciousness dominates his narrative strategy. Within the premises of nationalistic and localized thinking there is a surge of globalized world view that promotes homogeneity and synchronization of difference. Arif Dirlik emphasizes the need to 'rethink local' (463). The global world system is a focal point in the anthropological and cultural studies. As the national and local boundaries are blurred there is a new interconnection between political and economic conditions that are showing signs of increased interdependency. Simon Gikandi claims that globalization is one of the constitutive element in the studies of anthropology and culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 473). He explains the connection between globalization and postcolonialism as they both are concerned with explaining social and cultural conditions and aim to transcend the divisions of nationalism and Eurocentrism to open new vistas of understanding the cultural flows (ibid 473). Arjun Appadurai also mentions the emergence of media scapes and ideoscapes that aim towards a renewal of thought and ideology. This renewal is directly connected to hybridity, displacement and diaspora that are conditions of postcoloniality. Gikandi stresses the need for a combined role of globalization

and postcolonialism as it brings humanistic awareness to the otherwise economically restricted process of globalization. The competing forces of national identities and the transforming global identities create a crisis as well as a celebration point for current human condition (ibid 474). This crisis and celebration is conspicuous in narratives of identity crisis , cultural flows and immigration and hybridity.

In Mohsin Hamid's narrative, the retrospective shifts from Lahore to New York and from Manhattan to Valpariso, signify the cultural flow and the spatial shifts that are rampant in the globalized world. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is set in crowded streets of Lahore but it is interlocked through Changez's imagination with the hi-tech urban locales of New York. On one hand, Hamid presents an interconnected world of traditional Lahore that signify history, settled living and home of the protagonist. On the other hand, Changez explains his situation when he visits Erica's home in New York as "I felt a peculiar feeling. I felt at home, perhaps it was because I had recently lived such a transitory existence (Hamid 2007, 57). 'Transitory' signifies the immigrant life in New York. In this juxtaposition of home and transitory existence, Hamid brings into play the drama of immigrant identity and the localized national identity. The protagonist on one hand longs for home as "I missed my family and the comfort of a family residence, where generations stayed together, instead of apart in an atomized state of age segregation" (Hamid 2007, 58). On the other hand, there is a surge of celebration as an immigrant in him that makes him utter "when I first arrived (New York) I looked around me at the Gothic buildings and thought 'this is a dream come true" (Hamid 2007, 3).

Stuart Hall gives another perspective related to the cultural identity, despite all claims of globalized cultural flows and spatial shifts, the cultural identity remains interlocked to past. This identity remains grounded in a "difference" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 435). It is a difference between "what we really are" and as time elapsed "What we have become" (ibid). Hall insists that we cannot continue to speak about "one experience, one identity, without acknowledging its other side... cultural identity ... is a matter of becoming as well as of being" (ibid). The writers in exile or emigrants or expatriates are recurrently haunted by a sense of loss. A loss that triggers an urge to reclaim what is lost. In the process they recall the past, visit the lost homeland or cling to the souvenirs of past such as old photographs or old acquaintances and relatives. However, the process of reclaiming the past is not without uncertainties as explained by Salman Rushdie.

But if we do look back, we must do so in the knowledge — which gives rise to profound uncertainties — that our physical alienation. means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will create

fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 428).

These homelands conceived in the narratives are just pictures of mind not the real ones therefore they are imaginary in composition. The cultural identity and the sense of loss that ensues exile and displacement, have a traumatic undercurrent which writers aim to conceive in their write-ups about home and new spaces. It is imaginary as it is a part of imagination and remembrance of those who are displaced yet they cannot literally go back to those homes in reality. These imaginary spaces can be analyzed in Mohsin hamid's narrative where he suffers the identity crisis and a visible sense of loss that triggers new and imaginary spaces conceiving imaginary homelands (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 437).

The first part of the novel relates the process of transformation in Changez. From a Pakistani middle class house hold, Changez enters an elite educational setup in America. As a student he sported two distinct identities, one as a young prince who is generous and carefree and the other as a student who works on three on campus jobs and studies only at night. As he completes his education and appears before a recruitment manager Jim in Underwood Samson, he is labelled as 'hungry' by Jim (Hamid 2007, 10). Hamid recognizes the productive potential of American capitalist system. As there is a quick transformation of his 'hungry' status to a financially well to do status after he is offered a position at Samson Underwood. Changez exclaims about his transformed identity as "on that day I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee" (Hamid 2007, 38). The process of transformation does not stop with the financial achievement indeed it is only triggered by the renewed sense of achievement and a thirst for more. The overpowering sense of achievement in a new place with a new sense of being empowered is strongly countered by a recurrent sense of displacement from the native land and feelings of alienation in the new environment. Jim as a keen observer, again identifies a sense of displacement in Changez as he says "You are a watchful guy. You know where it comes from? ... It comes from feeling out of place" (Hamid 2007, 48). Migration and displacement are the ruling principles that modify the human communities, transform cultural relations and reshape the assumptions about distance and spaces. This change of places blurs the borders between nation states and fixed national identities. The process of migration and displacement gives rise to new cultural patterns and relationships on one hand and readjust the identities on the other hand. It is significant to analyse that how the human subject copes with these changing dynamics and reconfigures his sense of identity to avoid fragmentation and /break up in the global world.

### **Cosmopolitanism in New York**

Cosmopolitanism in modern age is associated with the special effects of globalization process, including the growth of multiple forms of citizenship, multiculturalism and cultural hybridity. While living in these transient global multicultural communities and interacting with a world of strangers, one requires not only tolerance and flexibility, but “irony and reflexivity”, which means the capacity for constant scrutiny and revision of one’s own perspectives (Turner 2002, 45). In the face of a globally transforming culture and complacent co existence, B. S. Turner argues, we need a greater sense of human sensitivity that is capable of generating a set of ‘cosmopolitan virtues’ which involve care for other cultures and ironic distance from one’s own traditions (55). On one of his visits to Erica’s house Changez experimented with his sartorial outlook. He combined a traditionally embroidered white Kurta with a pair of jeans.

Within the discourse of globalization and post colonialism both the multiplicity and pluralism have distinct recognition. Mohsin Hamid endorses the multicultural and cosmopolitan nature of New York as Changez feels comfortable in a subway as he was draped in a partly traditional attire from Pakistan. However, Hamid highlights a redundant application of the word *Cosmopolitan* as he critiques its ‘over usage in American society’ (Hamid 2007, 55). Cosmopolitanism signifies a shifting and uncertain condition in global world. As asserted by Gilroy it is a multivalent signifier that can have various interpretations. It is indeed a tendency to engage with the ‘Other’ (Hannerz 1990, 239). According to Pnina Werbner, The American Pakistani community, she argues, is a transnational society which engage in a complex traffic in ‘objects-persons-places-sentiments’, along with an ‘openness to strangers and stranger hood or difference’ which is evenly cosmopolitan (Werbner 1999, 26). Changez personifies the qualities of a cosmopolitan who relates culturally and socially with the American social and cultural set up easily. However, he is unable to eradicate his native cultural and social identity of a Pakistani immigrant. In terms of his immigrant status, he also belongs to a different class contrary to the American business elite to which Jim and Erica belongs. According to the social classification, Changez can be framed as a character within the working-class cosmopolitanism, one of those who develop a knowledge and frankness to other cultures. in this position, he is removed from a privileged position that is occupied by those who belong elite groups. He is foreign to that system and that system is foreign to him. Therefore, despite the claims of cosmopolitanism as a flawless universalizing system of integrity and coexistence, there are differences of class, race, culture and national identity that undermine the process of cultural homogenization. Homi K. Bhabha explains this as vernacular cosmopolitanism where the immigrant or the working class cosmopolitan always remains within the periphery of the cosmopolitan system. Bhabha refers to

## **Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: Redefining Fundamentalism....**

cosmopolitanism, in his essay “The Vernacular Cosmopolitan” in the context of British migrant Muslims and minorities. The same is applicable to American Muslim migrants also. He identifies in them a “shared sense of civic virtue” while preserving the language, food, festivals and religious customs of their native lands and cultures. It is this twofold life of British minorities that makes them “vernacular cosmopolitans” bridging gaps between cultures, appropriating traditions from a position where “locality” dictates its terms and simultaneously they enter into larger national and societal conversations (Bhabha 2000, 139). Martha Nussbaum also considers cosmopolitanism as a source of alienation where the citizen of the world remains alone as he remains ‘in a state of exile... from the warmth of local truths’ (Nussbaum 1996, 15). Hamid brings into lime light these issues in Changez’s dilemma as a cosmopolitan in the first half of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As Changez successfully conforms to the American social, cultural and financial set up, he progresses as a young trainee towards a mature professional in Underwood Samson. However, inside him there is an unseen fragmentation triggered, regarding his native identity. This fragmentation compounded only in the second half of the novel after 9/11. Hamid contests the claims of American multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism to be universal and globalized structures. It is evident that along with a spirit of coexistence and acceptance, these modernist cultural trends also promote a deep rooted alienation and indifference.

### **Cosmopolitanism giving way to Nationalism and Patriotism**

Kwame Anthony Appiah explains rooted cosmopolitanism as a world where everyone is attached to a home of one’s own with its own cultural particularities but everyone is also drawing pleasure from the presence of others and places different from home (Appiah 1998, 617). Appiah highlights a rise of innate sentiments against the acquired ethics of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. He calls these sentiments patriotism. According to him both patriotism and cosmopolitanism are sentiments and are different from nationalism which is more a respect for state. Contrary to nationalism the connection or bonding with the homeland that patriotism describes is different. Patriotism is fuelled by the pride that a native takes in his National Identity, this pride further consolidates the love and care for the homeland. This love is different from the respect that nationalism encapsulates and is therefore politically motivated towards a national objective. Appiah explains the liaison between cosmopolitanism and patriotism as ‘we cosmopolitans can be patriots, loving our homeland, our loyalty to human kind so vast so abstract a unity, does not deprive us of the capacity to care for lives nearby’ (Appiah 1998, 227). Ulf Hannerz, on the other hand describes a cosmopolitan as an individual of ‘uncertain patriotic reliability’ (1990 1). Bryan Turner also argues in the favour of a compatibility between a cosmopolitan and a patriot where there is a need for

‘cosmopolitan virtue’ and patriotism is not seen as an impediment to that virtue. Turner, in fact emphasizes the need for a republican tradition which is an amalgam of patriotism or love of state and nationalism or respect of state. Such a mixture of love, respect and loyalty triggers the formation of cosmopolitan virtue that is not fragmented or monolithic in composition.

### **Liaison between cosmopolitanism and fundamentalism**

Mike Featherstone describes a fundamentalist tendency within cosmopolitanism. A cosmopolitan is often described as voyeur, parasite and tourist associated with mobility, freedom of physical movement and communication. A direct contrast to those who are located and natives in familiar surroundings. Thus cosmopolitanism is also an in-capacity to form lasting attachments and commitments to places and others. It is also a life style that fits Anglophone societies in United States and Britain, in which the market value of the trader matters who look after deals and moves on. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as Changez moves from cosmopolitanism to patriotism, he is conscious of the fundamentalism he is drenched in, as an employee of Samson Underwood. As Jim explained to Changez “we are a meritocracy...We believe in being the best” (Hamid 2007, 39). Changez explains the fundamentals of his professional life as maximum return was the maxim to which we returned , time and again. We learned to prioritize —to determine the axis on which advancement would be most beneficial—and then to apply ourselves single-mindedly to the achievement of that objective (Hamid 2007, 41).

In his meeting with Erica’s father, Changez had to encounter the accusations for being a resident of a country which has problems of fundamentalism. Erica’s father said “I like Pakistanis...You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism” (Hamid 2007, 63). Changez was provoked by the accusation that was a polite insult to his identity, but his transformed cosmopolitan self prevented him from any rude retort or retaliation. The air of indifference in a subway and low potency drama at Erica’s home laid the foundation of a major development in the story that changed the course of Changez’s life. However, at that point Hamid makes a strong statement about the imperial and hegemonic undercurrents going strong within the claims of globalized harmony in the world systems. Hamid, in another episode highlights the third world sensibility of Changez as he encountered a Filipino in Manila. While being a representative of American global business class and sitting in a limousine, Changez got a undisguised hostile gaze from a Filipino. Hamid frames the hostility as an intimacy that the Filipino and Changez shared and called it a “sharing of third world sensibility” (Hamid 2007, 77). As an American representative, he became a In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid problematizes the innate conflict brewing up in Changez as a cosmopolitan and a patriot. Hamid playfully



constructs the resistance between the global business identity of Changez in America and his native third world sensibility as a Pakistani. The resistance is materialized and epitomized decisively as the event of 9/11 happens and there is a collapse of twin towers in New York. Changez explains his reaction to the news as “I stared at one —and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Centre collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes despicable it may sound but my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (Hamid 2007, 83). Indeed, the sentiment of pain was shared by many in that cosmopolitan moment, a moment of electronic empathy with the victims, that September 11, 2001 triggered. But Changez had a slightly different reaction even as a well behaved cosmopolitan. Thus for Changez 9/11 appeared as a defining moment between the conflicting values of cosmopolitanism, patriotism and individual identity crisis.

### **Redefining and appropriating fundamentalism**

Appiah explains patriotism as a sentiment that is associated with pride (1998 227). This sentiment is activated “when the national anthem plays, when the national team wins, when the national army prevails, there is that shiver down the spine, the electric excitement the thrill of being on the winning side” (ibid.). This sentiment grows strong in winning situations, however, it grows stronger in times of adversity. This bonding and its growing strength is scrupulously conceived by Hamid when 9/11 happens in America and there is a military standoff between India and Pakistan in subcontinent. As Changez reaches the climax of his cosmopolitan goodness the conflict between his cosmopolitan virtue and his native sense of belonging to a homeland precipitates. This conflict is conspicuous as he questions ‘to where I belong America or Pakistan’. Erica compared Changez to a rock pool. She explains “They’re like little worlds perfect, self contained transparent. They look like they are frozen in time “(Hamid 2007, 78). Changez’ s rock pool separateness which effervesced from his cultural identity was further compounded by the political reality of 9/11. He had to face his foreignness once he returned to America after 9/11 from Manila. He was made conscious of this foreignness by the Americans as he encountered a security check at the airport. Changez explains it as “I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts...and I was the last person to board our aircraft...I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self conscious” (Hamid 2007, 85). The self consciousness revived in him compounded by the surge of American nationalism that he experienced in the form assertions like “We are America” (Hamid 2007, 90), and the glimpses American imperialism in the footages of American troops invading Afghanistan. He not only felt left out from what was an American national sentiment that was fuelled by a one dimensional thirst for American security. He

was not convinced by the justifications of invading Afghanistan to save America. This resurgence of American nationalism that takes shape of imperialism is explained by Timothy Brennan in his Cosmo-theory. According to Brennan, cosmopolitanism is an American construct founded on liberal values and capitalist ambitions (Brennan 2006, 23). It is also a form of cultural hegemony that promotes and consolidates America as a super power. Thus cosmopolitanism can be framed as reflection of American imperialism, especially in the post 9/11 world. Brennan comes up with his cosmo-theory as a revised version of conventional cosmopolitanism that is now a subsidiary of American imperialism.

As the dream of universal cosmopolitanism is shattered within the cosmopolitan premises of America. It triggered a reactionary resurgence of nationalism and patriotism in Changez. The situation further compounded as Changez went back to Pakistan. The visit back home brought him in contact with another political conflict that resulted in the military standoff between India and Pakistan. The cultural and identity crisis through which Changez went through was politicized and materialized visibly as patriotism and nationalism. The impending war threat in Pakistan and Lahore as a possible battle field due to its frontier town location, Changez had the feeling of being a traitor. He abhorred his unsympathetic Americanness that taught him only to focus on fundamentals. While being in Pakistan, he had strong resentment as “What sort of man abandons his people in such circumstances?” (Hamid 2007, 145). Despite all resentment, Changez finally overcame the fits of patriotism on his way back to America. However, the feelings made a powerful come back as soon as he met Juan Bautista in Valparaiso, Chile. The meeting with Bautista was a last round of introspection before Changez realized the transformation in his self. He realized that he “lacked a stable core”, and asserted “I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore” (Hamid 2007, 168). He felt like two hemispheres, divided, fragmented and confused. The final catalyst came in the form of a parallel that Bautista drew between Changez and Janissaries. Janissaries were the Christian boys who were trained by Ottomans to fight and erase their own civilizations so that they had nothing else to turn to. Changez was completely devastated by this comparison which was indeed a final blow to his staggering American identity and the overpowering identity crisis.

#### **From fundamentalism to reluctant fundamentalist**

Hamid deconstructs various fundamentals in American and European system of thought. One of the most self evident features of this world system is to look at things compartmentalized and classified according to the cultures, geographies and politics. However, the recent developments regarding world as a global system undergoing continuous evolution, there is a sharp decrease in the

## Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: Redefining Fundamentalism....

distance between East and West. The western fundamental that East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet is approached in the novel with visible reluctance. Hamid scrupulously paints a picture of a world where East and West are inextricably intertwined with each other. In *Changez* there is a Western educated rational being who makes his way to success in the technologically advanced world of New York. But within him there is an in built capacity to stick to the fundamentals of national identity and cultural belonging. He bridges the gap between an absolute cosmopolitan and a hardcore nationalist. He strikes a balance between his tendency to explore the cultural 'other' while sustaining a living bond with his native values, culture and traditions. Despite asserting his national identity at the end, *Changez* explains his hybrid self as "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally intertwined with Erica" or America as some readers can assume it to be or it is slightly more segregated as Am-Erica. He further explains "I brought something of her with me to Lahore—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth" (Hamid 2007, 195). He has bridged the geographical and cultural gap between him and America by his cosmopolitan capacity to neutralize difference of race, ethnicity and religion. But his cosmopolitan self could not survive the endless antagonism between American nationalism and Pakistani nationalism. Therefore he chose to side with his side of nationalism which came to him naturally and in a more privileged position as compared to his uncertain cosmopolitan status.

Hamid works out his narrative as a resistant, oppositional and representational argument in postcolonial era. He effectively conjectures a dialogue between fundamentally separated entities, a dialogue between centre and periphery, contrasting societies and the colonized and colonizers. He creates a space where he re-examines and appropriates the fundamentals of modern age. He introspects his own colonized self and aims to decolonize it. He reverses the process where the universalized Western cultural values are introduced in the colonized region but the indigenous values are not universalized and introduced in the metropolitan centres of Western world. He establishes a dialogic relationship in place of a monologic imperial exchange. Such dialogues enrich and change both sides of the world system. Thus it can be concluded that in times we are living in, there is no room for totalization, there are no absolutes but only a permanent change.

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