

Globalization, 9/11 and Cross-Cultural interaction: Locating Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract – *The idea of identity is shaped with a sense of belongings of place, nation, culture, language and history. However, the idea of identity always flows with the rise of globalization as it promises a global space for all across the borders and boundaries. Migration of the people to the metropolis global space gradually has been increased and the new issues of immigration and immigrants have been arisen in the new era –the twenty-first century, especially after the 9/11. The paper aims at analyzing the issues of identity in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) which focuses on globalization, migration and cross-cultural encounter of the East and the West. The paper also tries to analyze the interracial love-relationship which explains the anti-globalization phenomenon in the post-9/11 scenario as it is represented in the novel. The protagonist of the novel is Changez, a young Pakistani boy who experiences the issues related to his race, religion, and region in post 9/11 America. Although Changez loves Erica and America as well, the response of both after 9/11 changes his mind. He feels alienated after being rejected by Erica and the American society. The paper focuses on exploring the idea of identity –individual and collective identity in response to globalization as native and immigrant/foreigner. The paper also examines the psyche of shaping and reshaping the identity in the home and away from home –metropolis global place. The paper foregrounds the conflict of identity in response to cross-cultural interaction and its issues and challenges of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation in the global metropolis space. Furthermore, it investigates the genesis of identity and identity politics in the twenty-first century globalization in terms of prevalent global politics with reference to the novel.*

Keywords: Cultural, globalization, identity, Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

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Like the ripples that formed when a pebble is dropped into a placid pool of water, in the same way, we have social circles that are formed around us and for this selectively targeting circle, we ought to be tactfully encrypted since in this era of globalization life has become a semiotic war zone; the society is engaged in pouring down the poisonous signs leading to a global-conflict with fashion and fumble with words and ideas. Although semiotic is to mirror up our mind, thought, and even heart from the day the life started, no doubt we are tricking as survival game and to get scape from this ogre's den of global conflict one simply opts for art which comes directly from the heart and reaches directly to heart of common man. Its simplicity and directness may be special among other arts. It provides input to the audience's response so that his or her idea may be fully unfolded. They simply start to see things from the common man's perspective, hence ciphering becomes purposeful and people start to judge other with interest and attention to meet the challenges of coming to grips.

It has no time for multiple identities, complex allegiance and cultural ambiguity. In the contemporary world, fundamentalism can be uncovered not just among religious groupings but also among many different kinds of community – political, economic, ethnic, and environmental, among others. The fault line running through contemporary global society divides those who call for the guardians of tradition to reassert themselves, and those who accept and welcome cultural diversity and seek dialogue and the minimum rules of coexistence so that all can live peacefully without resort to violence and coercion. It is a deep fault line, and testifies to people's remarkable capacities, under changing conditions, to hold tight to tradition values and practices, to forge new ones, and to be able, sometimes, to reason from the point of view of others. The debate about the nature and form of political good after 9/11 highlights the shifting grounds on which the sceptical analysis of the political is defended and challenged anew. (Held & McGrew 2007: 184)

September 11, 2001, encounters a terrorist attack on the soil of the United States, this the holocaust of the twenty-first century became a popular debate in electronic and printed media around the globe. 9/11 is an epoch of changing world order, the behaviour of the people, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq war. The American response of the attacks begins a global war against terrorism which has been supported by almost all of the countries. However, the migrants in America, especially, Muslims faced physical and mental torture during the investigation for security concern and treated untowardly due to their heterogeneity and identical differences. Terror and fear have been associated with an identity of particular belief, persona, and practices in post 9/11 world. This religious profiling makes a particular identity under surveillance with a sense of security, but creating a sense of alienating and othering from one another, have been the heaviest repercussion of fear in the human race at a global level in post 9/11 period.

The present paper is designed to study Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in the broader context of 9/11 as a timeline. The novel is a masterpiece of monologue which is narrated by Changez. The monologue begins with an unknown American Journalist at Anarkali Market in Lahore. "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am lover of America" (Hamid 2007: P. 1). Changez shares his experiences of his life to the unknown American. He discusses his life of America. He tries to show his experiences of educational, personal, and professional life which he lived in America. Through his narratives, he tries to convey his reason to leave America and how 9/11 changed his life. He tried to show his love for America, American culture, American modern education, American girlfriend, and American lifestyle, however, he was treated like Pakistani-Muslim- migrants in America which he criticizes. Although he was unlike the traditional stereotype Muslim-Pakistan, he was treated like the same Muslim-Pakistani immigrants in America.

The protagonist of the novels is Changez, a young Pakistani boy. He gets a scholarship to study at Princeton University. He goes to America to complete his study. He secures a job of a financial analyst in American multinational company – Underwood Samson. He meets an American girl Erica and falls in love with. He loves America and Erica but after 9/11 everything changes. He faces many problems after the attacks. The response of America and Erica also reluctantly changes his mind. His identity becomes an issue in the post-9/11 world. He feels a sense of alienation in metropolis global world which he believes to be his own. He is being realized as other outside his country Pakistan. Changez argues in the novel:

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 reason, when she reached out to me for help, I had nothing of substance to give her. Probably this was why I had been willing to try to take on the persona of Chris, because my own identity was so fragile. (Hamid 2007. p.168)

Changez witnesses the changing nature and behaviour of the American society towards the Muslim immigrants in the US especially after 9/11. America and its culture attract him. He is a meritorious student, gets a scholarship to study in the US. He is also a hardworking boy. He works part-time for his expenditure along with studying in the Princeton. He also gets a job just after completing his study in Underwood Samson, an American multinational company. He proves himself as a suitable migrant to stay in America. However, his expectation turns into darkness after 9/11. He starts realizing that the response of the attack changes the mindset of American society towards Pakistani, Muslim, and immigrants.

...I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my practice motivation. [...] I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares. Wainwright tried to offer me some friendly advice. "Look, man," he said, "I don't know what's up with the beard, but I don't think it's making you Mister Popular around here." They are common where I come from." (Hamid 2007:147-148).

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* represents the American society before and after 9/11. Hamid tries to narrate both the America –before and after 9/11 through the protagonist of the novel. Changez belongs to the reputed Pakistani family whose financial condition is not so good. He tries to get a scholarship from America. He gets the education from America and gets a job there. He also finds a girl, Erica whom he loves most. However, he faces many problems due to his Pakistani identity especially after 9/11. Changez shows both of the aspects of America. First, where he gets a scholarship to study and a reputed world class job through which he could change his life and financial condition of his family. On the other hand, second, he is being treated like an alien or other in the same place. Changez never assumes such a life where he faces problems due to his identity. He is being realized as other in America. He becomes a victim of American hegemonic society, which is directed by prejudices. He realizes the rise of Islamophobia after 9/11. In the end, he decides to

leave America and settles down in his native country Pakistan where he joins university lecturer.

In *Globalisation, democracy and terrorism*, Eric Hobsbawm covers these issues and rightly argues as:

The Globalization of the “war against terrorism” since September 2001 and the revival of armed foreign intervention by a major power which formally denounced the hitherto accepted rules and convention of international conflict in 2002 has transformed the situation for the worse. (Hobsbawm. 135)

The novel questions on the treatment of America towards Pakistani-immigrants after 9/11. Hamid, artistically, draws a line of American life on 9/11 timeline. He argues that the gap has been increased between the East and the West. The victimization of migrants is very common in America after 9/11. Muslim identity is subjected as the protagonist is treated. He loves for his Erica also unfulfilled. He becomes a victim of Islamophobia. He also realizes the American hegemony of War against terrorism where he finds himself as an American Janissary. He discovers same America as against himself, his country and his identity after 9/11. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* represents the best literary response of post-9/11 global world, especially, America.

However, the protagonist of the novel, Changez leaves America and decides to go back to his native country. He settles down in Pakistan. Throughout the novel, Changez faces the issues of cross-cultural interaction but his identity becomes a question mark in outside of his native country after 9/11. He tries to find an identity in metropolis third space, however, his search of identity is complete failure. Even he tries to act as Chris; the dead boyfriend of Erica but his attempt to adopting, acting and role-playing of foreigner's identity also failed. Changez experienced a cross-cultural encounter which insists him to leave the metropolis. He was talented and hard working. He proves his talent and potential to get the scholarship to study at Princeton University and job in Underwood Samsun. However, his regional, racial and religious identity unmatched because of his cross-cultural encounter in the global multicultural American society. Although he loves America, he faces the problem cultural conflict within and outside as well. He experiences completely different the cross-cultural interaction, the most pertinent situation for him was after the 9/11. He feels alone away from home. In the end, He leaves America and resettles in his native country culture of his country, community and religion.

This particular study has observed that the globalization opens new vistas of migration and its cross-cultural interaction in global metropolis space. The way globalization affects the twenty-first-century

lifestyle that opens many paradigms of cultural – formation, adaptation, rejection, especially in multicultural space. The study also analyzed the responses of cross-culture conflict in post 9/11 which has been shown vividly in the novel. The period of his leaving America and returning to Pakistan that his native country opens many questions related to rise of cross-cultural conflict and fear of dis-locating identity in the twenty-first century, especially after 9/11. In response to this cross-cultural conflict validates and the arguments of Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilization and Remaking the World Order* (1996). The literary response of identity-politics in post-globalizing world questions on the Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). The act of rejecting the global metropolis space and returning to the natives also doubts on the promises of globalization as the study found that Changez who lives in America, studies and having a job there, however, he encounters many challenges aftermath 9/11 in the same metropolis space that caused to leave the place.

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