

Exclusion in the Reluctant Fundamentalist

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The already problematic East-West relationship is aggravated by the Muslim anti-colonial stance. Consequently, Muslims were seen as ‘enemies’. This state of affairs was made murkier by the terrorist incident of 9/11, for which Muslims were, perceived to be a quintessential enemy and a serious threat, exaggerated by the matchless brand of the Western media, held to be responsible. New practices of exclusion were introduced. Exclusion is a multi-faceted mechanism shaped and driven by uneven power structure, in which certain groups or people are put to disadvantageous position due their affiliation with some community or group. This, as World Health Organization claims, leads to uneven access to rights, capabilities, resources that lead to health inequalities and resistance. This paper discusses how Mohsin Hamid through *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) depicts this exclusion and scenario of suspicion of post-9/11 American society where Muslims are looked as a considerable threat to be excluded, imprisoned and persecuted, and how they resisted it

Key words: *Alien, Exclusion, Fundamentalism, hegemony, Perception, Resistance, 9/11.*

Introduction

Exclusion is the disadvantageous status, marginalization, or victimization, and relegation of a particular group of a society to the fringes. It is the process in which individuals of a particular group are denied access, partially or fully, to, or obstructed from some opportunities and rights, that are, in normal situations, accessible to adherents of another group. The opportunities and rights are very essential to observance of fundamental duties and human rights, besides educational, legal, political, social or religious integration of any group into the fabric of any society. The denial leads to the alienation or disenfranchisement, of a group or its individuals due her/his appearance, color, ethnicity, political opinions, class,

race, etc. Anyone from the above categories, who forms a minority and seems to be deviating in any way from the perceived norms of a majority group may, in a way, begin to be target of coarse and subtle arrangements of exclusion. Though, exclusion is, primarily, linked “to social domain”. But “its kinship with social issues and problems make it difficult to comprehend because of its ill effects on psychological, mental, emotional and physical health” of the excluded groups (Mohanty, 2014, p.10, Perkins and Julie, 2013, p. 377-8). The normal upshot of the process is that the people or the communities who suffer from the exclusion, may resist in form of lobbying, protests, demonstrations against the exclusive practices oriented to disfavor them. (Young, 2000, p. 35–49, and Walsh, 2006, p.185-204), because they feel the emotional and psychological pain, which is not so different from that of a “broken arm” (Weir, 2012, para. 7).

The New York Times documents that the novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist (TRF)* “pivots on a smile”, which the narrator of the novel has when he finds the two towers collapsing (Olsson, 2007, para, 1). The paper underlines that although it, as the narrator accepts, sounds really “despicable” but the narrator who happens to be a Muslim, had the “initial reaction” of being “remarkably pleased”, by the sight of destruction of the towers. The question is how come a well-educated with American education, claims to love America, ‘smiles’ and feels ‘pleased’ when the country is horrendously wronged. At this point the problem becomes researchable. Young becomes unavoidable to supply an explanation of the results of exclusion. In this regard, the smile is a kind of “resistance” or “demonstration” or protests” of the people who experience exclusion (2000, p. 35–49). One can find answer to the problem in Freudian psychology of psychoanalysis, which describes the spontaneous and uncontrolled reactions of the people, like that of smile of Changez, to natural psychological operations of suppressed human psyche.

The novel is a dialogic monologue by the narrator, Changez and a mysterious American. The former narrates a tale of his life in the immediate pre and post/911 America. Meanwhile, he gives him a chilling account of exclusion of people globally in general, and Muslims in particular, experienced at the hands of America, just before and after the attacks. The title of the novel seems to intrigue one that he has turned into a radical terrorist or fundamentalist against America because of the exclusion, as he is disenchanted with the idea of ‘American dream’, after living, earning graduation, and a respectable job in America.

As the protagonist deals with the financial matters, he understands the exclusion through the economic fundamentalism of America that excludes people to poverty and helplessness. He discusses the economic fundamentalism, which according to him is the base of exclusion and control. So, he underlines that it’s the economic exclusion that leads to the exclusion of the people in other aspects and strengthens the process of exclusion in social, political and legal aspects. The core of the present paper is shedding light on the presentation of the theme of



exclusion in *The Reluctant Fundamentalism*. The novel under study is one of most famous works of the current day fictional scenario of English literature. As a fictional work the novel, besides other themes, focuses on the practical problem of exclusion, highlighted through the intricate fabric of symbolism, which the research holds, is not properly addressed. This paper presumes it a lacuna that needs to be addressed to contextualize the work. In this regard, this research aims to underline the importance of the theme of exclusion. The novel is sketched in a particular period of human history. It attains the proper meaning when it's contextualized in time. Therefore, the study plans to employ the Historical Approach to understand the historical importance of the work. Besides that, it's designed to take recourse to Sociological Approach and Closing Reading to understand the inner thematic pattern of the novel. The paper presents a qualitative study that depends on the text of the novel as its primary resource besides many other relevant studies as secondary resources. It would be trying to focus on explaining, how is historical setting responsible for the production of the meaning of the novel? How the novel offers an insight into the sociological and political scenario of the time, that lead to the exclusion and how the theme of exclusion is symbolically conveyed through it.

In *Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, Habermas says that for centuries 'tolerance' has been practiced in 'paternalistic spirit'. The single-sided nature of the premise that the culture of the majority wills "at its own discretion to tolerate the deviant practices of the minority is paternalistic". In this context, it recognizes the toleration or 'acceptance' given to an 'other' is characterized by an "act of mercy or doing a favor", which paternalistically conditions the accepted or tolerated to a particular 'behavior'. The paternalistic society conditions that a certain amount of deviance is allowed from the 'normal mores' as long as the tolerated minority doesn't transgress the 'threshold of allowance', which separates the two. This compartmentalization, while creating the zones of difference, in which the 'authoritarian allowance' gives one the privilege of being in power, while excluding the other from the threshold of advantageous position and equal opportunity. In this case, 'the concept of exclusion is underlined when you find that the concept of tolerance by itself possesses "a kernel of intolerance", because it can only be practiced "within a boundary beyond which it would cease[s]" to be. (Borradori, 2003, p. 40-41).

This is true of almost all cultures, featured by a lack of uniformity concerning demographic map of their diverse cultural communities. Hamid problematize this stand in his widely read novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), through his main character, Changez, by sketching his 'relationship with America' during the immediate pre-and-post-9/11 terrorist incident. In a conversation with Yaqin, Hamid says, that compared to Europe, America embraces everyone, if:



you speak with an American accent you are probably an American America's culture will absorb you regardless [if you are Muslim or anything else]. ... It's almost as if the American founding myth confirms that, by virtue of being born here, you are one of us (Yaqin, 2008, p. 48).

The same interview, ironically, intrigues one to infer that the situation is opposite to the explicit claim, as he conditions the acceptance with the conditional 'if'. The 'If' serves to negate the rosy picture drawn by him about American attitudes towards immigrants. He covertly seems to imply opposite of what he seems to claim about Muslims who "'appear' to be quite well integrated" into the American culture. He subtly conveys the situation of paranoid distrust about the 'people' in America (Gandara, 2006, p. 169-201; Malos, 2010, p. 297) as he says they are "incredibly self-censored. People don't say certain things and are afraid of speaking their minds... perhaps afraid is too strong a word... but they really hold back because they have a sixth sense of being watched" (Yaqin 48). He strikingly demonstrated this situation through the intimate encounters between Erica (Am-Erica) and Changez. In his eventual attempts to have sex with Erica, symbolically, a sort of intimate encounter with America, for Changez repeatedly fails as she doesn't respond to his advances, he impersonates as somebody he is not to be tolerated. He succeeds only when he impersonates Chris and asks Erica to "pretend I am him" - Chris (*TRF*, 105). Changez says that the spell of the pretention,

transported [Erica] to a world where I was Chris and she was with Chris, and made love with a physical intimacy that Erica and I had never enjoyed [before]. Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched him (*TRF*, 105).

Hinting towards his own dilemmas and apprehensions, Changez alludes to the recognition of his own previously invisible being in the circumstances of immediate pre-9/11 America, charged and obsessed with national identity, thought to be in danger at the hands of some outside threat. Changez narrates that "she [Erica] was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return" (*TRF*, 113). Erica's "nostalgia", though apparently specific for dead boyfriend- Chris, (Chris-tendom of exclusive colonial Europe or Christianity) is allegorical of the currant Americans for a nation, of older times, characterized by a particular ethnic, racial and cultural specificities, with links to Europe, as the naming word Chris "recalls not only Europe's Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas" (Hartnell, 2010, p. 343). This conditional inclusion has actually infuriated her. Later, after the sexual encounter, he is reported that she doesn't want to see him as "right now you're the hardest person for her to see. You're the one who upsets her most.... and you make her lose her balance" (*TRF*, 133), to imply that he has crossed the threshold. So he deserves to be quarantined and excluded. Changez finds himself nothing but an uncared, unsuccessful and unwanted intrusion- likely to

disturb, rather than a required new calming element, in the face of highly churning and disquieting “old thoughts” of Erica...he leaves her with her imaginative conversation with Chris (*TRF*, 113). He, ultimately, realizes that his ‘exertions’ to be a part in this ‘conversation’ is bound to fail, as Erica “was disappearing into a powerful *nostalgia*” (*TRF*, 113). However, she was going deep and deeper into that, distancing more and more, ‘territorializing’ herself away from Changez, who underscores that he was consigned past tense in Erica’s conversations, as she “had chosen not to be part of... [his] story; [as] her own had proven too compelling” (*TRF*, 167). Erica, (Am-Erica=America) in this way represents a tension in American nationalism that is made to look back to the past, which is not only specifically ‘European’- Christian and racially exclusive white, but also rooted in the ideology of ‘triumphalism’ of colonialism. Changez falls in no way under the purview of these ‘old thoughts’. So, he is excluded from the ‘discourse’ and ideals that include America. America is a country of immigrants, which as Gerges claims, apprehends that some cultural identities offer resistance to assimilation into American culture (Gerges, 2003, p. 75). Otherwise, all others become Americans. The immigrant society of America is largely comprised of the Christian people of the West, which, Maxim Rodinson says “perceived the Muslim world as a menace long before it began to be seen as a real problem” (2002, p. 3). For the Western Christendom, Islam is a problem from the time of its appearance. And “[T]hose who believed in it were the enemy on the frontier” (Hourani, 1991, p. 7). This perception percolated into the American popular culture from the Western immigrants to America. Consequently, “the religious and intellectual challenge of Islam continues[d] to seize the imagination of many people in the United States” (Gerges, 2003, p. 75). The result of this perception is seen in the popular American media.

Rather than simplistic rendering of American perception about the Muslims and state power, the novel presents a much more conflicted and convoluted perspective on exclusion. The novel critiques and identifies the racism that form the basis of the so-called ‘war on terror’ waged by America, at both foreign and domestic space, to present a sort of American hegemony, inherited from the European colonial ancestors and insular power. The novel is a self-described “tragic love story” of a Pakistani in love with an American Princeton graduate-Erica. But he is disillusioned as the ‘ethics’ of American exclusive economic fundamentalism and political domination unravels before him, while he is ‘disturbed’ by the ‘post-9/11 America’. He is subjected to face cultural exclusion, suspicion, insular and “backward-looking patriotism” and “racial profiling” to feel “uncomfortable at his own face” (Morey, 2011, p. 144). He claims to love America, but posits American nationalism to a complex interrogation while describing it an exceptional kind of imperialism, which is the core of exclusion, in the post- 9/11 and the so-called American ‘War on Terror’.

For Andrews, Hartnell and Scanlan, the novel is highly symbolical and allegorical, as the characters and events are typical of some larger people and the course of history of the time

the work is set in. They argue that under the disguise of the visible symbolism of the novel the main female figure – Erica (Am-Erica), personifies the American nationalism, while American state power is symbolized by the company- Underwood Samson, the initials of which-“US”, obviously reminds one as those of the nation. Rather than depicting the country as an epitome of *freedom* and unfettering multiculturalism, the novel elucidates a contrary discourse on the treatment of the nation and the state as exclusionary and fundamentalist, represented by Erica and Underwood Samson. Instead of being simply cynical, the story highlights America’s apparent allure of development, luxuriousness, prosperity, multiculturalism and rejection of aliens on both political and personal level, due to their non-conformity to the essential ‘American-ness’, i.e. single-minded ‘devoutness’ to national ideals of political and economic hegemony. Changez’s American dream shatters as he is illuminated about exclusive ‘American fundamentalism’. This understanding sows the seeds of “an envious distaste towards the world of wealth and power in which he now exists” (King, 2007, p. 684). Hamid comments, that unlike any traditional immigrant travelogue about coming home, the novel is

“polarity when the magnet switches and pushes them [immigrants] away. ...this is a story of someone who is in love with America, in love with an American woman, who finds he has to leave. ... The book doesn’t try to say America is bad, it’s how someone can be disillusioned with America (Perlez, 2007a, para. 16).

While critiquing the multicultural picture of American society in its different aspects, the novel shows a break in the treatment of the American society, as the action shifts to post-9/11 America. After the apparent multicultural pre-9/11 American society, the novel moves to the second section with the allegorical love story as a representation of the strained relationship between the East/Muslim or a Third World national and America. It sketches, as Hamid says, the American ‘war on terror’ as a duplication or recurrence of the Western colonial project (*TRF*, 202), in which color, race and culture form the core of the American politics of nationality and place. The Americans, at the time, regarded “9/11 as an attack on their national honour... [to] led them into the madness” (Moss, 2007, para. 15). Muslims are cornered and persecuted from every side by both the people and the government, for being non-citizens. Hamid delineates the character of Muslim Changez, who goes to America to realize his dream, that is, to study and be a *dignified* person. But, it is foiled because of 9/11 terrorist incident which shook the lives of Muslims, who grew to be the focus of ‘suspicion’ for they were viewed as culprits of the incident.

The initial experience of Changez in pre-9/11 America is marked by positivity, as he is overwhelmed by the ‘melting pot’ scenario without any sour encounter of exclusive practice. For him “moving to New York felt [was feeling] – so unexpectedly – like coming home” (*TRF*, 36). He could identify himself with the multicultural setting of New York. He reasons



this with the “fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers” and “samosa and *channa*-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli”, being very close to his apartment. (*TRF*, 33). He “was immediately a New Yorker” (*TRF*, 33), as he begins to experience life with the socially and economically high circles of city. In the “*cosmopolitan* nature of New York”, he “felt completely comfortable” donning his culture-specific garment, *Kurta* (*TRF*, 48). This early identification of Changez with the city, tolerant to the symbols of immigrant cultures, partly, presents a contrast to the one he identifies himself with, in the intolerant post-9/11 America that draws exclusive lines and boundaries between ‘people’ on the basis of race, culture, etc.

The post-9/11 America, witnesses a new surge of discrimination and victimization of immigrants in America with a sharp increased frequency at the hands of the majority section in their zeal of apparent single-minded patriotism, which “activated and transformed the historical memory of a militarist, racist, and class-specific masculinity, in the immediate September 11 attacks” (Puar and Amit, 2002, p. 125). This scenario gets an encompassing treatment in the novel. Changez says that he overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli restaurant that “the FBI was raiding” shops, “mosques, and even people’s houses”... “cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives”; “Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse” (*TRF*, 94). The attack changed the life of the people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent, in general and Muslims of those regions inhabiting in the US, in particular. Hamid describes the changed nature of the relationship between Americans toward the Muslims. The racist practice of lynching, exercised earlier against the Blacks, is now targeted against the Muslims. Other ethnic people, like Sikhs, are also encompassed within the arc of attacks due to even a vague similitude to Arabs or Muslims (Gohil and Sidhu, 2008, p. 10–41). The Muslims are indiscriminately attacked. They are hunted by the FBI, profiled by authorities and media. They are haunted. In public places Muslim men and women are attacked and cursed (Gandara, 2006, p. 169-201 and Malos, 2010, p. 297). In the business world and offices also, Muslims were discriminated and excluded. Changez narrates that there were “stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals” (*TRF*, 120) demotion, lessening salary, termination to which Muslims were unjustly exposed. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charge statistics documented about 11,000 workplace discrimination cases in America, filed during the period 2001–2006 in America (Malos, 2007, p. 298). The number of cases of victimization, unreported and unfiled, is left to the people, interested to imagine. Changez is also exposed to cringing behavior at his office (*TRF*, 130). Malos says that Muslims were exposed to psychological and emotional torture at the offices and were exposed to the words like “we have to send in our Phantoms and bomb their Mecca”, “we should bomb all the Rag Heads” and “Muslim bastards need to die”, “a good Muslim can’t be a good American”, “burning the hate-filled Koran should be viewed as a public service”, “it would be a good idea to vaporize Mecca”, etc. Some were regularly called with names like



“camel jockey,” “rag head,” “the ayatollah,” and “our local terrorist”, who have got training to strike a plane against America, though court made it unlawful (2007, p. 298-309).

This rising surge of insularity in the name of patriotism is symbolized by the omnipresence of flag-waving ritual, which had obsessed the society. While critiquing single-minded insularity, Hamid gives a picturesque view of this zealous patriotism of the time. He sketches the funereal atmosphere of flag-waving as,

“enacting American identity shown by the omnipresence of the American flag, a symbol which accompanies the rise in hostility towards... outsiders who become associated with terrorism simply through their appearance.... after 9/11, no longer providing... [an outsider] with the sense of acceptance and diversity which... [was] experienced before [9/11] (Andrews, 2010, p. 45).

Hamid puts the scenario in the following words, while Changez narrates the observations of his journey to his silent American addressee:

Your country’s flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere.... They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America*– not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different– *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath (TRF, 79).*

Changez alludes towards the invasion of militant America on the psyche of America through the flag invasion of New York. As flags “take the form material expression” of national identity, they “come to embody that identity through a process of symbolic association” (Leach 84). Therefore, the ritual of flag waving symbolized the commitment to national identity, defined by ‘territorialization’ and territory, which according to Changez was “gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage” (TRF, 94). Ironically, cultural symbol like the flag waving ritual intrigues to maintain the border, rather a wall that makes one ‘different’ from another and separates one from another. Consequently, this ensures a foreclosure and exclusion for some, even to human sympathy because they don’t form a part of this side of the wall.

Though sketching a contemptible portrait of America as an exclusive society, he documents the factors that are instrumental in making the society so. He counts Muslim identity, identification and love for it, another factor responsible for such a political, social and mental setup of American society. This makes one sometimes a passive target and sometimes an actor to protest and resist, like Changez does. With Hamid the situation is more intense. Changez, the protagonist of his novel charges America of “single-minded” fundamentalism (TRF, 98), leaves America for Pakistan and becomes a harsh critic of American foreign



policy in the Muslim world. He sympathizes with his co-religionist Afghans who are bombed after 9/11, and smiles when views on TV the twin towers collapsing on 9/11 (*TRF*, 72-3). Because, according to him, somebody has brought America to its knees, that gave him a kind of pleasure, although, he felt deep sympathy for the victims of the incident. Such a repulsing reaction of Changez alienates him from the sympathies of the reader and ironically from the people of the setting in which the action is set in, to his own exclusion and the people he represents. While Changez was in Philippines to accomplish an official assignment given to him by his office, he enjoys the air of being an American there in the company of his colleagues. Simultaneously, he is conscious of being a Pakistani, a Third World national, like the Filipinos around him. He subsists with his sense of invisibility of his “Pakistaniness” (*TRF*, 82), though not the complete absence of it. Although he recognizes himself with the victims of the attack, “American” people as soon as he is amidst of them in his office next day. He “felt guilty” (*TRF*, 74). What rivets one about the exploration of the novel is that it subtly delineates the sense of belonging to different nationalities and cultural ethnicities, while being a part of a multicultural society. While, identifies himself as a Third World national, who looks at the disastrous attack as something that has been instrumental in bringing the dominating, hegemonic, imperialist space – America, to its knees (*TRF*, 72-3), Changez is himself suspected as a traitor and subjected to rigorous immigration ‘formalities’ at the airport when he was returning from Manila, at a juncture when he recognizes himself as an “American”, owing to his ethnicity as an ‘Asian’, ‘Muslim’. Changez describes to his American addressee:

At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts.... and I was, as a consequence, the last person to board our aircraft. My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion (*TRF*, 74).

While Hamid holds Muslim immigrants themselves responsible for the American exclusive treatment they are exposed to, he, however, hints towards a more serious social phenomenon, which sounded more harmful to the human society in America than the pull-factor of immigrants. He seems to say that bias against Muslims was already ingrained in American society (Castro, 2018). As Changez alludes to “old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond” (*TRF*, 83), Hamid seems to say that the destructive incident of 9/11 was a decisively disturbing point in the U.S. history that made it to deliberate on the anti-multiculturalist discourses of ‘nation, race, culture, ethnicity’, etc. He says that such an incident spurred an anti- Muslim and anti-Islam lobby in America. At the same time, he seems to imply symbolically that the racial and cultural bias was already present there in America like the “settled sediments in the pond”. With the word like ‘spur’, he is, ironically, claiming that such an anti-Muslim-Islam bias was already a certain stand or a movement which is quickened by the incident. As he focuses on the “apparently seismic shift in national

perceptions” after 9/11 incident, Hamid seems to highlight a charged atmosphere of immediate post-9/11 period that was “merely an intensification of something” “present already there” before being stimulated by the incident. As he delineates the collapse of the multicultural setup, he simultaneously hints towards the causes of its failure (Hartnell, 2010, p. 349), i.e. the entrenched anti-multicultural ethics- hegemony and inconsideration against the minorities belonging to different races, cultures, colors, ‘nationality’, etc., particularly, Muslims. The settled “sediments” of the pond recently churned can be taken to be symbolizing the ‘invisible different other’— elided racial and cultural identities or minorities. They are made to lose their ‘invisible’ place they had settled in, to be focus of, rather, to be vulnerable in the post-9/11 disturbed racial waters of the pond— America. Because racism was refreshing itself by the time. Hamid seems to contradict his stand, which he stood for in an interview, when he compared Europe racial, and tribal which others immigrants to remain “forever... outsiders” with America welcoming and embracing. He says “in Europe it’s more a question of the tribe.... In Europe you can be a second- or third-generation Turkish-German, and there is still a question whether you are European”. In contrast to it, in America being even a Muslim is not taken note of (Perlez, 2007, para. 7). But he paradoxically conditions the embrace or the inclusion of the ‘different’ ‘others’ on their invisibility, under the garb of “American accent” – of language one speaks, what covers her/himself in American-ness to pass on as American. And opposite to it would entail ‘deviance’ and ironically vulnerability. Therefore, one has to be snobbish, to hide one’s identity and individuality, not to be brandished as ‘deviant’. Changez did the same, he cloaked himself in an expensive suite and lavishness of his account in the company of his colleagues to ensure his ‘invisibility’ and to conceal his “pakistaniness” (*TRF*, 82). Even after the Muslims are targeted in America he tries to avoid the idea as much as possible. He attempts to circumvent the impact of the tortuous and doleful tales, about Muslims being targeted and tortured, by questioning and unbelieving the validity of the tales, besides consoling himself with the idea that he is a Princetonian with a good job:

I reasoned that these stories were mostly untrue; the few with some basis in fact were almost certainly being exaggerated; and besides, those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year (*TRF*, 94).

He tries to ‘focus on the fundamentals’ of business and commerce of materialism (*RF*, 98). He continues to go to his office as usual, while, he says, America was obsessed with self-importance, “unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain”, that united America, as victim of 9/11 catastrophe, with the Afghan civilian populace, which was subjected to the wrath and the brutality of the ‘War on Terror’. Because, America had “retreated into myths of its own difference, [and] assumptions of [its] own superiority” (*TRF*, 168), where all the ‘others’



stand as inferior and rejected aliens to be excluded. At the return from Manila on airport, he is looked at, as if, he is from some alien land of monsters. He is singled out to be interrogated with frustrating questions. He is left by his colleagues without any concern for him, to ‘walk alone’ to home from the airport. At his office his “colleagues greet[ed him] with considerable—although often partially suppressed—consternation” (*TRF*, 130). It leads to his identity crises, while he tries to console himself with different ways of thinking. This state of things unsettles Changez. He tries hard to keep his mind diverted from the disturbing political atmosphere. He would sometimes make himself believe that he “overreacted, that there was nothing I could do, and that all these world events were playing out on a stage of no relevance to my personal life”. But “the embers glowing within” him about the situation made him incapable to deal, at his office, with the “fundamentals” (*TRF*, 100). He could not hold for long with his make-belief practices. What shakes him off from the make-believing is the news report “on the television” when he:

had reached home from New Jersey after midnight and... chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post (*TRF*, 99-100).

He says “I was no longer capable of so thorough a self-deception” (*TRF*, 100). The horror of the brutal War on Terror angers him to identify with Afghanistan and assume that “Afghanistan is the victim of an American invasion and that Afghanistan is somehow part of Pakistan” (King 685), besides its “friend [and] a fellow Muslim nation” (*TRF*, 100). The dilemma to hold his “position at Underwood Samson” without being “compromised” at the face of the pulls due to his commitment to his ethno-cultural demands exposes him to “internal conflicts” (*TRF*, 120). As he identifies himself with the East he finds his position in conflict with America. The internal conflict is prodded by his meeting with the head of a publishing company- Juan-Bautista, in Valparaiso, where he had gone to assess a company as an analyst from US- Underwood Samson. Juan-Bautista recounts him a tale about janissaries” [who]:

were Christian boys ... captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to (*TRF*, 151).

Though, Juan-Bautista seems to be ‘plaguing’ Changez’s psychologically with doubt to disturb his office work so that his publishing company is saved from the capitalists. But there was already enough stuff available in his mind to nourish the idea Mr. Batista puts in him, in this regard. Changez had already experienced the Third World gaze in Philippines, where a person looks at him with disdain to mock at him, as he seemed to the Philippine a collaborator in impoverishing a third world country like his own. Therefore, Juan-Bautista’s



words goad him to find similitude in his own position within the US, as an employee of Underwood Samson, with devotion of a janissary, to ensure something, what to him is, exclusive American expansion:

I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain (*TRF*, 173).

As Changez realizes his status, he is disappointed about his identity. Later, Changez goes to his home- Pakistan, when war with India was hovering over Pakistan. At the same time there was anti-American surge in Pakistan, because, as he says, it was instigating India to attack Pakistan rather than helping it against India (*TRF*, 178), as Pakistan was an inevitable ally of America in Afghanistan. But he expresses the helplessness of Pakistan which is unable do away with American hegemony and dominance, because it is aided by America with money, and finds his status as a nation like that of an “indentured servant[s]” and “serf class” of America (*TRF*, 157).

Changez is a finance analyst. So, he understands the impact and power of money and capital. For him, finance works as a critical factor in directing the course of events. He links the American empire with finance, while underscoring his position as “janissary” in the capitalist and fundamentalist America: “I knew from my experience as a Pakistani – of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions– that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination” (*TRF*, 177). While expressing the inner turmoil of a marginalized person, Changez comments on the political changes of his time to explain a perspective which uncovers American exploitation, imperialism and exclusionary practice, particularly after 9/11. As he recognized himself with Pakistan, Islam and Third World, he refers to exclusion, ‘gatekeeping’, ethno-cultural and class barriers, created and maintained by America through capital. He says that when he looked at the American conduct in this manner, he:

was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check posts at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer (*TRF*, 178).



The novel documents Changez's initial revulsion for economic domination in Marxian terms and his later animated rebellion against it, instigated and spurred by the brutal military expeditions in Afghanistan and at home— Pakistan, following 9/11 terrorist incident. Although, described as a terrorist figure from the American perspective, Changez falsifies the common notion of terrorism with notion of apparent unjust violence. He deconstructs the concept of terrorism and fundamentalism. To him American capitalist fundamentalism is the real terrorism, which bases its foreign political dominance and hegemony. To him, anything which is against the interests of America is be termed as terrorism. According to him terrorism is not only unjust violence but the 'representation' of it. His own anti-American demonstration in Pakistan, to make it freer from American hegemony, is 'represented' as terrorism. And in comparison to that violent terrorism which made life of Afghans miserable is considered, represented and interpreted as a 'security raid'. He upsets the normal and popular notions and boundaries about terrorism and the US-led counterterrorism- 'War on Terror', in Afghanistan and other places of the globe. He condemns American intervention. He says "that I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable: Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan" (*TRF*, 156). Changez explains:

A common strand appeared to unite these conflicts, and that was the advancement of a small coterie's concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism, which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers not wearing the uniforms of soldiers. I recognized that if this was to be the single most important priority of our species, then the lives of those of us who lived in lands in which such killers also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage. This, I reasoned, was why America felt justified in bringing so many deaths to Afghanistan and Iraq, and why America felt justified in risking so many more deaths by tacitly using India to pressure Pakistan (*TRF*, 202-3).

Therefore, engaging with American society and underscoring his ultimate disenchantment with what he describes as American fundamentalism of Marxian kind, Changez is vociferous about America as a materially fundamentalist society, which operates in tandem with its military power, to subjugate, loot and kill the weak 'people' on the euphemistic justification of 'War on Terror' so that the desired ends and interests of a coterie are achieved. Hamid seems to conclude that the World Trade Centre twin towers, which were symbols of military and capital are attacked because they have been working in cooperation with each other and expose the human society to tortuous status of exclusion.



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