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Hashim Khan *

Muhammad Umer †

Khalid Azim Khan ‡

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A Narrative of Confrontation and Reconciliation through Vivid Symbolism: A Study of Mohsin Hamid's Novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Abstract:

This study examined The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid as a response to the American position on 9/11. The author's 'research back' and 'counter history' literary technique was studied to analyze the novel as a fiction of confrontation and reconciliation. Both the elements were studied with reference to vivid symbolism of the characters, names, situations, texts and references. The novel is a bold encounter with American political narrative and military response. Out of a huge volume of post-9/11 fiction, The Reluctant Fundamentalist stands out as a part of counter-narrative literature. This article presents the novel as fiction with a balanced approach. The novel, despite displaying the element of confrontation, carries the gesture of reconciliation. It does not incite war; it invites political, cultural and socio-economic engagement. It stipulates the need for the Muslim world to minimize their gulf of mistrust and misunderstanding with America.

Key Words:

Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Confrontation, Reconciliation

Introduction

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid has been written in the form of dramatic monologue. It is an example of autodiegetic and metafictional literature. The author presented it by spotlighting its position as the 'research back' and 'counter history' fiction with reference to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. The event of 9/11 triggered a huge volume of literature in all parts of the world, which focussed on the event from political, economic, religious, racial, social, cultural and military aspects. Mohsin Hamid is one of those post-colonial writers who chose to adopt the 'research back' technique with the purpose to refute the American narrative about the event. His novel is different from the usual or conventional tone of post-colonial fiction. It deals with two aspects; confrontation and reconciliation through direct references and symbolism. A British Pakistani journalist and writer and the son of a university professor, Hamid enjoys a tremendous understanding of American and Western political philosophy. This understanding, mixed with his mastery of the English language, made his novel a thriller and caught the attention of a huge readership around the world. He skilfully presented his point in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in which the readers find him refuting the American rhetoric. But they do not find him inciting for a war; rather, he offers reconciliation for a balance of political, religious and cultural understanding between the Americans and Muslims.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is embedded with several themes, and it addresses several literary, social and political concerns. The novel is a remarkable example of fiction that makes

impressive use of symbolism to convey the intended message in characters' ideas, emotions, situations, state of mind and movements. This study investigates two key elements, confrontation and reconciliation, presented through vivid symbolism. Symbolism flows parallel like a thread with the gradual development of the plot from the start to the end.

* Department of English & General Subjects, Saudi Japanese Automobile High Institute, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

† Department of English, Islamia College University Peshawar, KP, Pakistan. Email: mumer@icp.edu.pk

‡ Assistant Professor, Deanship of University Development and Quality Assurance, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

Significance of the Study

The selection of this study has been made because of some important aspects presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The disastrous event of 9/11 was not only tragic for America and the victims of the attack. It also proved dreadful for Muslims living in America and the Muslim world. The following key points, spotlighted in the novel, make this study significant. First, the dominant American official discourse in the wake of 9/11 has no legitimacy in terms of American wrath wrought on the Muslim diasporas living in America and on the Muslim world, linking Islam with terrorism and Muslim cultural traditions and Western values facing off each other. American revulsion against the Muslims resulted in negative media stereotype, racial discrimination, hate crimes, unlawful interrogation at American airports and even physical torture and secret imprisonments. It aroused many serious questions on the image of America as a civilized state and responsible superpower. Second, the question of Muslims' integration in American society, as the third-largest religious community in America, identity issues of minorities, national affiliation, social and ethnic belonging, alienation of migrants, citizenship and multiculturalism of American society went into jeopardy. Third, the novel stands out as a counter-response to literary, social, religious, military, political and cultural rhetoric of American government, media, society and post-9/11 literature. In this way, the political philosophy and changing beliefs of Changez, the protagonist of the novel, can be termed as a kind of warning message to the world that the ruthless War on Terror and blind American treatment of Muslims cannot give a solution but it would further exacerbate the situation by producing more radical and anti-American and anti-West sentiments among Muslims and more Muslim youth joining the radical and extremist groups. Finally, the novel also presents 'Pakistan's case' in terms of the country's long history of fluctuating relations with America. It highlights Pakistan's responsible position in showing restraint to American bullying attitude and 'do more' rhetoric. The most important point is that Hamid does not suggest confrontation with the only superpower, but it suggests adopting a balanced approach by engaging Americans to understand cultural, geopolitical, religious and strategic limitations and commitments of Muslims in general and Pakistan in particular. By adopting the policy of mutual trust and understanding each other's values, both countries can enhance bilateral relations and people to people contacts. Keeping in view the present time setting of numerous misleading literary, media and social media platforms, the researcher chose *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as an apt, effective and serious fiction in highlighting the above-mentioned points.

Author's Background

Hamid was born in 1971 in Lahore, Pakistan. He moved to the USA in his early childhood with his parents, where he spent around six years while his father was doing PhD at Stanford University. Later, the family moved back to Lahore, and the boy (Hamid) studied at the famous Lahore American School. His early childhood and adulthood experience of first-hand exposure to the English language and English society played a vital role in his personality and his later years' contribution in the literary circles. At the young age of just 18, he went again to the USA for higher education and graduated from Princeton University in 1993. His luck favoured him as he got the chance to be taught by famous writers Toni Morrison and Joyce Oates. He joined Harvard Law School to study Corporate Law and graduated in 1997. Law could not attract his literary intuition and instinct of writing. His keen observation and literary tendency gradually took him to fiction writing. He wrote his first novel *Moth Smoke* which proved a big success and won international recognition and awards. His second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, has been credited as one of the best post-colonial novels. Literary critics have termed it as the most philosophical, apt and decisive response to the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in America. The novel appeared in a time when the world of literature is buzzing with a lot of established and new writers, most of whom responded to 9/11 in their fiction. But Hamid's novel has been accredited as more successful a critical masterpiece. The success of the novel has been regarded as an offshoot of the author's intuitive personality. His readers get the impression that even before 9/11, he had been keenly observing the world events which were leading to big conflicts. His imagination might have foreseen a likely culmination of the socio-political and economic conflicts between the big powers and the rest of the world. That is why when 9/11 occurred, Hamid's imaginative mind might have conceived many things related to it as 'readymade stuff' to produce *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Like some other authors of his age, he is also credited with strong imagination that can predict or foresee the consequential outcomes of social, political, psychological and economic imbalance in the life of hundreds of millions of people who are living in post-colonial societies. His literary

style aims to produce a new, lively, refreshing and easy to understand work in order to catch the attention of many with confusing and complex notions. Hamid employed two different styles of narration in his two novels. *Moth Smoke* is embedded with many narrators, while in his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, he uses the monologic narrative style. Hamid makes a conscious effort to describe various social concerns which act as a driving force when people are in the quagmire of confusion and chaos. This is the time when these concerns find an opportunity to come out in the form of people's reaction and resistance. He exposes physical, psychological, unsocial, uncontrolled and emotional aspects of inner hostility through his characters. Anger plays a vital role in sprouting aggression in people, and we see its depiction in the monologic expression of Changez, the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The novel carries several significant themes and addresses several literary, social and political concerns. This article, however, examines only two key elements, i.e., confrontation and reconciliation, presented through vivid symbolism.

Confrontation

The first paragraph of the novel gives the impression of confrontation, though in the midst of uncertainty. The talk begins without any introduction of the speaker (later introduced as Changez, the protagonist), the listener (later introduced as an anonymous American), the situation and the location, except the hint that the speaker is non-American, and the listener is American. The first words of the speaker alarm the reader that the speaker and the listener are not 'close' to each other, and there is something between them that prompts curiosity in the reader's mind to know about them. "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you... I noticed that you were looking for something, more than looking, in fact, you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services. How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours often occurs among the people of our northwest frontier... Instead, it was your *bearing* that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation." (Hamid p: 1-2)

Such a captivating beginning of the novel invites the reader with several signs to ponder on what could unfold in the proceeding story. It is clear in the first sentence that the speaker bothered the listener without the latter's request for anything. Like most parts of the novel, the beginning part has been dealt with the use of vivid symbolism. The speaker, as the reader soon understands by his reference and talk, is a Pakistani man, bothers an American without being asked to do anything, which symbolizes Pakistan's initiative in engaging the USA. The fluctuating Pak-US political and diplomatic relations, since the creation of Pakistan, have seen many ups and downs. These relations depicted the mist of trust deficit on both sides, despite Pakistan's joining the defence pacts of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation SEATO (1954-1977) and Central Treaty Organisation CENTO (1955-1979). A different and aggressive mood of the American administration emerged in the post-9/11 scenario. American president George W. Bush called Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to join the so-called American 'War on Terror' by attacking Afghanistan. That call can be termed as a threat, an ultimatum or a notice to Pakistan that the country had no option other than to join the war, or it should face the American wrath. America got aggressive with most of the Muslim countries, but it sought Pakistan's immediate and unquestioned participation in the 'War on Terror' because of Pakistan's geopolitical position with Afghanistan. The Reuters' reported about the American administration's mood in clear words, "While the ruins of New York's World Trade Center were still smouldering in late September 2001, President George W. Bush put nations around the globe on notice: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." (Reuters, 2011).

The opening words of the novel, Changez's talk, has been presented as a mood of confrontation as it is opposite to what generally has been Pakistan's experience with America. All Pakistani governments have experienced American diplomatic, military and economic pressure with the 'do more' doctrine. But Changez takes the start, which indicates that Pakistan initiates and takes the first step to ask Americans what they want from it and what Pakistan can do for them. Changez's remark, "I have alarmed you", indicates American general (negative) perception about Pakistan and the remark, "do not be frightened by my beard", signifies suspicious American perception about Muslims. Hamid has not presented any direct talk or dialogue of the American, but the reader conceives his impression through Changez's comments or responses to him. Changez's remark, "I noticed that you were looking for something, more than looking, in fact, you seemed to be on a *mission*", is a big blow by Hamid, which indicates

that Americans, despite their claims about their friendly relations with Pakistan, do not trust Pakistan and they always have doubts. Their relations with Pakistan have been more than common relations between the two. Hamid makes another blow when Changez tells the American that he did not recognize him by his fair complexion but by his 'bearing', which is not worthy of a gentle and respectable person. And if American thinks of his superiority because of his fair complexion, the people of Pakistan's northwest frontier (present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) enjoy the same skin colour. "No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours often occurs among the people of our northwest frontier." (Hamid p: 1). There is a double indication in describing this because historically, the people of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pashtuns or Pathans, are decedents of the Afghan race. America waged the so-called 'War on Terror' against Afghans, and the Pakistani Pashtuns stood on the forefront with Afghans. The majority of Pakistanis were against the American attack on Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban government. Most Pakistanis, especially Pashtuns, supported Afghans and the Taliban government with moral and other means though not very openly because of the Pakistan government's support to the American war machine. The similarity of the Pashtuns' and Americans' skin colour indicates that the former can engage the latter with no fear or intimidation, despite the huge difference of military and economic powers between the two.

Hamid also challenges American students' ability to get excellence and compares it with Pakistani students getting excellence despite many odds. Changez tells the American about his experience at Princeton. "They were almost all intelligent, and many were brilliant, but whereas I was one of only two Pakistanis in my entering class – two from a population of over a hundred million souls, mind you – the Americans faced much fewer daunting odds in the selection process. A thousand of your compatriots were enrolled...As a result, the non-Americans among us tended on average to do better than the Americans, and in my case, I reached my senior year without having received a single B." (Hamid p: 3-4)

The above extract symbolizes refuting excellence of American students in higher education as compared to Pakistani students even in America. It also hints that Americans are not more capable or more brilliant than Pakistanis. Pakistanis can engage them on equal footing in all fields. American threatening and bullying attitude towards Pakistan has been well portrayed when Changez tells the American that the latter's suspicious movements are well in his notice. "You seem worried...and there is no need to reach under your jacket." (Hamid p: 6).

His words remind a long history of the bullying attitude of almost all American governments towards Pakistan. They never trusted Pakistan as an ally but treated it with mistrust and issued ultimatums and threats on many occasions. Pakistan faced American sanctions when they needed their help and diplomatic support. During Pakistan's wars against India in 1965 and 1971 and at the time of Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, Americans did not realize Pakistan's delicate position to safeguard its sovereignty against its five-time bigger enemy, India. On the other hand, their relations with India remained cordial, and they helped and supported them on Kashmir- the core issue between Pakistan and India. This has been brilliantly portrayed by Hamid when Changez offers him tea and asks him about his choice. "Would you prefer regular tea, with milk and sugar, or green tea, or perhaps their more fragrant speciality, Kashmiri tea? Excellent choice. I will have the same" (Hamid p: 6).

This talk signifies that Americans never took Kashmir as a serious issue between India and Pakistan. They consider it only as a tourist place, and a large number of Americans are among the tourists who visit the Pakistani and Indian Kashmir valleys.

American 'do more' pomposity has been hinted at in the novel when Jim interviews Changez for a job in America. Changez tells him many things about his academic excellence, upon which he utters, "That's very good", and Changez feels that he has satisfied the interviewer. But Jim's next and unexpected question, "but what else?" (Hamid p: 7), makes Changez silent. It is an indication that Americans are never happy with whatever is Pakistan's performance and capability. They always expect it to 'show more' and 'do more.' Hamid suggests that such an attitude never makes friends, but it increases mistrust, confusion and distance. It also specifies that Americans never considered Pakistan as equal but as a state that is always in need of American aid, money and help. Pakistani governments, both military and civil, are more responsible for making Americans think of Pakistan as inferior. They never tried to establish their relations on equality by displaying diplomatic integrity and a position of a proud nation. Their long history of seeking American aid, both military and financial, and in return accepting American demands, gave the nation a humiliating and disgraceful position. Hamid, using striking symbolism, makes it clearer for the

readers when Jim directly asks Changez during the interview, “And isn’t it harder for international students to get in if they apply for aid? So, you must have really needed the money... Do your friends here know that your family couldn’t afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship?” (Hamid p: 9). These remarks are very humiliating for Changez, like the American governments’ attitude towards Pakistan, which is evident in his annoyance, “I was getting annoyed.” (Hamid p: 9). Hamid indicates his wish of confronting this attitude when Changez replies in anger, “Excuse me, Jim, but is there a point to all this?” (Hamid p: 9). But Americans would not consider Pakistani resentment at all, and they would continue rebuking and feeling fun in making Pakistan showing ‘some’ attitude. Jim does not care about Changez’s aggressive response, but he makes fun of it, “You have a temper. I like that.” (Hamid p: 9). The author is not in the mood to ‘tolerate’ American rebuking, and he tries to balance the situation by Changez’s response in which he explains his sound financial background, “I am not poor; far from it: my great grandfather, for example, was a barrister with the means to endow a school for the Muslims of Punjab. Like him, my grandfather and father both attended university in England. Our family home sits on an acre of land in the middle of Gulberg, one of the most expensive districts of this city. We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener – which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth.” (Hamid p: 10-11). Such response presents the author’s confronting mood against the so-called American superiority complex in which they continue humiliating other nations by the show of their financial strength and advancement in other fields. They misuse their status of being a superpower. The author suggests that being a superpower does not mean to humiliate and degrade others, but it is the status of more responsibility and the role of a ‘big brother’ or a ‘helping friend.’

Reconciliation

It has been mentioned earlier that the very first sentence of the first paragraph of the novel gives the impression of confrontation. But right after that, the second sentence of the first paragraph indicates the symbolic impression of reconciliation by the author. The protagonist, after alarming the American in the first instance, invites his attention to a reconciliatory gesture by saying, “Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America.” (Hamid p: 1). Such a captivating and symbolic beginning gives a sense of appeal to the reader that the story would unfold interesting proceedings. The beginning is not a conventional simple start of a story; rather, it hints to the reader to be ready for analytical involvement.

The reconciliatory tone by the speaker, later known as Changez, the central character, reminds Pakistan’s reconciliatory foreign policy and long history with the USA. Pakistan has never been in any position, financially, diplomatically or strategically, to be able to display any kind of disapproval or confrontation in response to American relations. The relationship between the two countries has never been friendly and based on mutual trust and respect. Though American governments have been claiming to have been engaged with Pakistan as a strategically and ‘friend’, the diplomatic history of the two countries negates this claim.

In their later talk, Changez tells the American that studying at Princeton was a matter of prestige and honour for him. His high praise for Princeton, its professors and his fellows indicates the reconciliatory gesture by which he tries to ‘come close’ to the American and have his ‘good feeling’ about him. “This is a dream come true...I have access to this beautiful campus...to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making.” (Hamid p: 3). This mentions what Pakistani governments have been doing since Pakistan’s independence in 1947. During their talk, tea is served, and Changez feels that the American looks at the cups suspiciously. Changez, in spite of criticizing him for his unnecessary suspicious nature to everything, extends his reconciliatory gesture to have his trust. “Do not look so suspicious. I assure you, sir, nothing untoward will happen to you, not even a runny stomach. After all, it is not as if it has been poisoned. Come, if it makes you more comfortable, let me switch my cup with yours.” (Hamid p: 13). This situation makes the reader uncomfortable about the American’s suspicious thinking. He does not seem convinced by Changez’s ‘explanation’ as the latter displays so much service that he switches his cup with him. Pakistani public can well understand and recall that on most of the occasions when Pakistan extended its cooperation to America, the latter never showed trust, respect or even appreciation. There have been many instances when the Pakistani public saw American account about Pakistan’s being a key ally and a ‘friend’ of America. Soon after such a statement, an American State Department spokesperson or a key diplomat would deliver a contradictory statement. It would again be a sign of mistrust, a hint of suspicion and the demand of ‘do more. Changez continues his talk about his personal love of America and his experience of

studying and working there. He feels that the American has not been 'impressed' by his talk. He does not want him to go and tries letting him sit for a longer time to listen to his talk. "Allow me to pour you another cup." ([Hamid p: 17](#)). His offer to pour another cup of tea is a gesture of his hospitality, but he wants him to stay with him until he finishes his talk.

The author repeatedly hints at confrontation and reconciliation. In several instances, Changez makes the American realize that he 'knows' about his every movement, and he can understand his intentions. During their talk, Changez realizes the presence of a satellite phone in the American's possession, on which he instantly tells him that he has seen the mobile phone and also that the phone is not an ordinary phone but a satellite phone. At the same time, he offers his reconciliatory gesture by telling him that he can comfortably receive the call and nobody would do eavesdropping. This instance reminds me of American use of advanced technology in espionage activities inside and outside of Pakistan, which damaged Pakistan's image as a peaceful nation.

Hamid also hints that Pakistan as a country or Pakistanis as a nation have never confronted America or Americans on any mutual or international platform. While telling the American about his communication with Jim, at the conclusion of their project, Changez tells him about his feeling about America. "I was not at war with America." ([Hamid p: 84](#)). Pakistanis have displayed a traditional fair attitude towards Americans. Even on the occasions when it is probably necessary to tell the Americans in a stern tone, Pakistanis maintain the fair tone. Changez feels that while telling the American about the comparative Muslim and American history, his tone gets rough. His apology symbolizes the traditional Pakistani position towards America. "I apologize; it was not my intention to be rude." ([Hamid p: 116](#)). The reader feels uncomfortable at this point because the comparison of Muslim and American history by Changez is quite convincing and reveals the historical facts. "And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies gnawing away at the edge of a continent. (Hamid p: 116). It makes the American embarrassed on the realization of which he apologizes. He tells the American that his love for America has not ceased, although he is no more living in America. "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation to your country had not entirely ceased." ([Hamid p: 195](#)).

At the conclusion of the story, Changez notices the American putting his hand in his jacket, and a gleam of metal is seen. He tells the American that the latter should not be fearful because they share a sort of shared intimacy, and the metal gleam may not be a weapon but a business card. Like the beginning, the last dialogue is also laden with symbolism, message and indication of the relations between the two countries. "But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards." ([Hamid p: 209](#)). This remark is symbolic, and it is a clear indication of Pak US history of engagement in fluctuating relationship. America never extended real help to Pakistan. It rather sued Pakistan with bullying and threatening policy.

Conceptual Importance of Symbolism

Fiction is a different genre from journalism. Contrary to the outright, obvious or straightforward expression in media, fiction writers tend to convey their message to the audience in a poetic or indirect approach. But this way causes complexity in understanding the entire concept or the literary objective presented by the author. To produce an impact and to insert an effective impression into the text, the authors use the technique of symbolism. The actions, names, objects, conditions or situations are associated with something else to produce additional or more substantial meaning. Symbolism allows the writers to achieve the literary objective as well as it provides them with the liberty/opportunity to polish their fiction with ornamented and figurative style.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is among those novels which have been written as the direct response to the 9/11 tragedy. Knowing the fact that the chronicles of Changez, the protagonist, revolve around before, during and after 9/11, Hamid makes use of allegories and symbols to present his novel as an effective counter-narrative against the dominant American narrative. He tries to attract the audience's attention to observe the shift of Changez's beliefs and hybrid identity from the spell of America's capitalist-cantered society to his genuine national identity, Pakistani identity. The new revelations after 9/11 are crucial in giving him the meaning of his original identity and departing him from the status of 'Other' in America under the mist of American values. The use of symbolism in the novel

serves the purpose of presenting postmodern literary tropes in highlighting the immigrants' conditions of hyper-reality.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is laden with features, textual references and physical elements which portray an effective display of symbolism. Some important and remarkable symbolic elements are as under.

Changez's Scar

The American is worried to see a scar on Changez's face which the latter explains as a childhood mark of a dripped molten wax. The author keeps it unanswered and leaves it for the reader to interpret its meaning according to his understanding. The reader can think of all possibilities; it's being the result of his recent violent opposition to the US and maybe because of a childhood accident. The scar's appearance is also symbolic as it is smooth but dark. The reader can infer its smoothness as innocence or its darkness as evil. Innocence or evil; both can be attributed to Changez as he may be as innocent and smooth as he describes to the stranger, or he may be a terrorist or sinister figure who wants to kill the American. The scar is left unanswered by the author to infer its interpretation keeping in Pak US diplomatic and military relations.

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Allegory of Changez and Erica Relationship

The relationship between Changez and Erica is difficult, awkward, complex and discomfited. Despite having passion, emotions and sentiments, they cannot enjoy the relation. The reader is perplexed to maintain the viewpoint about who is more inescapably drawn to whom; Erica or Changez? In analyzing this relationship, the reader takes Changez as Pakistan or maybe the Muslim world. Both attributions seem convincing. Pakistan or the Muslim world, both have never been at ease with their relations with America. Nor they could leave behind the odds and challenges between them and America. Erica's infatuation with Changez and her inability to enjoy her relation indicates America's diplomatic and military history with Pakistan and the Muslim world. America claimed and tried on most of the occasions, at least on the diplomatic front, to have balanced and normal relations, but the enigma of Muslim terrorists has always been disrupting the relations. Erica ultimately decides to leave Changez, and that is what we see in general American position with Muslim nations as compared to other nations.

Underwood Samson

The initials of the name of the American firm Changez worked for symbolize America's official name, the US. Not only the name but the firm's power, execution of plans, apparent optimism and the racist policies under the surface hint at American power and exercise of racist policies. The initial introduction of the firm by Changez gives the impression of meritocracy and rhetoric of so-called American Dream. When the story unfolds, the reader can see its hidden agenda which is a blend of racism, unjust and ruthless dealing with the employees who display any sort of contradictory opinion. The author is not a miser in showing 'good' in American people but the scope of their goodness is limited and it cannot compete with the imperialist and prejudiced version that can cause more harm.

Beard

With the start of the story, the reader can feel that the stranger (American) is scared and nervous on the sight of Changez's beard. Changez also tells him his experience of being suspicious in the eyes of his fellows after he raises beard. Beard has a symbolic importance in the novel. If kept by a Pakistani or a Muslim, it is matter of suspicion and a sign of terrorism and extremism for Americans. The beard of a non-Muslim has no issue for them. They do not or cannot understand Islamic tradition of raising beard by men. Changez's beard is also an indication of his rejection of American values and western traditions.

The Twin Towers

The image of the Twin Towers of New York stands as American dominance and financial power. The fall of the towers gives Changez the feeling that America deserves this because it bombed many Muslim countries and scores of thousands of innocent people died. He also acknowledges that many innocent lives have been lost in the devastation of the towers. His initial response of a kind of comfort on the collapse of the towers represents the Muslims' initial feeling about the incident.

Tea

Another symbolic item in the novel is tea. The stranger is offered to have tea in a café in Lahore. The stranger is not at ease at all, and he fears either to be poisoned in tea or ambushed by Changez, waiter or some unknown men hidden in the café. The reader feels, like Changez, that he is scared, so Changez exchanges his cup of tea with him. The story later reveals that the stranger's suspicion and fear are baseless, but the open ending of the novel still lets it open for the reader to derive a conclusion by his judgement of the situation. The exchange of tea also indicates many such incidents of exchange of cultural things in movies and fiction. It raises a question in the reader's mind if a series of cultural exchange between America and Pakistan or the Muslim world can ever minimize the gulf of mistrust and doubts between them?

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is usually believed as a fiction of resistance and a story of a confrontation with the American version of 9/11. Its timing is important as it was written in 2007 in response to the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001. Literary analysis of the novel reveals its position as a multifaceted fiction that covers several aspects like political, military, cultural, economic, social, psychological and religious. The endnote is related to the author's vibrant experience of living very close to American and western society. His high profile educated background and extensive capability of English language make him capable of presenting a fiction of balanced outcome. He has skillfully exposed the so-called American Dream, American hegemonic position and (neo) imperialist philosophy even in the time when the fall of imperialism has already been witnessed in all parts of the world. Hamid has maintained the balance by confronting the American position on terrorism but not inciting a war against America. He has offered the reconciliation between America and Pakistan in general and between America and the Muslim world in particular. The literary merit of the novel presents a vivid symbolism of images, phrases, situations, characters and names which have been used to convey the message of confrontation and reconciliation.

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