

Manifestation of Postcolonial Ideology in Mohsin Hamid's Reluctant Fundamentalist: A Critical Study

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Abstract

This thesis aims to study mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from a postcolonial view point. It includes introduction, biography of the author, plot summary of the novel. Also, postcolonial theory discussed in short. Next the concept of mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora being explained. Since the thesis investigates the aspects of postcolonial therefore mimicry, hybridity and diaspora are discussed with a postcolonial aspect. Also it explores the issue of mimicry portrayed in the novel and how mimicry is ineffective in aligning the immigrants' culture to that of the colonizer. After that it reveals the issue of hybridity in the novels depicting how cultural hybridity assists in forging a new culture. Moreover, it seeks to expound on the impact of cultural hybridity and how it can influence characters and self-worth. Next, it illustrates the concept of diaspora in the novel representing the immigrants' experience as complicated, finding themselves perpetually in a transient situation fraught with memories of their native land and struggling with realities of the new environment and host culture affected by the new environment diasporic identity. According to the discussions and findings, the study concludes that the cultural hybridity, mimicry, and diaspora were presented in the novel. The main character of the novel was affected by his diasporic situations, thus influencing the aspects of hybridity and mimicry. There has been a tremendous influence on the colonized population due to the policies of colonial power. Finally, the thesis analysis the novel based on quotes of the original text of the *Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Postcolonialism, Hybridity, Diaspora, Mimicry, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Mohsin Hamid's works have been a great source of knowledge elucidating various postcolonial concepts. The present paper explores Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, to reveal the portrayal of postcolonial concept related to identity. The study will investigate the postcolonial concepts through the lens of the main character as he struggles to construct identity in the host environment. He has extemporarily portrayed his mastery of literature by using postcolonial theory to communicate the effects of colonialism.

The issue of identity is of great importance in this literary work as the author tries to show how the characters try to adapt to the host country's culture despite his conflicting backgrounds. Mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora will be discussed in the novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. The characters in this novels portrays this fundamental concept. The author himself is also from the colonized country, and he has been through similar situations reflected by the character in his novel.

Mohsin Hamid is a renowned contemporary writer who has played a crucial role in revolutionizing contemporary Pakistani

literature. He has become famous for his ingenious literary works like the *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Moth Smoke*, and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Hamid was born in 1971 in Lahore in Pakistan. He grew up in Pakistan but spent most of his childhood in California, where his father was a professor and pursuing a Ph.D. at Stanford University. Hamid's family returned to Pakistan, where he received his early education at Lahore American School. At the age of 18, he moved back to the United States to pursue higher education. Mohsin Hamid attended Princeton University and graduated in 1993 with the highest honours.

Mohsin Hamid was fortunate to be under the mentorship of contemporary literary giants such as Toni Morrison and Joyce Carol Oates. Under this counsel and mentorship, Hamid developed a great passion for writing and nurtured this talent. He started writing drafts of his first novel in Morrison's fiction workshop. After graduation, Mohsin returned to Lahore and continued working on his novel. Later, Hamid moved back to the United States to attend Harvard Law School and graduated from this university in 1997. During his stay, he worked for McKinsey & Company as a management consultant to raise money to pay his student loans. In his free time, he was able to work and complete his first novel. In 2001 Hamid moved to London, and a stay that was scheduled for one year was changed to an eight-year stay with occasional visits to Pakistan. Later he was able to obtain citizenship in the United Kingdom and got married. His urge to travel exuberated, and he divided his time between Lahore, London, New York, Italy, and Greece.

Cultural studies are always broad and do not involve a specific object. In cultural studies, anything is liable to be utilized to explain and evaluate culture. Additionally, cultural studies typically utilize the qualitative method due to its normalcy of using textual evaluation found in any other discipline. These disciplines can be literary criticism, linguistics, or anthropology, which utilizes the method of qualitative analysis. On that account, it is right to state that cultural studies can be conducted by "close reading" in literary evaluation, which mainly centers on the text (Sardar & Van Loon, 2012).

According to Sardar and Van Loon (2012), cultural studies attempt to comprehend and distort the dominative structures located everywhere. The reason for studying culture is to perceive cultural practices subjects and how they are related to power. Its ultimate goal is to expound on the connection of power and evaluate the manipulation and shaping of the cultural norms by these connections. Cultural studies are also dedicated to the present community moral review and a rudimentary political activity line. Consequently, the study of culture also entails the reconstruction of society by involving the use of critical politics. Lois Tyson, in her book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide: Second Edition*, states that:

Cultural imperialism, a direct result of economic domination, consists of the "takeover" of one culture by another: the food, clothing, customs, recreation, and values of the economically dominant culture increasingly replace those of the economically vulnerable culture until the latter appears to be a kind of imitation of the former (Tyson, 2015).

Literature created during colonial times is very different from the literature done after the colonial era. The study of postcolonialism is inseparable from the aspects of colonialism that comprises of colonized and colonizers. In the postcolonial theory, the relationship between colonialists and the countries they colonized is evaluated. This theory also looks into the social and psychological relationship between the colonized and the colonialists. This relationship later develops into a vast field of postcolonial research.

Each writer writing postcolonial literature might aim to diversify the genre, but those writers who combine other traditional formats show continuous appreciation of the used formats. Most works of literature in English have shown a segregated historical-cultural surrounding of the postcolonial nations. Traditional formats can be used both in short poems and oral narratives. An example is Salman Rushdie in his book, *Shame*. Rushdie replicated the traditional formats that were present in the oral narratives in India. Postcolonialism comprises mimicry, hybridity, and diasporic aspects.

Bhabha (1994) utilizes mimicry based on the postcolonial era to reflect realism. He continues by saying that mimicry involves repetition that influences the loss of originality among individuals; mimicry is not in a form of representation. When the colonized uses mimicry, he portrays himself as an intellectual, according to the colonizer. The colonizer will then view the colonized as part of their society. If the colonized maintains and follows their own cultural identity, the colonizers feel unsafe.

Themes of mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora are recurrent and resulted from stereotyping and cultural differences. Homi Bhabha is one of the most known modern critics of postcolonial literature. Bhabha describes hybridity as:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces, and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (Bhabha, 1994)

“Hybridity and liminality do not refer only to space, but also to time: one assumption that Bhabha’s work undermines is the idea that people living in different spaces (for example, nations or whole continents) are living at different stages of ‘progress’” (Huddart, 2005). Despite this fact, individuals are able to maintain both cultural identities. They can also mediate, negotiate, and translate empathy and the contrast within the vigorous inclusion and exchange. A dominating counteragent is encoded within these individuals. Bhabha explains that in a situation where the colonizer portrays regular practices that are seen as dominating, the aspect of hybridity influences a third space to restate the meaning and negotiation (Bhabha, 1994).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist: A Postcolonial Study

Mimicry

Mimicry helps in shaping identities of characters in Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a reflection of ambivalence between the colonized and colonizer in the colonial and postcolonial setups. Bhabha’s theory of mimicry is used for the analysis. It shows the deconstructive resistance initiated by mimicry in a crisis of identity.

Mohsin Hamid has effectively addressed the issue of identity in his novel. In Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the author has also effectively addressed identity crisis through his characters. Identity crisis is expressed during the encounter among Changez (Pakistan Muslim), Erica (white American lady), and Chris (Erica’s ex-boyfriend) and because of the cultural and political factors. Hamid holds the belief in the intertwined nature of an individual and the political aspect of their surroundings. Changez and Erica, at one point, stand firm for their respective countries and cultures; Hamid addresses this issue from the point of view of the so-called subaltern cultures and thus writes back to the empire. Hamid expresses the current neo-colonial power, which is not compatible with American policies and culture, through encountering Changez, who is the protagonist of the novel,

Bhabha adopts a zoological term of mimicry to expound on the status of the postcolonial community. Essentially, mimicry denotes imitating, and imitating refers to copying something, making variations between the actual objects and the replicated ones. In this regard, the general opinion perceives that the colonized individuals are inferior because of imitating the colonizers. However, Bhabha denotes that “reading as being ravished. Writing is really a contingent and dramatic process” (Huddart, 2005). Bhabha opines that culture is like writing and reading. For instance, when an individual is reading a colonial cultural tradition, he is absorbed into the text they are reading, just like mimicry.

Mimicry is a term that denotes the instability of colonial discourse. According to Bhabha

(1994), mimicry should be regarded as a process through which the colonized individuals are perceived as almost the same, but not quite the same. Indeed, imitation cannot be regarded as original. Things like manners, culture, or principles that are copied by the colonized individuals contain a sense of mockery and imitation.

Hamid represents Changez's struggle to acquire an identity within the Western culture. Changez, the novel's protagonist, is a Pakistani who graduated from Princeton University and later joined a high-end valuation firm. The story's setting is in Lahore, where Changez comes across an American tourist who narrates how he lost his job, love, sense of belonging, and identity. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed the world for him and significantly contributed to his life struggles. He is now stopped at airports for random checks and inspections because of his national identity. Being a Muslim is no longer an identification of culture and religion rather a stereotype and a brand with numerous implications. Similarly, Changez strives for verification of his identity in American society, school, and market. He displays camouflage at the beginning of the novel to blend in with the American culture. Despite his mimicry, he is not regarded as equal, and people often humiliate him, which results in his anger. The shift of caring from oneself to one's country is depicted clearly in this novel. Thus, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* analysis aims to show how Changez expresses mimicry, its impact on his identity, and how social, personal, and political factors affect him.

Indeed, if the colonial discourse is duplicated, it develops into a colonial narrative lacking resistance. If all people believe in the discourse created through a narrative, there develops cultural colonization. Colonial individuals tend to spread their discourse because of their theoretical and historical simplification. They try to provide modernization, civilization, and the future as it boosts their status over the colonized people. Mimicry is perceived as a deconstructive postcolonial technique of breaking the colonial authority over the colonized individuals.

DIASPORA

Diverse theories and discussions of the diasporic encounter depend on the type of diaspora experienced. Preethamol (2018) defines diaspora as a category of diverse communities associated with contrasting languages, cultures, and religions. These communities share languages, social, religious, and cultural practices through the national extremities. Taking the context of a third-world country, diaspora is characterized various socio-political consternation, including ethnic violence, communalism, poverty, and fundamentalism shared to the rest of the world by the third-world countries. For some time now, identity has been the main focus academically through the globe, and through its replication in diaspora writings, the readers' perceptions are influenced by that critical issue. Identity has become a point of reference for the other aspects of people's culture and lives. An individual's geographical location is one of the components that structuralize a person's identity framework. A person's place of origin also affects his status and position in a given social structure and other people's behaviours around him. We will look at the implication of contrasting diasporic on a single individual in the novel; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid.

Mohsin Hamid characterizes Changez as a protagonist in his book, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez travels to America from Pakistan for academic purposes and later lands a job in a successful firm that offers consulting services. In his initial stay in New York, Changez's perspective on the United States and Pakistan is that of two binary contrasts:

In the stories we tell of ourselves, we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings. We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. 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, 2007)

The resulting outcome of the research is to develop a strategy to make the local cultures

from being over-influenced by their colonial masters. Many countries now practice the laws of their colonizers and live to their means. To prevent the human identity from being distorted by the colonizers, the study of decolonization theory is suggested.

This theory is mainly centered on decolonizing the colonized individuals or societies. Colonization and outrages subjected to the colonized by the colonizers are compared to physical and cultural abuse. According to Frantz Fanon (2007) in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, “decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transform the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of history” (p.2).

The only incurable change on postcolonialism effects that influence the distortion of individuals’ identities is by decolonization. Decolonization is not only applicable to the colonized, but this is a process that also involves the colonizers. White people are required to anatomize their ideas, perspectives, and culture because the hierarchy of colonialism is based and maintained in the dominance, taking into consideration this colonization culture.

A sane process of revitalization of culture is the main focus of decolonization. Reborn of cultures that were fragmented in the colonial era is crucial. Traditional and colonized individuals’ way of life is required to educate them by providing the cultural lessons of their history. By this, I mean educating traditional and native lifestyles, knowledge, and values and not teaching the powerful hierarchy of Western countries that confuses their history.

To prevent identity distortion returning of illegally acquired lands and coming up with relations that are not related to privileges of the whites. We are required to overcome our own extant to become invigorated, according to Mankiller in the book *Behind the trail of broken treaties: An Indian declaration of independence*. By Vine Deloria Jr

Only in that way can we transcend the half-millennium of culture shock brought about by the confrontation with Western civilization. When we leave the culture shock behind, we will be masters of our own fate again and be

able to determine for ourselves what kind of lives we will lead (Deloria et al., 1999).

CONCLUSION

The narrative of Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explains the presence of cultural hybridity and mimicry in the diaspora. The novel challenges the perspective that the aspects of colonialism, mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora are simply celebrated. this novel consist of character that undergoes a stressful process of seeking public recognition and renegotiation of their split inclination in the diaspora. Some of the characters are seen to defeat this process of identity distortion, but some are seen to succumb to its influence.

Without showing excitement of any hybrid identity, the novel reflects how the hybrid identity’s hope and promises are determined by what Bhabha refers to in an interview conducted by Rutherford as a thing that is new, unrecognizable, and totally different, which represent a new negotiation era of comprehension and representation. He goes and describes it as a new association and experience that builds itself and may require an individual to reconsider and expand on their principles

Mimicry is also used utilized by the character in one situation or the other. The use of mimicry is usually not successfully articulated. Taking the example of the novel, the characters’ mimicry is not successful, as shown Changez in *The Reluctant fundamentalist*. Although in the case of Changez, we see that his use of American culture mimicry proves successful until he is placed between the cultural identity gap. Jemubhai, a character in the book, *The Inheritance of Loss*, on the other hand, is significantly affected by the aspect of mimicry. The judge treasured the Britain culture and wanted to become an English man. Later on, it is evident that his aspect of mimicry failed.

The author of this novel narrates events from the point of dominance accounting to cultural dislocation, immigration, mimicry, hybridity, and belongingness. Taking from their backgrounds, they have faced these disturbing and distressing situations and practices. Hamid shows the importance of coming back to one’s homeland with the urge to find out more about the importance of intercultural situations that they have faced in their lives. The need to come back home should not be because of nostalgic

sentiments. This is one of the problems that heavily affects individuals' living in diaspora and is subjected to the postcolonial aspects of mimicry and hybridity. With the majority of it being illegal immigrant, this individual is subjected to discrimination and segregation, a total opposite reception that he had perceived to receive. This type of treatment is what makes this individual return home with nostalgic opinions and distorted identities.

The novel can be described as a reflection and the expansion of the exclusion and space experienced by the vulnerable individuals in the society. This novel also portrays diasporic and immigration experience that can be in form of country to country or culture to culture and how these experiences influence individual experiencing it. The author of the novel aims at portraying the postcolonialism concepts and how identity loss is influenced by these concepts. Mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora place an individual in the gap in between two cultures, a place where an individual's cultural identity is seen to have been distorted.

There are evident cases of postcolonial concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and diaspora in the novel, and these cases are seen to have impacted a loss of identity in the characters of the book. Some of the individual affected by this postcolonial aspect is seen to have emotionally succumbed to it. Other character is seen to have finally overcome the effect of identity loss after falling victim to it like the narrator in the book *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

In this research, we found out that the life of immigrants in foreign countries are affected by the pressure of trying to be part of that foreign culture, thus influencing the particular individual's cultural identity. This can be seen in the example of character from the novel in context. Narrator's character seen to be experiencing the problem of distorted cultural identity in the book *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez is seen to have been primarily affected by the foreign cultural practices during his stay in the United States, specifically in the metropolitan of New York.

Most people living abroad or who have been exposed to foreign culture often shows the characteristics of mimicry. This adaptation of this feature is usually implicated by the

assumption that Western countries' lifestyles and cultural practices are generally superior to the cultures of other countries. Immigrants from third-world countries are typically excited by the American way of life, and they strive to acquire their identity so that they can also be viewed as dominative.

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