

**Islam as a religion and its Rituality: A driving force in Re-establishing Islam
in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.**

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Writers from any particular genre of literature--to say, short story, poem, novel, romance, drama etc, use their literary tools to pinpoint the most aggravated or blessed spectra of the phenomenon on which they loiter. It may include the multifaceted dimensions of their psychological, mental, familial or the inner world which presides over him or her in leading them step out by evacuating all those suppressed feelings into their writings. Some may, on the other hand, include the societal, cultural demarcation on which they are bound to witness the routine of the proceedings of everyday life and its spheres of happenings that eventually can be affective, unacceptable and opposite to the rest of the followers of its constructed ideas. These writers take this mode of expression as an apparatus to convey the true message of the particular events that are culturally, socially falsely created by the hegemonic usurpation. In this regard, we have one writer or more specifically novelist, namely Mohsin Hamid, who has taken novel as the literary genre as an important apparatus of resistance to the theorization of certain events that were made before his eyes. He has attempted to portray the exact dimension of the religion he believed, i.e. Islam, which under the spell of cultural imperialism and usurpation of the superpower has been turned into distorted, phobic manifestation to the world in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Islam is a religion of peace. Islam means 'surrender'--surrender to God for vowing that no evil things will be done, surrender to sin for not making it once again in later time, surrender to humanity that it must keep the very essence of human values, its moralities, its societal responsibilities. But since its advent to the human world, Islam has been caricatured by the West in all sorts of medium from time to time. He has erected this Islam as a religion, like other different believers of different faiths, and its common rituals as the most requisite tools to establish the essence of the very faith.

Muslims in the twenty first century world view are portrayed to that much extent how much it can designating them or their religion from worse to worst. Islam is considered to be the religion of brooding terrorism, mass killing, and an enemy to humanity. But fortunately, this is

not what we are made to experience about Islam. Like many other religions, it has its own history of civilization, a sheer contribution to the development of human kind throughout its gradual encroachment towards modernity. Who are the main masterminds before the fictitious creation of Islam? Can West or America only be blamed as the propagator of this *neo-colonism*? Are *Fundamentalists* and *Islamic Fundamentalists* who convey the message of protecting their community not responsible for the distortion of Islam and Muslims? What are the ways to curb the ever growing tactful hegemonic *invisible terrorism* of America?

ABSTRACT

This paper tends to delineate one Sub-Continent *Muslim narrative* in order to depicting how certain matters are constructed, moulded against the Muslims over the globe, how things have been turned into a diametrically changed situation about Islam and its followers; how Muslims have spent moments after moments after the great curse to humanity, the 9/11 attack on World Trade Centre, 2001. This paper also aims to show how Muslims are concerned to redefine their own religious, ethnic identities that are loosened as the impact of forceful racial cultural new form of subjugation.

Key Words: *Neo-Colonialism, Fundamentalism, Islamic Fundamentalism, Invisible Terrorism, Muslim Narrative.*

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Pakistani born-American Muslim, Hamid came into the fore by his first novel *Moth Smoke* in 2001. But he came into limelight with the publication of his second novel *The*

Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) which availed him to uphold Islam to the world as a religion and those which are being constructed for the benefits of the West. Changez, his mouthpiece in the novel as the protagonist, is the literal representation of the novelist himself who, just like the protagonist, has a glorious record of his academic life, studying at Princeton University and later Harvard, his successive internships throughout the South and later at Underwood Samson-a top firm in Manila by the elite evaluation. But the 9/11 attack in 2001 in the World Trade Centre brought a diametrically changed life situation of Muslims at the heart of America. Islam from thence became the puppets of hatred, assault, frequent and most importantly checking of Muslims separately in offices at the airport for several occasions became the extra task of the American government. 'When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners. The officer who inspected my passport was a solidly built woman with a pistol at her hip and a mastery of English inferior to mine; I attempted to disarm her with a smile. "What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?" she asked me. "I live here," I replied. "That is not I asked you, sir," she said. "What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?".....In the end I was dispatched for a secondary inspection in a room where I sat on a metal bench next to a tattooed man in handcuffs. My team did not wait for me; by the time I entered the customs hall they had already collected their suitcases and left. (Hamid, 74)1. This fictional cum -personal account of the protagonist as well as the novelist gives its attestation to the accentuation of what Islam is and how its followers are to follow its daily duties, how these elements act as a driving force to the re-establishment of the religion in this section. The story opens with the narrator, Changez who is also the protagonist in a conversation with his American friend in the Old Anarkali district "at a cafe table in Lahore" where the story gets its liveliness through remembrance in the manner of a dramatic monologue. Changez started his narratives through the recalling of the past events that he has undergone in America during his staying as an overseas scholarship student at Princeton University, Harvard University and later as a successful employee in a prestigious firm, Underwood Samson and the simultaneous courtship along with his busy life for Erica –the daughter of a wealthy East coast family. The story evolves with this past memory where the American stranger is the audience who nods as a feeling of satisfaction to what the narrator depicts about the American matter and sometimes bows his head as sign of displeasure to the point the narrator delineates about America. The story gets its climatic point after the 9/11 invasion to the American civilisation by Al-Qaida in 2001 when the protagonist was there in America. As a Muslim, he had to go through a serial claustrophobic atmosphere in his office, in his apartment and in the airport. Though he had a valuable degree in American Universities and a good record of his satisfactory job in the American firm and who never wanted killing of humanity, he had to pass on such these ordeals. "I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of American University; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed?" (Hamid, 72-73)2.

This account through dramatic monologue has helped the novelist accentuate the fact on which America planned a game of hide and seek through mass killings, bombings and severe harassment of Muslims throughout the world in a disguise of 'a war on terror'. This kind of account also validates the accuracy of the fact-that Islam is a way of life, a perfect system for living everyday life and its ritualities are the appropriate tools for facilitating this task of sustenance, that a whole compact ideology cannot be judged through a small section of defiance done by few evil minded Muslims, which the novelist intends to uphold before the world. Changez, 'a product' of America and a big mastermind in drafting the American economic policies through the Underwood Samson firm, altered his Americanness and put on the dress of his own religiosity, ethnicity after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. He started to keep growing his beard-a symbol of his own religion, a ritual performance that his Islam has prescribed which he has been witnessing from his childhood in his own country. He started to appear at his office at Underwood Samson with his bearded face which had shaken all his fellow colleagues. Even after his mother's request at his home, he returned to his office with the two-week grown beard. "It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my precise motivations. I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaved youngsters who were my co-workers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry." (Hamid, 130)³. His resistance towards the supersession though brought grave problems to him. He was "subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares." Few of his colleagues, who have no knowledge about the religious sanctity of this beard, attempted to advise him for cutting the beard: Wainwright, "look man, I do not know what's up with the beard, but I don't think it's making you Mister Popular around here." Changez, as a retort, immediately told that "they (the beards) are common where I come from." (Hamid, 130)⁴. That is, yes this beard must be kept as part of his own identity, his own ethnic topography and as a most important part of his religious rituality. This conscious awareness about his religion also made Changez furious after the 9/11 attacks against the opponents of Islam who tried to defame it. So, when a man cast abusive languages, "akhala - malakhala", a dialect of that man that indicates "fucking Arab", against him apprehending him as an Arabian, when Changez was walking to his rental car in the cable company. Changez, when his blood throbbed in his body, stormed at him, "say it to my face, coward, not as you run and hide." (Hamid, 118)⁵, and this supposedly led to a fight in the road between the two.

His conscience at preserving his own identity occurred in him at a time when he felt the gradual collapse of Muslims were being accelerated world widely with a conceptualized antagonistic framework against the Muslims by America. To keep himself inactive in such jeopardized state of Islam and its followers, he considers it as "a kind of coward in my own eyes, a traitor." And these successive alerting consciences eventually compelled him one day leave the country which was killing his fellow brothers and availed him to preach the doctrine of his own

religion which he believed as a perfect way of life and not that which the West had construed. He banished his American dream –his zeal for earning money, prestige, social status and most importantly his love, though he had sustained it in the deepest core of his heart, for the establishment of a true picture, a perfect image of Islam. Changez devoted rest of his life in his own country for the welfare of both his countrymen and his religion. His teachings at various institutions in Pakistan after his returning from America helped him propagate the idea of how Islam is being disfigured with the American foreign policy and financing. He considers that “moreover 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.”[Hamid, 156].⁶

This autobiographical presentation of the aftermaths of 9/11 in the novel is the projection of spreading the message about the actual aspect of Islam and its ritualities as the necessary preliminaries, not that which the West constantly made us see in a degraded manner from the starting of the civilisation.

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