

From Home Land to Host Land: Identity Negotiation in Diasporic Context

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Abstract

The term "diaspora" has undergone numerous changes from its original meaning to its treatment. In this study, I have attempted to moderate the term by bringing it closer to its host, on whom it depends for its conceptual, empirical, and theoretical reliance. Diasporic consciousness is reflected in the post-9\11 fiction, which is based on the themes of migration, conflict identity, and chasing American dreams. 9\11 fiction also depicts the sad and tragic tale of woes and suffering from different angles. My paper title, "From Home Land to Host Land: Identity Negotiation in Diasporic Context," will throw light on diasporic consciousness and identity issues depicted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. This paper examines the experiences of Eastern people by unravelling the concepts of identity, belonging, and nationalism and tells the story of Changez, who is from Pakistan and migrated to America in search of a good education and job, but his dreams were distorted and he faced the identity crisis. The novel represents a diasporic consciousness of the Muslim community, shocking and a realistic picture of biasness, dehumanization, and torture towards Asian communities. This paper also discusses geopolitical issues, American imperialism, and the continuation of racism in the 21st century.

Keywords: diaspora, identity formation and distortion, racism, cultural locality, and American imperialism.

Introduction

The term diaspora is used to refer to the population that migrated from their native place to foreign land. The word diaspora is derived from the Greek word *dia speiro*, which means to scatter. In the history of human civilization, cross-border movements have been a cyclic occurrence. These movements generated diasporas among groups of immigrants residing outside of their native land. In the contemporary period, diasporic groups are flourishing because of globalization and advancements in digital technology. According to Safran, the

features of diaspora include: "dispersal from the original homeland, retention of collective memory, vision, or myth of the original homeland, partial (never complete) assimilation in host society, idealized wish to return to the original homeland, desirable commitment to the restoration of the homeland, and continued renewed linkage to the homeland." (p.5)

In the modern period, the meaning of diaspora has evolved from being merely the dispersion of individuals to the construction of identity. It starts with the horrific experiences of immigration to the settlements. In this process, theorists postulate the cultural, historical, and political heterogeneities of immigrants. Further theorists focus on the formation of the identity of immigrants by deconstructing the binary of home and host country. In the context of diaspora and identity, theorists' have different opinions and conceptions, though it seems that in the third space of diaspora, immigrants' cultural identities are formed by mixing of their past and present experiences. In this context, cultural theorist Stuart Hall said that historical experience and cultural practices help immigrants to establish their cultural identities. In addition, different theorists presented different hypothesis about diaspora and its impact on how immigrants' cultural identities are constructed. In 1996 In the Avtar Brah work "Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities," Brah referred to diasporic awareness as a homing yearning. According to Brah, a diasporian home is a legendary site of longing, so instead of talking about the homeland, she talks about the longing desire to return home. Homi K. Bhabha, in his work *Location of Culture*, theorized different types of cultural identities that are extremely similar to Changez's sketch. According to Bhabha, to determine dual nationals, we have to recognize them through a variety of sources. Changez's experiences in the US fit into this range. According to Needham (1975), contemporary notions of the diaspora category are "polythetic," meaning that they encompass various variations, with a primary focus on trans-national characteristics rather than international ones.

Diaspora has evolved from its traditional definition, which refers to "a situation of people living outside their traditional home." The idea of inclusivity and exclusivity, as well as "the inside and outside," vehemently distinguish the modern Diaspora from the traditional concept. This is similar to Changez's transnational consciousness, which delves deeply into traveling abroad and returning with a keen sense of foreign culture. Expanding this definition of "inside" further, it encompasses "vertical networks formed within host societies". Changez character that I have used to analyse in this theoretical frame work.

Literature review

The diaspora traced the multiple heterogeneities and realities after getting popularized in the host land. Even ten or twelve years ago, it was difficult to challenge this observation because, in the eyes of the majority of Indian diasporic writers, acculturation issues were merely superficial. In the diasporic context, the novels that were written by many authors hardly represented the racial, ethnic, and identity-negotiating issues that they experienced in the host lands. Diasporic writers paid little attention to class conflicts and tensions. However, since the events of 9/11, some writers from the Indian diaspora have felt compelled to address these concerns. Disappearance of Seth (2009) by Kazim Ali, Ask Me No Questions (2007) by Marina Budhos, and Transmission (2004) by Hari Kunzru mention post-9/11 hate crimes committed in the western world against South Asians by exposing the racialized fabric of the country. In "Theorizing Identity in Transnational and Diaspora Cultures: A Critical Approach to Acculturation," Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram acknowledge the psychological growth of the diaspora and attempt to delve into the cognitive boundaries of host and diaspora affiliation. By removing the conventional colonial dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor, the researchers examine the evolution of the interaction between the Diaspora and the host. Its stated goal of expanding on the conventional definition is "to challenge such essentialist, fixed, historic conception of identity." Further, they claim that "the concept of diaspora is offering us a new way of thinking" (p. 5). As a result, Diaspora has been adopted in a completely new way of thinking. Apart from a few Indian authors, Pakistani diasporic writers also start to focus on such racial and identity negotiating issues; among them is Mohsin Hamid, who wrote a text titled *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. This text highlights the racial and dehumanization issues against South Asians. Kathryn Nicolai, in his work "The Reluctant Fundamentalist Depiction of the Postmodern Portrayal," highlighted that "Changez experiences a demystification with America's nostalgia-driven regression" (p. 1). It's interesting to note that Changez's demystification of American nostalgia is a form of cognitive decolonization. In the study "Young Diaspora Immigrants' Attitude and Behaviour Toward the Role of Cultural Identification," Katarina Stoessel acknowledges the strong cultural ties that bound the diaspora to the host nation, which measure the degree of reliance and dependence on the host culture. According to her, "the strong markers of positive relationship between the two are positive attitude toward members of the host culture, host-

culture language, and social relations with the natives" (3). The key aspect to note here is that she regards culture as the most important factor in determining the diaspora's level of involvement and its connection with host culture. Additionally, cultural affiliation is the starting point for the establishment of relationships between the host and the diaspora that denote favourable and facilitating assimilation and grant some degree of nativity as well as power over language and culture. In the Changez case, going through the same situation proves a constructively supportive relationship between the Diasporic population and host.

Textual Analysis

The protagonists of the novel the Reluctant fundamentalist is from Pakistan and having Punjabi background, who represent a variety of ethnic, multicultural and racial, and transnational identities, to full fill his dream. A young Muslim man from Pakistan named Changez travels to the United States in search of a better education and a prosperous job. He saw himself as a "star" and professors as "titans," and the students as "Philosophers (2-4). After getting selected at Underwood Firm, he gained competence and self-assurance. When the company offers him a credit card, he feels empowered because he thought that he can spend more money in an hour than his father can make in a day. He was happy to contribute to American society. when his American national identity begins to emerge. His Pakistani heritage or native identity started to fade. After spending successful years in Underwood Samson, he considered himself an American.

The opening line of the novel is "Excuse me, sir! May I be of assistance? Ah, I see that I scared you. My beard does not frighten me; I am an American lover. Since I am a resident of this city and understand your language, I felt I might be able to help you. I noticed that you were seeking something; in fact, it seemed like you were on a mission." (Page 01) These lines reflect that Changez is a conscious listener and speaker. He has expressed his willingness to help the stranger. In the whole conversation, Changez managed to hold their attention. In the novel Changez, identity builds in a more ambivalent manner and fusion of bilingualism, biculturalism, and diverse ideological affiliation. In location of culture, Homi k Bhabha has discussed such multiple cultural identity theories that are most similar to Changez characterization. AS Bhabha says "diverse as nineteenth-century colonial history, contemporary literary and psychoanalytic theory, and the imperatives of minority cultures"

(p. 01). In the novel, he stayed as a completely multifaceted character that purposefully and continuously switches between many successful events. As he states, "This is a dream come true; Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (pg. 3), here he expresses his admiration for Princeton, and this line also reflects the completion of American Dream. Further, he states that "I see the power of that system, pragmatic and effective, like so much else in America" (p. 4). Here he also glorified the system, which is progressive rather than "splitting," as Bhabha has defined in the actual manifestation of Glocality. Bhabha stated that "the very place of identification caught in tension of demand and desire is a space of splitting, if it isn't positively assimilated" (p. 44).

Changez's successful assimilation of the host land and economic participation cherishes and preserves as a legacy of an American dream, as he acknowledged in front of his American companion: "We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations, interviews, essays, recommendations...until the best and the brightest of us had been identified." (p. 09). As established by Bhabha, the demands and promises of mutual coexistence in a global world with multiple demands and desires are not one-sided but rather two-sided and transitive, with the dual selves reflecting each other's. Changez's acknowledgement is a "transitive demand for a direct object of self-reflection, a point of presence that would maintain its privileged enunciation." (p. 47)

Changez professionally assimilates in the atmosphere of Underwood. Sampson expands his emotional ties as he expresses, "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker. I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city. It still occupies a place of great fondness in my heart" (p. 37). Changez further expresses his heartiest gratitude for the love of his firm, as he states, "I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm's impressive offices made me proud. I wish I could show my parents and my brother!" (P. 39) Here, diaspora and assimilation in host land are expressed in a deeper way. Bhabha states, "A form of living that is more complex than 'community'; more symbolic than 'society'; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than patrie; more rhetorical than the reason of the state; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen." (p.200). When Changez states, "I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my

suit, by my expense account" (p. 101) and, "[The Beard] was, perhaps, a form of protest... a symbol of my identity" (p. 134), here his identity and sense of belonging are enveloped in a more symbolic and connotative way. Changez seems to preserve his local identity. It demonstrates that there are no negative thoughts about this process and that his homeland's national identity will merge with the host country's national identity.

No doubt he became successful in creating and moulding his identity according to the environment. But he also faced the rigorously expressed stereotypes and judgmental opinions about the Asian and Muslim communities that depicted the hostility attitude of the host land. For instance, Changez said, "It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins." (p. 223). In addition, in a very scathing way, he says, "As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrum (p. 233).

Here, the diaspora is being challenged by Changez recurring development. The theories of home and the want to go back home continued to be central to the idea of diaspora. Cultural theorist Anna Harutyunyan has commented that "the integration issues in host societies are always disrupted by an intrinsic and powerful desire to go back home" (p. 89).

Changez experiences discrimination despite his love for America. For instance, "I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American." This line demonstrates that he behaves and speaks like an American in order to assimilate into a new identity. It also demonstrates his willingness to modify his existing identity and his readiness to accept a new one.

Conclusion

This paper shows that Changez immigration to the US with variety of ethnic and religious identities creates the adverse situation for him, while he trying to assimilative into the host land culture with the retention of the native identity. His native identities started to collide in foreign land because of cultural and religious barriers. In the novel, Hamid investigates this obstacle which threaten the identity of Changez. In the paper, by using framework of

Glocality tried to explores the gap between host and native land as well as attempted to make a negotiation with the concept of diaspora and identity.

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