

Neo- Colonial Trends and Power Dynamics between East and the West: A Case Study of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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ABSTRACT: Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistan based fiction writer who deals with the themes of migration and repatriation. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is Hamid's second novel published in 2007. This novel is a first-person account of protagonist Changez Khan's life and therefore it gives an insight into the perspective of east towards dominance of the west. This paper shall analyze the identity crisis faced by Changez Khan in America after the attack of 9/11. He started to feel torn between his fascination for America's luxurious lifestyle and love for his motherland. Thus, he is faced with a situation that is called "unhomeliness" by Homi K. Bhabha. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows cultural prejudices, political and economic domination of western countries that continue till date even after most of the third world nations are independent. The continuation of western domination over eastern nations is conceptualized as neo- colonialism by various theorists. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* perfectly covers various economic and political aspects that are instrumental in defining the neo- colonial power relations between powerful western countries and struggling eastern nations. This paper shall present a case study of given text in the light of Marxist and Postcolonial theories that are helpful in unfolding power structures presented in the novel.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial, neo- colonial, power dynamics, Marxism, hegemony.

Date of Submission: 08-05-2021

Date of Acceptance: 22-05-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The word neo- colonialism is made up by the combination of two words neo and colonialism which means new form of colonialism. Kwame Nkrumah coined the term neo- colonialism in his work *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). He explained the meaning of neo- colonialism as the exploitation done by European colonizers of their former colonial subjects for economic, political, ideological, cultural and military benefits.

Cambridge Dictionary defines neocolonialism as political control by a rich country of a poorer country that should be independent and free to govern itself.

Neo- colonialism, therefore, can be used as umbrella term for all policies, infrastructures and agencies which are responsible for the continuation of the practices of colonial era. Jean Paul Sartre also talked about neo- colonialism in his work *Colonialism and Neo- colonialism* (1964). Although both these works specifically focused on African neo- colonial issues, this problem of western domination in economic and political affairs is not new for newly independent Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Post- colonial critics like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha have already talked about the cultural domination of west over the east where eastern world is just projected as an exotic other to the western society but economic base for exercising this domination is seldom noticed even though it is the most important tool in the hands of powerful countries.

The concept of neo- colonialism through economic dominance can be linked to the Marxist theory which came into existence with the publication of Karl Marx's *DasCapital*, in 1867, where he presented a critique of capitalism as a stage in social and economic development of society. Marx talked about the base and superstructure model of society where there is economic base and legal and political superstructures present in every society. Therefore, in order to establish any rule or order in a society one needs to be in the position of economic power. The protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Changez Khan experiences this as he becomes a part of the system where he discovers American wealth accumulation is happening at the cost of destruction of smaller and less powerful countries like his own. America has been a colony of British Empire and faced the same exploitation but as soon as it gained economic resources it finds itself in the position of establishing same exploitative relationship with other nations. Thus, we can analyze the phenomenon of neo- colonial power relations through Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* because hegemony in modern world is not necessarily established by ex- colonizers, rather it can be exercised by any nation with economic power.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist covers both cultural and economic hegemony established by western world over potentially weaker nations. Therefore, this paper will highlight the economic base of political and cultural hegemony established by America over Pakistan as presented through the experiences of an ex-patriate Pakistan based MNC employee Changez Khan. Therefore, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an important text both in cultural and Marxist studies.

II. IDENTITY CRISIS OF A FUNDAMENTALIST IN NEO-COLONIAL WORLD

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a first-person account of a Pakistan based immigrant who failed in his attempt to make himself an American financier. This novel of Mohsin Hamid is written in the form of dramatic monologue and thus the views presented are specifically from the perspective of the east and protagonist Changez Khan gives clear statement regarding his emotional inclinations. He talks about his university friends who had gone to a trip to Greece with him and says "...so devoid of refinement were they- were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class" but in the very next line he accepts his urge to be more sensitive to this situation and he says "... I am inclined to exaggerate these irritants in retrospect, knowing the course my relationship with your country would later take"(Hamid 21). Therefore, we can clearly understand that the account presented by Changez Khan is bound to be more sensitized by eastern sensibilities.

The character of Changez Khan feels very deeply for his hometown and misses even smallest of joys it offered. In the very first chapter of the novel, he disregards all the luxuries that his life at New York offered and says "Princeton made everything possible for me. But it did not, could not, make me forget such things as how much I enjoy the tea in this, the city of my birth..." (Hamid 15). This shows strong sense of place in the protagonist's mind for his hometown but at the same time he is no less attached to the city of New York and this is visible in his tone when he shares his experience with the stranger he is in conversation with. He says "... I was immediately a New Yorker. What? My voice is rising? You are right; I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city" (Hamid 33). This sense of identification with two different sensibilities and yet not at ease with both is identified as 'in-betweenness' by Homi K. Bhabha.

Lois Tyson also talked about the post-colonial man with double consciousness in his work *Critical Theory Today*(1998) and claims that they often have an unstable sense of self. Changez Khan confesses his dilemma in front of his listener while talking about Erica and says "I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged- in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither- and for this reason, when she reached out to me for help, I had nothing of substance to give her" (Hamid 148).

III. CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL ERA: CONFLICT OF TWO CIVILIZATIONS

Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* articulates all those emotions that justified the imperialism in the indigenous Asian and African countries for a long time in world history. This is a classic example of the ideology where civilization of the whites is considered superior and pious whereas the culture of indigenous civilization is considered as primitive which needs the guidance of white man in order to come out of darkness. This domination was established by direct military rule in the colonial period and the armies of European nations fought battles with rulers of various territories which later became their colonies. By the mid of 20th century most of the colonies got their independent rule but still their minds were enslaved by their former colonizers. A sense of superiority is still a part of white man's ideological inclinations. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* when Erica's father met Changez, he expressed these opinions about Changez Khan's homeland very blatantly and said, "Economy is falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers... You guys have got some serious problem with fundamentalism." (Hamid 54). This is where the conflict of minds begins as the native man takes equal pride in his or her ruined civilization which was once glorious. Changez proudly talks about his culture in the lines, "we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television... 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 101).

This shows how both the opinions about the third world nations are contradictory and thus could hardly co-exist.

The immigrant native, however, sometimes give into this glittering and shimmering western lifestyle and starts to feel disgust about his own native culture and this is more common form of hegemony established in postcolonial era. This was visible in the observations Changez made after coming back to Pakistan from America. He says,

"I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter... I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls... even the dim light of the hissing gas heaters our furniture appeared

dated and in urgent need of reupholstery and repair... I was shamed. This is where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness” (Hamid 124).

So, the pride of glorious past in a native is not long lasting due to the current ruined state of their provinces. Although Changez tried to mimic the white man as much as possible, especially in pursuing Erica, in order to be intimate with her he literally took up the persona of her dead lover Chris, symbolically representing ideal American man that he could never be and thus could never have Erica.

Once a native man is faced with this conflict and starts to fall back towards his own culture, he starts to assert his native identity through various ways and means. Changez, for example, started to flaunt his beard on streets to assert his Islamic identity and to provoke anyone who has prejudices towards his culture (Hamid 167).

IV. ECONOMY AS A TOOL OF IMPERIALISM

In the modern times of globalization and privatization the most important thing that talks about a country's status in international scenario is not its military strength but its economic growth and that is why all the powerful countries focus on increasing their economic status. The emergence of America as a superpower of 20th century is largely due to their economic development. America and other powerful countries have established their Multinational Companies (MNCs) in various countries with low-income standards and thus they earn huge profits through these employees. All the profits earned by these MNCs is taken back to their respective nations and meagre salaries are all that is earned by native workers where firms are established after promises of economic development and better life.

Apart from MNC's the rich crème of workforce is selected from various economically weaker countries and they are given all the facilities that they cannot dream of getting in their respective countries and they are used as elite workforce for the development of the economy of dominant countries. This bulk of outshining workers who could improve conditions back home further add to the disparities in the economy of western and eastern countries as they are charmed by the luxurious lifestyle, they get in all these countries. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, one of the notable episodes is that when Changez Khan got his first credit card. He says, “Do you know how exhilarating it is to be issued a credit card and told that your company will pick up the tab for any ostensibly work-related meal or entertainment?” (Hamid 37).

The native man feels charmed by these facilities offered by big companies that are contributing to their national wealth and their own countries lag behind. As Karl Marx has given the model of base and superstructure in his work *The Capital* these first world countries dominate other nations by the base of economy only and the military imposition is only its superstructure. The protagonist Changez Khan observes and talks about this phenomenon of American domination in most parts of the world. He says, “your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable... 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). Changez Khan worked in finances and closely observed how America's rich economic structure leads to its efficiency in military dominations.

However, not all the immigrant workers realize that they are a part of system which imposes power over their nation, in subtle manner mostly. Even Changez realized this mistake of his clearly after his encounter with Juan- Bautista whose firm he was to evaluate for selling. Juan- Bautista made a comparison of Changez with janissaries. Janissaries were the Christian boys who were trained under Ottoman Empire and when they grew up, they were ‘utterly loyal’. Juan Bautista says, “they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to.” (Hamid 151).

Changez Khan a bit later confesses about his role as a janissary and says, “There really could be no doubt: 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 a war.” (Hamid 152).

V. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion of this paper, we can clearly state that the economically powerful countries of the modern world are directly or indirectly interfering into the matters of other weaker nations. From beginning to end there is a threat of war against India in the homeland of protagonist Changez Khan and later in the novel he realizes he is actually working to help accumulate wealth that will be ultimately used against his own people. Even though economic domination is most common form of hegemony established in the modern world, cultural superiority of the former colonizers and their relative white man's cultures are still working in a bit subtle form. Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* beautifully portrays the anxieties of third world nations when put in direct contestation of power with western and more powerful nations.

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Adeeba Fatima. "Neo- Colonial Trends and Power Dynamics between East and the West: A Case Study of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 10(05), 2021, pp 55-58. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722