

A Psychoanalytic Approach to Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract

Literature has always been considered as the reflection of human life because of its involvement with human behavior, thoughts, activity, development, progress, etc. Sometimes while reading a literary text, readers often face complicated characters that are quite troublesome and create difficulty to understand but at the same time, these characters generate curiosity in the mind of the readers to know more about them. Such a character is Changez from the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. This dissertation aims to explain the behavior of Changez, the protagonist of the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* who narrates and shares his experiences about his time in America to an American stranger. To analyze his personality, this paper uses the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. This paper upholds psychological pressure and its consequence on Changez as an individual who faces a sudden and unexpected social change in America. All the methods that are applied to conduct this paper are the qualitative method and analytic descriptive method. Finally, this study serves a relation between psychoanalysis and literature.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, id, ego, super ego, conscious and unconscious mind, Changez, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Introduction:

a) Introduction to *The reluctant fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a contemporary novel by Mohsin Hamid. By nationality, he is a Pakistani author and spent a long time in America. Graduating from Princeton University he went back to Pakistan. Later he came back to America and enrolled in Harvard Law School. After he graduated from Harvard Law School he decided to work as a management consultant at McKinsey & company in New York City. In 2001, he moved to London and in 2007 his second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* got published. In this novel, he uses his personal information along with an auto diegetic narrative tone.

The novel deals with a very contemporary issue which is the clash of civilizations. Because of the clash of civilizations nowadays it is a prominent characteristic among the people that they do not know which side they should take. They felt extremely divided in their mind. Such a character is Changez, the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez is a twenty five year old young man who went to Princeton University, one of the prominent universities of America with full free scholarship and later goes to an elite company named Underwood Samson. With time Changez faces some critical situation that leaves him confused about his actions and identity. The novel raises the question about the confusing behavior of Changez. The novel continuously challenges classifications of identity while simultaneously affirming them

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(Woltmann 2). Identity here does not refer to any nation rather it refers to the inner self, inner mind of Changez. We can analyze and relate to his identity as well as understand his behavior through psychoanalysis.

b) Introduction to the psychoanalytic approach

The psychoanalytic approach refers to the theory of personality organization based on the psychological condition of the human mind. At first, it was commonly used in the medical field to treat the psychological patient. This theory is founded by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He quoted that, "there is a powerful force within us, an unilluminated part of the mind that is constantly at working molding our thought, feelings and actions" (Juma).

Freud further claims that the human mind possesses unconscious and conscious thoughts, feelings, desires, and memories. According to Freud, the conscious mind of a person is aware of the present sensation, memories, thoughts, and feelings. It acts as the tip of the iceberg. In the case of the iceberg, the bigger portion always remains under the water and therefore remains unseen. Like this under the conscious mind, an unconscious mind carries the repressed memory or desire which a person does not want to express to the people but still, they always come outside in a way or with some medium. From this unconscious mind, a person can retrieve memories into the conscious mind. He claims that instinct and emotions associated with trauma can be found on the unconscious level.

To describe the psyche of an individual or human personality in 1923 he introduced id, ego, and superego as the biological drivers of human behavior. Id lies in the unconscious mind and seeks immediate satisfaction. Superego also lies in the unconscious mind but it refers to moral behavior. The ego is the most prominent part of the human psyche. It works keeping in mind both id and superego. Ego helps an individual to walk on a path where neither his behavior will go against society nor he has to suffer for not getting any pleasure.

In this paper, psychoanalysis has been used on the protagonist Changez from the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The novel is all about the struggle of a Pakistani young man facing a severe clash of civilization and identity crisis because of nine-eleven (9/11) in America. The ultimate challenge for Changez was to face his true self. In the process of his self-realization, he turned into an activist from a core believer of the American dream. The main focus of this paper is to understand the behavior and actions of Changez according to psychoanalysis.

For the academic purpose, this dissertation can be very important to understand Changez from the psychoanalytic point of view. Though there are a lot of papers on various aspects of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, there are very few papers with a psychoanalytic approach to this contemporary novel. This paper intends to benefit the readers of literature in general and the readers of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in particular, to come across the interaction among different psychoanalytical traits. While excluding the broad application of psychoanalysis in a different field, this paper intends to explain it from the viewpoint of literature only and limited the data of psychoanalysis on Changez onto some important incident that happened with him during his four and half years in America.

Literature Review

The psychoanalysis reading has been practiced since the early development of psychoanalysis and has developed a rich heterogeneous tradition (Alausa 3). Freud uses psychoanalytical theory in literature to explore the inner mind of the author, characters and their motivation, narrating style, behavior (Hossain, 43). Ann Dobie in her book *Theory into Practice* states, "The conscious mind is not aware of its submerged counterpart, it may mistake the real cause of behavior" (Dobie 56). Freud, in order to properly establish his thought regarding the concept of the conscious and unconscious mind, introduced three elements of the psyche which are Id, Ego, and Superego.

The Id is considered as the first part of personality development. It refers to the selfish, primitive, childish pleasure. It acts according to whatever it feels right at a particular moment to achieve its desired satisfaction as if it is a devil sitting on a shoulder (Niaz et al. 38). In order to seek pleasure, it can be a self-destroyer as well as a destroyer for society (Rajeshwari and Meenakshi 366). It has the power of imagination but does not possess the power to distinguish between imagination and reality, between right and wrong and does not know the value of an action (Mustikawat 2).

The superego on the other hand can be defined as the factor of personality which forces an individual to go with the morality principle, with social norms. It seeks value, rules, ethical and moral development of personality. It is the complete opposite of id. Where id seeks satisfaction, the superego chooses to abandon satisfaction while going with moral behavior. It keeps reminding the greedy id the value of acting wisely (Mustikawat 3).

Ego lies between the unconscious and conscious mind or it refers to the conscience. It works as the moderator between id and superego. It acts on the reality principle. It helps individuals whether they can indulge without causing trouble or suffer themselves (Mustikawat 2). Through these elements, Freud explains the final development of personality.

In literature, psychoanalysis helps to understand the motivation of an individual character. It draws support from many classic works from writers such as Shakespeare, Sophocles, Virgil, and many more (Hossain 43). Not only has classic literature got this benefit but it also has significance in contemporary understanding. It creates a self-understanding for the character as well as any person who wish to understand those character.

Self-understanding or self-acknowledgment is a prominent key fact in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The novel is intensely narrated on 184 pages with a monolog style. As the novel starts, a delusional American dreamer Changez appeared who enjoys the prestigious Princeton university education and hopes to reach the highest success in his life. He got a prestigious job, respectable colleagues, and fame at the workplace. In his workplace rather than facing any racism or criticism because of his Pakistani or Muslim background, he earned appreciation and was generally loved (Ghosh 50). He got involved in a romantic situation with an American woman named Erica. Erica provides him some short of mental comfort which in one sense

becomes assurance for his identity but when he found his identity questionable he made himself doubtfully alienated by playing the role of Erica's dead lover. As 9/11 happened in America he found himself pleased at this situation (Ghosh 51). Later he found himself alone despite his successful life in Manhattan (Hamid 44). He gradually found his identity in America getting labeled up as a person from a dangerous community. He was receiving curses like, "fucking Arab" (Hamid 69). He has to face discrimination so much that he started to despise his life in America (Awan et al. 11). His self-doubt about his identity made him stand in such a point that he had to choose only one path as he states, "I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequences: I lacked a stable core. I was not certain where I belonged in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid 86). The moment Afghanistan got invaded by America, he begins to dismantle his American identity (Ghosh 51). His experience in America was illuminating for him and he had to believe that home is the ultimate resort for him (Awan et al. 11) His decision to leave a developed nation become the turning point that indicates his inner development, his psychological development. This paper thus aims to explore and explain the changing behavior of the protagonist Changez according to psychoanalysis. The influence of the unconscious & conscious mind, the impact of id, ego, and superego on the personality of Changez will be discussed vividly.

Research Methodology

- A. Design:** The design followed in this paper is the qualitative method with the analytic descriptive method.
- B. Instrument:** The theory of psychoanalysis has been used as a tool.
- C. Data & type:** All the data related and required for this study is all the text content. The type of data wanted for this study was qualitative and the secondary resources were used for data collection. Related reviews and commentaries appearing in various papers have been taken into consideration. Materials from various online journals such as Jstore, Research Gate, Academia, and some eBooks were used.
- D. Data Analysis Technique:** The analysis has been done using suitable references related to the study from the textbook. The answer to the research question has been given by analyzing the novel.

Analysis and Discussion

The novel starts in a local restaurant in Lahore, Pakistan. A man in a beard approach an American stranger and the readers immediately known that the person in the beard is the protagonist Changez. The influence of the id that seeks immediate satisfaction, can be seen from the very beginning as Changez approaches the stranger with an obscure motif as if he wants to toys with him to gain satisfaction. He starts with, "Excuse me sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (Hamid 1). Not only here he is trying to assure his stranger friend that he is indeed a safe person whom

he can talk to but also kind of trying to criticize him because American misconceives Muslim guys with a beard as dangerous or more clearly to say in today's contemporary world a terrorist.

Changez started to give his account of information to his American guest that he went to the Princeton University and boasted about it as a "dream come true" for him (Hamid 2). In today's world for most Asian students, it is a common dream to complete higher education from America and living in the American dream. Author Mohsin Hamid uses this contemporary notion as a motivation here as Changez further says, "Princeton inspires in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (Hamid 2). One thing which is quite noticeable about Changez is that at first for a quite long time in America, he never entertain any thought of disappointment with that country rather he thought highly of his surroundings as he states, "I have access to this beautiful campus. I thought, to professors who are the titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher kings in the making" (Hamid 2). But when he was narrating his story in the present time he expressed some sort of disappointment as he thinks now that Americans get more facility in the admission procedure due to their nationality, "Americans faced much less daunting odds in the selection process" (Hamid 2). His behavior might seem rude to the readers here but it can be assumed that his rudeness is the result of his unconscious mind as the unconscious mind possess repressed memories. When he was in America at the beginning his conscious mind was more influential on him but the feeling of discrimination remain in his unconscious mind. While talking, Changez derived those memories of unfairness from his unconscious mind to his conscious mind and kind present rude attitude towards his American stranger friend.

Changez upon his arrival in New York was very positive. He felt he become "immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid 19). The reason behind his homely feeling is his accomplishment of reaching the first step of his American dream which is the 'Underwood Samson' as he says, "I felt something well up inside me, a sense of pride so strong that it made me lift my head and yell" (Hamid 9). His happiness can be explained as the reply from his unconscious mind to his family's incompetency to provide him enough resources for his higher study. Though his family was not super-rich, they had enough wealth during the life span of his great grandfather. But because of inflation neither his grandfather nor his father was able to enjoy the previous wealthy situation and when his time came "the money is simply not there" (Hamid 6). Though Changez appears to be contained with his family without any complain but in his unconscious mind, there might be some memories of this situation as he confesses, "I did grow up with poor boy's sense of longing"(Hamid 41) and when he able to get the job in that elite company he obtains the sense of equality like an American. He gradually becomes a respected and loveable employee in his dream company Underwood Samson and becomes so satisfied that he commented, "I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet" (Hamid 27). According to psychoanalysis theory, the id acts on the pleasure principle thus Underwood Samson becomes a backbone for Changez to act according to his id which also becomes the reason behind his rude behavior in Manila. During his trip to Manila, he found that his colleagues who are by-born Americans are receiving more respect than him though he is more capable than them which caused him great discomfort as he also wants his "share of respect as well" (Hamid 38). In New York, he felt like home but in

Manila, he felt "like a distance runner who thinks he is not doing badly until he glances over his shoulder and sees that the fellow who is lapping him is not the leader of the pack, but one of the laggards" (Hamid 38). His repressed thoughts of insecurity of not being an American, not being treated as his colleague, feeling like an outsider provoked his id that wants to receive the same attention of a person holding American nationality not a capable person holding Pakistani personality as Changez says to his American stranger guest, "I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American" (Hamid 38); therefore driven by the id, if anyone asked about his nationality he learned to say "I am from New York" (Hamid 38).

Though it seems like Changez's attitude in his professional life is heavily empowered by id but in his unconscious mind a sense of shame keep piling up as he confesses, "Did this thing troubled me, you ask? Certainly, sir; I was often ashamed. But outwardly I gave no sign of this" (Hamid 38). Up to this account of revelation by Changez about his life does not make the readers of this novel so confused about his attitude until he confession about one of his acts which left the readers in confusion that whether he is cruel or a senseless person who does not deserve their sympathy and that particular act is when he 'smiled' at the news of terror attack occurred in America, at the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center. Though it sounds despicable, his "initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (Hamid 43). It is a matter of astonishment that, New York, a city where he never faced any racism or criticism neither in the road nor at his workplace before 9/11 rather he earned appreciation due to his capability, a place that he considers as his home; he becomes pleased at its destruction. This is the turning point for both the novel and for Changez. This controversial confession of Changez or this certain account of behavior can be explained as the outcome of the feelings of his guilt that are stored up in his unconscious mind. According to Freud, "unexpressed emotions will never die, they are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways"(Juma). In Changez's case also his unexpressed emotion of guilt came out in an uglier way. There could be several reasons behind the formation of these feelings of guilt. Several times while narrating his story in the present time Changez confesses that he was embarrassed about his past attitude. Sometimes in the past, he used to compare Pakistan with America, and every time he found that Pakistan has many lacking compared to America. His own acceptance of his country's lacking while knowing that once his country was among those resourceful ones that got robbed during the colonization process may lead the guilt feelings in his unconscious mind. Thus in Manila, upon his realization that he is just 'play-acting' but in reality, he does not belong to America unsettled him and as a result, the destruction news from America gives him kind of excuse from the falsified successful identity that he was chasing after and he 'smiled' due to the beginning of his self-freedom.

The terror attack that happened in America on 11th September 2001, commonly known as 9/11, is considered the darkest day in history. Thousands of people died in that heart-wrenching incident. Though the Muslim community is often being considered as a matter of obscurity among the Non-Muslim communities but in the case of Western countries, they always possess some sort of misconception about the Muslim community and Muslim people. But after 9/11, America kind of start treating Muslims as the enemy. In American society, severe racism rise its head and many innocent Muslims had to pay the price. Changez is also one of those Muslims

who had to face the post 9/11 society that was going through a huge shock at that moment. Suddenly, Changez found himself 'alone' despite his successful progress at his workplace. Influenced by the personality trait id, the picture of a successful life that he tried to set suddenly become so vulnerable, and therefore while meeting with Erica he no longer wanted to understand her mental situation.

Actually, the world of Changez can be refuted in two parts; one that is based on his desire to be successful, particularly revolves around his career and the other one based on his love interest revolves around an American girl Erica. Erica was a fellow Princetonian with whom Changez meets upon his trip to Greece. For Changez, Erica became a source of freedom around whom he was able to act according to his ego or in other words reality principle. The main reason why Changez felt so comfortable around her is because of her interest in him about his true self. She wanted to know the 'Changez' who came from another country and not the 'Changez' who is trying to set himself according to the American dream. With Erica, he followed his ethical principle as Erica commented, "I don't think, I have ever met someone our age as polite as you. [...] Not boring polite. Respectful polite" (Hamid 15). In front of Erica whenever he tried to give a description about Pakistan he does not feel inferior for once. He presented himself as a man from Pakistan, not from New York. He was proud while sharing information about his upbringing. Erica also shares her story about her dead lover with him. Before the 9/11 incident happened, he got enough assurance from Erica that he never felt like he had to keep performing well to keep her company which he felt at his workplace. He never felt competitive while he was with Erica. He was just being natural. Thus with Erica, most of the time his personality was influenced by 'ego'. After his return to New York Changez again wanted to run away from reality and wanted to rely on Erica. But because of their failed intercourse, Erica enters into the phase of nostalgia where there was no place for Changez. Changez eventually felt that, with Erica diving into her nostalgia, he is also going to lose her. To keep Erica's company or in another sense protect the peace he was getting from Erica, he gave up on his id and decided to act according to how his id drives him. As a result, Changez tried to take the place of Chris and request Erica to "pretend" (Hamid 61), to think of him as Chris and he confesses, "I do not know why I said it: I felt overcome and it seemed, suddenly, a possible way forward" (Hamid 61). At this point it seems like, with the appearance of identity crisis in his life although in his professional life he was slowly getting out from the influence of id, from seeking satisfaction; but in his personal life regarding Erica, he starts to take decisions based on his psyche element id.

Changez's identity crisis becomes severe in the post 9/11 American society. But Changez still tried to hold on to his broken American dream preferred by his 'id' as he confesses in the present time, "certainly I want to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream" (Hamid 54). In a study of psychology it was asserted that, "most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility" (Bryan 87). Changez is also like this does not want to take responsibility for his unstable life or the broken American dream. So he keeps ignoring the pathetic situation his fellow

Muslims from America were facing at that time. He considers most of the things he "overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli" were not true and reasoned that "such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the helpless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year" (Hamid 55). The influence of id is still visible here because if he went with the reality principle then he would have tried to look more about what is happening around him but he simply tried to ignore those things that cause him mental disturbance. When Afghanistan, the fellow Muslim nation and according to Changez "Pakistan's neighbor" (Hamid 58), was attacked by American troops in the shield of night, it was not only an invasion of America in Afghanistan but also an invasion of ego, invasion of the reality of his identity which was deeply influenced by id. With the attack in Afghanistan by America, Changez realizes that he can "no longer capable of so through a self-deception" (Hamid 58). The foreign policy of America made the situation worst and clear at the same time for Changez. His disappointment with America reaches its final level as America did nothing in order to stop the war-like situation between Pakistan and India despite having the power of being a mediator. After returning from a short visit to his family in Pakistan, he started thinking and acting everything based on reason, based on reality and his reality refers that he was living in a false dream. He started to keep a 'beard' and thinks that it is only normal for him to have a beard because, for him, his beard bears his actual identity which he is sure of. His newly found identity is influenced by ego or reality principle because neither he again wanted appreciation or success nor did he become too righteous. It can be considered that from his unconscious mind all the repressed feelings of unfairness, guilt, and doubt started pushing him to take a final decision for him like what Sigmund Freud says to explain human mind in psychoanalysis that, "there is a powerful force within us, an unlimited part of the mind separate from the conscious mind that constantly at work molding our thought, feelings, and actions" (Sigmund Freud Quotes). In Changez's case also his unconscious mind keeps molding his thoughts about right and wrong and thus in the end despite Jim's encouragement to hold on, Changez decides to come back to his country Pakistan. The moment he decided to go back, his personality can be considered taken over by the psyche element ego. With the help of ego, Changez is finally completely able to accept his inner self and build a strong identity for himself which made the path clear ahead of him to become the present narrator Changez.

Result

The character of Changez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalists* is a strong one. His personality is predominantly shaped by the psyche elements id and ego. Before 9/11 took place in America, Changez was particularly driven by id because id refers to the pleasure principle, and analyzing Changez's personality it is clear that at the first place all Changez wanted was success, appreciation, satisfaction, and a trouble-free life in high-class society without any back affection. He never wanted to think about right and wrong rather he was just proud to be a part of an elite university and company. But things changed after 9/11 took place. Changez was naturally forced by his unconscious mind to look for his own identity. In the middle of a severe clash of civilization, ego took over his personality when he realized that he is living a life full of fallibility. Thus he acknowledged that his conception of America is wrong, his conception of his

way of life is wrong. But there is almost no occasion where the presence of the superego can be seen in his personality. If he had acted according to the superego, then there would have been too much religious content or negative allegation towards another society in the book. The novel becomes well balanced due to its approach towards the development of Changez's personality from a young American dreamer to a mature person who can criticize not only the situation around him but also himself.

Conclusion

In the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the author Mohsin Hamid portrayed Changez in a very simple way that on the surface it seems like he is a person who could not tolerate the discrimination about his community and went back to his nation but inside he is a person who has to fight against himself in the first place to find out his true identity. We can only understand his struggle to survive, his acceptance of his inner self in a condition where everything is against him only with the help of id, ego, and superego as from Freudian psychoanalytic perspective development in human behavior caused because of the interaction among id, ego, and superego. The illogical behavior of a person can be explained if the inner self got revealed. Indeed leaving a successful and developed life in the contemporary context is quite illogical though Changez has the opportunity to go with the flow, to continue his American dream he chooses to follow a path where he is not pretending anymore opens a door for the reader to seek out his psychological mind which gives him the audacity to accept his inner self. Thus the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis acts as a key for the reader to understand the behavior of Changez.

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