



The Narrative of Hybrid Identity in the Third Space: A Postcolonial Critique of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid

Dr. Moazzam Ali Malik*, Shiraz Ahmed**, Dr. Muhammad Ehtsham***

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat, moazzam.ali@uog.edu.pk.

** Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, shiraz.ahmed@uog.edu.pk.

***Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt. Zamindar College, Gujrat, mehtsham@gmail.com.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 20.03.2021

Accepted 26.06.2021

Published

Volume No.8

Issue No.I

ISSN (Online) 2414-8512

ISSN (Print) 2311-293X

DOI:

Keywords: Postcolonial Critique, Hybrid Identities, Third Space, The Reluctant Fundamentalist

ABSTRACT

The study aims at analyzing the construction and the working of hybrid identity in The Reluctant Fundamentalist. The review of the literature discusses how postcolonial identity research has undergone a paradigm shift in recent times. Among the modern postcolonial critics like Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (2013), 'colonizer' and 'colonized' are dynamically dependent on each other for their subjective constructions. The identities of the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized' are not autonomous; rather, they have mutually exclusive identities—a structuralist stance taken by the earliest postcolonial theorists. Instead, such identities of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' are transcultural and fluid in nature and can negotiate themselves 'in the third space of enunciation' for 'new' forms of 'social collectives' (Bhabha, 1994). This aspect of hybrid identities provides the framework for our research. So, the study, through the textual analysis of The Reluctant Fundamentalist, has applied Bhabha's (1994) concept of 'hybridity' to unearth different aspects of Changez's identity in the wake of changing geopolitical and global scenario after the 9/11 event. The study ends on a note that there is a further need to develop the concept of hybrid identity so that it might enlighten us more about the role of 'cultural materials' in constructing such identities.



Introduction

Many researchers, philosophers, and thinkers like Wittgenstein (1953), Derrida (1967 & 1976), Foucault (1972 & 1980), Barthes (1967 & 1972), Kristeva (1986), Rorty (1990), Barker (2000), have convincingly uncovered the limitations of structuralist claims about the explainable, fixed and relational nature of the meaning. Moreover, many postcolonial critics like; NgugiwaThiong'o (1993), GayatriSpivak (1987), Robert Young (2001), and Homi. K. Bhabha (1994) have taken up the post-structuralist and the post-modernist positions to theorize about the colonial and postcolonial discourses. The current study, by analyzing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, delineates how structuralism falls short of explaining the fluid nature of the identities bearing certain social, psychological, cultural, and political dimensions. The theoretical framework for the study is formulated by drawing insights from a post-structuralist perspective to critically discuss the negotiation of Changez's identity in the third space.

The article is an exploration of the nature of the hybrid identity of Changez— the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. It unearths the processes involving the fusion of personal and cultural identities to give birth to the hybrid double consciousness. It focuses on the fluid, ephemeral,

transitory, and unstable nature of Changez's hybrid identity in the backdrop of changing socio, cultural, historical, and geopolitical scenarios after 9/11.

The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a story of a young Pakistani, Changez, who has lived a few years of his life in American society. His interaction with the American culture has greatly affected him, and he shares his experiences of life in America with an un-named character of American origin. The story of Changez is the story of negotiating his identity in a dramatically changing socio-political world.

Rationale for the Study

The concept of hybridity, in postcolonial studies, problematizes the Marxist and structuralist notions of power, hegemony, identity and cultural purity. In modern, globalized, and multicultural world, the ever-increasing cultural contact has made it imperative for the postcolonial critics to revisit the traditional notions of essentialist cultural identities and bounded nationalities. Some studies have explored Hamid's literary works from the emerging perspectives of modernism, urban sociology, globalization and hybridity (e.g., Ahmed & Malik, 2019; Ahmed, et al., 2019; Jarandikar&Jarandikar, 2014; Khan et al., 2020). These studies identify multiple hybrid stands, in the novels produced by Hamid from the cultural, national, psychological and social perspectives. The current paper explores *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in its historical and multicultural context by applying corpus-informed discursive strategies which highlight how the modern Pakistani culture is ambivalent construct of the Western and the Eastern cultures. The point of departure for the current study is its focus is not only on the hybrid identity of Changez but it also delineates how the cultural materials like foods, dresses, artifacts and architectures are the emerging cultural forms in the postcolonial third world.

Literature Review

Identity

Identity is a complex concept and difficult to explain in one definition. Bruke (2006) believes in role-based identities. A typical individual is continuously in contact with his social environment. Resultantly, an individual may carry a set of identities like; husband, father, son, teacher, Muslim, etc., at any given point in time. His social membership and cultural associations with the community play an essential part in ascribing him an acceptable behavior in a given society or culture. These sub-identities may even interplay in different proportions as demanded by the social context of interaction and are essential for the group memberships (Bruke, 2006). This view of identity in social psychology has many implications for postcolonial theory and our analysis of the complex identity of Changez. In Changez, we find an interplay of many multiple identities rooted in local/global, indigenous/exotic, Pakistani/American settings. This notion of multiple, fluid, and hybrid identities as the constitutive of the individual identities is an anti-structuralist notion in nature and augers well in broadening our understanding of the concept of shifting identities in this age of globalization and multiculturalism.

Postcolonial Identity in Structuralism

In the field of Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies, till the 1980s, structuralism has remained a dominant influence. Saussure, the father of modern linguistics and structuralism, took language as an anti-representational phenomenon—an entity that does not refer to any referent outside its structure. He proposed the concept of sign in language as a combination of the signifier (sound image) and the signified (concept) (see Saussure, 2016). The structuralist paradigm is a quest for meaning which is differentiable and relational in nature. Saussure (2016) opines, "In language, as in any semiological system, whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it. Difference makes character just as it makes value and the unit" (Saussure, 1916, p. 121). Saussure has illustrated how in binary oppositions, one sign *is* what the 'other' is not; and, later, the early postcolonial critics borrowed this structuralist stance.

These critics have treated the colonial texts as sites for the construction of colonized 'other'. According to Saussure, "in language, there are only differences without positive terms" (1916, p 120). Hence, signs are "defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system" or by their salient characteristic of "being what the others are not" (1916, p 120). Informed by such structuralist thoughts, early postcolonial critics like Amie Cesaire (1939) studied the construction of

binary oppositions like colonizer/colonized in the colonial texts. Fanon was the first postcolonial critic who, in 1952 exposed the discursive construction of binary oppositions like colonizer/colonized in his work *Black Skin and White Masks*. He showed how the stable and fixed meaning of 'white' depends on the very negation of the 'black'. So, for the early postcolonial critics, the set of identities like the colonized and the 'other' were polarized with the colonizer and the self to give meaning through their 'differences without positive terms'. The fixity of meaning in such binary oppositions remained unchallenged till Derrida came up with the notion of *différance* and the fluidity of meaning in binary oppositions.

Postcolonial Identity in Post-structuralism

The hierarchical system of binary opposition was challenged by Derrida in his article *Sign Structure and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences* (1967). Through his critique of logocentrism, Derrida questioned the stability and fixity of meaning in binary oppositions. His revolutionary ideas of deconstruction were cherished by many postcolonial critics; notably, by Edward Said. Said (1978) questioned the legitimacy of the construction of the Orient in the colonial discourse. In colonial discourse, he sees the construction of the Orient and the 'other' as a means of defining the Occident and Self. Said (1978) was aware of the fact that the relationship of binary oppositions, despite being relational, is hierarchical. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Said says,

"The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he could be there, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part" (1995, p. 12).

Said considers Orient or colonizer's identity as a 'European invention'. He is of the view that through the 'Orient', Europe defines itself. He also contends that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient, the Self and the Other, the colonizer and the colonized is a relationship of domination in colonial discourse. Though Said (1978) acknowledges the hierarchical nature of these relationships, yet he never discusses how the colonized, the other, and the Orient resist the colonial domination. Said critiques the "synchronic essentialism" being an Orientalist strategy of constructing the Orient with a stable identity in essentialist terms and disregarding the socio-cultural and historical inconsistencies that index the fluidity and the non-essentialist aspects of the Orient's identity. Such discursive strategies put aside the narratives of evolution and change that emerge in the history of imperialism. Said's critique of the Orient's representational strategies in the colonial discourse is criticized by Young (1992 & 2001) because it focuses more on the colonizer's cultures and ignores the essential element of resistance that colonized pose to the colonial domination. Young (2001) says about *Orientalism* as:

If the representations of Orientalism were so false, as Said continually insists, he does not offer a method that enables a counter-representation that allowed the colonized to speak... a task which he admits his study leaves 'embarrassingly incomplete'. (Young, 2001, p. 391)

After Said, the modern theory of post-colonialism has developed a lot. Said (1978) took the colonial discourse as a discourse of domination, but in recent times, colonial discourse is considered a site of interaction between colonizer and colonized. For example, unlike Said, Bhabha is more interested in analyzing how hierarchical divisions are resisted and negotiated by the colonial subjects. His introduction of the concepts of 'hybridity', 'third space', 'ambivalence' and 'mimicry', have blurred the distinction between structuralist categories of colonizer/colonized, self/other, local/global, indigenous/exotic, etc. An important feature of Bhabha's approach to postcolonial theory is that we are no more concerned with just the polarities of the binary oppositions; instead, we have a third space between them where transcultural identities can be transformed. For this reason, Fulford (2002) thinks that Bhabha's theory of postcolonial identity has introduced 'a broader range of theoretical options' (p. 7). Bhabha has elaborated on his concept of postcolonial identity in his essays like *Of Mimicry and Man* (1984), *The Other Question* (1983), *Representation of the Colonial Text* (1984).

In his book *Location of Culture* (1994), Homi. K Bhabha introduces the concept of 'hybridity' that, by deconstructing the binary oppositions, establishes a 'third space' (p. 37). Hybridity is "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998 p. 118). The concept of 'third space' is quite enigmatic and has never been explicitly defined by Bhabha.

Nevertheless, it refers to the space between two polarized cultural identities where through the process of inter/trans-cultural communication, the identities are transformed. Hybridity refers to those linguistic, social, and cultural identities which are negotiated, transformed, and re-defined in the 'third space' between the binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized or us/other. Bhabha theorizes that, in the third space, colonial subjects co-opt, modify, adapt and transform certain elements of colonial culture by the process of 'miming' and negotiate their 'ambivalent', 'hybrid' self.

Analysis of Hybrid Identities in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

As an established concept in postcolonial theory, hybridity cannot be taken as an entity. So, hybrid identity does not treat colonial identities as fixed, unchanging, and stable. In other words, the individual or societal and cultural overlapping of dresses, places, beliefs, stereotypes, etc., in America and Pakistan are not static and are constantly negotiated with the socio- and geopolitical changes. This hybrid identity is always negotiable and in-the-making. It is the process through which we give meaning to the world around us through the rigorous and continual process of defining ourselves. Bhabha does not believe in identity as an entity in totality. He thinks of 'third place of enunciation' or 'contact-zones' where transcultural identities work in fluidity (2004).

In our case, Changez carries his Pakistani identity in America and successfully negotiates a hybrid identity in the third place of enunciation. With this hybrid identity, he moves into American society as a student, lover, and employee. It is noteworthy that he could completely give up his indigenous culture in favor of a successful American life at no stage. In the first chapter of the novel, he says to the unnamed American, "*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, steeped long enough to acquire a rich, dark color, and made creamy with fresh, full-fat milk*" (Hamid, 2007, p.2).

In our search for Changez's hybrid identity, we do not find either Pakistani or American culture completely overpowering Changez. Bhabha considers any culture a constellation of those social and cultural elements that they share with other cultures at a given point in time (2004, p. 52). So, he does not seem to believe in the 'purity' of these 'social collectives' or cultures. Moreover, his theory of 'social collectives' does not simply refer to the conglomeration of cultural elements or 'cultural syncretic' or 'cultural synergy'; rather, he considers that when common cultural elements get yoked together, they give birth to 'new' and 'different' forms of culture (2004, p. 162).

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we do not come across with the Pakistani or American culture in its 'pure' form. In the novel, we are continuously reminded of the hybrid nature of American and Pakistani cultures—none being 'pure'. We find '*Urdu-speaking drivers*', '*Smosas and Chana-serving establishment*' in Manhattan and '*girls in 'jeans*', '*Royal Marque*' and '*Company Punjab Club*' in Lahore. Social collectives from both cultures find their place in Changez. The overlapping of Pakistani and American cultural elements results in their subsequently emerging 'new' forms in Changez. Therefore, we do not claim about Changez as being an American or a Pakistani; rather, the overlapping of the American and Pakistani cultures gives birth to a 'new' hybrid identity in him. He tells the American in the very beginning, "*I am both a native of this city (Lahore) and a speaker of your language*" (Hamid, 2007, p. 1). Moreover, Changez's hybrid identity is further emphasized by Hamid through his skilful treatment of the plot of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. There are two overlapping hybrid plots of the novel and the first-person narrator Changez's free movement between them highlights not only the hybridity at the narrative level but also at the psychological level of the narrator.

The hybrid identity of Changez is also not fixed or stable. We find that his hybrid identity also undergoes a severe transformation after 9/11. This transformation makes one wrongly think that perhaps Changez has given up his hybrid identity, and by bearing a bearded face and leaving his job and America in favour of a life in Pakistan, he is perhaps heading towards his 'pure' singular Pakistani or Fundamentalist Muslim identity. Actually, he has learned to negotiate his fluid identity in the 'third space'. For Changez, after 9/11, the centers of his Pakistani and American identities have been de-centered, and his cognizance of such decentralization bothers him. He has become a man who is standing at the crossroads of cultural identities and has become more aware of his transcultural and hybrid identity. At the beginning of chapter 2, Changez draws the American's attention and says, "*Do you see those girls, walking there, in jeans speckled with paint? Yes, they are attractive. And how different they look from the women of that family sitting at the*

table beside ours, in their traditional dresses' (Hamid, 2007, p. 3). Here, Changez is just an observer of a transcultural fact and does not have any prejudice towards Pakistani or American culture. He, himself, does not identify with either Pakistani or American identities in totality because that will, perhaps, qualify him for being a fundamentalist.

Changez is not a fundamentalist. Erica tells him, 'You give people their space. I really like that. It's unusual.' His ability to give space to others does not qualify him for carrying any sort of 'fundamentalist identity'. Nevertheless, in response, he is not given space in American society. On one occasion, he says, "I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the others appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking. Erica alone smiled". Perhaps the rest of the party was too prejudiced or fundamentalist towards Muslims or Islam that they could not conceive Islamic society with nuclear capability.

Moreover, ultimately, Changez must negotiate his non-fundamentalist identity by explicitly confirming that it was a joke. Even back in Pakistan after 9/11, sitting in Anarkali, Changez can see beneath the hypocritical 'fundamentalist identities' when he tells the American, 'That bearded man...himself unable to stop glancing over his shoulder at those girls, fifty yards away from him' (Hamid, 2007, p. 3). This ability to see reality under false appearances cannot be the outcome of a prejudiced or fundamentalist mind.

This skilful treatment of the concept of fundamentalist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is exciting. Taking the fundamentalist or non-fundamentalist identities is not a simple matter. This is following Bhabha's thesis that identities are fluid and negotiated. The stereotypical treatment that he receives in America after 9/11 exposes the biases and prejudices of American society towards Muslims which are nothing less than fundamentalism. Similarly, the waiter and the bearded man, who stand for common Pakistanis, in Anarkali get troubled and look uneasy with the presence of the American. The prejudice of these Pakistanis towards the American is also a kind of fundamentalism. So, the treatment of the very concept of fundamentalist identity in the novel shows the fluidity of the concept. This concept is not only fluid at the societal level, but it is fluid at the inter-subjective level also, because we find different levels of fundamental prejudices among the individuals of any given society. Changez has grown out of such fundamental prejudices and has successfully negotiated an identity for himself, which is free of such prejudices after his contact with American society.

Conclusion

The possibilities, which the concept of hybridity offers for the analysis of the colonial/postcolonial texts, are numerous. Hybridity may be studied at various levels like cultural, linguistic, political, religious, ethnic, social, psychological, etc. Unfortunately, the scope of our study did not allow us to analyze all the different dimensions of hybridity or hybrid identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Even with the delimited aim of studying the hybrid identity of Changez, his awareness of his 'miming' and his experience of 'ambivalence' remain un-discussed. Nevertheless, the study reveals that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a narrative of Changez's Pakistani/American, local/global, colonizer/colonized, fundamentalist/non-fundamentalist identities of hybrid, fluid, transcultural and transient nature. It is hoped that the concept of hybridity will be further developed to include the role of cultural materials like dresses, foods, songs, artefacts, architectures, etc., in the negotiation of hybrid identity. Many scholars have critiqued Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity, arguing that the notion is not explicitly delineated and rigorously presented (e.g., Young, 2001 & 1992; Visoka, 2017; Sayegh, 2008). For instance, Sayegh (2008) highlights that many aspects of the theory are incoherent and disconnected. Sayegh (2008) argues that Bhabha has inadvertently contributed to the discursive construction of a space that represents the postmodern condition of the modern age. As explained by (Drichel, 2008), in postcolonial criticism, hybridity is a "widely misunderstood" notion which needs further exploration. The current study responds to this call and proposes that more studies in this area may help us better understand the concept of hybridity and its implications for postcolonial studies.

References

- Ahmed S. Malik, M.A (2019). Investigating the Metropolitan Hegemon: A Postcolonial Sociological Reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(1), 223-233.

- Ahmed S. Malik, M.A. & Ehtsham, M. (2019). Contextualizing Self (Re)Invention in Modern World:
An Urban Sociological Perspective of Exit West. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 267-278.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. (1998). *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Barker, C. (2000). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Barthes, R. (1967). *The Elements of Semiology*. London: Cape.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Cape.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (ed.) (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Burke, P. J. (2006). Identity change. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 69(1), 81-96.
- Cesaire, A. (1939). *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*. (Trans. By Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard). Newcastle: Bloodaxe.
- Derrida, J. (1976). (trans. G. Spivak) *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Drichel, S. (2008). The time of hybridity. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 34(6), 587-615.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Fulford, S. (2002). 'Eavan Boland: Forging a Postcolonial History', in Glenn Hooper and Colin Graham, eds., *Irish and Postcolonial Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hamid, M. (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. New York, NY: Harcourt.
- Jarandikar, N., & Jarandikar, S. (2014). Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: A Critique of The Grand Narrative of Globalization. *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies*, 5(2).
- Khan, W. A., Khan, S. H., & Ali, S. (2020). Cultural Hybridity as Perpetuation of Americanization: A Study of the Selected Novels of Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie. *sjesr*, 3(4), 35-42.
- Kristeva, J. (1986). 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in T. Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- NgugiwaThiong'o. (1993). *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rorty, R. (1990). *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism: Western concepts of the Orient*. New York: Pantheon.
- Saussure, F. de (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*. London: Peter Owen.
- Spivak, G. (2013). *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (1987). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Towards a history of the vanishing present*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Sayegh, P. Y. (2008). Cultural hybridity and modern binaries: Overcoming the opposition between identity and otherness?
- Visoka, G. (2017). After hybridity?. In *Hybridity: Law, culture and development* (pp. 301-324). Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Young, R. (2001). *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Young, R. (1992). *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. New York: Routledge.