



RESEARCH PAPER

9/11 and Pak-US Relations: Identity Issue of the Protagonist in The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid

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ABSTRACT

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This research paper explores the stages of identity formation of the protagonist Changez in the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. It has been written in the backdrop of 9/11 at USA. In such a chaotic situation, the identity retention for an outsider, especially one from some economically poor state, really becomes a crucial issue. The personal and cultural identity of the protagonist Changez passes through various stages at USA. The writer's position as a Pakistani definitely provides an ideological position to the protagonist. The researcher has tried to analyze the three stages of identity development by the application of Eura Jung & Michael L. Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) which provides four frames such as personal, enacted, relational and communal. Anyhow the researcher has delimited his research to the application of relational frame only. The relational identity of the protagonist has been highlighted through 'I/We -You' pronouns which set a juxtaposed analogy pattern

Introduction

Mohsin Hamid, a Pakistani novelist, motivates his people and especially the young authors to search new vistas for themselves in their futures. He himself has a large number of readers within his country and across the globe. He wishes his youth to be more potential, energetic and challenging in all the fields of life. Through his writings, he instills in them the quest for their identity as an individual as well as a nation.

The novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the story of a young man of 22 who goes to USA for study purpose and money matters. It is told from the first-person point

of view in the present, as a kind of prose dramatic monologue addressed to an unnamed guest at a restaurant in the Old Anarkali, Lahore, Pakistan. With first-person narration there is set the second person as 'You' in order to have a befitting counterfoil for comparison and contrast. Actually, there are two stories, the one Changez tells about how he became a successful employ in a renowned company of the USA i.e. Underwood Samson and how he developed his emotional and physical association with Erica, a young typical American girl lost in the memories of her late lover Chris. After the incident of 9/11, both of his adventures lead him to disillusionment; he is fired from the job and Erica commits suicide in her trauma. In the end the survival of Changez with his turban and beard, as his native identities becomes impossible and he returns to Pakistan. He becomes a professor in a University and starts teaching how to be fundamentalist and loyal to one's state and ethnicity.

The plot of the novel has been set in the backdrop of 9/11 when the identity retention for the Muslim expatriates at America really became a crucial issue. We see Changez passing through such crucial turmoil after that incident in America. As a Muslim and as a Pakistani, he had to suffer a lot till he grew a fundamentalist in the true sense of the word.

Literature Review

Language has two principal functions to perform simultaneously; it is an instrument of communication as well as a means of affirming one's identity or one's uniqueness from others. A common language may express the distinctive character of a social group, and to encourage common social attachments on the basis of a shared identity (Dieckhoff, 2004). In other words, it can be said that language can be a vigorous marker of social identity in order to bind and divide groups and that its prominence may displace other (e.g. ethnic or religious) identities (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009). In this way language is never a set of utterances and sentences, rather it is always burdened with ideology on the part of the users. To be more accurate, it becomes an identity marker at individual level as well as social and cultural levels.

Cultural identity is dynamic and evolving new modes of thinking and acting all the times. As a rule, the life of an individual is never constant and so is his identity. Cultural identity is the continuously shifting perceptive of one's identity in relation to others around him.

Cultural identity is negotiated, co-created and reinforced in communication with others when we socially interact. They are manifestations of social reality-reflect on our unique personal life history and experience. Forming a cultural identity involves making choices about the cultures one identifies with and deciding to join the cultural community to which one belongs. Beliefs and practices of one or more communities can also be adapted. Every individual belongs to numerous overlapping and non-overlapping cultural and sub-cultural

groups. Therefore he has different identities at different levels that make up his cultural identity.

Tajfel (1982) defines social identity as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group'. More recently, it has been argued that social or collective identity arises when self-definition is focused upon a shared self-aspect, which may be a belief, a symbol, a psychological or physical trait, etc. (Simon, 2004). For example, the salient self-aspect, upon which the social identity of an ethnic group is established, may be the belief in a shared heritage. The social psychologists argue that identity may be in jeopardy if individuals' feelings of continuity over time, distinctiveness from others, self-esteem and self-efficacy are threatened by changes in the social context (Breakwell, 1986, 1992; Brewer, 1992). This discussion shows that the social contexts count a lot in determining and establishing one's identity and recognition. With the change of the social context, one either resists or readjusts one's identity. If one readjusts himself, one manages to survive with the change of some of his pre-set modes of thinking and living. In the case of one's complete resistance to the new circumstances, one usually finds an escape from there.

Several writers highlight the association between language and ethnic identity (Cho, 2000; Baker, 2001). In some situations, the ethnic group might be considered an important group identity in early life; the value and emotional significance attached to that group is likely to be high, as the child is involuntarily socialized in the in group culture (Halliday, 1975). However, it is a universal fact as in some cultures other identities may be more important or more salient; for instance, religious has been said to be a particularly salient identity among British Pakistanis (Jacobson, 1997). According to Cohen (2000), 'One can be Muslim in the Mosque, Asian in the street, Asian British at political gatherings and British when travelling abroad, all in a single day.' Same may be the case with the people who migrate to settle in USA particularly where apart from individuality, the ethnic attributes also count a lot. In this way, identities within and outside of the native environment are supposed to be qualitatively different in many aspects.

The identities in some fiction or narrative are usually designated to the characters by the writer on the bases of so many things such as his name, his geographical and historical background, his dress, his physiognomy, his native ecological and so on.

When the writers from some particular culture with their own native ideology and grooming dare to create protagonist as an enunciator in an alien cultural setting, they definitely go in comparison and contrast between the two discrete settings. As a result, they are either lost in the marvelous world of glamour and technology or they try to resist the onslaughts to the maximum. These two processes of accommodation and resistance may also go side by side till the experience of the situation or the consumer of the feelings comes out of the

ambivalence and decides to take some conclusive stance as Changez does in the novel comes 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'.

Identity Theory also focuses on the idea of salience. Identity salience is the element that a given identity is active across situations. (Hage, Jerald & Charles H. Powers. 1992.) Identities are generally ranked in a hierarchy. Identities that are higher on the salience hierarchy are more likely to be enacted. The order of the hierarchy is directly related to the element of commitment. The greater identity commitment the greater identity salience is there. In the novel under research, we find that the enunciator in an alien context is always committed to his position and role as bearer of his cultural identity.

Jane Collier and Milt Thomas (1988) opine that our identity is structured as a result of how others see us and how we see ourselves. These researchers call such juxtaposed attitudes as avowal (how others view us) and ascription (how we view ourselves). No doubt, both avowal and ascription are important in having some final outcome of some situation otherwise the picture remains biased and one-sided. In other words, these two poles set a befitting juxtaposed analogy for the emergence of Changez's ideology as a fundamentalist. Here, fundamentalism is a positive attribute regarding his national and religious identity.

The protagonist, as enunciator on the part of the writer himself carries on comparing and contrasting the position of his own groups to that of other group. In this way the growth of that individual may be traced through various stages. Anyhow, the researcher takes the liberty to apply Hetch's (1993) Communication theory of Identity (CTI) to trace out and analyze such stages of development of Changez from his personal frame to the communal one and finally standing out as the exponent of his nativity.

(A) Framework

The research is a qualitative one with the application of Eura Jung & Michael L. Hecht's (1993) theory named as Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). He gives the following four layers or frames of identity as;

Personal Frame: It is an individual's conception of self. It is often called self concept. This aspect highlights how a person thinks that he/she is. In other words it is the way, how one sees oneself internally and how one defines oneself or what is one's self cognition. The personal identity, in the novel, is visible through 'I' (First person sing. N). through 'I' the writer takes his own enunciative position as a Pakistani writer. Changez, the protagonist in the novel sits at the same enunciative position. In this way the narrator outside the text and the narrator within the text both merge into 'I' or sometimes into 'We'.

Enacted Frame: it is the frame which tells that how an identity is expressed in language and communication. It may also be non-verbal, such as through one's

jewelry, clothes, style, brands, way of walk, names, etc. There is the use of cultural and native identity markers such as kuta, jalebies, Anarkali, Nathia gali. All these markers impart a position to 'I /We' in order to communicate 'my/our' role as a narrator.

Relational Frame: It is the frame or the layer of identity that is established through comparison and contrast of two individuals or characters with each other. It is comparative and contrastive in its spirit. The story of the novel has been set in America with the hero from Pakistan making a series of comparisons and contrasts throughout the whole narration. The markers 'I/We -You' at the contrastive position set the whole framework for this research. The markers 'I/We -You' are not simply the pronouns but they dare to afford so many analogies such as;

I/We	You
Changez	Erica
Changez	Jim
Changez	Unnamed American
Kurta, turban	Bikini, jeans
Enunciator	Enunciated
Self	Other
Native	Non-native
Lahore	New York
Govt.College Lahore	Princeton University
Pakitan	America

Communal Frame: It s relatively larger and macro level of identity frame. Here the identities are defined collectively or in groups. The group, as a whole, gains a new identity for sharing common ideas, inheritance, history, names and literature. And a feeling of belongingness or '**We**' develops among the group members. One group of people may be of Muslims and other may be of Christians or one group of people may be of Pakistan and other may be of America and so on. So the way of communication of group with the other one sets the identity of the groups as a whole. Here it is worth mentioning that the groups may be on the bases of gender, ethnicity, geography or political affiliations.

Delimitation

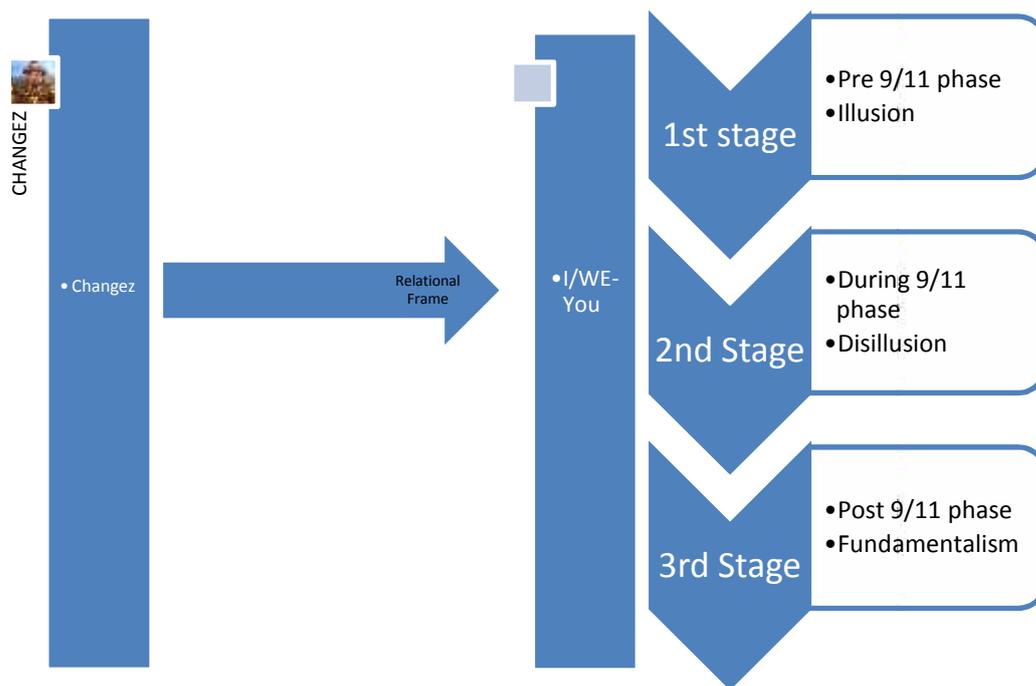
The researcher has delimited his study only to the application of relational frame for which he sets the contrastive analogy (I/We- You) as shown in the above given table. The protagonist has the process of metamorphosis regarding his identity growth in three stages such as t illusory stage (pre 9/11), disillusionment (during 9/11) and fundamentalism (post 9/11).

Methodology

The story of the novel has symmetrical arrangement in the form 12 chapters but thematically there is tri-partite division such as Chapters 1 to 4 deal with Changez in his illusion and glamour regarding America as a dreamland, Chapters 5 to 10 narrate his state of disillusionment and Chapters 11 to 12 establish his position as a fundamentalist.

The textual data related to the three stages (from the respective chapters) have been selected and then analyzed qualitatively through the method of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is an integrated approach for the study of text that views language as a form of social practice and centers on the ways social and political power elements are reproduced in text and dialogue. It is a method of multidisciplinary analysis for the literary texts and for the areas of social sciences.

Figure:1



Data analysis

The data in the form of the following textual quotes have been selected and analyzed in the light of the relational frame of identity.

1st Stage: (Chapters 1 to 4): Illusion; Pre 9/11

(A) Yes, **you** are right; it was Princeton! Quite a guess. **I** must say. This is **a dream come true**. 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**. **I** had the access to the beautiful buildings, **I** thought. To **professors who are titans** in their fields and fellow students who are **philosopher-king** in the making. (Ch.1, P 03)

(B) **I** was, **I** must confess, caught off balance **I** did not know how to react. But **I** did know **I was impressed with Jim**; he had'after all, seen through me in a few minutes more clearly than had many people who had known me for years. (Ch.1, P 10)

Discussion

In these above given extracts we find that the enunciator 'I' establishes his relational identity structures through the iterative use of 'I' and the attributes attached with 'I' are such as; **a dream come true, everything was possible, professors who are titans, I was impressed with Jim**, may clearly show that Changez is in his illusion.

Firstly, the way of universalisation of the attributes such as **everything was possible** and **professors who are titans** highlight the relation feature of identity. It indicates that Changez lacked so many things/ dreams in his own homeland and America would materialize all his dreams in an instant. These dreams are definitely related to economy and finance glamour which Changez like every Pakistani needs to run his affairs smoothly

Secondly, **Princeton inspired in me and I was impressed with Jim** indicate that the enunciator is deeply in glamour of the ontological structures of America. The Princeton University building seems an adorable thing to him and the style of Jim and his manners really impress I/We.

Thirdly, the **professors who are titans**, sets the epistemological glamour that all knowledge is with America and I/we, the Pakistani are ignorant or insufficient in our education and research.

Fourthly, the use of figurative expressions as **a dream come true, Philosophers-stones and Titans**, also highlight the height of enunciator's poetic imagination regarding America. I/ We generally associate such illusions with Europe and especially with America to find our all wishes come true.

In this way, such constructed ontological and epistemological metaphors make us discontented with our own homeland and history. The very thing was going to happen with Changez as an enunciator in a relational way.

2nd Stage: (Chapters 5 to 10): Disillusionment; During 9/11

But he[You](an American) was caught by one of his friends by the arm and tugged at him, saying it was no worth it. Reluctantly, the first allowed himself[Yourself] to be led away. "Fucking Arab" (Ch 8P 134)

*It is remarkable, given its physical insignificance – it is only a **hair style**, after all – the impact a **beard** worn by a man of **my complexion** has on **your fellow** countrymen. More than once, travelling on the subway – where I always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in – I was subjected to **verbal abuse** by complete strangers and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a whispers and stares. (Ch 9,P148)*

Discussion

In these texts the enunciator 'I' again communicates his identity to the readers through the same relational way as earlier. But he is now the subject of disillusionment with the same intensity sense he used to have illusion for America and its people. The use of attribute that the Americans use for him is "**Fucking Arab**". This thing forces him to think about himself as being a Muslim. He may be an Arab but not fucking.

*The **hair style, beard, complexion** of I/We as an enunciate or cause a sense of shame and resentment in others and he faces **verbal abuse** everywhere.*

The **hair style, beard, complexion**, not only set the dichotomous situation with Americans at cultural and ethnic levels but his glamour about American culture and ethnicity is shaken violently.

'Beard' is, no doubt, an icon of ethnic identity in the wider sense but at individual level it is the physiognomic feature that makes him discrete and prominent in American society. Along with his beard, his turban also highlights his individuality which he wishes to sustain and maintain. '**Do not be afraid of my beard**' (P 1). The element of fear with the beard is very typical in the sense that it is the sign of terrorism in American society but he is always reluctant to shave it out. It does not simply mean that he wears it as a fashion but he has it for the sake of peculiar identity rooted somewhere deep into his cultural and religious norms.

America's favour to India against Pakistan really disillusioned I/We as a state. In this way the political shift of paradigms can be observed through the identity makers if views in wider political parameters.

In this way Changez's journey from illusion to disillusionment is covered almost wading through the long route of six chapters (Ch. 5 to 10). It means he

took a long time to come out of the ontological, epistemological and political neurosis regarding America. His ambivalence as the enunciator of all the relational frames of identity is coming to close and he is going to shift into another domain of identity.

3rd Stage: (Chapters 11 to 12): Defense; Post 9/11

I am a believer in nonviolence; the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self defense. (Ch.12 P 206)

*It seems an obvious thing to say, but **you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists.....** (Ch.12 PP 208, 209)*

Discussion:

The glamour is over. No more disillusionment. Self realization as a nationalist and a Muslim fundamentalist (in positive sense) is quite obvious in the above given extracts. The enunciator is out of his ambivalence. 'I' is now converted into 'We' as **I am a believer in nonviolence** and *we Pakistanis are [not] all potential terrorists*. Here the identity is established through his contrastive position of observing the things.

The use of pronouns 'I/me' is very significant here as they clearly associate the reader to the writer and Changez. If we take 'I' in the words of Catherine Belsey, it again unites ennui (writer, as a narrator outside the text) and enounce (narrator as a protagonist inside the text) which means the identities of the writer and the narrator inside the novel are united in a single whole in the character of Changez as 'I'. The enunciator speaks on the part of himself as well as on the part of the creator of the fiction. The 'You' is definitely the other.

Secondly the juxtaposed dichotomy of 'I/We- You' is quite interesting to note as

I/We	You
Changez	Americans
Pakistan	America
Non-Violent	Violent
Peace lovers	Terrorists
Mohsin Hamid	The western writers

We see that the pattern of dichotomy, as given in the table is not just a lingual one but ideological one. Pakistan and America are two ideologically different territories where it becomes rather impossible for the enunciator like Changez to survive and in the end he has to identify his position and ideology as a fundamentalist. In this way Changez's return to his homeland in the end can be justified on the grounds of his identity retention.

Conclusion

The discussion of the data in the light of relational frame shows that the identity of Changez develops through contrast (I/We -You) in the novel. He passes through the three stages of identity growth finally becoming a fundamentalist. The research highlights that after 9/11 the identity retention for Pakistani immigrants in USA really got a crucial importance. Their Islamic and national identities went at stake and their survival in that situation got impossible. The novelist epitomizes all these things through the metamorphosis of Changez.

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