

FRACTURE IN PAK-AMERICAN DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST: A PAKISTANI'S RETURN HOME

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Abstract

Identity is interactional, not fixed or stable. No two relations are equal and the imbalance in any equation of relationships finds expression in the use of language and other cultural modes. After 9/11, the Muslims living in America realized that their identity as Muslims outshines their credentials as Americanized citizens and professionals. All the attempts by the Diasporic communities to look like Americans in America are thwarted by the stark realization that cultural and ideological differences matter more than the merit and worth of the individuals. Mohsin Hamid demonstrates various aspects of the identities of the American Muslims who have to adjust themselves in a conflicting cultural situation. Changez tries his utmost to come up to (Am)Erica's temperamental and contextual requirements but he fails to bridge the gap that symbolizes the failure of the relationship between two cultures. Changez's identity fluctuates between two poles of Pakistani eastern style shifting desperately towards American social standards to adjust in that set-up. He is entangled by social, cultural and, most important, economic compulsions that dictate and determine his place in US society. The relationship is bound to collapse because of unnatural bond between them.

Keywords: Identity, self, other, representation, difference, hybridity, assimilation

Identity is the product of social and cultural differences and interactions. Macmillan Dictionary defines identity as 'the qualities that make someone or something what they are and different from other people' (Macmillan Online). Social identity is the product of interaction of individual with the society. As individuals assume different personae in changing communicative contexts, identity is not fixed and stable: it keeps changing with the changes in the context in which one lives. Cultural identity comes under pressure in contesting environments. "Identity, whether at individual, social, or institutional level, is something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives through our interaction with others" (Thornborrow 2004). "The concept of *audience design* (Bell 1984) provides a theoretical account of the reasons of why speakers change the way they talk depending on the situation and the context they are talking in" (Thomas et al 2004, p.169). The principles of *convergence* and *divergence* also explain adjustability

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between/among the speakers according to the differences of their social positions. Identity has also a share of a community's interaction with its contrasting others: things are defined by their opposites. "Identity has no origin in (itself) and is not a fixed entity, but is differential, a meaning generated by difference although that difference has in a sense been already constructed beforehand ... (T)he British or English identity of the colonizer can only become a 'reality' after the colonial contact which truly confirms it" (Bertens 2001, p. 207).

Avtah Brah observes that diasporas are about "putting roots 'elsewhere'" (2006, p. 443). More than the question who travels this conceptual heuristic device involves the following questions:

- i- When, how and under what circumstances are the journeys undertaken?
- ii- What socio-economic, political and cultural conditions make the trajectories of these journeys?
- iii- What regimes of power do inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora? (p. 443)

Exploration of these trajectories is necessary to differentiate one mode of diaspora from one another. Along with "circumstances of leaving ... [and] those of arrival and settling down" (p. 443) are also important to understand various nuances of the ways a group is "inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality or other axes of differentiation in the country to which it migrates" (p.444). The 'situatedness' of a group is further informed by a diverse chain of discourses including institutional practices, state policies and economic processes, adds Avtah Brah. Furthermore, the regime of power plays its politics of inclusion and exclusion of group into and from the body politic of the 'nation', to inscribe them as psychic and juridico-political subjects. The purpose of this article is to explore the diasporic 'situatedness' of Changez in the historical specificity of post-9/11 Pak-America relation. The variability of the relationality of Changez – the metonymic protagonist of *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, implying Pakistani side of Pak-America relations – explore various dimensions of the "configurations of power" of the relationship in our distinct particularity of historical experience.

After 9/11, George W. Bush in a speech on War on Terror said: "Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's

emergency plans. Our military is powerful, and it's prepared" (americanrhetoric.com). This overgeneralized policy and politics of allegations included all those who were reluctant to accept it into the terrorist group: "Either you are with us or with terrorists," said Bush (youtube.com). The title *Reluctant Fundamentalist* also challenges this too easy and sweeping divide. "War on terror is a discourse" which, observes Croft, constitutes "identity with a particular group, and that which constitutes identity against a particular group" (2006, p. 27).

In the context of misrepresentative disgusting attitude of American media towards Muslims after the Oklahoma bombing (1995) and inclusion of the word 'Islamophobia' in Oxford Dictionary (1997), "Muslim Americans," observes Peck, "were no strangers to hostile treatment before 9/11" (2011, p.37). The stereotyping of the Muslims made them conscious of their religious identity. Aroosa Kanwal in the context of 9/11 comments that "... the Iranian Revolution, the Gulf War, the Afghan Jihad, US oil interest in the Gulf region and Afghanistan and the Rushdi Affair [are] other significant markers that ... contribute to the changed perception of the Muslims in the Diaspora after 9/11" (2015, p. 6). Through the interplay of economy and religion America played havoc with the lives of innocent others. An Iraqi woman in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) questions her family's perception despite that they had done no harm to America. Saxby Chambliss, a Republican representative, voiced his religio-ethnic prejudice in the following words: "Let me arrest every Muslim that crosses State line" (Peck, 2011, p. 5). In fact, all sharing of ethnicity and/or religion came under strict American surveillance, harassment and prejudice (p. 22). Rafhan (2016) also traces historico-political and religious significance of the date 9/11 in the American and European non-Muslim discourse. On 9/11, 1973, in Chile and Ireland, "these were casualties the same as the number of American 9/11 – Cromwell stated that the massacre of Drogheda Killing numbered 3000 people (p.44). Paul Crotch's *The Shadow of Apocalypse* (2004) observes that 9/11 had been prophesied for war in Psalm 23:4 (Croft, 2006, p. 30). Grant Jeffery (2000) also observed that war against Iraq had been prophesied by Jeremiah.

Lori Peek (2011) observes that Muslims especially Arab Muslims were held responsible for the 9/11 catastrophe. They had to face "a range of discrimination ... [and] the personal and collective impacts

of the backlash” (p. 1). Even Hindus, Sikhs and Latinos because of their resemblance with Muslims suffered discrimination. Peek commented that American media reported more than 465 cases of American discrimination against Arab Americans. FBI got 28 hate crime cases against Arabs in 2000 and 481 cases in 2001 (Peek, 2011, p. 32). Don DeLillo’s *The Falling Man* is a representative American voice on 9/11. Equating terror and Islam, DeLillo portrays a group of Muslims who conduct attacks on America to avenge her progress and their backwardness: “It’s not the history of western interference that pulls down these societies. It’s their own history, their mentality. They live in a close world of choice, of necessity. They haven’t advanced because haven’t wanted to or tried to” (p. 47).

Terror fiction, in this context, has become a subcategory emerging in response to 9/11 situation of the world and *Reluctant Fundamentalist* a representative work from Pakistan. Other works in this category include: *Specimen Days* (2005) by Michael Cunningham, *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) by Laila Halaby, *Self Storage* (2007) by Gayle Brandeis, *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Kamila Shamsie, *Home Boy* (2010) by H.M. Naqvi, *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khalid Hosseini. All these writers are collectively constructing and retrieving the voices suppressed by world politics against the displaced peoples. Referring to this politics Zahoor observes that *Burnt Shadows* explores “the traumatic displacement of innocent humans because of the major historical events caused by the world power politics” (2015, p. 46). George Banita in *Race, Risk and Fiction in the War on Terror: Laila Halaby, Gayle Brandeis and Michael Cunningham* (2010) evaluating their novels *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), *Self Storage* (2007) and *Specimen Days* (2005) observes that the fall of Twin Towers led to a misconstrued American prejudiced discourse replacing racial discrimination with an ambiguous moral discourse. Muslim writers in general and Pakistani writers in particular have been countering that American construct of “the terrorist Muslim”. Halaby, a Jordanian-American Muslim novelist, who once considered America “a land of stainless steel promises ... and possibility” (p.63), had to revise her point of view after 9/11 attacks. In *Once in a Promised Land*, the protagonists, Jassim and Salwa, leave Jordan for Arizona to realize their respective dreams of success and freedom. Though Ground

Zero is 2000 miles away from their residence, racial discrimination and paranoia pervading over the nation badly affected them because of their American Muslim identity. Jassim, professionally a hydrologist, industriously makes water accessible to all preventing its wastage. But FBI labels him a national terrorist. Salwa, his wife, has to face racial discrimination: a client refuses to work with her for her Jordanian origin. Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* also shares with Halaby dream of success and disillusionment that brings him back to Pakistan.

The 9/11 Commission Report reported that Bush called and threatened the world to join America in her war on terror: "The United States would punish not just the perpetrators of the attacks, but also those who harbored them" (p. 330). Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, enumerated the following seven steps America wanted Pakistan to take:

i- To stop al-Qaeda operatives at its border and end all logistic support for Bin Laden; ii- to give the United States blanket over flight and landing rights for all necessary military and intelligence operations; iii- to provide territorial access to U.S. and allied military intelligence and other personnel to conduct operations against al-Qaida; iv- to provide the United States with intelligence information; v- to continue to publicly condemn the terrorist acts; vi- to cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan; and vii- if the evidence implicated bin Laden and Al-Qaida, and the Taliban continued to harbor them, to break relations with the Taliban government. (p. 331)

President Musharraf and the top military command swiftly agreed to the American demands. American Embassy reported the next day:

Musharraf said the GOP (Government of Pakistan) was making substantial concessions in allowing the use of its territory ... His standing in Pakistan was certain to suffer. To counterbalance that he needed to show that Pakistan was benefiting from his decisions. (p. 331)

After performing the role of front line partner state of United States and suffering huge losses of life and property, Pakistan earned only the rise of terrorism. In this context, *Reluctant Fundamentalist* embodies a complex web of interaction between various kinds of identities

overlapping, nullifying, questioning and perceiving and misperceiving one another. The novel basically embodies clash between two different master identities: American and Pakistani characters with their conflicting nationalities, gender difference and ethnicities find each other in a kind of social laboratory questioning both sides in their complacent misperceived conceptions. The oxymoronic title of the novel defines the mood of the whole novel in which East and West with their conflicting ideologies and cultures are en face. Both pass through a process of adjustment with East at the passive receiving end and the West at the active giving end and in the meanwhile they come to see each other with clarity of their lenses: both prove to have their own misconceptions and fallacies. Erica and Changez are representations of West and East respectively, both dismantling some illusions about each other, both sharing a part of each other though in an unequal proportion, and both readjusting with each other but ultimately failing in their effort to bridge the gap. The introductory paragraph lays out the whole conflicting scenario that serves as the context and basis of the novel:

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be afraid of my beard: I am a lover of America ... you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services (p.1).

The apologetic behavior of Changez and his consciousness of his beard creating a sense of alarm define the positions of both of them in comparison with each other. The claim that he is 'lover of America' is a desperate effort of adjustability. The only relation available to him is to be helpful. His defining himself in comparison with an American, speaking his language and looking at himself through his eyes says a lot about the predicament a Pakistani who finds himself in the post-9/11 world. Neither of the interactants is named, to raise the allegorical status of both the figures from individuals to representatives of Pakistan and America, two different and even opposing *cultures* in every sense of the word: 'what people do, think and have.'

One of the central issues of the novel is to dismantle the pseudo-conflict between the two identities and Hamid is very conscious of his agenda throughout the work. The Mr. American is made to realize that his complexion is common in the northwest of the country; his dress is

no peculiarity; his expansive chest is common to the ‘sportsmen and soldiers’ of all nationalities; it is, rather only his ‘hardened face’ that makes him look like American. Tables are thus turned upon him to make him realize that his defining feature is a negative hardness rather than any enviable characteristic of being a typical American.

The identities of both Changez and Erica’s father are stereotypical: the latter refers to his previous servant who was a teetotaler because he was a Pakistani and his inductive generalization therefore that Changez too must be averse to drinking is refuted by him. Likewise, his beard has nothing to do with his Pakistani origin as is again fallaciously perceived by her father.

It is ‘the power of that system, pragmatic and effective’ that attracts Changez and he partially loses his Pakistani identity and gives a deceptive feel to his American counterparts that he is absolutely one of them. But the sense of his own self deep down in him is never totally lost and negated. He feels a strange kind of pleasure to see on T.V. the fall of the towers of The World Trade Center but he knows that his position in an alien land does not afford feeling pleased. He makes conscious effort to make things normal. Changez’s religious consciousness – despite his being a minimalist practicing Muslim – is undeniable. American religio-racial discrimination compelled his return ‘home’, who otherwise would have liked best to live in and contribute to American society. This return to national identity in the era of globalization is the issue this article explores.

The protagonist comes to see himself from the point of view of the West. The new milieu makes him feel his suit “too formal ... several old ... (and) somewhat shabby” (p. 29). The choice of dress becomes an extended metaphor of conscious adjustment in a new civilization: “... I wanted to dress as I imagined they would be dressed: in a manner elegant but also casual” (p. 29). But it was he himself alone to think so; “... no one seemed to take much notice of me at all” (p. 29). On the other hand Erica is so casual in dress that “on the beach she put on a shirt – a gentleman’s shirt, I still remember, blue and fraying at the tips of the collar” (p. 15). The casualness of Erica and the consciousness of Changez in the choice of dresses symbolize the confidence level of the two civilizations, the strength of the West and the weakness of the East in their interaction. The reason may be that Changez has to live in Erica’s

culture, not vice versa. He owns the things as well as the people around him: “The area – with its charming bistros, exclusive shops, and attractive women in short skirts walking tiny dogs – felt surprising familiar, although I had never been there before” (p. 29). The adjectives in this quote show his fascination for this atmosphere. And there is a long list of adjectival phrases scattered through the novel which can be interpreted in this way:

- i- Erica’s family lived in an *impressive building* with a blue canopy.
- ii- My firm’s *impressive officers* made me proud.
- iii- It was ... a *spacious bedroom* in a *prestigious apartment* on the Upper East Side.

The adjectival phrases have been given with the sentences in which they occur and all of them reflect Changez’s fascination for the Western razzmatazz and he loses a part of his identity and redefines his position and placement and by implication of the whole of the East, in a new culturally contrastive scenario. He, a Pakistani in Manhattan, though always conscious of his Pakistani context, never “thinks of himself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee” (p. 21). Changez’s gestures show him to be someone simply incapable of dealing with his Western counterpart on equal terms though she finds him nice and interprets him positively:

‘I don’t think,’ she said finally, ‘I’ve never met someone our age as polite as you.’ ‘Polite?’ I said, less than radiant with joy. She smiled. ‘I don’t mean it that way,’ she said. ‘Not boring polite. You give people their space. I really like that. It’s unusual’ (p. 15).

The protagonist is a typical Pakistani in giving her the space. And ironically, the comment ‘It’s unusual’ compares this Pakistani character with American man, who, we can infer, is less space-giving and not ‘respectful polite’. It was his western aura that was disturbed at the mixed compliment, ‘polite’. It was his sense of inferiority, as was the case in conscious choice of dress, that made him polite and respectful or perhaps, he was behaving with a Pakistani man’s controlled spontaneity marked with effort of adjustability. Therefore, he was unusual to Erica. He, however, does observe self-restraint if not self-abasement in his interaction with Erica. Mohsin Hamid creates many situations in the

novel when Eastern false modesty and restraint find themselves in an unavoidable interaction with western buoyancy and spontaneity and yield to fascination. In one such situation, Changez and Erica are both shocked: “[a]nd then as I watched, only an arm’s length away, she bared her breasts to the Sun.” for Erica it was a general act of basking or sun-bathing but for Changez it was a highly seductive scene. His gaze also disturbs Erica who becomes self-conscious and loses her spontaneity.

Changez has many alternatives but he is unable to realize any one of them and, despite his effort, he is unable ‘to think of something else to say, failed’. Repetition of ‘Hello’ makes him sound ‘unbelievably foolish’. This is a recurring feeling and he is constantly and consciously making efforts not to look so in response to Erica’s naturalness: “... my thoughts were engaged in a struggle to maintain a facial expression that would not appear idiotic” (p. 15). He is questioning his culture, manners, mannerisms and all that collectively make his identity, but Erica too, occasionally goes through this questioning. When Changez is blushed to see her bare breasts, “she smiled with uncharacteristic smile” (p. 14). This uncharacteristic blush would have been replaced with some other mode of behavior – characteristic of her – had she been in presence of a western counterpart, say, Chris, her boyfriend once. Thus Erica and Changez, West and East, are redefining themselves though the former has greater and dominating influence in remolding and readjustment. But Changez’s embroidered *kurta* is one of the items that attract Erica; fascination is perhaps not a proper word to use for Erica: that is not a western response. Even humor becomes frightening where there is lack of harmony and understanding. Changez’s remark that ‘he hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability’ is shocking to others because it is a typical Western response to Pakistan and Pakistanis and it is only Erica ‘who seemed to understand my sense of humor’ (p. 17) and he was forced to explain to others that he was just joking.

Beard is another feature of Eastern life that has been made a questionable feature in post-9/11 world. Erica’s father also suspects Changez’s attitude towards alcohol on the basis of his preconceived over-generalized misperception about Pakistanis that they do not drink. Changez says to Erica’s father about beard: You seem puzzled by this – and not for the first time. Perhaps you misconstrue the significance of my

beard, which, I should in any case make clear; I had not kept when I arrived in New York (p. 37).

The implication is that beer had nothing to do with Pakistan or Islam or east. One may be 'liberal' enough to drink, to be fascinated by a lady's naked breasts exposed to the sun, to swim with her letting his legs graze upon hers and efficient enough to be selected by Underwood Samson and Company purely on Western standards and one may have a beard and still one may be a Pakistani Muslim. This is a new kind of othering concocted to other Pakistani Muslims. A beard like that of Changez has nothing to do with fundamentalism. Alcohol is similarly referred to expose and disentangle western confusion. Erica's mother says that he is twenty two, implying that 'so of course he drinks.' Erica's father says: 'I had a Pakistani working for me once. Never drank.' Both these points of view are products of misconceived overgeneralizations. Neither all those who are twenty-two drink nor all those who are from Pakistan don't drink nor is it otherwise. Changez responds to the offer of red wine, 'I do (drink) sir. Thank you.' This may again make Pakistani character dubious: if wine is illegal for Pakistanis and Muslims, why do then Pakistani Muslims drink? And the answer is:

In truth many Pakistanis drink; alcohol's illegality in our country has roughly the same effect as mari juana's in yours. Moreover, not all of our drinkers are western educated urbanites such as myself; our newspapers regularly carry the accounts of villagers dying or going blind after consuming poor quality moon-shine. Indeed in our poetry and folk songs intoxication occupies a recurring role as a facilitator of love and spiritual enlightenment. What? Is it not a sin?

Yes, it certainly is — and so, for that matter, is coveting thy neighbor's wife. I see you smile; *we understand one another then.* (p. 73, my italics)

This passage is the microcosm of the novel. Mohsin deftly moves from point to point with a very dilute plot because the whole focus is on dismantling the confusions and misgivings and reaches the conclusion of this novel as well as the purpose of this novel: 'We understand one another, then.' It does not seem natural that Changez who cannot respond Erica at many occasions properly and makes a consciously sustained effort not to look idiot, solves his father's

confusions about Pakistan with so keen probe and brave handling of the issue. But in both cases Mohsin is successful. This discrepancy does make the protagonist more convincing to represent Pakistani character that has never had spontaneous interaction and relationship with women, not to speak of a Pakistani man in strange environment of America facing a girl that carries the whole spontaneous confidence of that country and civilization and does not need any training or familiarization to interact with a male stranger; this is natural to her. His exposition of the western confusion is marvelous, and that is the purpose of this novel. It may seem a political and propagandist gesture, but, for that matter it is a truer novel — a novel written not in the air, rather on the ground, with consciousness of ground realities, and with a view to letting the two segments of the world see each other properly, the world where writing lives on differences and distances, and rifts make most easily selling commodity.

Again, in conversation with Erica's father, Changez has to listen to the detailed disapproving summary of Pakistani situation. Though admitting that 'there was nothing overtly objectionable in what he said', Changez is well aware of his American intellectual milieu to trace the origin of this point of view: '... his was a summary (of) ... the short news items on the front page of the wall street journal.' Changez understands the subjectivity of his 'tone' with typically American undercurrent of condescension' (p. 33), and the 'yes-but' structure of his response reflects a partial acceptance of his point of view, negation of his exaggerated overtone, and defiance with a conviction that the things were not incorrigible: "Yes, there are challenges, sir, *but* my family is there, and I can assure you that it is not as bad as that." This mixture of partial acceptance and partial resistance goes on intermittently throughout the novel.

Changez is divided between Pakistan and America. Despite that all his family lived in Pakistan, and that he repeatedly shifts to Lahore in nostalgia, when he was asked where he was from, he 'learned to answer' that he 'was from New York'. 'Did these things trouble me, you ask? Certainly, sir; I was often ashamed. But outwardly I gave no sign of this' (p. 38). This 'new learning', this conscious negation of his actual identity and adoption of the new one was possible by his ability to come up to 'genuine aptitude for our work ... and the glowing reviews my

performance received from my peers' (p. 38). The irony is that peers are 'my peers' and work is 'our work': the former phrase shows a sense of separateness from the group and the latter shows his absorption in 'us'/'our work'. Identity is the cost of adjustability in both the cases. Despite sacrifice of and pride in his own Pakistani identity, he cannot win a thorough acceptance from American society. Colleagues are not company and their appreciation is for 'aptitude for work' and 'performance', not for the man himself. Work is the only joining factor for them. And for how many people is this relationship possible? How many Ericas can be there? He feels disillusioned with his adjustability and fruits of his sacrifice of his identity when he comes face to face with a stranger on the road:

I was riding with my colleagues in a limousine. We were mired in traffic, unable to move, and I glanced out the window to see, only a few feet away, the driver of the jeepney returning my gaze. There was an undisguised hostility in his expression; I had no idea why. We had not met before ... But his dislike was so obvious, so intimate, that it got under my skin. (p. 39)

Consequently, he excludes himself, though for the time being, from the compulsive inclusive 'we' and addresses his Pakistani audience: '... you will have noticed in your time here that glaring is something we men of Lahore take seriously' (p. 39). One proof of the sense of mixed identity, mixed relatedness is the recurring shift of narrative between America and Lahore (Pakistan). But despite his best effort to adjust himself in American circumstances at the cost of his Islamic Pakistani identity, he is never able to fully get rid of what he actually is:

...they had identified Jim as a man of substance, and the smiles and attention were impressive to behold. I was the only non-American in our group, but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and – most of all – by my companions. (p. 42)

Changez's Pakistani identity remains intact and springs upon him clearly when he watches on T.V. "the twin towers of New York World Trade Centre collapse" (p. 43), and admits that "despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (p. 43). Hamid skillfully develops duality of Changez's character. First he feels pleased at death and destruction in America because he "was caught up

in the symbolism of it” (p. 43) – an allegorical response to a long history of indifference, differences, deception and designs. But then, like oxymoronic title, he, caught up in and divided between a paradoxical situation, realizes the consequences of feeling “remarkably pleased” in his position, he becomes confessional in his tone. But his response is more complex than this; he is a human being as well as a history.

Two conflicting situations are en face in allegorical implications of Changez, his beloved and his American surroundings. On one hand they are bursting forth with ire: “We are America – the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us beware our wrath,” and on the other, Changez is speaking with reference to his American beloved irrespective of his Pakistanism and her Americanism, in true spirit of natural bond between man and woman that goes beyond all immediate parochial identities: “...she looked older, more elegant; she had an element of that beauty which only age can confer upon a woman, and I imagined I was catching a glimpse of the Erica she would one day become. Truly, I thought, she is an empress-in-waiting!” (p. 47)

This relation, however, is very precarious and marked with fear on the part of Changez and with initiative and frank courage on the part of Erica despite 9/11. Following non-linguistic responses show his fear:

- i- I nodded but said nothing in response (p. 48).
- ii- I felt we were encountering one another at funeral (p. 48).
- iii- I suspect I looked alarmed (p. 48).
- iv- I considered her choice of words (p. 48).

And Changez had to tell an emotional story of a beautiful and faithful aunt where love for her husband survived ever after her husband’s death three months after their marriage. But it was not his sentimental story that filled the gap; it was her temperamental buoyancy that spoke to break the ice: “I missed you. It’s good to have you back” (p. 48). But despite this encouragement “I wanted to slip my fingers between hers, but I held my hand completely still, as though I was *afraid* any movement on my part might dislodge our connection” (p. 48). The relationship between them is delicate and at the risk of breakup any time. They do not behave spontaneously as a couple from the same culture does. There is a long history of poisonous memories suppressed and ignored but never erased from their subconscious:

The destruction of the World Trade Centre had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that *had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond*; now the waters of her mind were *murky with what previously had been ignored*. I did not know if the same was true of me. (p. 49, emphasis added)

Changez is in many ways dependent upon her directly or indirectly. She reminds him of ‘a delicacy we entirely lack in Lahore’; his residence was ‘a tiny fraction of the size of her own home’ and that too in her homeland; Erica’s regular invitations are very ‘pleasing’ to him; and the most important is that Changez feels that ‘this was how my life was meant to be.’ It was she who bridges the gap between them ‘*with a small caress*’ whereas his response was characterized by *shyness and awe*. This episode matures into physical union between them but the union lacks bilateralism. It is Changez who ‘pulled her to me, embracing her gently and giving first her forehead, and then her lips a kiss.’ This warmth is missing on her part; she is ‘*silent and unmoving*.’

I found it difficult to enter her; it was as though she was not aroused. She said nothing *while I was inside her, but I could see her discomfort*, and so I forced myself to stop. ‘I am sorry’ she said. ‘No I am sorry,’ I said. ‘You don’t like it?’ ‘I don’t know’ she said, and for the first time in my presence her eyes filled with tears. ‘*I just can’t get wet. I don’t know what is wrong with me*’ (p. 53).

The italics show how the relationship keeps shifting from one to the other but it is almost never mutual. Even in the extreme intimacy man and woman can ever afford, they essentially sustain two different identities; the gap is unbridgeable. Erica reveals that she ‘had only once achieved orgasm, and, that, too, by fantasizing of him (Chris)’ (p. 53). The whole situation is richly symbolic of Pak-America relationship, of the uncertain relationship between two civilizations. Erica and Chris share the identity; even Chris’s fantasy is sufficient for an orgasm. Both of them merge into each other physically and spiritually (if the word spirit is applicable to the western civilization). On the other hand, Changez is fully involved in her, bewitched by her beauty. And she too is in *a kind of love* (or at least maximum intimacy) with him. Despite all that, she is ‘silent’, ‘unmoving’; ‘she did not respond’, ‘she did not resist’. The whole interaction ends into a sorry affair, connoting lack of

consummation of relationship between the two. Changez is ‘better than any medication at putting her at ease’ (p. 54). The remark has double implication. On one hand it refers to Pakistan’s role as forefront ally of America in her war against terrorism; that extended so much help at the cost of national losses that Americans themselves did not expect. On the other hand ironically, this remark demeans Changez (Pakistan) from a human being to a thing, something better than medication. Whereas in case of Chris “suffice it to say that theirs had been an unusual love, with such a degree of commingling of identities that when Chris died, Erica felt she had lost herself; even now, she said, she did not know if she could be found” (p. 54). Changez too, at the end, ‘dreamed not of Erica, but of home’ (p. 54). Things fell apart.

Despite being immersed in American dream that was restoring to him the status of his family long lost in Pakistan, he felt his dream shattered because of 9/11 debacle that threw America into a ‘self-righteous rage’ and Changez came to identify himself with ‘Pakistani drivers being beaten ... Muslim men ... disappearing ... into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse’ (p. 57). The American face stood exposed with which he could not afford to identify:

I had been avoiding the evening news, preferring not to watch the partisan and sports-event-like coverage given to the mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty first century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribes below (p. 59).

Onwards from the 7th part of the novel Changez traces his withdrawal from his affiliation with America that had ‘cast machines as heroes’. What is heroic for America is for Changez “ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post” (p. 59-60). Changez’s readjustment of what his life is meant to be redefines the implications of his pronouns as well. Previously his ‘we’ includes him and Americans and now his ‘we’ includes Afghanis and Pakistanis (p. 60). And a dichotomy between you and me first time glaringly develops in the text: “Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbor, *our* friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by *your* countrymen caused me to tremble with fury” (p. 60). This is the true self of Changez, his true identity which he

can conceal but he cannot obliterate. It is at the same level as that exists between Erica and Chris, deep rooted, spontaneous, and unforced. It is American self-righteous assertion that pushes Changez into a new pattern of identity. His use of first person plural pronoun ‘we’ includes his Pakistani Ancestors to refute American perception of ‘us’: “In the stories *we* tell of *ourselves* *we* were not crazed and destitute radicals *you* see on *your* television channels but rather saints and poets and – yes – conquering kings. *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’ (p. 61, emphasis added).

He is now divided between two identities: one based on love, money and power and the other is more fundamental. The flap of the novel sums up this split and shift of identity:

For a time it seems as though it will stand in the way of Changez’s meteoric rise to personal and professional success. Put in the wake of September 11, he finds his position in his adopted city suddenly overturned and his budding relationship with Erica eclipsed by the reawakened ghosts of her past. And Changez’s own identity undergoes a seismic shift as well, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power and may be even love. (p. 17)

The new pattern of politico-socio-economic structure of the world is constantly there to reorient Changez’s outlook. Despite his extreme fury, he tries to normalize himself by false consolations that “there was nothing I could do, and that all these world events were out on a stage of no relevance to my personal life” (p. 60). He also apologizes with a clarification that it “was not his intention to be rude” (p. 61). And it is third bottle of whiskey that puts him to sleep. The dilemma is microcosm of the hard times the Muslims are passing through in the world. They know what is right and wrong and they differentiate between the ‘benefactor’ and ‘destroyer’ but they are not brave enough to themselves to call a spade a spade. It is social, economic and cultural dependence that does not let Changez say with assertion what he considers right though it was not a subjective claim, rather it is only ‘economics’ that has spelled out horrible version of American truth. But beggars are not choosers. Money and ammunition decide the acceptable version of truth. Changez tells his *truth* to himself alone. His reference to his glorious past

and his definition of Muslims as saints and poets rather than terrorists is no more than a monologue; it never develops into an active interaction with any American character, male or female, not even Erica; otherwise, perhaps, their relationship would have come to an end far earlier.

Changez's return to Pakistan, his native land, because of American discrimination is not a merely a figment of imagination; this position is supported by many other working in this context. Irum Sheikh (2011) presented the lives of six Muslim Immigrants in New York, arrested by FBI on the allegations of terrorism. Through their detention for years without any reason, Sheikh shows how powerful states play politics over the voiceless. The detainees report that their arrested were conducted dramatically to frighten the local community about Muslims and to blacken Islam. Ali Usman Saleem comments that *Burnt Shadows* "deconstructs and challenges the popular post-9/11 western discourse and presents a counter-narrative to initiate a dialogue between the west and the Islamic world" (2015, p. 113). The observation applies to *Reluctant Fundamentalist* as well; the novel is actually a dialogue as the beginning shows a Pakistani talking to an American though his contribution to this 'dialogue' is missing making it practically a monologue. The purpose may be to let Hamid's side of the world have its say to strike a balance against what America has already said. Changez's return to Pakistan has multiple implications: i- critique and questioning of American hegemonic role in the contemporary world; ii- strengthening of Pakistani nationalist identity; iii- seeking a new mode and circumstance of dialogue between the East and the West; iv- making the Muslims realize their 'fundamentalism' as west sees it; v- consciousness of their reluctance tempered with double pull, back to the 'fundamentals' and forward to the western 'progressive' worldview, and vi- making the west realize its share of responsibility in creating and escalating the crisis and clash.

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