

DECONSTRUCTING ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN“THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST” BY MOHSIN HAMID

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Abstract

Shared common interests, values, and beliefs define communities as an amalgamated body of persons. Often it is said that community is a united population in which people are bonded together. However, it is observed through studies that ideals of homogeneity and identity are basic things on which communities are founded. The whole world has become a global village because of modern invention and technology and this globalization has put the identities of the people at stake. The research paper about "Deconstructing Identity Issues in 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' by Mohsin Hamid" examines the problem of identity and discovers the troubles of immigrants especially the Muslim-Pakistani immigrants after 9/11 incident. It also talks about the role of the characters roots and history in building their identities and how the characters face challenges which make their life problematic in multicultural America. They try to negate their past, culture and roots but in doing so, they find themselves in trouble because to leave past and roots is very difficult process.

Key Words: Post colonialism, imperialism, identity, 9/11 incident, discrimination.

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, 21st century is the age of science and technology. All nations of the world are enjoying the fruits of modernization but at the same time, this modernization and globalization create many complicated problems for the people to face as diaspora, racism, hybridity, alienation and identity crisis etc. These sensitive issues are highlighted through powerful weapon that is called Literature. The problem of identity crisis is also one of them and is the product of post colonialism. The post colonialism is the period when formerly colonized nations got their independence officially. The post colonial is a term which is employed to unfold all the culture affected by the process of imperialism. Simply it can be said that post colonialism shows the end of colonialization by releasing the native population from the culture and politics of imperialism and by giving them significant independence. Actually, imperialism was characterized by the commercial venture of the western nations which started from late 17th century and early 18th century. They desired to look the markets for their goods in different lands as well as by gaining control over all the natural resources and man power at the lowest possible cost. To fulfill this purpose, they established colonies to provide them raw material for colonial power. The colonizer treated the native people of these lands as colonizers and in this situation; many westerners began to spread this ideology that all people other than white are inferior. The issue of identity crisis occupies a prominent place in the post-colonial period and literature because of its presence in all post-colonial societies. Post colonial nations show opposition to the cultural, emotional and political effects which were brought and left by colonizers. The people of these have attempted to find their identities which they have lost in the period of imperialism.

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The dilemma of identity is a question which has penetrated into the allpartsoflife along with literature. According to Ashcroft (1989) that literature represents the knowledge of post - colonialism and tries to explore what type of issues are suffered by the colonized people. Many post colonial writers attempt to present the problems of immigrants which endanger the identity of the immigrants in foreign land and The Novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" by Hamid is an attempt to describe this issue elegantly.

1.1 Statement of the problem

In this modern age of globalization, the dilemma of identity crisis gains much popularity. To highlight the importance of this issue in modern man's life, this paper explores the circumstances and causes which create this issue. Mohsin Hamid is a well known Pakistani writer and he has touched upon this issue through his work named "The Reluctant Fundamentalist"(2007]. He presents how people face different issues and fail to maintain their identity in foreign land. He is of the view that it is the outward appearance of the people which enables others to identify them and thus paves the way to identity crisis.

1.2 Importance of the Study

Identity is defined who we are and it is the individual feature by which a person or thing is recognized. Identity crisis is a state in which people experience what kind of people they are and what type of people they would like to be. This is a state in which people are not sure who they are. This term is used by Erickson (1950). The paper explores that "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" by Hamid(2007) presents several issues, resistance ,challenges and problems which are faced by people and become risk for their identity in a foreignland with different culture. He presents Changez, the central character of the novel suffers from this problem of identity after 9/11 incident. He is born in Pakistan and goes to America to seek education .But staying there, he tries to dissolve his own identity to be an American .Before the incident of 9/11, and he feels that bright future is awaiting him. He expresses his love for America and speaks and behaves as Americans do. He renders his services for Underwood Samson, a famous American firm and feels proud. But situation is completely changed after the incident of 9/11. He faces biased attitude of Americans towards him and all non native especially against Pakistani Muslims. They ignore his all services and his attempts but just keep in mind that he is non - white and so he is danger to America. He observes such circumstances that put his identity at stake. Hamid (2007] tries to explore such issues, troubles, problems and dilemmas which immigrants face because of differences in culture, language, appearance and religion. All these factors are responsible to produce the critical problem of identity. Hamid (2007) shows the same attitude of westerns for Eastern especially for Pakistanis.

1.3 Research Questions

- (1). How does globalization affect identities of persons and groups?
- (2). How does people suffer from psychological problem because of identity crisis?
- (3). How does Hamid in "The Reluctant Fundamentalist' attempt to Point out the western positioning of the Orient especially the Muslims?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study has the following objectives: -

- 1]. To sort out the effect of globalization which is responsible for Identity crisis.
- 2]. To find out and investigate those psychological problems created due to identity crisis.
- 3]. To analyze the attitude of the western towards the orient and to explore the problems that Pakistanis face in western countries.

2. Literature Review

Identity crisis is highly delicate issue and several writers have gained worldwide fame in literature by touching upon and elaborating this issue. Ngugi ,Naipaul,Woodward, Hall, Lehiri, Morrison, Desai, Narayan, coetzee, kureshi, Fanon, selvon, Walcott, Phillips, Ferguson,Rhys , Rushdie and Gosh are prominent among them who have highlighted the issues of identity . Naipaul (1967) presents the problem of identity in modern age. He is of the opinion that by leaving and negating the past and past culture, people suffer from the issue of identity. His works show that people have to face thisproblem when they imitate foreign cultures blindly. Woodward (1997) shows that Identity directs the way which helps the people to sort out the factors that identify them with the people who share thatpositions well as it helps them to trace the ways in which they do not identify themselves with other people who do not share that position. Hall (1996) attempts to reveal the fact that identities are never settled and fixed but they are always in a process of change. Hall (1996) further argues that people go to other countries,face the problem of identity crisis and they have toface these questions why are you here in this country and ‘when are you returning home. But almost all immigrants are unable to give the answer of these questions.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework provides such type of framework which is used to read and analyze the texts. By employing theoretical framework, different facts and perceptions may be derived. Social identity Theory by Tajfel (1979) helps us to analyze the text "The Reluctant Fundamentalist". Social Identity theory presents the way thatpeople employ to perceive and categorize themselves. It presents two group, in- group and out- group. In- group stands for majority group and out- group stands for minority group. According to this theory that the simple act of being group creates prejudice towards other group.It points out three stages.One is Social Categorization. In this stage, people are classified into different categories on the basis of gender,ethnicity, occupationetc as black, white, student and professors etc.Second is Social Identification.In this stage, people adopt the identity of the group to which they belong .Third stage is Social Comparison. In it, people compare their group to other group by showing favorable biased attitudetowards their own group. This creates discrimination between groups.

4. Analysis And Discussion

People are encountered with many issues in the age of globalizationbut the problem of Identity is the important one. People migrate to other lands with constructed identities which are made in the native surroundings and they face problems in other lands due to these constructed identities. Their already constructed identities present clash with the identities of foreign lands due to differences in culture, religion and life style. Hamid(2007) explores the struggle of a person who attempts to get his identity. In his attempt of gaining identity, he encounters with such challenges that put his identity at stake.Hamid(2007) throws light on the challenges and problems which are faced by immigrants and how these issues cause threatfor the individuality of a person.Hamid (2007) presents Changez, the main character of "The Reluctant Fundamentalist".Hamid tells us about his life while living in US by sharing his experiences of getting education and job .Changez gets his education fromPrinceton and then finds a lucrative job in a reputed firm of US as an analyst. He enjoys his job and is attracted by American life style and culture. He feels proud to be a part of this country. He thinks that a shining future is coming to welcome him. He adores America and thinks that his American dream has been fulfilled.But situation is altered after the incident of9/11 when America is targeted by terrorists."The Reluctant Fundamentalist"

highlights how the protagonist of the novel is subjected to racism, prejudice and contempt of the white because of his appearance and being non- white. He observes such circumstances after 9/11 which takes him to the way of alteration of his identity. This novel plays an important role in splintering this fallacy that all eastern especially Pakistani Muslims are killers and terrorists. Hamid (2007) through *Changez* attempts to break the current depict and misrepresentation that propagate the prejudice and biased attitude towards the persons who are reconsidered and treated as 'others'. 'Others', is the word which represents the persons who are neither because of their attachment to other culture, race and nation other than white. The main character of the novel is treated as other despite of the fact that he loves America and attempts his level best to conceal his originality and absorbs himself in the culture of America. His this attempt is highlighted by the text:

"I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American." (2007, 7)

It is shown that he acts and talks as the Americans do to adopt and absorb the new identity. It is argued that he is willing to alter his existing identity and is ready to receive new identity happily. To be an American, he starts drinking. Once Erica, beloved of *Changez*, invites him for dinner at her home. When *Changez* arrives there, Erica's father takes him as non- drinker but he affirms that he drinks. *Changez* is enchanted by the culture of US to such extent that he calls himself New Yorker as is revealed by the text:

"I was immediately a New Yorker." (2007, 37)

Changez's feeling is explored when he starts his job in the reputed firm. Multicultural nature of this city creates in him a sense of belonging to this city and it is the prolificacy of the culture due to which he takes himself as an American. He never feels that he is stranger. He takes America as his own country. For this purpose, he tries to conceal his originality. When he gets his job, he keeps secret his identity as the text shows:

"on that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson Trainee...." (2007, 38)

The text shows that he attaches himself to the divergent culture by negating his past. His job gives him strength and excitement to such extent that he is constrained to say:

"I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet."

The evidence of the fact that by leaving his roots and culture, he struggles to conceal his identity as is highlighted by the text:

"I was the only non - American in our group, but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account." (2007, 82)

The above mentioned quote reveals his feelings while staying in Manila for the task of Underwood Samson with Americans. *Changez* is respected only by Filipinos after concealing his original identity and having the cloak of American culture. His all attempts of hiding his constructed identity and absorption of new identity fail after the incident of 9/11. He remains stranger and is treated as non- American despite of all his struggles and love for America. Before 9/11, he is glad and excited by thinking that his dream of success has been realized. But the situation is totally altered when he observes biased attitude, prejudice and contempt after 9/11 incident in the country to which he says that he is the lover of America. But after facing the heartrending situation, he starts to think about his own identity. While staying in Manila, he hears the incident of 9/11. With the attack of terrorism, attacks are started on his identity. He is confronted with the partial bearing of the white against non- white. When he is

coming back from Manila, Changez is suspected due to his outward appearance and stopped at airport for inspection. The officer at airport asks him to reveal his real intention of staying in US. He replies that his purpose is peaceful but she is unwilling to trust him. Hamid(2007) presents through this novel that all white have feelings that all other than white are barbarians and are not reliable. Post 9/11, all westerns thinking about eastern become intense that they are killers, terrorist and extremists. They think that others' presence in this country means "damage of America". When Changez observes this situation, he starts to separate himself from Americans and ponders upon his own originality. America's attack on Afghanistan makes Changez restless. It shows the change of Changez's thinking. He stops identifying himself to America as he acted and behaved earlier.

America's behavior against orient is shocking for Changez. Distances are produced between orient and occident and this factor creates crisis for Changez's identity. 9/11 incidents provides the logic to occidents in thinking that all easterns are nether and killers. Hamid(2007) explores the so-called concept that orient especially Muslims are terrorists. Through this novel, he (2007) explores that all eastern especially are targeted of partial attitude as the text shows:

"Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives;" (2007,107)

The text shows that this biased attitude of occident is responsible in creating the issues of identity for non-native especially the Muslims in depiction of Changez.

Changez visits Pakistan to meet his family after 9/11 incident. At this time, he starts to think about his identity. He grows his beard before leaving Pakistan to separate himself from Americans and to represent his own identity as the text shows:

"It was perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity," (2007, 147)

With growing beard when he comes back to America, he faces extreme behavior of the white. His colleagues in the firm start whispering about him as he is not trustworthy being Muslim and is danger to them and their country.

By observing these circumstances, he leaves his attractive job and comes back his homeland. He teaches in a local university with his own true identity. In this novel, Hamid(2007) throws light on the behavior of westerns towards backward nations especially towards Muslims.

5. Conclusion

Globalization creates many delicate issues and identity crisis is also one of them. People who leave their country and go to other country with constructed identities and new culture poses a threat to already constructed identity of people. Hamid (2007) states that cultural and political factors effect the individuality of a person. He further says that other factors like imitation and hybridity also create impact on the identity of the people. There are differences in culture, religion, race and nation which classify people into different categories. On the basis of his race, culture, religion and nation, Changez is taken as other and is humiliated because of his belonging to so-called inferior culture. Hamid(2007) presents the fact that no culture is ideal. Every culture has drawback, no culture is superior and no culture is inferior. It is just thinking and attitude which created distances between backward nation and developed nation. Hamid(2007) highlights the partial behavior of the westerns towards eastern and cultures. This biased attitude puts the identity of an immigrant at stake. Loss of identity leads towards distances between communities as with Changez. He does services for America but after facing adverse circumstance of biased attitude of westerns, he comes back his home land by losing his true identity.

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