

INEQUALITY OF POWER AND DOMINANCE IN MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*: A NEW HISTORICISM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*New Historicism (NH) emerged in the practice of criticism by Stephen Greeblatt in 1990. The theory describes the constituents of the history and regards the history as the while entity rather than the series of incidents. The present study is conducted in the perspectives of NH employed on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid. The novel comparatively analyzed the core values of native and USA culture and intention soon after 9/11 incident. The elements of NH are described in the present study to highlight the presence of core values of the theory for the purpose of manipulation of power relations between powerful nations to marginalized nations, attitude of capitalist society and the system of marginalizing the values through systematic intentions. The findings of the study have suggested that there is existence of NH elements in the novel based on the personal experiences of Mohsin Hamid.*

Key Words: New Historicism, History, Power Relations, Values, Capitalist Society, Marginalized Nations, War on Terror.

Introduction

New Historicism is considered the strategic interpretation of the text which was firstly recorded in 1972. NH, proposed by Stephen Greenblatt in 1990s, can be defined as cultural analysis form through which the text (as the product of culture) is analyzed under the shade of power and interaction in historical perspectives being operated within a society. Yet it has formerly been treated as philosophy. Later on, it has been considered as theory and employed as the type of criticism. Brannigan (1998) has remarked that NH is not a new case of study as it could be employed to the Greek stories and heroes. Cantor (1993) has pointed out that NH

has the tenet that there can be connectivity of anything to other. Kramer and Maza (2006) have found that NH re-conceives history on literature model. Basically, the new historians think that the historical values change over the time while historians describe that there can be no change in the notions of historical facts and behaviours. The rise of NH was based on post-structuralism as Mukesh (2003) has suggested that the shifting of closed discourse to the opened systems is the main aspect of NH as it manipulates the discourse in which it is produced and compares it with the most powerful discourse of the world.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), the masterpiece of Mohsin Hamid, is the autobiography of the author. Hamid is among one of the writers who wrote about the contemporary society and history of Pakistan in novels. The writing styles have shifted after the emergence of new global life in the world especially after 9/11 incident in America. The novel is about the life of Changez who has been living in America and have to leave back to Lahore (Pakistan) due to no job and public remarks against Pakistanis. The novel revolves around the life of Changez who has been studying business and has been working in an international firm. Changez has to come back to Pakistan after 9/11 and it impacts on his life so the thinking philosophy changes and the things are being compared in the mind of Changez which leads him to become a mentor and professor of finance at a university in Lahore, Pakistan. There, he critically examines the new emerging trends and thoughts and tells all this to his students.

The present study also focuses on the elements of NH in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and describes how he has depicted the history and new historical views in his novel.

Statement of the Problem

Though modern society believes in equal choice of living and opportunities, but it lacks the values when it comes capitalistic thoughts. New ways of marginalizing people have flourished in society for unequal power for the sake of values. These inequalities, in the modern age make the people marginable not only in thoughts, but also in living.

Objectives

- To understand the notion of power and inequality presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
- To manipulate the social inequalities in the age of capitalism for marginalized nations.

Research Questions

1. How is new historicism presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
2. How do capitalist societies marginalize other nations in terms of unequal power and values?

Significance of the Study

The study helps to understand the inlaid inequalities in the modern society which leads towards the thoughts of equal chance of living and opportunities. The study is significant as it helps to understand how the global society marginalizes the middle class and eastern people in terms of values and power.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative and is conducted to understand the existence of new historicism in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It has adopted the framework of new historicism proposed by Greenblatt (1990).

Elements of New Historicism

What follows are the elements of new historicism:

- Literature is used as showcase of cultural and historical context.
- History is the whole entity rather than series of events.
- No text has single background.
- All types of criticism are due to the circumstances of time and it cannot have unchangeable meanings in literature.
- It focuses on government, culture and upper-class society, and analyzes their institutions which are based on the strong political and anthropological basis.

Holloway (2020) describes the following elements of NH:

- This school of thought focuses on the history as well as on the historical events.
- The text can be studied on its merits and demerits solely.
- The textual work can be understood in the social and cultural context of production.

Textual Analysis

“It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins.”

The lines describe the inter-textually and the ironical interpretations in the perspectives of elements of comparing “native culture” to the “strong culture”. Pakistanis are treated as terrorists soon after 9/11 which was postulated and propagated by the western media. The trends behind this recognition is the comparison of the terms being employed to one nation, revert to the other one as well. The textual description is also there when the employed terms to the one nation are strongly accepted by the world. The text also describes the “showcase of culture” where the Americans are also called as assassins. The inclusion of such terms as “assassins” is the mouthpiece of the nation which is blamed. The historical event is not described here where the 9/11 is being produced beyond the scene. The 9/11 event has changed the minds of the people. The extract also describes that there is need of study of whole history where the non-natives especially Pakistanis are unable to get the noble status in America.

“When my turn came, 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.”

The intended semantics in the text is about the interpretations of the challenge to the global democracy where the state of Islamic Republic considered the state of fundamentalists where the ruler should be moderate rather than extremist. The dictatorship of Pakistan does not get the favour of the westerns because they like the moderate rulers in Pakistan. The answer of the question in the lines truly illustrates that the inter-textuality is not there when the perception of any cultural people cannot be fulfilled by the natives of Pakistan. The nuclear capability of the state of Pakistan is not liked by to the other rulers of the west. Thus, they keep it in the safe hands rather than in the hands of a ruler who is a fundamentalist. The

political anthropology is clear here when the global politicians are not in favour of the Islamic Nuclear state. The cultural interpretation is evident when most of the Pakistanis are in favour of dictatorship rather than democracy. The essential Islamic teachings are suitable to the presidential system of governance. The global politicians as well as the global establishments do not want to see the same thoughts in the country. The NH is quite here where the diversity of the cultural aspects is much evident in the state to state as is described.

“Time only moves in one direction. Remember that. Things always change.”

NH has the aspects of changing rather than those of maintaining. Time has the linear direction as the whole entity moves in one direction. But the important aspects which are the ideas and theory, according to NH, changes and varies ever because the perception of the people, standard, status and intentions have to be guided through the systems and the situation being described in the diversity of the scenario. The lines themselves describe that there are the certain elements of NH in the novel where the things which are regarded as the behaviours. Intentions of the people vary from time to time and the whole history cannot be changed. History is the sequential and the incidents are the part and parcel of the time being described in the novel.

“...status, as in any traditional, class-conscious society, declines more slowly than wealth.”

The marginalization of the social status is there about the Western society when the native society is quite opposite. The personal and historical experiences in the perspectives of NH are described here when there is analysis of the upper-class and status conscious society. The observation against the upper-class conscious society is there as it is considered as USA society where the wealth and capital have great importance to maintain the relations. On the other hand, native society is going to transform itself in the west. The perspectives of describing the present situation in the novel are that the natives of the Pakistani society would not be status conscious as they are going to be. The cultural ethnicity must be followed in regard to the preservation of the values and traditions.

“I was a modern, progressive, internationally-minded individual before 9/11,” says Changez. “But after that day I became a citizen of a different world altogether.”

This dialogue reflects the impact of 9/11 on the character of Changez, who feels a profound sense of alienation and loss of identity in the aftermath of the attacks.

“Do you think that a country that cannot control its borders deserves to be a superpower?” asks Changez. This dialogue highlights the power dynamics at play within American society, which Changez questions the assumptions and beliefs that underpin American exceptionalism and its status as a global super power.

“The United States was the envy of the world, the exemplar of freedom and democracy,” says Changez. “But it is one thing to say that you are democratic, and another to allow for political differences.”

This dialogue reflects the novel’s exploration of power and privilege within American society, as Changez questions the extent to which democracy is truly inclusive and representative.

“People are dying, Changez,” says Erica. “The world is falling apart.”

This dialogue reflects the historical context in which the novel was written, with Erica’s concerns reflecting the anxiety and uncertainty that many Americans felt in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the War on Terror.

“We all are dying, Erica,” says Changez. “One way or another, we are all dying.”

This dialogue reflects the novel's exploration of identity and morality, as Changez confronts the fragility of life and the impermanence of individual identity in the face of larger historical and political forces.

The novel has analyzed the social system and state system in which the cruel like people do administration while the fair and loving people have to work under them.

"[...] I stated to them among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America."

The ruling and powerful class is being studied and analyzed in NH where the power plays significant role in the manipulation of the ideas and values. The humanistic feelings are abandoned in the contemporary society of America where the prestige is to the natives while the other are tended to be the colonial or frightened beings, only for killing or to be assassinated. The power relations and the constructed values, which are dimensions and core subject of NH, are being called as the "snatching of living" rights by the powerful state of America. The novel intentionally treats such beings as the controller of the other beings through fear and their killing. The natives of the other countries do not meet the standard of the progressive people. Thus, they need to be taught (or killed) so that they might rush towards progressivism.

"But surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you—an American—will agree, it is the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details."

The Americans construct history in their own ways without taking care of the past and incidents or the social norms. The comparison of cultural study in view of other culture is the main aspect of NH which is employed here and the standards are being told to the contemporary Pakistani society.

"It seemed to me then—and to be honest, sir seems to me still—that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority.... Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only in the rest of humanity, but also in your own."

NH compares one culture with the most powerful acknowledged culture in the world. The description of society is being described here as the more helping and supporting to share the pains and hardships in the form of care and engagement while these elements are abandoned in American society. The suggestion is that the US society would feel pains of the Americans. Such a society is more sensitive in regarding the preservation of its own ideas and beliefs.

Conclusion

To cut the long story short it may be said that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be analyzed through a new historicist perspective. Rightly, it explores the relationship between historical and political events and individual identity and experience through its portrayal of the protagonist Changez's journey from a successful young professional in America to a disillusioned and marginalized figure in the post-9/11 Pakistan, the novel offers a critique of inequality of power and dominance, by situating the novel within its historical contexts,

reader can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which political and social structures shape individual lives and experiences. As Lyu (2021:1075) remarks that “not dealing with a text in isolation from its historical contexts, new historicists paid more attention to the historical and cultural context of the literary text.” Conclusively, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a powerful and thought-provoking work that offers a unique perspective on the impact of globalization and historical events on the people throughout the world. The novel invites its readers to consider their own place in the world. As such, it is a valuable addition the cannon of contemporary literature, and a must-read for anyone who is interested in the intersection of culture, identity and history.

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