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MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*: A PAKISTANI RAISIN IN THE SUN

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A Raisin in the Sun

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

-Langston Hughes

The Reluctant Fundamentalist the second novel by Mohsin Hamid, was shortlisted for Man Booker Prize in 2007. It is a remarkable fictional work by the Pakistani author after 11/7 attack on the World Trade Centre. Like Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Mohsin experiments with the narrative techniques making the effect of the story more outstanding. The action of narration takes place at a café in the Old Anarkali district of Lahore during a single dusty evening. The book is narrated by a bearded Pakistani man called Changez, who buttonholes an American traveller and offloads the story of his life.

Changez talks about his time in the US, where he attended Princeton before working for a blue-chip financial firm in New York. Being a Muslim, he is singled out and the terrorist attack on 11 September proves to be a fatal reason.

The story seems to be an outburst of a man who could be any common man living on the face of the planet. The reading of the text with a meaning could be phenomenologically flawed from reader's interest, nationality, religion, point of view and imagination standpoints. It is so, since today the nature of human relationship has gone through lots of changes. This is partly because of realization and reality of growing global village. Globalization, commercialization, modernization are some of the important factors. The oozing of significance of any incident to the minimum group of people or from one point to another in any part of the world undergoes myriad

changes and results are treated one. Media treats it largely. While talking about the move from the modernist culture of calculation to the postmodern culture of simulation, SlovejZizek a Lacananin and Marxist critic in his book *The Plague of Fantasiessays*:

The clearest indication of this move is the shift in the use of the term 'transparency': modernist technology is 'transparent' in the sense of retaining the illusion of an insight into 'how the machine works'; that is to say, the screen of the interface was supposed to allow the user direct access to the machine behind the screen; the user was supposed to 'grasp' its workings- in ideal conditions, even to reconstruct it rationally. (Zizek,131)

Such are the workings of technological changes. It is not only changing the way the world was imagined but also bringing about the changes in the ways imagination is to be dealt with. The retained illusions are at gradual work in the religious perspectives. The technological advancements are of the assistance in the construction and retaining of a view to the dogmatic level due to its adaptive techniques of presentation. They appear to be having their functioning on different levels and the life in the world works on the different levels few of them being personal and community. The globalization on the one hand is complex phenomenon of ever changing nature and on the other hand it brings about several changes to the different levels like personal. It is on the personal level that the protagonist or narrator of the novel is affected due to the attack on the World Trade Center. The attack holds its chain of events that may reveal a sequence of incidents interconnected and worsened by the capitalist and religious antagonistic mindset on a larger scale.

It includes the narrator's failure at love, disappointment at workplace due to religious bias and tensions created because of the course of the incidents happening. Narrator with full grown beard declares in the beginning of the novel to the American listener that he is the lover of America. This declaration is of course ironical but nevertheless in the course of incidents narrated in the novel, narrator does not register any outrageous negative remark against the country. But surely it indicates the notions of revolt. But its immediate target seems to be invisible and hence more complicated and painful.

Changez is troubled on the account of his religious orientations and it proves to be very disastrous in his life. Unlike the movie *My Name Is Khan* by the director Karan Johar, the Mohsin presents of course with the advantages of fiction writing work, an elaborated picture of the circumstances which took shape after the attack. Muslim community's marginalization indeed has become more painful and less discussed phenomenon due to the changes in world politics and terrorism which was labeled as Muslim religious creation. The call for *Jihad* was always interpreted negatively and in many contexts it (the term) was manipulated.

While interpreting any phenomenon on universal level, one always needs to understand the chain of events which were interdependent and roots of the incidents which took place as in sequence making the next one occur. It is the exactly the reason why the people in the world tend to misinterpret the religious teaching. The evils of globalization, the monstrous capitalism, interruptions of capitalist countries like US in internal affairs of the countries like Iraq and Iran, increasing antagonism among sects in Islam, destitute and misguided Muslim youth at a very early age and invisible support and encouragement from some countries for anti-nationalist movements in the country are some of the reasons of a kind of intellectual marginalization of Muslim community. In the first chapter Concerning Violence of *Wretched of the Earth* Franz Fanon writes about legitimization of violence for the national cause as a necessary part of the national freedom movement. But it seems to be very difficult to interpret *Jihadi* violence in the context. It tends to

bring threat of justification of irrational violence. However it can be emphasized that this notion be given a basement of logical thoughts, a sort of poetics. It is of course to be done in order to avoid violent ways and also have one's say.

Mohasin presents the psychological reasons of reluctance of the 'fundamentalist'. Changez an outstanding scholar had to undergo through many hurdles in his life because of his being Muslim. He lost his love. He had to abandon his job. He had to leave US and come back to Pakistan. The tension created between Pakistan and India also troubles his psyche and he becomes more conscious about the security of his family and country. It is necessary to understand Changez's reluctance on the reasons mentioned above as what else one can feel when one is robbed of one's happiness on myriad levels. It is the dream deferred and the reluctance of Changez is on the verge of explosion. Or is it often right to take the present conditions as test as it is mentioned in the noble Qur'an Surah Anakaboot, Chapter 29, Verse 2.

Do people think that they will be
Left alone because they say: "We believe,"
And will not be tested? (The Noble Qur'an, 531)

or is it not too transcendental for Changez to believe in Allah's in this postmodern world of disbelief in Surah Fatir, Chapter 35, Verse 5.

O mankind! Verily, the Promise of Allah is true.
So let not this present life deceive you,
And let not the chief deceiver (Satan)
Deceive you about Allah. (The Noble Qur'an, 584)?

The use of the word fundamentalism is not so much of religious origin here. The writer believes the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel. He thinks that the world is suffering from a deficit of empathy at the moment. It is exactly the reason why the narrator of the story suffers. The deficit of empathy often tends to culminate into antipathy. One reason for such transition is fear which is produced from different sources. The attempts are to be made that we stop being confused from the illogical fears. It could also be maintained that the narrator is giving out a painful cry telling the people about stopping the hatred which is not capable of yielding fruits other than hatred itself and violence.

Deaf, dumb and blind,
They will not return (to the path)
(Surah Al Baqarah, Chapter 2, Verse 18)

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*To Cite the Article:*Patil, Vishnu,&Nawale, Arvind, “Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist: A Pakistani Raisin in the Sun*”. Literary Cognizance, 1-1 (2015): 73-76. Web.

