Chapter I: Introduction

1.1. Islam and the Notion of First World Nations

The present dissertation is based on Pakistan born American writer Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which was published in 2005. It questions the identity of a Muslim in a world where Islam seems to be synonymous to violence and disturbance, especially in regards to the mentality of the leaders of the first world nations. Taking this notion as the guideline, the present research analyzes the novel to seek for a Muslim's identity from existential perspective.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist relates to the negative connotation of viewing the third world Muslims by the first world denizens. It is the story of an America-return-Pakistani youth, Changez, who has to bear the brunt of injustice and harsh comments of the West for being a Muslim, follower of Islam religion. Islam is one of the most sacred religions of the world that preaches mercy and fraternity to the people. However, in recent times, Islam religion has been seriously inflicted by some anti-social elements who are seeking shelter in the name of sacred religion to justify their inhumane acts. Especially, after the infamous 9/11 attacks, there has been a rise in the act of terrorism, where mostly the anti-Islam factors are involved in the name of Islam religion.

The novel can be taken in two parts: the outer section and the inner section. In the outer story, Changez proceeds to offer an unnamed American, his unsolicited autobiographical monologue, recounting his days, a few years back in Princeton, America. The much-heralded tension of this aspect of the novel consists in the fact that, for the most part, Hamid deprives readers of information about the identity or intentions of the American listener. The American could, with equal plausibility, be a tourist wandering through inner city of Lahore, on the one hand, and on the other hand, subject might be a CIA assassin dispatched to kill Changez. But, we are left clueless. Likewise, we get no

information about Changez's intentions for the American listener. He might want to chat with the American, but is doing so for an opportunity to behead him.

Readers throughout the novel are suspended between the most kind and most sinister interpretations of the communication between the only two characters in the novel. Hamid, through their dialogues, penetrates into the minor relations between East and West, who in the recent days have been equally apart as the two parts of the globe: the East and the West. Here, Changez stands for the East and the mysterious listener who remains silent all the time during the narration represents the nature of the West.

The 'inner' story of the novel consists of Changez's brief autobiography as told in his monologue with the American. In the outline at least, the story is fairly straightforward: Changez goes to America in his college years to make a success of himself, and seems at first to become a success. Along comes 9/11, which changes everything. Gradually, both 9/11 itself and the American reaction to it awaken Changez's hitherto latent Islamist-nationalist sympathies. After a while, he comes to the resentful realisation that life in America has made him a traitor to his identity, and made him a mercenary for American interests. And so he abandons his ostensibly successful American life, returning to Pakistan to use the imperialist's tools to dismantle the house that American imperialism has built.

Another part of the story is not-quite-consummated love affair of Changez with a Manhattanite grown and reared, sensuous beauty, Erica. It seems to be adding some psycho-sexual masala to the tale. Unfortunately, neither story really works: the outer plot is too implausible to be credible, and the inner plot is too banal to be interesting. To believe the outer plot, we have to believe one or both of the two preposterous things: (a) that Changez is in danger of being killed by the American and/or (b) that the American is in danger of being killed by Changez. To credit the 'Changez-in-danger' scenario, the

reader has to bring himself to believe that the CIA would send an assassin to Anarkali bazaar to assassinate an insignificant (if portentously bearded) tea-drinker whose most significant revolutionary activity consists of some anti-imperialist number-crunching in the Finance Department of the local university.

1.2. Critical Reception

This scenario might approach believability if Hamid had prepared us somewhere in the book to think of Changez as the South Asian equivalent of Che Guevara, but he doesn't. Changez is a Princeton-educated bourgeois financial analyst with precisely the soul of a Princeton-educated bourgeois financial analyst, and Hamid gives us no reason for taking seriously the idea that the American government would want such a person dead. No one can say that this as a fairly enthusiastic proponent of targeted killing, as there seems no practical reason to make the central character, Changez dare to take such a foolish risk. But somehow, it is a fact that he is American return and has some likings towards it. In any case, on strict logical grounds, if the Central Investigation Agency (CIA) of the U.S., wanted to assassinate Changez, wouldn't the more plausible scenario be one in which it got a Pakistani fellow to do the job.

Julian Warren makes an attempt to know the scenario after the 9/11. She claims that the 9/11 has been a date in the Western world, which will be remembered as the turning point rather than the destruction, it invited. She writes:

> The Americans have desperately wanted or at least have claimed to want to understand the workings of 'the Islamic fundamentalist mind,' since then. Nothing seems more inscrutable to them than the sense that someone out there could so dislike them as to want to kill them on principle. 'Why do they hate us?' as the old chestnut goes. (57)

The Americans have been desperate to know about the workings of third world Islam

citizens and its government, especially, after the 9/11. Together with the Western nations, the Americans have time and again interfered in the internal politics of the Islamic nations, including Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, thereby inviting chaos and violence in those nations. The West "seems guided by the belief that an average third world Islam denizen dislikes, or even hates a Westerner" (Warren, 56).

The entire novel consists of one side of what admittedly isn't a very two-sided conversation. The only voice we hear is that of Changez. He sees an American in the district of Old Anarkali, a local market in Lahore, Pakistan and invites him to have tea and then dinner with him in one of the establishments there. For the rest of the afternoon and late into the evening, Changez recounts how he came to be the man he now is, graduating from Princeton and landing into a great job in the United States to once again living in Lahore – thanks to the whim created by the infamous September 11, 2001.

Mohsin's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has received a wave of criticism after its publication in 2005. It has challenged the traditional issue of viewing the West as the saviour and messiah of the willing youths of the third world nation. It is an obvious issue that hundreds and thousands of youths fly to America each year seeking for a better career and life. But, what status do they earn there has been a major issue of discussion for years. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is one such novel where delicate humane feelings and sentiments are presented in the most accurate manner.

In the words of a critic, Dylan Foley, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about awakening. She views:

> *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not a defeat of Changez, but is the dawn of new hopes. As long as there is awakening and consciousness towards oneness there cannot be defeat of the eastern world youths. It will forever

> bring hope and strength in life, to struggle and make their voice heard amid all adversity. (112)

Foley blames the social structure for the failure of American mentality. She further adds that it is the realization that is most crucial in the case of search for one's identity.

Similarly, Sadik Al-Azm in *Boston Review* views the novel as the beginning of the end of Western dominance in the mind of the eastern youths. He opines, "The 9/11 has made American susceptible towards the youth of the eastern world, and interestingly oriental youths also are awakening to the eastern values and opportunities" (2).

Another prominent English writer of India, Kiran Desai opines, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to be a document of distrust between East and West. However, she is skeptical on the exact balance the writer has maintained in explaining East and West. She, on the one hand, praises the book as an excellent piece of work for its masterful control over its subject matter but, on other hand, criticizes the book for its failure in maintaining the traditional balance between the East and the West. She writes:

> *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a brilliant book that has restraint and masterful control over its subject matter. Hamid unpicks the underpinning of the most recent episode of distrust between East and West. But this book does not merely excel in capturing a developing bitterness. The narrative is balanced by a love as a powerful as the sinister forces gathering even when it recedes into phantom of hope. It is this balance, and the constant negotiation of the political with the personal, that creates nuanced and complex portrait of a reluctant fundamentalist. (32)

Desai's view is an evocation on the need to re-establish the need to gap the bridge between the East and the West. Since last few decades, there has been visible difference of distrust and enmity between the oriental and the occidental.

In the sense, Hamid's portrayal of Changez in the autobiographical term is quite similar to self. Like Changez, Hamid, too moved to the United States and into the Princeton University, for better career and opportunities, and their hometown is also Lahore. Hamid grew up in the typical *teastalls* and *panshops*, as described in the novel. Hamid later attended Harvard Law School and also worked as a law practitioner. His first book is *Mother Smoke*, which is published in ten different languages. It also won a Betty Trask Award 2006 and also picked for the PEN/Hemingway Award finalist in the same year. He has written about world politics from a Muslim perspective for the *Time*, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, among others.

However, things go otherwise for Changez after the infamous 9/11 and he decides to come back to Pakistan, to the same old *chai and pan* shops. The indifference in attitude of the people of the West towards the East has to be analyzed in the essence of Islamization of Pakistan, including other Islam nations. His home nation, Pakistan moved towards a greater Islamization of state and society under General Zia ul-Haq, the country's president from 1978 to 1988. A side effect of Pakistan's Islamization was due to the increased conflict between the different religious communities and organizations, especially between the Sunni Muslim majority and the Shia Muslim minority. Although anti-Shia sentiment existed in Pakistan, the 1990s saw a dramatic upsurge of religious radicalism and violence. Armed with automatic weapons and explosives, militant Sunni organizations fought equally with the militant Shia organizations.

During this period of religious violence, Pakistan, long regarded as a stable ally of the United States, became a training ground for guerrilla warriors and Islamic terrorists. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, and a ten-year Soviet-Afghan War followed. Afghan rebels set up camp in Pakistan where Muslims from other countries joined them to train as guerrillas. Known as Mujahideen, the guerrillas were regarded as

freedom fighters in their campaign against Soviet forces, and they received substantial financial and military assistance from the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other countries throughout the 1980s. After the war ended with the Soviet withdrawal, from Afghanistan in 1989, many of the Mujahideens returned home to such countries as Algeria, Egypt, and Pakistan. There they contributed to the spread of radical Islam. Others remained in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan's military, Islamized under Zia, supported the Mujahideen. The military developed close ties with the Taliban (the movement that controlled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until November 2001) and with militant Pakistani groups. So did many of Pakistan's Madrasas (religious seminaries). Pakistan and Afghanistan together supported the Mujahideen in their struggle against India in Kashmir, disputed territory claimed by both Pakistan and India.

In a bloodless coup in 1999, the then chief of the Pakistani Army, Pervez Musharraf seized power and declared himself as the president of the nation and also retained the post of the Chief of Army. During the parliamentary elections in 2002 Musharraf formed an alliance with a coalition of six hardliner Islamic parties known as the Muthida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA; United Council of Action). Until the 2002 election, the religious parties had never won more than 5 percent of the total vote in the country, but their alliance with Musharraf in 2002 brought them 11 percent of the vote. With 50 seats, the MMA became the second-largest opposition party in Pakistan. The MMA parted ways with Musharraf in 2005 after he ordered the army to attack tribal lands along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. Some of the Islamist political parties in the borderlands, which receive support from the tribes, were supposedly "hosting" members of Al-Qaeda.

After a U.S. invasion toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, Musharraf provided critical support to the U.S. war on terrorism and aid in the effort to capture

Osama bin Laden. As a result, however, Musharraf became labeled an "American puppet" in Pakistan, where anti-Americanism has steadily increased on account of the war in neighboring Afghanistan. In October 2006 Pakistanis erupted in outrage after Pakistan's military bombed a *madrasa* (Islamic school) near the Afghan border, killing at least 80 people. Musharraf also came under criticism from the United States and Afghanistan for allegedly providing refuge for the Taliban.

One answer points us in the direction of the fundamentalists' grievances, another in the direction of the fanatical dictates of their religion. But are these mutually exclusive options? And are they exhaustive of the options? It's safe to say that no one in American political discourse has answered these questions in a fully satisfactory way, and that on the whole, Americans have given up trying. And so the wars against terrorism continue without resolution against a series of unidentifiable and seemingly incomprehensible enemies.

This combination of despair, incomprehension, and intellectual lassitude explains why Americans are, par excellence, suckers for attempts to 'explain' Islamist fundamentalism by way of intellectual short cuts. And Mohsin Hamid's new novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offers up just the sort of short cut that an American could love: the opportunity to emote one's way to understanding. Hyped to the maximum on both sides of the Atlantic as well as on the Indian subcontinent, the book hit number one on the Barnes and Noble bestseller list soon after its U.S. publication, and has come to be regarded by critics as authoritative account by a self-styled insider of Muslim resentment for America.

Irfan Khawaja, one of the many critics of the book, links it with the existent fundamentalism prevalent in the South Asian nations, especially in the Islam states. According to him, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is:

> A brief, charming and quietly furious novel; a seething commentary on America's reputation in the non-Western world, and an act of courage that tells us things that no one wants to hear; a work that gives us an uneasy shift of perspectives, a moral disquiet remembered beyond the last page a superb cautionary tale, and a grim reminder of the continuing cost of ethnic profiling, miscommunication and confrontation; a 'delicate meditation on the nature of perception and prejudice; a deeply provocative, excellent addition to the burgeoning sub-genre of September 11 novels; a delicately thrilling novella that leaves our ears ringing when we close the book. (1)

As clear from its title, it is a novel to impact sense of story telling in the Islamic nations and its people. As such the novel is structured as a story within a story, and thus ends up telling two of them.

Considering all these facts and issues, about Islam and Muslim and a vision to see them by the first (Christian) world, the present researcher will consider *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* from existential perspective to search for a Muslim identity.

Chapter – II: Search for Identity as an Existential Crisis

2.1. Existentialism

Existentialism is a literary and philosophical movement that interprets the meaning of human existence. It also focuses on an individual and his relationship to the universe. It believes that human being is an isolated existent in an alien universe. Further it opposes the traditional belief which sees truth as objective and universal. According to this philosophy, truths are subjective, so what is true to one may be false to another. Whether a thing is true or false, it depends on the decision the individual makes. Thus, it emphasizes on individual choice and freedom.

Existentialism, a philosophic movement that began in the nineteenth century, denies that the universe has any intrinsic meaning or purpose. It focuses on the essentiality for the people to take responsibility for their own actions and shape their own destinies. Defining the term, existentialism Simon Blackburn in *Dictionary of Philosophy* defines, [. . .] "the individual experience of choice and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequent dread of sense of absurdity in human life" (129). Blackburn further opines that it is "the so-called rational understanding of the universe, invited by various philosophies, which has marred humans' want for a free and independent life" (130).

Existentialism has its root in enlightenment, where people lost their faith in religion. As a result, Friedrich Nietzsche announced the "Death of God." Similarly, the horrors of the First World War caused man to abandon faith in social progress. Many more people predicted the hope of radical social revolutions but Stalin changed the Soviet Union into a totalitarian tyranny. As a consequence, people no more believed in them. Likewise, during the Second World War, barbarism, mass murder and genocide compelled man to lose the faith in humanity. So, the horrific situation of the wars evoked the sense of despair, alienation, anxiety, frustration, loneliness and helplessness. Spiritual emptiness spread in rich societies

of Western Europe and the United States. As a result, people's formerly held certainties collapsed. Then, for man the world lost its meaning and stopped making sense. These resulted in man finding himself thrown in a universe that is frightening, illogical, and incoherent, disordered, chaotic, irrational or in a word 'absurd'. In such conditions, the belief in concepts like unity, morality, value, rationality, logicality, absolute truth and Christianity was shattered. This realization gave rise to the idea that human existence is meaningless.

Thus, they believe that they can create value for their lives by making choices. Existentialism as a mode of thought believes that man has to choose and create meaning for his own existence in the world. So man is what he makes of himself. Man is free to do whatever he wants and responsible for whatever he makes. Thus existentialism talks about individual existence, freedom and choice.

Richard Tarnas, one of the contemporary critics on existentialism opines that the human condition, more precisely and clearly than any other schools of thought, is responsible for the crisis of individuality. According to him, "Spiritual emptiness, senses of insecurity and cosmic absurdity are the depiction of an individual's loss of identity" (388). Man, who is given an existence without essence finds spiritually alone and when dumped in the larger part of the world, cannot lift himself to the status of collective happiness. Further, he is entrapped by morality, fear, uncertainty. There is no 'super being' or 'transcendental absolute' to help fulfil the needs of human life. So, Tarnas states that "existentialist thinkers concerned themselves with fundamental problems of human existence like-suffering, death, loneliness and dread, spiritual emptiness, sense of insecurity, cosmic absurdity, inability of human reason and tragic human condition" (389).

Existentialists deny the existence of God. Nietzsche's announcement 'God is dead' influenced existential philosophy. Hence, the belief among atheist existentialists is that there is no God to determine our existence. First, we exist, and then we create our essence

ourselves. We are what we make of ourselves. In that sense, we are in the state of becoming but not in the state of being. We are consciously choosing and creating ourselves because it is not possible for us to stay without choice. Even when we don't choose, we still choose by not choosing. In this context Tarnas say: "Even if I do not choose I have chosen not to choose" (149).

Existentialism is closely related with phenomenology, which is a philosophical perspective and method established by German thinker Edmund Husserl. It emphasizes on the self or subjectivism. It studies human consciousness. The world is as it appears to us. So, it means it lays emphasis on subjectivism. Husserl talks about phenomenology in this way: "Phenomenology itself learns its proper function of transparently human living from an entire relationship 'self.' [. . .] Phenomenology is not less than man's whole occupation with himself in the service of the universal reason" (qtd. in Tarnas 15). Thus phenomenology stresses individuality and subjectivism. It rejects the idea of the objective. There is no absolute thing in the world. Things are as they appear to us our senses.

The major themes of existentialism are existence, alienation, frustration, loneliness, anxiety, dread, awareness of death, etc. Existentialist philosophers think that man is conscious and because of the consciousness he feels tragic, miserable, and lonely in the world.

Nietzsche has criticized Western philosophy and Christianity. According to him, Western philosophy and Christianity both were corrupt since they taught abstractions. The Western education system tries to prepare the historically educated/learned man but historical knowledge doesn't serve life, rather it corrupts life. Then, people become purposeless. Such knowledge cannot provide happiness to people because they become like pendulum in the chain of history whereas man has to face the present for happiness. For Nietzsche education should be for the sake of human life and existence. In his essay, "On the Use and Abuse of

History" he says that "we need education for life and action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and action or merely for glossing over the egoistical life and the cowardly bad act. According to him, history is useful only in so far as it serves living" (152).

He also doesn't believe in the thought of absolute truth that controls an individual. Man is the product of his own action from his choice. Since, God is Dead; there is nobody to govern an individual. So, he is the master of himself. For Nietzsche, as Blackburn comments in the *Dictionary of Philosophy,* "No moment is more important than the present in which one has the opportunity to make active choice that influence the character of the whole" (292).

He also denounces the existence of God and further says even if there is God, he is dead. Therefore, there is nobody to determine our existence. He also calls Christianity a shelter only for the weak, sick and disabled and at the same time it possesses a slave morality" (912). Thus, religion for him is only a refuge for the person of weak mentality and who cannot fight their way out of the crisis in life. This sense is one of the features of humanity, that they need shelter during the time of dejection and catastrophe. Nietzsche seems to be quite positive towards suicide because it is also one of the choices that individual makes. He takes the suicide as a solution in some way. So, suicide is not surrender but a means to achieve goals. It also makes fulfillment, thus for Nietzsche, suicide is a positive means to end one's sorrow and tragedy.

Another existential critic, Jean Paul Sartre, emphasizes on individual freedom and responsibility. Robert Solomon opining the Sartre's vision states: "The central tenet of Sartre's existentialism is the freedom of human consciousness, freedom to act, freedom to value and freedom to make itself" (86). He also agrees that "existence precedes the essence" (86). In accordance with Sartre, their first exists appearance on the sense and thereby it makes

choice/choose and, we create. It means we make ourselves what to be only after we exist. We create meaning in our life by making choices.

Sartre also thinks that God does not exist but he opines that if there is God, he is useless. To support this idea, he states that "existentialism isn't so aesthetic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather, it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing" (51). Though he frequently talks about freedom, his view towards it is negative. He supposes freedom as a curse but not as a boon. For him, man is condemned to be free because one has to choose the route of life; he is responsible for his actions in life. So, life is determined by choice a person makes.

Further elaborating his idea, Sartre says that there is no predetermining essence but one creates essence by choosing. So, existence is primary and the essence of existence is secondary. He argues that existence and freedom go together, however, the concept of freedom is determined the environment of factors motivating and determining existence. For Satre, "Freedom is existence, and in it existence proceeds essence" (66). When he talks about freedom, he also states individual freedom relies upon the freedom of others. In this way, like most of the existentialists, Sartre focuses on freedom of choice and personal responsibility conveying that there is no absolute power to control a man.

Existentialism could be best understood through the concept of absurd, first coined by Albert Camus to indicate the pathetic situation of Sisyphus, a legendary hero whose pursuit for achieving goal has been commented and analyzed by hundreds of scholars and critics. Sisyphus was entitled by God to place a round stone at the top of a hill, as a punishment. But, as the stone was round it was impossible for him to place it at the top. He knew well that his attempt was worthless and the job was impossible but, he continued to do it every time he failed. His never dying pursuit of spirit has been termed as 'absurd task' by the Gods.

2.2. Identity as an Absurd Entity

The condition of modern man is absurd. S/he is in an attempt to achieve each and every thing that comes to the sight, and hence is ruining life. Nietzsche too has termed the modern man's desire as absurd, like that of Sisyphus. He used the term saying that Christianity was irrational and even absurd for the human beings, as it virtually ends the hope of men to the path of knowledge. Later, Nietzsche's idea appeared in literature as "Literature of the Absurd." After that this term/phrase began to be applied to refer to a number of workers in drama and prose fiction that have commonly the theme/sense that the human condition is essentially absurd. After the Second World War, it emerged as a revolt against strong belief and values of traditional culture and literature. In fact, according to Nietzsche, "Earlier people assumed that human beings as completely rational creatures who lived in at least partially ineligible universe and are part of an ordered social structure and may be capable of bravery and dignity even in defeat" (1).

Camus's works express the central idea that human existence is absurd due to the parody of politics, a gift of the modern day curse. He also believes that man is free to give meaning to life, but is obstructed by the parody of politics. When he makes choice, it leads to repetition and the repetition leads to the sense of absurdity. Camus presents the example of Sisyphus. He writes:

> Sisyphus was given a repetitive work that would remain forever a punishment because he had revolt against the Gods. The task was that he had to roll a rock up the mountain top again and again because it rolls down to the bottom of the mountain. It was an absurd and purposeless work as it would herald no result. (66-67)

So, Camus came to realize a parallel between man's condition and Sisyphus' condition. He also has the sense that man chooses to exist, give meaning/value to life. When he chooses, he

makes repetition of things. Then, the repetition rouses the sense of consciousness, and consciousness leads to the sense of absurdity.

Camus argues that the human condition is absurd. So, his search for purpose in the world is meaningless because the world has no meaning, value of ultimate truth. In this regard, M.H. Abrams referring to Camus says that human being is an isolated existent who is thrown into a strange world. S/he believes that the universe does not know why an individual is thrown into this strange world. S/he believes that the universe doesn't possess inherent truth, value or meaning. Human life moves from nothingness and moves toward nothingness. So, human existence is both anguished and absurd. Likewise alluding Camus, Abrams says that the universe has no secrets or truth and man feels strange in the world. In this regard, he quotes from the *Myth of Sisyphus* in this way: "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels strange. His is in an irremediable exile. [. . .] This divorce between man and his life and the actor and his setting constitute the feeling of absurdity" (1).

According to Camus, the universe is unknowable and uncertain. Though we try to understand the ultimate truth, through science, philosophy, religion and mathematics, it is inaccessible. So, it is absurd to search for the absolute truth (25). It means that human reason can't comprehend the universe properly. He further says that man tries to get something which is irrational. So, there is clash between human need and the unreasonable science of the world (reason) which gives birth to absurdity. Likewise, absurdity springs from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality; action and the world that transcends it as well as from their conformation. That's why, absurd is essentially a divorce.

Moreover, the absurd is constant encounter between man and his own obscurity (3). The absurd makes everything really free. In search for freedom, man creates different things that confine his own life. So, being free he is not really free. The absurd enlightens him because he knows there is no future for man and it gives inner freedom to him. It also

indicates that he takes the absurd positively and opines that it helps us lead a real life. By accepting death, the absurd man feels released from everything outside. Death and the absurd are principles of the only reasonable freedom which a human heart can experience and live. So, what is important is not the best thing but the most living. The absurd and the extra life don't depend on man's will but on its death. So, death is the source of absurdity (59-61).

Camus says that man who by accepting the absurd does nothing for the eternal is the absurd man. He possesses the nostalgia. He likes his courage and reasoning. Courage teaches him to live without appeal and proceed with what he has. On the other hand, his reasoning informs him of his limitations. He can accept that one is not separated from God and the commandment; however he lives outside that god. He sees nothing in them but justification and at the same time he has nothing to justify. So Camus concludes "absurd does not liberate but binds" (64). This shows that an absurd man is both courageous and reasonable and can live a happy life due to awareness of his situations.

Likewise, Camus talks about repetition by alluding to Don Juan's story. Don Juan goes from one woman to another for more satisfaction but he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and profound quest. Then, he gets the same type of satisfaction, nothing more than it.

> Camus says that all existence for a man who turned away from eternal/death is a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. So, creation is a great mime. The work of art is also a kind of creation which is very monotonous. However, the creation is not the end, the meaning and the consolation of life because creating or not creating changes nothing. Therefore: Creation itself is absurd. People work and create for nothing. People know that that creation has no future. The absurd negates everything on the hand and glorifies them on the

> other. Because of absurd creation, man got revolt, freedom and diversity but later they will show their sheer futility (106).

Thus, he thinks that creation itself is absurd because it doesn't bring any change in our life.

Edmund Husserl says the universe is full of contradictions and nonsense. So it is a vast irrational. Simon du Polock in *Albert Camus Existentialist or Absurdist* states that Camus might more properly be supposed an absurdist than existentialist. Polock differentiates Camus from Sartre. Polock says, "Camus used the term 'absurdity' to refer to the human condition whereas Sartre used 'nausea' to denote it. Camus views the denial of world to fulfill the desire of man. When man has high expectation but the world doesn't respond to them, then the absurd occur" (15).

Martin Heidegger says human existence is foolish and irrational. Man is lost in the universe. Likewise, the consciousness of death is the main source of anxiety and absurdity. Likewise, Martin Esslin talks about the meaning of absurdity. According to him, absurdity originally means "Out of harmony in a musical context" (23). So, its dictionary meaning is out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, and illogical. But it may simply mean ridiculous is command use. However, it is not the sense in which Albert Camus uses the word.

Esslin says that the *Theater of the Absurd* can be taken as a new combination of a number of ancient, even archaic traditions of literature and drama. The ancient tradition has been brought together in a new form in the *Theater of the Absurd. The Theater of the Absurd* has roots in the mimus *of* Greece of Rome. There was the tradition of miming and clowning. Similarly, the *commedia dell arte* of Renaissance Italy also became a component of the movement known as the *Theatre of the Absurd.* Likewise, popular forms of theatre, like The Pantomime, The Musical Hall in Britain also contributed to it. The ancient convention of nonsense poetry also supported it to rise. In Greece and Rome, there was the tradition of

dream and nightmare literature which gave rise to the new type of theater. Moreover, the allegorical and symbolic dramas of the medieval period known as the morality plays provided this movement with plenty of nourishment. It has also developed from the Spanish "auto Sacramental." In the same way, this anti-theatre movement has originated from the ancient tradition of fools and mad scenes in dreams of Shakespeare and other playwrights. Further, the more tradition of ritual drama also contributed to the theatre.

For Esslin, the ‘Theatre of the Absurd' tries to make man, as:

> . . . aware of the ultimate realities of the condition. It also attempts to put but again in man the lost sense of cosmic wonder, to take him out of an existence which has become mechanical, trite (dull), complacent and deprived of dignity. It is a part of the ceaseless endeavor of artists of their time to destroy the wall of complacency and automatism. It also makes an attempt to re-establish consciousness of man's own situation when he is confronted with the ultimate reality of his conditions. So it fulfils a dual purpose and presents a two fold absurdity (400).

This obviously shows that it tries to make man aware of ultimate realities of his condition by breaking the wall of complacency and automatism. Similarly, it also brings back the consciousness in man in order to face the harsh realities of life.

Esslin says that though the 'Theatre of the Absurd' appears to be grotesque, frivolous and irreverent, it performs the original and religious function of the theatre since it deals with the ultimate realities of the human condition, fundamental problems of life and death and breakdown of communication. Here, he thinks that the Theatre of the Absurd is a symbolic religion that deals with man's fundamental problems of life. Likewise Richard L Peck state that "the central idea of the theatre of the absurd is that if we break traditional views by abandoning logic and meaning, we can know the truth" (4).

Moreover, Esslin states that the 'Theatre of the Absurd' shows the audience with a picture of a disordered world that has lost its meaning and purpose called "an absurd world". The Theatre of the Absurd shows "the madness of the human condition and enables the audience to see his situation of grimness and despair. So, it works as a therapy. Then, he will be out of illusion, fears and anxieties. As a result, the individual will be able to face the harsh realities of world consciously" (414).

According to Esslin, the 'Theatre of the Absurd' expresses modern man's hard effort to accept the world where he lives. It also tries to make him encounter human condition as it really is. At the same time, it endeavors to free him from illusions that cause maladjustment and disappointment. Man in the world attempts to endure the loss of faith and moral certainties through mass entertainment, shallow material satisfaction, false explanation of reality and ideologies. However, the dignity of man lies in his ability to face the reality in all its meaninglessness, accept it freely, fearlessly, consciously and to laugh at it.

Martin Esslin says that absurdist playwrights regard themselves as lonely outsiders who being cut off and isolated from society live in their own personal world. Each of them deal with both subject matter and form in individual manner. All of them also discuss over own roots, sources and background in their personal ways.

Esslin says that the 'Theatre of the Absurd' talks about the stylistics aspect of plays without emphasizing the philosophical side (genus). He states: "Perhaps the most serious critical limitations of Mr. Esslin's otherwise excellent work, the Theatre of the Absurd is precisely this tendency to focus too quietly and exclusively on the stylistic breed worth stressing the philosophical genus" (3).

He opines that many of absurd plays from the beginning have circular structure and ending. The absurdist playwrights also say that it is impossible to motivate all human behavior. So, the audience in the absurd plays faces such actions or incident which has no

motivation, such characters that are constantly moving and mostly such events which are irrational. Similarly, what's going to happen next cannot be predicted in such plays because like in traditional plays the action doesn't go logically and chronologically, rather it slowly develops complex patterns of the poetic image. It indicates that it is not possible to motivate all human nature. So, they present unmotivated characters and irrational actions which create a pattern of poetic images.

Similarly, he also talks about the poetic image which is "complex, ambiguous, multidimensional, and multi-meaningful. He believes words are meaningless and all communication among human being is impossible" (128). So, interpretation is useless because we can't give the exact meaning. That's why it consists of the theme of incomprehensibility of a life's experience. As a result, "it dramatizes the futility and failure of human existence" (151). He opposes the elegant, logical construction of the well-made play, rather he demands for intensity, the gradual growth of psychological tension. To bring this about the author does not have to follow rules or restrictions. In this way, he is against the standard of traditional play.

Similar to Martin Esslin, William I. Oliver also discusses about absurdity and absurdist playwrights. He says, “Absurdist playwrights believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born; we die without seeking death and live between birth and death trapped with our body and reason. We have our senses, will and reason but can never perceive anything completely” (47). Oliver states that all our creations are doomed to decay as we ourselves are destined to death. We create in order to see ourselves in some form of eternity but our creations become autonomous because of repetition. However, we can't find out it. So, the more we make efforts at definition and permanent distinction, the more we feel absurd. So, the only truth we have to accept is that we don't understand our life completely. Our sense of power, permanence and distinction is

achieved when we give up reason. It is impossible for us to act efficiently, perceive accurately, and create anything definitely and permanently. It is impossible for us to stop acting as long as we live in the world. This is the very condition of human being called absurd.

He says the context of absurd drama remains very much the same but only the style changes. So, absurd drama is not new but as old as farce. In fact, farce and tragedy are the double masks of absurdity. The absurdist dramatists think that the subject of farce is like that of the tragedies and their subject matter is the terrible or comical disclosure of man's absurdity, ignorance and impotence. The farce rouses laughter, removes our sympathy away and frees our cruelty. But tragedy causes tears and awakens our sympathy. On the other hand, the absurdist's of today mix up the qualities of farce and tragedy that make us laugh at that which hurts us most and weep at that which is most foolish in our nature.

Oliver says the absurdist is a thinker who accepts that the human condition is absurd. So, he knows his own absurdity very well. He thinks that realization of the absurdity is important for people to live a reasonable life full of expectations, importance and responsibility. If one recognizes absurdity, he in his life knows what is right to do and wrong not to do. If man doesn’t know absurdity he is a puppet who is being dangled on the strings of dogma and illusion. It is a bitter discovery for all men and at the same time the only judgment that will rightly evaluate man's power of perception, action and success. It is ironically also only ground upon which man's mind can stand secure it clearly says that he takes the absurd positively because it helps man live a reasonable life by abandoning unnecessary strings of dogmas and illusions. The absurdist is a social farce also. He tries to lead his audience to the logical inference of absurdity for their good. He has to inform the audience that they must encounter the absurdity of their own existence so that they can be bold and courageous to face the difficulties of life. He has to show the audience the reasonable benefits of absurd

living in order that people get convinced of giving up their bundles of dogmas illusions and superstitions. Likewise, in Oliver's opinion:

> The absurdist as a technician has to choose those devices which can convey his ideal and purpose indirectly. He can use expression, allegory or irony to express his ideas, in this way, the absurdist dramatist will search for such a form and style that first of all act as a disguise of his assertions rather than a direct and complete expression. In the same way, the ideal absurdist will never present his opinions in symbols and action which implies that the encounter with the absurdity is a nihilistic experience. (15)

Observation of all these ideas, we come to know that all writers lay emphasis on meaninglessness, futility, irrationality, disorder, illogicality, foolishness and purposelessness of the human condition in the universe.

Specifying this vision of existential crisis, Edward Said in *Covering Islam* writes that it is the United States that rules this notion. Said opines:

> For no non-Western realm has been so dominated by the United States as the Arabic-Islamic world is today – but the interchange between Islam and the West, in this case the United States, is profoundly one-sided and, so far as other, less newspaper parts of the Islamic world are concerned, profoundly skewed. (27-28)

However, the fact is Muslim and Islam is given a slightly more coverage and importance in the international media and forum. This has sometimes resulted in serious threats to the world; however, it is time that the Islam, be taken with subtle and serious attitude.

Thus, the existential crisis of a Muslim youth is flexible due to the dwindling notion of mentality largely determined by the influence of the west upon the eastern culture and norms. A Muslim youths like Changez, are victim of these issues that leaves him/her

sandwiched between the east and the western; as they can neither adopt to the western culture to the fullest, nor the eastern in true sense. It has made their life a parody, adding further to their woes because of the political chaos. The first world nations and its youths, especially in the Muslim world are a direct victim to this indifference created by the political and cultural differences. In such a scenario theiir life becomes futile and meaning of life turns absurd, like that of Changez, brought up in Pakistan, a third world Muslim nation and their life and living is determined by the standard set by the west.

Chapter III: Textual Analysis

3.1. Search for Muslim Identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a tale of uncertainty and instability in the Muslim world youths. The chaos and intrigues prevalent in the Muslim youths is scattered all over the Islamic nations and, as far as to the United States. It is a story of Changez, who finds the situation in the States unfavorable for a dignified living and similar is the condition in his hometown in Pakistan.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is largely a narrative monologue, though Changez's speech is not quite uninterrupted. He is shown dealing with an unidentified American, yet when the American says something it is not his speech that is heard, but rather Changez's reaction to the sayings of the American. Mohsin even in this vague set up also does not deter to show how the Muslim youths are facing an uncertain future, at least, in the eye of the West. For example, when they order their dinner Changez describes the waiter (apparently) reciting the menu and says, "I could translate for you but perhaps it would be better if I selected a number of delicacies for us to share. You will grant me that honor? Thank you. There, it is done, and off he goes" (14). These words uttered by Changez both in the form of answer and question is an example of narrative monologue.

This kind of stage-direction-in-speech and the absence of voices are another sense of uncertainty and vacuum present in the heart of the Muslim heart. It is the depiction of falling of the self-confidence by the youths like Changez, who are west returned. It is, obviously at times, very annoying; however, it is the lack of Mohsin to expose the declining identity of the third world Muslim youth's mentality. It emphasizes the fact that Changez is in complete control of the situation, but from a single point of view. It makes the American more of a mystery than he has to be and leaves the readers wondering why he's willing to listen to all

this without asking more questions or trying to engage Changez in something more of an actual conversation.

Hamid does present his story in this way for a reason. Not everything is quiet what it seems. Changez, a Muslim youth from Pakistan has been to Lahore on a scholarship program, quits the States for the streets of Lahore. The ending of the novel seems quite ambiguous but. it doesn't seem the most effective way of pulling it off, though; it is very clear that the writer presents the mysterious nature of the West set in the heart of the eastern people. One of the major problems of Hamid's approach is that the American remains a peculiarly shadowy figure. It, of course, has to be explored from the point of view of eastern belief and ideas set against the western standards and vision, they have made for the people of this region.

One thing that is clear is that the American is carrying a gun: if not exactly trigger-happy he is certainly itchy-fingered, and while its presence is never openly acknowledged, Changez makes clear from the beginning that he is aware that the American is packing. When Changez first brings it up he is still relatively circumspect. As he says, "You seem worried. Do not be; this burly fellow is merely our waiter, and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet, as we will pay him later, when we are done" (16). However, it is more like a scene where an individual is trying to assure ownself in the pretext of calming the other. It is a clear deal of a person who lacks confidence in self, and wants assurance of the same from the other. It comes up several more times, and by the end, he's much more direct:

> When you sit in that fashion, sir, with your arm curved around the back of the empty chair beside you, a bulge manifests itself through the lightweight fabric of your suit, precisely at that point parallel to the sternum where the undercover security agents of our country -- and indeed, one assumes, of all countries -- tend to favor wearing an armpit holster for

their side arms. (78)

These dialogues are clear indication of persisting indifference and disbelief existing in between the two, the Pakistani and the American. In a broader sense, despite being the allies in the war against terrorism, these nations are equally un-relying to each other as witnessed in these two characters.

They share an entire evening together in one of the busiest markets of Pakistan, in Lahore, still they are at arms distance and refrain from shaking hands or sharing some of the common things about being friends and allies. Changez has a particular way with words, especially regarding the American. Rather than stating the obvious, he offers a more agreeable alternative -- one that permits both him and the American to continue their charade. And that it is a charade right from the get-go is already clear from Changez's willingness to engage the American:

> Come, tell me, what were you looking for? Surely, at this time of day, only one thing could have brought you to the district of Old Anarkali -- named, as you may be aware, after a courtesan immured for loving a prince -- and that is the quest for the perfect cup of tea. Have I guessed correctly? (32)

These dialogues are not of friendly nature but are indication of uncertainty prevailing in the hearts of the Changez, a representative of the eastern Muslim youth. It is not a clear hint towards a smoother relation between the two. However, they remain together and share their experience in an odd manner, which opens the scope of studying the issue from existential approach.

Unfortunately, there's not much subtlety to Changez's observations and guesses, and so much becomes very obvious sooner than it has to. So, for example, in a conventional narrative the fact where the American chooses to sit could be slipped in much more subtly than Hamid chooses to do so here ("You prefer that seat, with your

back so close to the wall?" (37).

A game is being played here, and the moves are actually quite funny to watch or read for. The American's instincts when the waiter first approaches aren't that far off, for example -- but the way Hamid relates the moves makes it less effective than it could and should be. In particular, the American's reactions fail to convince. With only Changez's reactions to the American's reactions and words revealed, the latter never becomes a very convincing figure -- and the situation he allows himself to find himself in (including listening to this guy for hours and hours on end) doesn't seem entirely plausible.
Readers may be meant to be led to believe that the conversation over tea and dinner is merely a framing device, and that the true heart of the novel is the life-story Changez recounts, but that narrative is interrupted too often and the clues that something else is going on spread too thick for that to seem convincing. More likely, of course, Changez's life-story holds clues to what brings these two men together here for what is surely meant to be a fateful encounter, and, yes, Hamid pulls that off to some extent -- but again not quite well enough.

The title of the book has a double meaning. The bearded Pakistani walking up to the American on the first page might suggest that this is, indeed, a novel about a man who is an Islamic fundamentalist, but that idea is dispelled -- or at least suspended -- very quickly; in fact, it first means something very different. And the second meaning of the title is associated with the unnamed American. Who is he?, why has he come to a suburb popular for attacks on foreigners, and why is he not, or at least, dares to risk his life in such a dangerous place? This in turn, shifts our vision to the second meaning of the title, are the Americans in an attempt to give meaning to the Muslims, to which they are looking for, or is it yet, another distort the American are planning to play with the Muslim world people and youths.

Changez, born and raised in Pakistan, was admitted to Princeton -- where he was one of only two Pakistanis in his class. He did exceptionally well there -- "I reached my senior year without having received a single B" (118) -- and was hired by a prestigious valuation-firm who figures out "how much businesses were worth" for their clients, Underwood Samson & Company. The man who hires him is also something like a mentor: Jim is an American who rose from poor circumstances to become a very successful man, and he sees a similar hunger in Changez -- though Changez doesn't think they are that similar. The fundamental motivation is slightly different, as he recalls to the unnamed American here in Anarkali market:

> I did not grow up in poverty. But I did grow up with a poor boy's sense of *longing*, in my case not for what my family never had, but for what we had had and lost. Some of my memories held onto imagined memories the way homeless people hold onto lottery tickets. *Nostalgia* was their crack cocaine, if you will, and my childhood was littered with the consequences of their addiction: unserviceable debts, squabbles over inheritances, the odd alcoholic or suicide. In this, Jim and I were indeed similar: he had grown up outside the candy store, and I had grown up on its threshold as its door was being shut. (129)

Both Changez's father and his grandfather attended university in England, but Pakistani circumstances -- even without any family-specific catastrophe -- left them (like, Changez makes it sound, the entire population) inexorably downwardly mobile, "So my grandfather could not afford what his father could, and my father could not afford what *his* father could

Through hard work, first at his studies and then at his job, Changez looks to escape this vicious circle. True, he can only do so by taking a job in the US, but the strict meritocracy at Underwood Samson would seem to be the perfect place for him to thrive"

(133).

He does excel at his job -- for a while, like the vision of the American think about the youths of the third world nations. They find fault in them, and which, in turn often is ended up in naming their nations as weak and so are they. This not only hurts the ego and selfhood of the third world youths but also arise the question of identity. Who are they in the eyes of the American and the first world nation?

Then, the attacks on the World Trade Center in September of 2001, which Changez sees on TV while in an assignment in Manila. He realizes that his first reaction -- "And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (59). He can't even explain it to himself, not then, but when he returns to a changed country, where suddenly his appearance and origin mark him as someone further outside the fold, he begins to have more doubts about the American dream (or illusion).

With the realization of self coming *smile* upon the news of Twin Towers demolishing by the terrorists, is associated with the sense of being a Muslim, or Muslims answers to the western hegemony. As Changez narrates:

> It seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look *back*. (93)

However, Changez cannot overcome the nostalgia of being a saddened person at the blast of the Twin Towers. Some of that is simply, because he is like most other Muslims an innocent person. The pleasure of living in truly cosmopolitan New York, where one can find Urdu conversation and Pakistani food is not only associated with the fact of identity.

There's more than the identity of a Muslim restaurant and food, or Urdu language being spoken in that part of the world. Even as Changez seems willing to create a new life for himself in New York; he falls in love with a girl who also clings hopelessly to the past. The relationship that develops is a close one, but that which Changez wants is unattainable. Even though she knows that what is past is past, Erica can't let go of what has been lost, leaving her physically ill and psychologically irreparably damaged. Changez even suggests play-acting, pretending that nothing has changed for Erica (though putting himself in an entirely new role); it allows for intimacy, and a glimpse of what Changez is after, but it is built on a lie and proves more destructive than living the truth had been.

Every time he thinks about Erica -- and he does, a lot --, every time he sees Americans' reactions to "9/11", every time he thinks of his family's slow decline, Changez should realise that nostalgia is a cancer. It rots; it kills.

> If there is any island free of nostalgia it is Underwood Samson. Meritocracy does rule, and as long as Changez does his job there is a place for him there. But Changez questions what they do, too. It can seem harsh, *Focus on the fundamentals*. This was Underwood Samson's guiding principle, drilled into us since the first day at work. It mandated single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value. (117)

For a while Changez does that very well, able to ignore the fate of the workers who are made redundant and the lives he affects in other ways. But after the attack on the World Trade Center he begins to see things differently, and finds himself to be a more . . . reluctant fundamentalist.

The situation in Pakistan, with America setting out to attack Afghanistan in retaliation against the Taliban, and the tensions between India and Pakistan rising to dangerous heights,

obviously also affects him. Indeed, he resents American attitudes -- both on the smaller, inter-personal scale, as well as on the global stage -- more and more. Even as there are some who reach out to him -- even when Jim fires him he extends a hand in friendship, too -- Changez finds he can no longer be part of this establishment. He essentially saws off the branch on which he is sitting, assuring that he will have no other options. The pull of nostalgia proves too powerful for him, as well: he winds up back in Pakistan.

Since returning Changez has become a popular university lecturer; he has also become politically active: "I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine" (123). Admirably, Hamid almost completely avoids any religious implications: Changez's opposition is not primarily rooted in that, and whatever reluctant sort of fundamentalist he may be, it does not appear that he is a religious one.

The statement that may get the most attention in the book is Changez's admission that he smiled upon watching the World Trade Centers collapse, but he knew well enough to hide that feeling at that time. Far more consequential is a very public statement, for the cameras of the international news as, "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. I was perhaps more forceful on this topic than I intended" (176).

Hamid, of course, can't leave well enough alone and has to have Changez over-explain even the significance of this as, "Such was its impact that I was warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse" (137).

Throughout the novel one has the uneasy feeling that, on some level, someone here is facing their judge and executioner; where Hamid does succeed fairly well is in not making it entirely clear which of the two (almost-)conversation partners is doing the judging. After all, while Changez is doing most of the talking, his speech is both confession and indictment.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist reduces the geo-political to the individual and personal. Changez finds changes are too much, the price too great. He withdraws: instead of an America-like role of imposing change (as he had in his valuation-job) he wants an end to such interference from outside. He believes America's pursuit of its single-minded goal -- dressed up as self-preservation, but far more far-reaching -- have terrible consequences, and he must do what he can to oppose it:

> 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. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family. (67)

Among Changez's first words to the American was the claim: "I am a lover of America", but as his story progresses it becomes ominously clear that he was not being entirely forthright. But then throughout his speech isn't really forthright, something that even the American must have figured out early on.

On the other hand, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a frustratingly almost-good novel as far as associated with an individual’s identity. Hamid has some very good ideas here, and a decent touch with a lot of them as well, but much of what he does also undermines his various ambitions. The faceless American, in particular, is an annoying non-figure: omnipresent, he is obviously important, but Hamid's coy presentation leaves him far more of a cipher than he should be. Changez, too, is an odd figure: true, he even goes so far as to emphasize that he was very young when much of this happened -- just out of college -- but he doesn't always convince as the very smart, very well-educated man he is supposed to be. Hamid also tries to have it every different way -- even suggesting, late into book, that maybe Hamid rams home several of the messages too hard -- certainly the nostalgic theme is beaten

to a very visible pulp -- and is surprisingly obvious with far too many of what should be the novel's subtler points and examples. Some of the action -- Erica's obsession, Hamid's irresponsibility at work -- is also not entirely convincing, at least in how it is presented. Indeed, the book feels very structured -- the sort of text one would use in a high school English class, where even 10th graders could see and point out what Hamid was doing, and how he was doing it. But *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* isn't straight out of Writing 101, either; there is a bit more to it. Just not enough.

As, the story starts, at a café table in Lahore, a bearded Pakistani man converses with an uneasy American stranger. As dusk deepens to night, he begins the tale that has brought them to this fateful meeting. Changez is living an immigrant’s dream of America. At the top of his class at Princeton, he is snapped up by the elite "valuation" firm of Underwood Samson. He thrives on the energy of New York, and his infatuation with elegant, beautiful Erica promises entry into Manhattan society at the same exalted level once occupied by his own family back in Lahore.

However, in the wake of September 11, Changez 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 is in seismic shift as well, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power, and maybe even love.

The janissaries of the Ottoman Empire were captured Christian boys trained to fight against their own people, which they did with singular ferocity. This interesting class of warrior is described during a business lunch to Changez, the young hero of Mohsin Hamid's second novel, at a moment of crisis over his own identity. Born in Pakistan, educated at Princeton and currently the hottest new employee at a New York firm specialising in ruthless appraisals of ailing companies being targeted for takeover, Changez recognises himself in the description. "I was a modern-day janissary" (23). He observes, "A servant of the American

empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine" (43).

3.2. Identity: Eastern Versus Western

Identity is associated with recognition that completes a complete process of inward transformation that begins when one realizes that happiness is with him/her by an act. However, in the case of Changez it is a counter of east and west. He was half-gladdened by the World Trade Center attacks, and it now prompts him to sabotage his own high-flying career, to give up his pursuit of the beautiful, troubled Wasp princess Erica and go back to Lahore. There, bearded and generally reacculturéd, he meets an American in a restaurant in the Old Anarkali district, and buttonholes him with his life story. Thus, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a quietly told and cleverly constructed saga of identity sandwiched between the fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous faultiness of current east/west relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual - but especially American - prejudice and misrepresentation.

The richest instance of the latter is in the way it plays with the idea of fundamentalism itself. From the title, and from the increasingly tense atmosphere arising between Changez and his American listener, the expectation is that Changez is moving towards the revelation that he has gone, however "reluctantly", all the way over to the dark side of Islamic fundamentalism, and is possibly, even as he speaks, orchestrating some Daniel Pearl-like execution of his perhaps literally captive audience. But in a neat - arguably too neat - reversal, it transpires that the real fundamentalism at issue here is that of US capitalism, specifically that practised by Changez's former employer, Underwood Samson, whose motto, as they do their pitiless bit for globalisation, is "Focus on the fundamentals". The subverted expectation very efficiently forces one to reconsider one's preconceptions about such words and their meanings, and a point is duly scored for relativism.

This precise, rather classical orchestration of symmetries and reciprocities is both the

strength and a weakness associated with the findings of the definition of being a Muslim. It fosters the kind of concentration astute cultural observation at which Hamid excels. At frequent intervals the narrative executes a nice flourish in the form of some densely emblematic image or epigrammatic remark. Changez pithily summarizes, for instance, the experience of every happy Manhattan transplant when he declares, "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (32). And his figure for that city in its ominously flag-bedecked state following the 9/11 attacks, "I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle" (179). But at the same time, this aphoristic tendency gives the story a slightly abstracted, thin-blooded quality challenging the existence of being a third world nation.

This relationship between Changez and Erica is another part of the novel, which deals on the aspects of identity of Changez. In the eyes of Erica, Changez is a citizen of a dejected nation and nationhood. She is a privileged, patrician girl, who has a tragedy in her past. She had a childhood sweetheart named Chris who died in his teens, whose death was the cause of her traumatic experience. Her growing intimacy with Changez, while interestingly free of the racial tensions that traditionally afflict such couples in literature, is nevertheless thwarted by her inability to forget Chris or allow Changez to take his place. In the turbulence following September 11, this preoccupation with her own past becomes a crippling obsession - "she was disappearing into a powerful nostalgia" (97), as a result in a breakdown, hospitalisation and probable suicide.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is sketchy, psychologically, simultaneously over the top and under substantiated, when it comes to the point of depart of Changez with Erica, the blonde American. But after a while it is realized that in the event is a realm of psychology associated with the allegory of the relation between the first and third world denizens, correlated with each other’s distinctiveness. It dawns on the fact that Erica is America (Am-

Erica) and that Chris's name has been chosen to represent the nation's fraught relationship with its moment of European discovery and conquest, while the narrator himself stands for the country's consequent inability to accept, the Christianity.

The allegory isn't as glibly intrusive as that makes it sound, but it has a stiffening effect on the narrative, shifting it from the dramatic to the essayistic. It's no great surprise to hear Changez drop his sinuously self-deprecating manner towards the end, in favor of something more finger-wagging polemical as stated by Changez, "I resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan [. . .]" (179).

The nature of fiction is to make one distrustful of any character that lectures and castigates. By what higher personal virtue does Changez presume to judge? Changez's opposition to America's conduct is to be founded on some morally superior alternative set of values. But aside from his discovery of his own patriotism, his repudiation of America in the wake of the September 11 attacks is a curiously frictionless, voluntary event, leaving one with an odd sense that his decision to quit is ultimately just the superior opportunism of a well-trained appraiser of ailing companies, who knows which way the wind is blowing. A potentially fascinating character, but not, I think, what his creator intended.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a testament to its genuinely provocative nature, and it remains, at the very least, an intelligent, highly engaging piece of work. Similarly, the novel carries seeds of international crisis as well, somehow related to the murder of American journalist, Daniel Pearl. However, there are no clear line of demarcation line of associating Changez as akin to Pearl's murderers, Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khaled Sheikh Muhammad. Pearl was a well-known journalist on the trail of a hot story, but nothing about the unnamed American suggests Pearl's intelligence or passion or such flow of the American journalists flow. On the other hand, Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khaled Sheikh Muhammad were religious

fanatics with lifelong histories of violence, but Changez appears not to have a religious bone in his body, and the closest he comes to violence in the novel is an abortive fist fight over a racial slur. This is simply not the material of a credible murder plot.

If the outer plot is preposterous, the inner plot, by contrast, is entirely believable as it is a genuine issue that the Muslims find themselves dejected in the U. S. For the same, they quit a good opportunity in the land and heed back to their nation, where uncertain future awaits them. It isn't hard to imagine a young man's coming to the United States from Lahore to study at Princeton, experiencing a bit of alienation from America while identifying with New York (i.e., Manhattan), falling in love with a lithe but troubled girl named Erica, getting a high-powered job in the financial sector, watching 9/11 on TV, and confronting his ethno-tribal demons as a result. In fact, that could be the story of any of my Pakistani cousins - or, frankly, any foreigner here for the first time on a student visa.

The issue of finding of self is extended to the limits of quasi-sociological character-study of Changez and the unnamed American. Though they do not end up doing very much, Changez is, to Hamid's credit, a coherent and interesting character, at least in terms of what he unwittingly reveals about himself. What makes him interesting, however, is not the frightening glimpse he gives us into the dark soul of the Islamic fundamentalist, but the revulsion he produces as a recognizable instance of the contemporary South Asian elite, clawing its way to the top of the global economic order while trying desperately to pledge allegiance to the delusional pieties of first world-versus-third world ties.

The character of Changez seems sufficiently reasonable and likeable to qualify as a candidate for the reader's sympathy, who seems lost between the two different worlds, the East and the West and its circumstances. He is bright, articulate, cosmopolitan, intelligently hedonistic, and without the slightest tinge of religiosity, fanaticism, or bigotry. But these

somewhat superficial traits tend to conceal a set of deeper and more unsavory ones, namely the ones that actually constitute his character.

From the very opening of the novel, we confront in Changez a man whose articulate cosmopolitanism masks an overwhelming narcissism, obsession with status, and sense of superiority to almost everyone around him. In the early pages of the novel, we learn that Changez came to the U.S. to attend university at Princeton; his first moments at Princeton inspire in him "the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible" (3). This narcissistic admission, revealing both for its pomposity as well as for its detachment from reality, sets the stage for the obsessively invidious comparisons that follow.

3.3. Changez: Victim of National Identity

Whenever Changez compares himself to the people around him in America - and he can't stop - he comes invariably to the conclusion that he is in some way superior to them as, more intelligent, harder working, thriftier, pluckier, and better at working in a hierarchical setting; also, more gracious, more reserved, more polite. It hurts him in two ways, firstly they (Muslim's) work is rarely taken into consideration and, secondly, their work is more manual and less intelligent. It's an incongruous set of traits, at once bourgeois and aristocratic: the cosmopolitan gentleman as go-getter. But Changez conveys it best: Princeton students were "clever," he says, but he was "something special" like "a perfect breast, if you will – tan, succulent, seemingly defiant of gravity" (5). His specialty was related to have established a name and fame by a Muslim in the world of the whites, in an alien land. His nationality was associated with his superior feelings.

This pride of Changez being 'something special' is candid about the class origins of his self-image. It helps him to find his place in a world marred by conflict and disbelief to any one other than their race (white). Changez puts as follows:

> Our situation is, perhaps, not so different from that of the old European aristocracy in the nineteenth century, confronted by the ascendance of the bourgeoisie. Except, of course, that we are part of a broader malaise afflicting not only the formerly rich but much of the formerly middle-class as well: a growing inability to purchase what we previously could. Confronted with this reality, one has two choices: pretend all is well or work hard to restore things to what they were. I chose both. (10-11)

The key to this choice and to Changez's character generally is his tacit understanding of the point of his efforts. Fundamentally (so to speak), hard work is for him neither a means of promoting one's own hedonistic pleasures, nor an end in itself. It's a redemptive exercise - a way of restoring 'things to what they were.

The things that were are as unreal as their time and location. What Changez seems to have in mind by the way things were is a very rosy, hazy, and protean conception of:

> . . . a collective past - implicitly, one gathers, a cross between the Mughal Empire and the Muslim caliphate. So it is that Changez feels mortification when it's discovered that he needs a menial part-time job at Princeton to make ends meet, preferring to comport himself in public like a 'young prince, generous and carefree'. (11).

So it is that he conceives of Lahore, the easternmost city in Pakistan, as 'the last major city in a contiguous swath of Muslim lands stretching west as far as Morocco,' and as standing at the eastern edge of the Muslim 'frontier' (p. 127). This is a conception that might make sense to a caliph, but makes no sense today: its conception of 'contiguity' makes a unity out of things fractured; its conception of 'frontier' relegates Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta to the status of wilderness.

Changez's desire to return to an imagined past is facilitated by the resolution to pretend to accept the realities of the present in search of what his heart is seeking for. The pretense produces disorientation, and the disorientation in turn produces resentment and shame. Thus on his first day of work at Underwood Samson, a New York-based financial firm, Changez begins by describing his 'sense of wonder' at his new workplace. The sense of wonder quickly gives way to an invidious comparison that strikes down his ethnic pride: “Their offices were perched on the forty-first and forty-second floors of a building in midtown -higher than any two structures here in Lahore would be if they were stacked one atop the other . . ."(33-34). What might otherwise be a neutral architectural fact wouldn't the broadest structures in Lahore be broader than the broadest two structures in midtown Manhattan?

It becomes an occasion for envy, shame, and the reflexive assertion of collective identity in case of the Muslims, as they are Muslims by birth and some others are Christians or Hindus, or whatsoever. As, Changez puts it:

> Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me: they made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed. (36)

The resentment and shame Changez feels is on behalf of an entirely notional, indeed preposterous sense of affinity with a civilization to which he could not possibly have any real connection.

There is no sane sense in which the contemporary denizens of Lahore are the same 'people of the Indus River basin' as those to whom Changez refers, hence no sane way of making sense of the 'we' that facilitates Changez's resentment. Nor is there any coherent way of thinking of oneself as a member of the civilization of the 'Indus River basin' and thinking of Lahore as the boundary of a 'frontier': Lahore (sort of) marks the eastern boundary of Pakistan, but the Indus River basin proceeds well past that boundary into India.

Changez, is not just the victim of a national identity, but of multiple and conflicting ones, giving rise to collective identity scarcity. As he moves through life, he cannot help but think of himself as a member of some we - but he cannot, for that, seem to settle on one we to adopt, or even a consistent set of them. He is, at different times in the novel, a third World resident, a Muslim, a Pakistani, a member of the Indus River Basin Civilization, a New Yorker, and a Princetonian. Even his acts of rebellion and assertion (e.g., growing a beard) are expressions of collective identity - Changez-as-Muslim rebelling against America. What he cannot seem to be is an individual sans collective descriptor: Changez.

This ad hoc appropriation of collective identities of the Muslims produces an unstable mix of superiority and inferiority complex, as well as power and powerlessness. On the one hand, it mitigates Changez's sense of inferiority by making him part of something larger than himself; he draws power from the fact that he is not merely an individual making his way in the world but a member of something larger and more significant - an ethnicity, a nation, a religion, a culture.

On the other hand, this very conception of power enervates him because it is the source of his obsession with invidious comparison-making. He feels resentment at American achievement to the extent that he insists on viewing that achievement from the perspective of some anti-American collective whose identity he tries on. But he feels self-contempt when he realizes that he is not in fact a genuine member of the entities, like Pakistan, to which he

professes attachment. As Changez states:

> I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased… I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (72)

Hamid eventually has Changez try to rationalize his reaction to 9/11 by way of a juvenile set of political 'grievances'.

In yet another instance, Changez narrates:

> Yes, my musings were bleak indeed. I reflected that I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. (156)

As such, if there is a consistent principle behind this set of grievances, it is the propensity to individuate events by reference to specifically American involvement, subtracting all other agents and factors from the description. For Changez, the troubles in Vietnam, Korea, the Taiwan Strait, the Middle East, and Afghanistan all began with American involvement there; nothing pre-existed that involvement and no other historical fact is relevant.

This attitude becomes particularly poignant where Pakistani Muslim actions are involved, as in Changez's comments about the U.S. attack on Afghanistan after 9/11. "Afghanistan', Changez complains to the American, "was our friend, 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" (100). Changez's fury wipes out the preceding sixty years of

Afghan-Pakistani relations, and with it, the preceding decade of Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan in search of being an a Muslim.

Thus, Muslims like Changez, who condemn the barbaric acts like that of the 9/11 attacks, has their own causes and reasons to justify the inhumane acts of terrorism. Such acts are increasingly becoming a way to establish their individuality in the western world, though they are well aware about it tragic outcome. Many, like Changez, are not associated with the act, but somehow find meaning of it in their life. As for them, it is the awakening of the world community to the grievances of being non-nationals of the world community. Further more, the way of the search for existence of the Muslim, seems somehow associated with the making of such incidents to make the world community listen to their woes and grievances, by hook or crook.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

4.1. Fall of Western Illusion

Hamid Mohsin's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the story of a voiceless Muslim youth, who is in search for his identity, spread between the East (Pakistan) and the West (the U.S.). Changez, a Muslim youth educated in the West is in search of establishing minimum recognition of being a Muslim. But things are opposite as in this world caste and social background are the sign of being qualified as a terrorist. Muslims, as to the belief of many westerners are by nature violent, and furthermore, inclined to extremism. Changez, the narrator expresses his woes to an unnamed American and thereby, is in an attempt to establish that the notion of viewing Muslims by the first world is absurd and faulty.

Changez, an inborn of Old Anarkali Market, Lahore in Pakistan goes to Princeton University, Princeton, the United States of America for pursuing his higher studies, under a scholarship program. He excels in studies and other curricular activities and earns himself a prestigious job of a banker, in the city. Besides, he is in involved with sensuous Erica, a blonde of New York in an intimate relationship. Erica has lost her childhood sweetheart and is trying to figure out her tragedy in relationship with a third world citizen, as her people no longer provide her relief. However, for Changez, Erica becomes a mean to find his uniqueness in the west. She serves him as a bridge to lessen the ideological and cultural gap between the east and the west. Changez is doing well, economically, as well as socially, at least, externally. But, when it comes to the level of internal conscience and awakening, he is somehow always is haunted by the feeling of being a victim of dejection and discrimination in the lands of the white. Then, the final blow in the form of infamous 9/11, which ultimately confides him to quit America, the prestigious job and sensuous Erica. Changez decides to quit America in search of internal conscience, associated with the feeling of being a Muslim, a third world denizen.

As an adage goes, "whenever one becomes conscious, tragedy begins," applies to the life of Changez. Things were good going with Changez, until the awakening of being discarded as he is a Muslim and in the ground, subject to racial discrimination. He, of course, hates terrorism; but somehow smiles to the fact that the Twin Towers is demolished by a terrorist attack in September 11, 2001. His smile is associated with internal pleasure in hope that though wrong, the voice and dignity of the Muslim will be heard and respected.

America was his dreamland, which was in his feet – a good job, a girlfriend and social status. However, these factors were external, and were associated with external factors in satiating his ego and desires. It was, in fact, a mere covering to his internal unsatisfied desires that were helping to be wrapper, for the same. Changez, was suited and residing in the American standards, however, his feelings were never far away from the Old Anarkali market, the crowded area of Lahore. Amid the American standards, he was still rooted with the *pan-pasal* of the old *chachas* at the corner of the market.

His longing for the *pan-pasals* and the *chai* shops were surfaced by the infamous 9/11 incident. At the same time, he was forced to rethink of his existence in the American land – an alien land. He was mere a third world citizen, and at times, even a fundamentalist. Thus Changez, a third-world Muslim's soul awakens and he embarks in an odyssey for the search of his identity. He finds the same old crowded and under-developed Old Anarkali market to sophisticated and developed America, as the first was his land and his people. As such, Changez a reluctant fundamentalist quits, his once dreamland – America in search of his soul – identity.

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