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Role of Hegemonic Forces in the Formation of Protagonist's Psyche: A Study of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the way hegemonic forces mold the thought process of Pakistani protagonist to embrace and glorify the West (New York) both at conscious and unconscious level. The protagonist gets consumed by the hegemonic forces working at different levels. The power of hegemonic structure devices certain methods to lure the minds of the Eastern masses (subscribers). As the subscriber (protagonist) affirms to abide by the authority of hegemony, the western domination gets concretized. In Moshin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, play of hegemony force is depicted through the one-sided narration of the protagonist which gives the true insight into the psychological impact that he had experienced. The concept of meritocracy, intelligence, and moral leadership are used as tools used to make the Eastern Minds follow the west. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony explores the psychological domination, explicating reasons of the consent given by the Easterners.

Keywords: Hegemony, Ideology, Moral leadership, Dominant group, East, West, Oriental.

Creating a mind, which gives the consent (accepts the hegemony), is never a simple act. It indeed results from the social structures and the cultural designs. The code of conduct, moral value and education standards are the designed by the ruling classes and followed by the rest, both in social and global scenario. This social and cultural scenario dictates each group or its subordinate societies to what should be its behavior. Each and every institutions (social, cultural, political and economic) it prescribes its practices too. But often in the history of mankind, we have read and seen that the western world have succeeded in achieving this goal and maintained its hegemonic force. The monopoly on the standardization has remained in the hands of the Europeans. The parameters of judgment, for all spheres of life and living have been set by the ruling bourgeois. The proletariats are often times marginalized. Their voices are muted. All they need to do is to follow the norms and standards set by the bourgeois and struggle to survive in their own capacity. This is hegemony indeed. But, the initial projection and setting up of this hegemonic force is calculated so judiciously, that it seems justified in itself. Thus, this force hovers around the globe today and influenced every individual from every society.

Nevertheless, in this novella, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, we shall also looks at how the protagonist, biologically a Pakistani guy, is being trapped in the web of hegemonic influence of America. The protagonist of the novel, Changez, has a very common view as that of the

masses about the West, especially the United States of America. Many of us feel that we define our own life despite being born in any society or community, but it is not the ultimate truth. Raymond William points that, “To say that ‘men’ define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In many actual societies there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society, these are primarily inequalities between classes” (108). When the leading protagonist, Mr. Changez, reaches Princeton for his studies, he feels very different. He gets a new status in the New York City, though he belongs to Lahore, the Eastern region of the world. He gets an opportunity to be a part of the Western upper middle class society, thus his life changes drastically because education and social scenario starts molding him to fit in that western arena. Covered by the vile of the hegemonic force he starts to feel that education indeed transformed him into Westerners, thus says, “This is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I had access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making” (Hamid 3). Every man of the East dreams to visit and be a part of the western world at least once in a life. When the protagonist uses the phrase, “this is a dream come true”, it suffices the argument that he considers his own land is inferior and deprived in terms every sphere of life, unlike America. But the protagonist doesn’t realize the facts as stated by, Chimamanda Ngoiz Adichie, a Nigerian-American author said America sells dreams and Eastern buys it and follows it blindly. In fact, Changez is also a prey of this dot-less lie. Like millions of the other Easterners, he takes American life as most preferred and most dauntlessly his own, with a hope to mingle and be one amongst them. The force of hegemony engulfs the many not only physically but also mentally and make them the prey of it, as Raymond observes, “Hegemony...it is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our sense and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (William 110). The miracle of the hegemonic force is change, the change in totality. It changes all existing practices, lift up expectation and give a new set of perceptions to view the world and self from a new direction. The senses are ruled and the energy in a person directed, infusing in them a newer perceptions about self and others. The protagonist wants to analyze himself from others perspectives. This idea of leaving the self-identity and longing to be someone else, (i.e. Changez wanting to be a New Yorker or Chris) has indeed mars the growth and development of the entire easterners. This is psychic self-subjugation in front of the hegemonic gaze to consider that I am not me, but someone superior than myself. Changez, an innocent youth with a different set of enthusiasm and zeal of life enters the arena and inculcates a very distinct way of life and outlook than the previous ones. He feels that he has been alleviated a little high in life when he uses the words ‘titans’ for the professor, and ‘philosopher-kings in the making’ for students, including himself. His perceptions are new, so are his outlooks. But he cannot realize the fact that, “Literary education was now determined by dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance” (Ngugi wa Thiongo 12). Through the means of education and language, West exercises power and domination over the rest of the world, which is seldom felt by the rest. The protagonist, Changez willingly accepts whatever come from and of the West, he is ready to sacrifice every bit of his energy and intellect to be the part of the Western society as he states;

Students like me were given visa and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited to the ranks of the meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute

our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first. (Hamid 4).

He says this with pride, as though he is really elevated to much higher position. He is very confident of getting any job that he prefers. He never gives a single thought about serving his own country. A sense of inferiority complex about his own land grows within him. Not to say that he is a hypocrite; indeed he is chosen one from the race of western. He associates himself to the New Yorkers thus, getting a sense of self-superiority. In the text, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward said points out,

It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlines our right to direct the rest of humanity. Material power is nothing but a means to that end. (Said 17)

Ambiguity in life has never lead anyone decide the best for oneself, but amongst them. The ambiguity created by the hegemon nation is the most deceptive one with a perfect trap, wrapped in the conviction of superiority, a moral superiority indeed. The protagonist of the novella admires the western ways of life and it ignites a feelings in him that he is a Westerner. He believes he is morally superior and perfect from every angle, thus it indicates that he is trapped in the vicious circle of Western Hegemony. Keeping this view in mind, we can draw another evidence as to how did the protagonist surrender to the hegemony force at psychological level. Gramsci in this regard says, the cultural training or the education only serves:

...to generate misfits, people who believe themselves superior to the rest of the humanity because they have amassed in their heads a certain amount of dates and data, which they rattle off at every opportunity so as almost to make a barrier between themselves and the others. (Santucci 34)

According to Gramsci, the superiority that the westerners are fanatic about, is a vain display which can create a barriers between themselves and others. Education instead of acting as a needle, it is in this Western context, working as a scissor to cut, divide and create disparity amongst the people within and the outside the social and economic boundaries. The powerful tool of education is also responsible for the creation of hegemon halo over the psyche of the protagonist and get entangle in the world of illusion. Due to this phenomenon, there is psychic annihilation of the protagonist, Changez. Devoid of self-consciousness and psychologically disillusioned, he accepts all in the West as 'his dream come true'. For instance, in New York, Changez goes for a job interview to the Underwood Samson and Company. In the interview he is asked many odd and subjective questions, thoroughly scrutinized by Mr. Jim, "Do your friends here know that your family couldn't afford to send you to Princeton without a scholarship" (Hamid 8). This is a direct attack, rather a voice of someone very high and much more superior person compared to the interviewee. The subtle play of the hegemonic force or the strength of

the moral superiority is visible. The silence of the protagonist is the subjugation of the Eastern world to the Western hegemony.

The eastern souls judge the western culture solely by the values and standards of their own culture, and often feel inferior. When judgments are on the basis of comparisons with others, it's always flawed. The moral dignity of one culture cannot be surpassed by the other culture. But when Changez was attacked on his background being poor, the psyche subjugation is seen. He introspects on his own culture; language, behavior, custom, religion and life style back home by comparing it to that of the West's. He is hungry for a job and a good life in New York thus, he digests all odd questions and insulting remarks about his country, family and himself. The psyche of the protagonist is transformed, he associates perfectly himself perfectly with the rest of the Europeans, compromising and self-negotiating with all his colleagues and the environments. Raymond William says,

The true condition of hegemony is effective self-identification of with the hegemonic forms: a specific and internalized 'socialization' which is expected to be positive but, if that is not possible, will rest on a (resigned) recognition of the inevitable and the necessary. An effective culture, in this sense, is always more than the sum of its institutions: not only because these can be seen, in analysis, to derive much of their character from it, but mainly because it is at the level of a whole culture that the crucial interrelations, including confessions and conflicts, are really negotiated. (William 118)

The protagonist, Changez, identifies himself as one amongst his western colleagues. It is definitely positive aspect of the social culture which has influenced (i.e. economy and power), thus he breaks through all the barriers of his mind and calmly accept all odd situations for the achievement of his dream.

The entry of Erica in the life of Changez too has a great contribution in influencing his psyche, which gives a false sense of being citizen of New York. At some point of his life, at the island of Rhodes, he is also fascinated by the sensuousness of the West, which indeed is a sort of weapons used by the westerners to lure the minds of the dormant Pakistanis in the novel. The protagonist also built a sort of physical intimacy with the European girl Erica but by assuming the role of her dead fiancé, Chris. He is ready to forgo his own self in the pursuit of the western sensuousness. In the guise of Chris, he establishes a physical relationship with the Erica. The degree of influence can be felt, as he himself says, "I remember it well: I felt both satiated and ashamed. My satisfaction was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes" (Hamid 106). The point here is the 'I had diminished myself in my own eyes'. The psychology of a person is dominated by the physical surroundings. Changez was in New York, and he was under the direct hegemony of the west. The protagonist had submitted himself totally to the norms of the west, as Dr. Faustus sold his sold for twenty-four years to Lucifer. The hegemonic influence is so intense that all the three aspect, i.e. body, mind and soul are in the grip of the west. They mimic the as directed by the west. Homi K. Bhaba points,

Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and pose an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers. (86)

Mimicry of the protagonist, Changez, his conscious annihilation of self during his sensuous act with Erica is the testimony of the inappropriateness, practiced by the East and posing a threat to the ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary powers. Belonging to an Islam culture he enjoys wine and girl. Beyond this what is left to degrade? Blinded by the hegemonic force the easterners are been plundered physically and psychologically. She is so enchanting for Changez that he starts to sip wine with her, which is a forbidden act according to his religion. The protagonist of the novel is culturally detached from his own; the social and psychic process of New York integrates him to a new arena with new sets of identity, truth and self-recognitions because of the western hegemony. Changez start living in illusion. He associates himself with the west and negates the thoughts of East, thus western hegemony annihilates his Pakistani psyche. Homi K. Bhabha in his text, *Location of Culture* writes,

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation; it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. (66)

Since the time of colonizers, the subordinate group has been following the fixed norms set by the rulers. The benchmark on their culture, history and race has set by the ruling class and there is utmost rigidity, as long as the reform is concerned. Changez, like millions others Easterners have the idea that perfect peace, happiness and glory lies on the Western world ignorant of the fact that it is what they expect us to believe in. The inner consciousness or the psyche of Changez is attuned to the waves of the Western Hegemony thus; he is bound to think the way he is directed. Ralph Ellison raises a similar concern in his novel, *Invisible Man*, when he says, “What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do?” (Ralph 206) The innate desire of the young protagonist is not to be lost in the fanciful dreams of New York City but he is forced to follow the waves of the global hegemony. His desire is unspeakable indeed in that part of the world, he says, “I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islam republic with nuclear capacity”(Hamid 29). Though he says in a mocking tone amongst his friends, it is his inner feelings. Though he has such feelings and desires, he is not practical in his execution part, because like the masses he too longed for a money, luxurious life and prestige in the society.

Meritocracy is a system practiced by the West, which the people with perfect health and inherited talent having firm support of the family in every sphere of life including education and other perspective are rewarded. These selected lots are expected to work hard and contribute for the social benefits and endeavor ahead for the betterment of the masses. But ironically, it’s never the same as talked or spoken about. Meritocracy has been purpose oriented act of any firms, focusing on the amassing of the wealth for self and a simple tag of fame for its employees. But

this tag of fame, which is also a nod of approval of the Western world and it has been the priceless pearl for the Eastern souls. In the race of meritocracy, Changez wins, which is indeed a defeat of the East. Though it was a talk about religion but the true nature and character of the European is explicitly exposed by Chinua Achebe, when he says;

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (Achebe 152)

The cunningness of the colonizers and their art of domination are such that, a direct objection fails as they show themselves as justified. The shadow of hegemony is so soothing, it calms all its victims to sleep and it merges as victorious. It is a deliberate act of befooling the mass. The technique employed to creep into the secret domains of other's region and fragment the united clan is indeed malicious. The west values; humility, meritocracy, lineage and prudence for they are solely concerned about the ambitions and achievements in life with the help of brain for self - betterment. The purpose is till the self. So what was, Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*? Or was the European's heart really the, *Heart of the Darkness* as Joseph Conrad implicitly projected in his novel? The question has never be attempted, and the answers came only from the Europeans themselves, and this has be the guiding doctrine the world has been following as their spells has penetrated all the minds of the East and the entire world. In the name of fashion and standard, numerous people accept norms like meritocracy, which is indeed a weapon that the West is using plunder the entire world and the East has been a silenced victim. The much appreciated meritocracy is a painstaking philosophy in the Western job markets, which sounds weird but much practiced. They strictly follow meritocracy. Changez pass this gate too, which gives him an entry to New York City life. The orientation member of the Underwood Samsons and Company, Mr. Sherman says, "We're a meritocracy. We believe in being the best.....If you do well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't you will be out of the door" (Hamid 35). This becomes a great challenge for the non-Americans in the interview but not for Changez. He is outstanding in his performance, which owns him a good job in New York, which is yet another proof of his relationship with the West as per his own notion. But he doesn't realize till late in his life in New York that, he is exploited by the West and his such foolish acts is helping his enemy nation grow indeed. Nevertheless, he is blinded by the American dreams, a luxurious life, name and bulky income which many others aspire for. So, definitely the protagonist is not an exception to this system. The potential of the Eastern brain is constantly exploited by the West by selling them the unachievable American dreams, a pseudo hope to the ignorant, innocent and indigenous Eastern counterparts. The point 'we're a meritocracy' itself gives a feelings of desolate and despair. The concept of the meritocracy kind of world needs to be inculcated in those who choose to be a part of them. Changez accepts this choice. He wholeheartedly accepts the false conceptions like 'we believe in being the best.' Thus, it is the nod of consent that the Easterners (Changez) give upon such high sounding concepts, which heightens the glory of the hegemonic force. The Oriental people or the Eastern dwellers take decisions and directions unconsciously oftentimes. Forfeited are their rationality and brains impoverished. Changez starts to judge his self and psyche based on the western dictums and lifestyle, a sort of willing suspension of disbelief is created in his mind due to the free play of the hegemonic force. Kate A. F. Crehan, in his text Gramsci, *Culture and Anthropology* remarks,

Is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's own personality? (Crehan 81)

As individuals, each person is expected to possess his or her own principles of life, at least to make decisions. But no wonder, poor illiterate or eastern nations have been snatched by the ruling bourgeois nations of the West with the words, like 'If you don't you will be out of the door.' Meritocracy of the West has been a sort fascination amongst the middle class people of the East, they dream of having western kind of luxurious life which is indeed a merely distant dream altogether. The bourgeois class is very active and dynamic as they can be capable to regulate the state activity, and this makes the state a field of play for the bourgeois, as it is pointed,

the entire [complexity] of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules"(Gramsci 244). The latter is done through the enlargement of the bourgeois sphere of influence both "technically and ideologically... The bourgeoisie is a class in continuous movement...capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the state has been transformed; the state has become an educator... (Gramsci 260)

When the state becomes the site for bourgeoisie domination, it makes every effort to assimilate its own values and ideals to the common people, makes these values and ideals seem universal, beneficial for all. This way in the guise of serving the poorer ones, they silently establish an active consent. For instance, the protagonist Changez, too gets into the nods of approval and gives his acceptance for his own exploitations in the hands of the Underwood Samson and Company. Changez says, "I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond — only younger, darker, and possibly better paid"(Hamid 73). Just before this, his white counterpart in the office had said, "You're number one in your class. Your instructor says you've got a bit of warrior in you. Don't be ashamed of that. Nurture it. It can take you a long way" (Hamid 44). These words fired up his notion of being one in, not just the skin and the blood but at par in the intellect with Westerners. It is indeed true but for how long, it is never know and never will it be. These are some nods of approval in the hands of those who exercised the magical wane of hegemony to silence its subordinate to their sides with full consent

These are what has been done and advantages drawn. Exercising both state and civil law they have made sanctions for the colonies rather or the subordinate societies, thus the whole of the masses is caught in the gyre designed by the hegemonic nations, consuming not only the subordinate nations but annihilating their history too. Amongst many reasons of liking the West, there are reasons of hating their own homeland too. The young protagonist was always tortured by some thoughts about his own country as he says,

Four thousand years ago, we, the people of 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 still barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowment greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed. (Hamid 34)

The race was won by the hare not the tortoise, which indeed makes every Eastern mind salute and embrace the West despite having the a subtle spark of hatred in them for the disparity that is bridged. The novelist also presents the way deployed by the Westerners to provide fast, attractive and the newest offers to the brilliant minds of the East and lure them to serve their country. Changez, the most brilliant fellow gets trapped in the net of the hegemony of the west and says,

I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet. How soon that would change! My world would be transformed, just as this market around us has been. See how quickly they have brought those tables into the street. Crowds have begun to stroll where only a few minutes ago there was a rumble of traffic. (Hamid 45)

Indeed this is the magic of the West that has always fascinated the Easterners. Changez feels that a young New Yorker with abundance of wealth and an appreciable status at the Underwood Samsons and Company. The feeling of change that the protagonist approves is in itself a great sign of accepting the hegemonic force. He says, 'my world would be transformed' but whether to a positive note or negative, is not mentioned. In the *Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhaba remarks, "the desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry – through a process of writing and repetition – is the final irony of partial representation" (88). The authenticity of mimicry is never validated. The east may mimic the west throughout life but they can never be one with the west. Well, the debate of the physic annihilation of the East by the West with the device of intellectual and moral leadership can never come to an end. The assumptions and calculations are very subtle thus, the hegemonic domination plays; unquestionable role of civilizers as well as the cunning colonizer. Edward Said in his famous text, *Orientalism* points out that crust of the matter as,

The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either "original" or "repetitious."The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty. (59)

The West has mastered the strategy to rule the human minds. The oppression and any sort of threat that is being posed to the East are with full proof security thus, it is said that the threat is muted. The best of the products, arts, artifices and the intellectuals of the East is given the highest priority and interest by the Western counterparts. In the slogan of 'meritocracy' and 'white', all the best minds are attracted towards the West. Who is going to raise the voice? All intellectuals are commoditized and thus, purchased at the highest price by the West. No voice is left behind. East is muted. The power of economy which is possessed by the capitalist society which rules the entire world has never spared the East as it has done with the rest of the world.

West has become a source of everything for the East. Mimicking has been a profession for the Easterners and a way of life too. Viktor Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarization was for the minds to make them aware and conscious of the reality but the West had used it in its opposite. They made everything so much familiar to the east that- it has now become their way of life. There is a willing suspension of disbelief in the Eastern counterparts, believing every trash produced and pronounced by the West to be something 'original' and respectable. This way the East is baited in the spoon of the West. In the similar way much of the east has started believing that they have to ape the West to be called themselves the high tech twenty-first century people. So, the degree of hegemonic domination is much beyond pronouncement.

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