

Vol. 8, Issue-II (April 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

# THE CRITERION

*An International Journal in English*

Bi-monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Sr. No. 40]

*Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite*

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## **Detachment and Counter Attack of East on Western Hegemony in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

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**Article History:** Submitted-16/03/2017, Revised-13/04/2017, Accepted-18/04/2017, Published-30/04/2017.

### **Abstract:**

This paper investigates the rise of all pervasive western hegemony and its encounter with budding ideologies of East. Western hegemony is an accepted phenomenon which overpowers Eastern ideology in different aspects. Western thinking is portrayed as accepted truth due to the support of media and facilitation of international counterparts. In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the protagonist, Changez Khan represents Eastern fascination for the West due to economic prosperity and how his attitude changes after 9/11. Changes in his attitude reflect the emergence of ideological apparatus of West. Changez's revolutionary journey portrays Eastern counter attack over Western style of thinking. This research paper explores the journey of Changez's detachment and counter attack on West as an symbol of eastern ideology versus Western hegemony.

**Keywords: Detachment, counter attack, hegemony, domination.**

Hegemony means dominance by one state or social group over other, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, America represents powerful and all pervasive Western hegemony. Walter L Admson observes:

Hegemony for instance, is sometimes compared with domination; in this case the reference is to the process of gaining legitimate consent within the functional universe of civil society, as opposed to simply holding it together through a monopoly on the means of violence. (10)

Walter explains that hegemony is compared with domination; the powerful group suppresses the weak and holds the control over them by having their consent at the same time. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, America dominates East in almost every aspect. Western society seems to be more promising to Easterners and they follow and propagate

it willingly. Changez like other Easterners is fascinated by materialistic progress of West and living his dream life in America, having an Princeton degree, American job and American girlfriend, he feels he is on cloud nine but all his dreams starts turning into nightmares.

Changez saw a news report on TV, which he first misinterpreted to be a film but when he continued watching it, he realized it was not fiction but real. The news telecast was of attacks on Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre. He saw them collapse and initially he was "Remarkably pleased" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 72). He smiled looking at TV and could not understand why he reacted in such a manner. He later explains that he was not happy by the deaths of people or destruction, but by the symbolism of it. "The fact that someone had so visibly brought America to his knees" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 73). He was happy because America lost to someone, whom he thought to be extremely powerful. The attacks changed everyone and everything. Muslims in general were questioned and faced harsh comments and racism. Changez had to stay in Manila for some more days as all flights were cancelled, when he with his colleagues reached airport, he was taken aside in a room and was told to remove his clothes for checking, he was the last person to board the flight and he says "I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 74). He was conscious about his appearance and he was trying to be normal and calm, but he was not comfortable in his own skin. When he reached America, he was again separated from his group and was interrogated, and was sent for inspections. This made him alone and isolated as his team did not wait for him and he had to travel back alone. When Changez saw the people affected by the attacks, he was ashamed of his reaction and thought "my own uncharitable-indeed, inhuman- response to the tragedy, and I felt from then a constant murmur of reproach" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 79). Changez heard some rumours at Pak-Punjab Delhi, that "Pakistani cab drivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centres for questioning or worse" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 74). West lost its trust on Muslims and doubted that every Muslim is a terrorist and was trying to find out people responsible for this destruction. This created a sense of terror in Muslims, living in America, as they now faced racism and were under suspicion, Changez too was very afraid but consoled himself by the fact that all these things were happening to poor people and not to person like him, who is a "Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 75). Now he had to mention his education and job to everyone he meets, to make them comfortable. Often tires of his rental car were punctured, which was not a mere coincidence. Racisms was the first reason that Changez felt alienated and detached from America. He tried to be calm but he could not avoid the news when he watches Americans troops' raided Afghanistan. His reaction was "Afghanistan was

Pakistan's neighbour, our friend, and 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” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 100). Jonathan Joseph states:

It argues that the position of the ruling group is not automatically given, but rather that it requires the ruling group to attain consent to its leadership through the complex construction of political projects and social alliances.  
(1)

He explains that a group or society in power needs to be in power through political tricks and being associated with social groups. When America was attacked, everyone supported Americans but when America attacked Afghanistan; which people called a raid on a Taliban command post, no one uttered a word which explains the Western hegemony. The second reason of Changez’s alienation was Erica, He tried to talk to her, but she did not respond and when he met her, she was ill and pale; she was unable to sleep due to over thinking. Changez could see her struggling through her thoughts and was worried about her. He says “been indulging in daydreams of a life Erica's husband; now I found not just these daydreams but the women herself vanishing before my eyes” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 104). Changez was desperate to help her and wanted to take her out from the maze she was lost but Erica was unable to forget Chris. Changez told Erica to imagine Changez as Chris, he thought it would bring them closer but he realised that he was competing with a dead person, he says “In the strange romantic triangle of which I found myself a part of my dead rival” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 106). He could not understand what made her sink in so deep in her sorrows that she is unable to come back.

The attacks of 9/11 made everyone look back and something was undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms’, living in New York was suddenly like living in the time of Second World War. Everything seemed different to him and he felt homesickness, so he tried to focus on his work. Changez says “once I was walking to my rental car in the parking lot of the cable company when I was approached by a man I did not know. He made a series of unintelligible noises “akhala-malakhala,” perhaps, or “khalapal-khalapala” and pressed his face alarmingly close to mine” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 117). Changez was frightened by the act and thought that man was mad or drunk, and then another man called Changez a “Fucking Arab” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 117). He was hurt and completely shocked after this incident, he felt alienated and started feeling detached to American society and realised that he did not belong there.

Ivonaldo Leite in his article “Alienation” states that

Basically the cause of alienation is the capitalist economy. It rises in that field and then dominates every institutional sphere. Human beings are

devalued in direct proportion to the increase of production. Humans become a commodity.

This incident changed the way Changez looked at America and he began to dismantle his American identity. He was unhappy with the dual role of America, it is currently at the peak of its power and confronts East that has the desire and will to shape the world in non-Western ways. Changez's job was the only thing left with him. He was ranked number one among his comrades but he says "instead of celebrating my good fortune, I was confronting the possibility that soon my country could be at war" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 121). He was constantly thinking about his family and even when his parents told him not to come, he could not resist and travel to Pakistan. When he reached Lahore, he was observing everything differently; he says "I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offering. I was struck as first by how shabby our houses appeared, with cracks running through its ceilings and dry bubbles of paint flaking off where dampness had entered its walls"(Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 124). Changez was ashamed to identify himself as the citizen of Lahore, but as his surroundings became familiar, he understood that "the house had not changed in my absence. I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 124). Changez realized that nothing has changed except him, he was now looking at everything as an outsider and this realization made him angry and he thought "I was disturbed by what this implied about myself; that I was a man lacking in substance and hence easily influenced by even a short sojourn in the company of others" (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 125). He accepted that he was influenced by west and started considered himself to be like them and a part of western society. As Said observes:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over. (Said 207)

This was the hardest blow, a blow of realization and deeper conflict that exists between the two worlds. The power of the western hegemony does no good intentionally but definitely gives an opportunity to stop, think and set out right to nurture a full-Hedged eastern ideology.

Changez was happy to return and appreciate the place where he belongs, he had a storm of emotions within him; he was worried, angry, helpless all at the same time. He did not want to leave his family in such situation, he says “and this made me a coward in my own eyes, a traitor” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 128). Changez’s mother advised him to shave before going back but in spite of knowing its consequences, he did not shave, he says “I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 130). Here the detachment is complete and he feels he is ready for a counter attack. Changez did not want to mix in the army of clean shaven men and hide his identity. He says “at Underwood Samson seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 130). Wainwright, Changez’s friend also advised him to shave but he did not accept his suggestion, he felt like he never belonged to America. Changez sent a message to Erica and she told him that she was in “an institution where people can recover themselves” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 132). He was losing Erica, he was hurt seeing her in such condition “emaciated, detached, and so lacking in life—pained me” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 140).

He was offered a new assignment in Valparaiso, Chile. He lacked concentration and in spite of doing his work; he was interested in news, he says “Instead I perused news websites which informed me that Pakistan and India were conducting tit-for-tat tests of their ballistic and that a stream of foreign dignitaries were visiting the capitals of both countries” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 143). Changez realized he himself was confused and lacked a stable core; his body and soul were at different places, He says “I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both in neither” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 148). Changez lost his own personality as he pretended to be Chris so that Erica accepts him and felt like his own identity is damaged in the process of becoming an American. He says “probably this was why I had been willing to try to take on the persona of Chris, because my own identity was so fragile” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 148). He felt nothing more than a slave to West; He said “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 152).

Changez was so annoyed and torn apart that he refused his vice president to work any further as his part of protest against West. He was well aware of the fact that without his job his visa would expire and he would be forced to leave United States but he says “all I knew was that my days of focusing on fundamentals were done” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 153). Changez says “it was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 156). When

Changez woke up next day, he thought more practically, his feelings were entirely different and he realized the value of things he was giving up but he “was convinced that I had made a mistake; no, I was merely unconvinced that I had not made a mistake. I was, in other word, confused” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 158). When he was going back to Lahore and was collecting his things from the office, only Wainwright came to shake his hand, he said “I realized how deep was the suspicion I had engendered in my colleagues over these past few—bearded and resentful—weeks” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 160).

He went to meet Erica for the last time before going back to Lahore, when he reached the institution, he learned that Erica was missing and she had possibly committed suicide. He felt like he had lost everything and had no reason left to stay in America, he was isolated and felt alone. Erica and Changez’s relationship depicts the relationship of Changez and America, unstable and unpredictable. He says “I was an incoherent and emotional madman, flying off into rages and sinking into depressions” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 167). He was unable to accept the fact that Erica was missing but deep inside he knew the truth that Erica will never come back, he said “I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore-or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 172).

The American stranger asked Changez that what he did to stop America, to which Changez explains “I had in the meanwhile gotten a job as a university lecturer, and I made it my mission on the campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine” (Hamid, *Fundamentalist* 179). Changez tells that he protested against an American ambassador and was arrested when things got out of control, he spent that night in prison and soon after that his office hours turned into meetings with politically minded youths.

He knew that some people thought he was wrong and his activities needed to be controlled but he was right in his own mind and continued to do his work. His aim is to change the mindset of people and encourages them against America; he did everything he could to show his hatred towards America. His counter attack on American hegemony is the formation of Eastern ideology, for that he started working from grass root level.

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