

MONETARY EXPLOITATION OF THE ORIENTS: ANALYSIS OF “THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST” BY MUHSIN HAMID

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Copyright @Author**Corresponding Author: *****Dr. Syed Anwar Ali Shah****Abstract**

Throughout human history the weaker nations have been exploited economically, socially and culturally by the stronger; but this exploitation has gained momentum over the last few decades especially in the glob of post 9/11. This paper seeks to examine the economic exploitation of the Orient as depicted in Muhsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) within the framework of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The paper focuses on the “Orient”-“Occident” dichotomy, the superior image of the West, and the practice of “othering”. Textual analysis, as a research method, employed for the analysis and discussion of data. The three stages of textual analysis, namely preparation, organizing and reporting were utilized to establish a nexus between the theory and data. The finding of the study showed that every human has equal rights to the resources of the world but they have been exploited by the leaders and rulers of the world for their national interest. The study underscores the experiences of the protagonist, Changez Khan regarding broader economic inequalities and cultural tensions that arise from such exploitation. Besides, it endeavors to follow the failed journey of Changez's assimilation into American society, especially in post 9/11 America. The paper discusses how Changez Khan, in the pre-9/11 world, thinks high of America, pins great expectations with it and how his dreams shatter when he is marginalized and become a victim of American prejudice in the post 9/11 world.

INTRODUCTION

When colonialism came to an end, postcolonial writers in the newly independent states investigated critically “the immense distortion introduced by the empire into the lives of the “lesser” peoples and ‘subject races’ generation after generation.” (Said, 1978, p. 16). As observed by Said (1993) ‘without empire —there is no European novel’ (p, 69), all the colonial literature not only seconded imperial powers but was also vindictive towards the colonized. Exploitation, whether economic, cultural, social, ethnic and religious, is not a new phenomenon:

powerful and authoritative nations have been exploiting the comparatively weaker nations since time immemorial. Prominent literary figures across the globe have inked countless productions in which this bias is very much visible. Prominent examples are “Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), and E.M Forester's *A Passage to India* (1924), (Cuddon & Habib, 2003, p,160). Novels like these totally misrepresented the culture, traditions, passions, sentiments and voice of the local colonized people. They were biased towards the

colonized and justified the injustices done by the colonizers.

Postcolonial literature is replete with literary productions which reveal that economic exploitation is deeply rooted in unequal power dynamics. Writers from erstwhile colonized nations such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott and R.K. Nayan" interpreted biased colonial misrepresentation (Parameswaran, 1983, P 34). Apart from these, Edward Said's prominent work *Orientalism* (1978), Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1983) and Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) productions are just a few of the many literary productions where episodes of economic exploitation and cultural marginalization of the orientals can be witnessed quite often. Thus, in postcolonial literature, the focus of attention became the former colonies instead of the colonial Empire. Postcolonial literature navigates through different themes such as hybridity, slavery, identity, diaspora, space, cultural imperialism, alterity, ethnicity and identity crises.

Muhsin Hamid is one of the luminous stars in the galaxy of postcolonial writers. His superb production *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* depicts the experiences of a young Pakistani in America which shows how oriental discourse and economic subjugation go side by side. The novel throws light on the economic and cultural marginalization of non-Western nations. (Riaz ud Din, 2023). This paper critiques the concept of economic domination of the East by the West as depicted by Muhsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* keeping in view the concept of alterity in Edward Said's *Orientalism* for exploring the monetary exploitation. As Economics is related to economy, resources and production whereas exploitation refers to taking unfair advantage of someone for personal gains. So, the term economic exploitation means unfair economic practices probably in a systematic way. The renowned philosopher Karl Marx used the term in his famous book 'the Communist Manifesto' 1948 and *Das Kapital* 1967 in his critique of capitalism explaining that how the bourgeoisie exploited the proletariat or working class. Prominent economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo also discussed labor value in their economic theories.

Statement of the Problem:

All human beings have equal rights to the resources of the world but the narrow interests of the world have classified human beings into haves and have nots. This division and the resultant exploitation is propagated by the imperial powers. The attitude of the colonizers, the postcolonial world in general and the 9/11 incident in particular provided a setting for the economic exploitation of the orientals depicted by Muhsin Hamid in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Humiliation, mishandling and marginalization of the orientals were carried out in the name of peace. This study explores economic exploitation of the orientals in the postcolonial era in general and in the post 9/11 world in particular.

Objectives of the Research:

- 1 to examine the economic exploitation of the Orientals in Muhsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.
- 2 to explore the failed journey of Changez's assimilation into American society in the novel.

Research Questions:

- 1 How does economic exploitation take place in different contexts in Muhsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
- 2 Why does the assimilation process of Changez in American society fail?

Significance of the Research:

This article explores economic exploitation of the orientals in Muhsin Hamid 2007 from Edward Said's postcolonial theory. This aspect of the research is a new addition to the stock of knowledge available on economic exploitation. It is a fact that all human beings are created equal (Kobayashi & Hidaka, 2020, p. 1) and have equal rights to the resources of the world. But the colonizers unjustifiably occupied these resources and exploited the colonized. According to Said "the orient was a place to be exploited" (p. 3). Said opines "The relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony— economic exploitation is dressed up in the language of 'civilizing mission'" (p. 222). This study shows the bias attitude of the

Occident Said Edward towards the colonized people in the post 9/11 America.

Research Methodology:

Qualitative method of research has been followed here. Textual analysis, as a research method, has been employed for the interpretation, analysis, discussion of the text of Muhsin Hamid's 2007 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The postcolonial theory presented by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* 1978 has been employed in this study for the analysis of the economic exploitation of the orientals in the novel titled "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" to examine the power struggle between the colonized and the colonizers, which is the main concern of postcolonial study. The riches which are choking it (the imperialist powers) are those plundered from the underdeveloped world. The *Wretched of the Earth* 1961, p, 58 According to Karl Marx 1867 colonialism was basically driven by capitalist exploitation. Engels, in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* 1884, linked colonialism to economic oppression. In Edward Said's *Orientalism* the self~which represents the colonizers~ exploits the other, the local colonized people. Edward Said focuses on the perception of orientalism which is described as 'the West's othering of the East in terms of knowledge, power and status (Fludernik, 2007, p. 267). According to Frantz Fanon "The colonial world is a world divided into compartments... The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town... The town belonging to the colonized people... is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how." (The *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 3-4) Said (1978) says "Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being." – p. 108. Said (1978) believes that *Orientalism* invented an "imaginative geography", where the West represented the difference between "our land~ barbarian land" (p. 54). However, "This imaginative geography emphasized and dramatized the economic

exploitation of 'them' at the hands of 'us' (Nayar, 2010, p. 15).

Literature Review:

Scholars have examined that in the face of American economic dominance Muhsin Hamid has portrayed global capitalism, neocolonialism and marginalization of the orientals. Tshering Thommo, Phub Dorji, Yangzomc and Sonam Yonten are of the opinion that America exercised its power upon weaker countries like Pakistan through finance (2022) p.28. This political discourse of the greater countries has adversely affected the economic plans of weaker countries. The scholars believe that through its financial power the USA exploited the skills and capabilities of talented young Orientals first by bringing them to America for higher studies and then to encourage them to work for American companies for the maximization of their profit. According to them this is clear cut example of the economic exploitation of the orientals.

Economic and cultural hegemony is usually reflected in post 9/11 literature (Huggan 2004, Graham 2005). Ahmad (2011) maintains that how Hamid's narrative exposes the orientalist discourse that justifies economic domination. The scholar maintains that it aims to examine the repression of colonizers, the struggle of the colonized against colonialism, the impact of colonization on colonizers and colonized, the relationship between them, diasporic identities, assimilation of cultures, and cultural hybridity. Moreover, Young (2016) asserts that postcolonial theory is oriented towards "forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain" (p. 11). Similarly, Mtairi (2019) maintains that postcolonial theory concentrates on the bonds that exist between the empire and its colonized subjects (Shah, S. A. A., Ahmad, K., & Ullah, R. 2025).

In addition, Ayman Mleitat, Bilal Hamanra and Ahamd Qabaha opine that Changez's decision to accept a funded scholarship at Princeton University is a result of the lack of economic opportunities in Pakistan and the corrupt economic and political systems that impoverished his family, (p, 288). The scholars opine that imperialism and global capitalism

are causing movement of immigrants and refugees from the underdeveloped Global North to the economically developed Global South (p.289). They point out that other critics have illuminated America's economic fundamentalism as exemplified in the practices of the Underwood Samson company, which capitalizes on the expertise of skilled immigrants from the East within its capitalist machinery, thereby maintaining a structured economic gulf between their countries of origin and America (Araújo 2012; Hai 2020; Haider 2012; Kennedy 2018). Edward Said believed that Western representation of the orient was based on misrepresentation and illusion which was invented in order to dominate it (Shabanirad and Marandi (2015).

This paper puts light on the economic exploitation of the orients, here represented by the highly educated young Pakistani, Changez Khan who becomes the victim of global capitalism and imperialism. According to Ayman Mleitat et al. some critics, in their discussion of the novel have highlighted America's manipulative and exploitative capitalist practices in Pakistan and generally in Third World nations (Poon 2017; Raggio 2016). Akers (2019) categorizes Hamid's text as "world system literature" (iv), while Poon (2017) asserts that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* exemplifies "the issue of economic disparity and inequality in global capitalist societies" (p, 290).

The above-mentioned scholarly productions throw some light on the exploitation of the backward people of the East by the global powers leaving sufficient gap for the present paper which explores the economic exploitation of the Orientals by Western powers, especially America, in the post 9/11 world.

Result and Discussion:

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is "A novel so sly it whispers in your ear and stabs you in the back—simultaneously. "Ron Charles (The Washington Post), 20 April 2007. The setting of the novel is the chaotic and exploitative post 9/11 globe. Muhsin Hamid (2007) explores the story of a young Pakistani young man, navigating corporate America, who is making his career at Underwood Samson after graduating from Princeton University of America. The novel beautifully captures the psychological and

economic complexities of the post 9/11 world. "Few novels have captured the psychological complexities of the post-9/11 world as deftly as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which challenges Western perceptions with nuance and daring." Morey, Peter. 2010, pp. 336-347. Right from his solicitous first sentence, "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?" (Hamid, P.1) the narrator, Changez, establishes a beguiling and yet troubling hold on the reader as he confides his life story to an American stranger in a Lahore café (Anthony, (2012).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), offers beautiful writing and delights the readers with a very sharp approach to the question of identity, "cultural power", cultural clash between the West and the East in a context of the dominance of one powerful country such as the United States (US) prior and after the attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. The themes in the 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' are diverse and portrayed in a very nuanced manner. In one of the interviews, Mohsin Hamid said that the objective of this book was to be like a mirror to the reader, to confuse the reader in order to show that the characters in this book are as complex, multidimensional, can be many things, with many identities as the people in our world (Book Review Amazon USA).

Economic Exploitation:

The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth century form (Barry Peter, 1995). Postcolonial literature shows the cultural, economic and political exploitation of the colonized countries (dominated social class) by the colonizers (dominant social class). Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) feels elated at first at the thought of making his fortune in America but later on he realizes that he is being exploited. The financial power of America compels him to work relentlessly for the cause of America bringing into action his full talents. However; this dedication does not save him from exploitation that he receives in the form of biased treatment in post 9/11 America. 'At eh airport I was escorted by armed guards into a room-and I was, as a consequence, the last person to board our aircraft.' (Hamid, p, 49). The elite valuation firm-Underwood

Samson- embodies Said's concept of Orientalism and serves as a tool for economic domination. The catchword of the novel "Focus on the Fundamentals" Hamid, P 64, reflects the exploitative capitalistic ideolog which disregards human cost for profit maximization. Changez is very much enthusiastic at the beginning but later on he considers himself a **Janisary** Hamid, P.96 Ch 10, - a term used for Ottoman soldiers who were forced to serve their conquerors. ' I was a modern day janissary, a servant of the American empire" Hamid, P 97 , Ch 10. This explicitly proves the economic exploitation of the Orients. Changez, like the janissaries, is a subject co-opted by a dominant power (American capitalism) to serve its interests, even if it undermines his native Pakistan (Shah, S. A. A., Sharar, T. U., & us Samad, A.2019). This aligns with Said's view that Orientalism is not just coutural but also economic as Western powers shape Eastern economies to serve their purpose (Said, 1978). The result of this exploitation is alienation (Barry Peter, ch-8). indeed, there are no two opinions that exploitation leads to alienation and widens the gulf among people and nations. Changez feels himself alienated in America once he realizes that he is being exploited there.

Exploitation in Historical Perspective:

Hamid is of the view that the people of the Indus River basin, "the Orients" were well developed and advanced in the past but due to their exploitation at the hands of the west "the Occidents" they lagged behind in the race of life (Shah, S. A. A., Sharar, T. U., & us Samad, A., 2019). "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 (...). To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed." (Hmid, p, 24). Again "We built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and we built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent" Hamid, (p, 25).

Post 9/11 Scenario:

The world has undergone a sea change since the events of September 11, 2001. The September 11 incident and its catastrophe have overturned the political world (Kellner, 2015). It has completely changed the political, cultural, and economic climate for the US (Bhaba H k, 1994). As a result of these changes America brought a major shift in its foreign policy against terrorism to obliterate Al-Qaeda by dominating Afghanistan and to attack Iraq in the name of eradicating Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) (Dorji Phub, 2022). The 9/11 commission report states, "Secretary Powell said the United States had to make it clear to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Arab States that the time to act was now" (Kean, 2001, p.330). Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) pictures the United States of America as having enormous financial and military power. Through financial power, which is also termed as soft power, it attracts foreigners to adopt American customs (Shah, Samad & Wail, 2021). The hard or military power enables America to control the affairs of the world. The soft power attracts Changez to America where he attends Princeton University on scholarship and is granted a work visa. After graduation he is employed at Underwood Samson, a covetous valuation firm, in America. Changez does not escape biased treatment in the post 9/11 America despite the fact that he is extraordinarily talented and works wholeheartedly for the American firm (Hartnell, 2010, 336-348). Thus, it becomes clear that the Occidents (The West or the USA) economically exploit the Orients with the help of its financial and military power.

Orientalism and Exploitation of the Orients:

The roots of Orientalism can be found in the pre-modern world when the premodern Europe, particularly France, interreacted with the orients through the crusades and other explorations (Jan, A, & Ali Shah, S. A., 2025). The West looked at the Orients through their own eyes, did not take them as they were. This perception of the Orients through the lens of the West or Occidents is called Orientalism (Dorji Phub, 2022)

Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) is an innovative piece of Postcolonial production which critically examines the way the West historically perceived the

East (the Orient) or the Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Though Said's main focus is on cultural and intellectual aspects of Orientalism but the representation of economic exploitation or imperialism can also be perceived in Orientalism. "The Orient was not only a place to be studied and written about; it was also a place to be exploited... The great colonial powers—Britain, France, and to a lesser extent, Russia and the United States—were able to achieve dominance in the Orient because of a combination of military, economic, and cultural power." (Chapter 3, *Orientalism and Empire*). It means that the development of the Orientalist discourse and economic interests of the colonial powers are linked together. We cannot separate one from the other (Shah, S. A. A., Shah, I. A., & Ahmad, G. 2021). This passage links the development of Orientalist discourse with the economic interests of the colonial powers. The West's intellectual constructions of the Orient served to justify their imperialist activities, which often centered around extracting wealth from the region (Ali Shah, S. A., & Wail, M. I. 2021). "I was beginning to feel that I had been, in some sense, imported to America for the express purpose of being made to work for a system that was indifferent to me" (Hamid, P. 67, ch. 7). It shows the West is not concerned about the interests of the colonized; rather it wants to make maximum profit by exploiting the talents of the "Orientals".

According to Edward Said's *Orientalism* "The Western academic and cultural discourse about the Orient, founded on centuries of European exploration, colonization, and military conquest, was a vehicle for justifying the economic exploitation of the Orient... It produced representations of the Orient as a land of backwardness, barbarism, and stagnation, which made it easier for Western powers to impose their economic interests." (Said, E Chapter 3). It proves that the West completely felt itself justified in exploiting the Orientals economically because such an exploitation, in their opinion, was vital for the economic interests of the West.

Conclusion:

The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* throws light on the circumstances which were prevalent in the world in general and in America and countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq in particular in late 90s and

2000s. Economic exploitation of the Orientals existed for a long time but the incident of 9/11 totally changed the shape of the world and paved the way for America to exploit the weaker Asian nations for her own interests. The destruction of the World Trade Centre created unrest in America (Lau L, *Re-Orientalism*). Hamid portrays its impact on 'others' through his protagonist Changez. Changez feels that he is being exploited. Through the lens of Said's *Orientalism* some aspects like economic exploitation or hegemony, post 9/11 scenario, exploitation in historical perspective and Orientalism and exploitation of the Orientals have been highlighted and analyzed in detail in this study. The study also reveals that initially Changez was a great fan of America. At Samson, as a financial analyst, he worked wholeheartedly not only for the development of the company but also to make his own fortune. But his enthusiasm dies down after the incident of 9/11 and he dissociates himself from American society. Thus, his assimilation into American society dashes to the ground.

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