



THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION IN THE NOVELS OF MOHSIN HAMID

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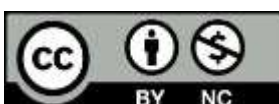
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Abstract: Mohsin Hamid's novels critique the socio-economic and political anxieties of a globalised world. By contrasting pre- and post-9/11 landscapes, the study explores the predatory attitudes of the elite, the ruthless corporate takeover of institutions, and the chilling rise of a pervasive surveillance apparatus. In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid depicts a late-1990s Lahore defined by stark class divides, where nuclear testing backdrop mirrors a volatile economic climate. Here, the wealthy elite exhibit a predatory consumerism, effortlessly swallowing smaller enterprises and leaving the marginalized to navigate a rigged financial system. This corporate ruthlessness evolves into a systemic geopolitical force in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Through the protagonist Changez's work at a premier valuation firm, the novel exposes the "fundamentals" of global capitalism—a cold, profit-driven ideology that demands the merciless restructuring and dismantling of companies regardless of human cost. Following the tragedy of September 11, this aggressive economic model seamlessly merges with a hyper-vigilant political atmosphere. The research analyses how Hamid portrays the immediate shift from corporate exploitation to state-sanctioned suspicion, cultural displacement, scathing indictment of how globalized capitalism and state surveillance work in tandem to commodify human lives and enforce a neo-imperial order.

Key words: Globalisation, Corporate Capitalism, Take overs, Rampant Consumerism, Neo-liberal order, Xenophobia, Surveillance State, emergency-911.

Globalization has undoubtedly dawned new era of rapid growth in the last three decades with rising per capita income, higher purchasing power etc. It has ushered in unprecedented technological growth in the field of IT, medicine and business, Globalization has turned the huge world into a tiny global village. Darker side of globalization is also worth noting. The unparalleled greed for profit, disappearance of boundaries, emergence of giant corporate, growing socio economic divide, migration to cities, human trafficking, drug dealings and unpredictable financial fluctuations has left many countries (especially Third world) devastated. Pakistan is one such country which has borne the brunt of globalization. Pakistan's anarchic state, military coups, pseudo-democratic rule, excessive dependence on other countries for financial aid, hugely unpopular decision to be a close ally of United States in their war on terrorism, failing economy, society grappling with problems, erosion of tribal nomadic life, people denied of basic amenities, factional politics, leader's greed for power, assassinations, corruption, increasing presence of foreign troops, drone attacks, continuing unrest with the neighbour and eventual rise and growth of fundamentalism and extremism are different facets of the same phenomenon called globalization. Globalization has left Pakistan in tatters.

Very often country in such turmoil forces the writers to wield their pens just as Bolshevik revolution and subsequent violence was instrumental in the genesis of Boris Pasternak's classic *Dr. Zhivago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Personal experience of imprisonment and forced labour during Stalin's epoch of terror, political oppression resulted in *The Gulag Archipelago*- a key work unparalleled in Russian or any other national





literature, Pathetic conditions of workers of industrial revolution era prompted Dickens to pen *Hard Times*. Similarly, Pakistan- a country of utmost significance and strategic importance among all south Asian countries, and its continuous history of violence, its politics and policies that have deformed or destroyed the lives of millions has been a source of prolonged contemplation and debate for many intellectuals. Today Pakistani writers feature prominently in the international literary scene as award winners or nominees, bestselling authors, festival speakers and, increasingly, topics for research students and critics. The success of novels such as Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (longlisted for the 2004 Man Booker Prize), Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007 Booker Prize nominee), Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (longlisted for the 2008 Booker), and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009 Orange Prize shortlist), have also inspired American-educated Pakistani writers such as Ali Sethi and Daniyal Mueenuddin. In addition to this one cannot also ignore writers such as Sara Suleri Goodyear, Aamer Hussein, Uzma Aslam Khan and Jamil Ahamed. Though all these writers are equally potent, none uniquely and compellingly portrays the new existential incoherence, its suspicion, blurring of old boundaries and penetration of the remotest societies on earth and growing divide and discontent between the rich and the poor, exposing the human self to unprecedented risks and temptation caused by capitalism and globalization, then Mohsin Hamid.

The first novel of Mohsin Hamid - "*Moth Smoke*" was published in 2000. The novel uses multiple narrative viewpoints. It examines the contemporary, corrupt, military dominated Pakistan hyped on the prospect of becoming a nuclear player even as corruption drains its political will. *Moth Smoke*, set in the defining summer of 1998 when the nuclear weapons were the talk of the town showcases the urban Pakistan where everything lies hidden under the veil of deceit and money. It portrays how the new evolved Pakistan is different from the clichéd stereotyped view. Fast-paced and unexpected, *Moth Smoke* portrays a contemporary Pakistan as far more vivid and disturbing than the exoticized images of South Asia familiar to most of the West. It was considered by some critics to be "the most interesting novel that came out of [its] generation of subcontinent writing" (Basu) Eminent novelist Anita Desai noted that

"One could not really continue to write, or read about, the slow seasonal changes, the rural backwaters, gossipy courtyards, and traditional families in a world taken over by gun-running, drug- trafficking, large-scale industrialism, commercial entrepreneurship, tourism, new money, nightclubs, boutiques... Where was the Huxley, the Orwell, the Scott Fitzgerald, or even the Tom Wolfe, McInerney, or Brett Easton Ellis to record this new world? Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke*, set in Lahore, is one of the first pictures we have of that world." (Desai)

Moth Smoke traces the disintegration of Daru Shezad, a junior banker and a one-time boxer with a fondness for hash, ecstasy pills and heroin. Daru loses his job for insulting a client in the bank. His insecurity is heightened by the return from the US of a childhood friend and rival Ozi. Ozi has everything Daru doesn't: a Mitsubishi Pajero, (contrary to Daru's own Suzuki) a well-paid job, a foreign education, a wealthy, corrupt father and a beautiful wife, Mumtaz, who leads a secret double life as an investigative journalist with the name - Zulfikar Manto. For Lahore's upper class, these assets are everything - life preservers that allow them to maintain their precarious position above the grimy, impoverished world inhabited by their servants. Hamid acidly characterizes this as the air-conditioned/non-air-conditioned divide: the power-hungry AC units of the rich collapse the city's electricity grid just as their corruption has drained the life from the state. Hamid expresses his resentment strongly through the voice of Daru's former economics professor-Julius Superb who elaborates that there are two social classes in Pakistan and the distinction between members of these two





groups is made on the basis of control of an important resource: air-conditioning. He fumes at how Pakistan's elite "have managed to re-create for themselves the living conditions of say, Sweden, without leaving the dusty plains of the subcontinent." (Hamid 102)

As the trio- Daru, Ozi and Mumtaz spin through a series of decadent parties for Lahore's bored elite, Daru and Mumtaz begin a disastrous affair. Like the moths of the title, reduced to smoke by their fatal fascination with candle flames, Daru has an appetite for self-destruction. Against a backdrop of escalating nuclear tensions between India and Pakistan - the friends agree that "the first place they'd nuke is Lahere" - his social and financial position crumble as his drug habit and obsession with Mumtaz spiral in this world, the price of a moment of chemical or sexual ecstasy is no less than annihilation. The novel's acute depiction of young men and women trapped between two worlds has the ring of experience (Hamid, who grew up in Lahore and attended Princeton and Harvard law school, wrote it while working as a management consultant in New York). *Moth Smoke* lays bare the greed and insecurity of Pakistan's rich, and their devastating effect on their poorer neighbours. As the selfish but pragmatic Ozi puts it:

"You have to have money these days. The roads are falling apart, so you need a Pajero or a Land Cruiser... The colleges are overrun with fundos... so you have to go abroad... The police are corrupt and ineffective, so you need private security guards... People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller, so if you love your family, you'd better take your piece now, while there's still some left." Observation this sharp needs no elaboration." (Hamid 82)

Pakistan's ever widening divide between the rich and poor is poignantly brought out in an incident where Ozi's Land cruiser mows down a boy riding a bicycle and Daru tries in vain to save him by quickly shifting the injured boy to the nearby hospital in his Suzuki car. Hamid tactfully uses the Land Cruiser, Suzuki and bicycle as signifiers of economic inequality. What is evident is the insensitivity of the rich towards the poor and their sufferings. "The most impressive of Hamid's gifts is the clear-sightedness of his look at the power structure of a society that has shifted from the old feudalism, based on birth, to the new Pakistani feudalism based on wealth' (Desai)

One can hardly miss Hamid taking a dig at the stupidity of conducting a nuclear test when the country was on the verge of economic collapse and the hard times yet to come due to sanctions. Hamid also mocks at the blissfully ignorant jubilant general public both in Pakistan and India, unaware of the repercussions of nuclear race. Hamid voices his opinion through the character of Murad Shah. He exhorts "You boys think we've done a great thing, but you'll see. Difficult times are ahead." (Hamid 134) Very visible fight against globalization is Murad Shah's tactics to disrupt the newly introduced cab services which only rich can afford to save his rickshaw service. At the heart of the novel is growing disparity between poor and rich.

Moth Smoke does have some flaws. Hamid employs a faulty analogy and the names have resonance for anyone familiar with Mughal history. As Anita Desai points out that the names sit oddly upon their namesakes: Ozi does inherit the crown of wealth from his father, and by the end of the book he has Daru thrown into prison, certain to be hanged. But he bears no resemblance to the Emperor Aurangzeb, who was known not only for his ferocity but also for his piety and austerity. Daru has had a college education but he longs, it seems, only for a banker's job and a car as smart as that of his rival and shows little inclination toward the arts or the Sufi tradition of harmony between religious communities as Dara Shikoh did. Then there is the problem of Mumtaz: historically, she was the mother of the two and beloved of their father, who built the Taj Mahal as her tomb.



The analogy proves fragile and, like a glass goblet put to rough use, shatters. The flaws can be overlooked as *Moth Smoke* was a debut experimental novel of Hamid.

Hamid took a giant leap from being experimental to near perfection in his second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (novel short listed for Booker prize 2007) It is one of the finest post 9/11 novel. In the summer of 9/11, before he left for London, he had already completed first draft of his second novel. It was to be about a young Pakistani working in corporate America who decides to return to Pakistan and then "September 11" happened. Most of the world saw 9/11 as a clash between two cultures, two world views- the Muslim world and the west Judeo-Christian in its values although until then secular in its practice. The importance of 9/11 couldn't be overstated. So Mohsin Hamid threw out the novel of which he had written the first draft and began another novel. After 9/11 when Writers of the calibre of John Updike, Jay McInerney, Jonathan Safran Foer, Claire Messud, Don DeLillo, Philip Roth, Kalfus and Martin Amis seem to take the easy way out by retreating to depiction of domestic life or by relying on widely circulated clichés about terrorists found in websites of Koranic pseudo-scholarship of jihad mongering journalism and propaganda videos as the source for their novels and Writer of the stature of Ian McEwan accepted that he is now "wearisome to confront invented characters." (Mishra 01) Hamid's second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* masterfully examines the implications of 9/11. After six years *The Reluctant fundamentalist* came out to international acclaim in 2007. Hamid looked at the event of 9/11 as an act of retaliation by the victims of capitalism dispelling the notion that fundamentalism is nurtured by religion. Hamid in this novel made use of only one narrative-a Pakistani, one speaker whose voice we constantly hear. The narrator, narrates a story without realizing that in the process of narrating he is revealing much of himself just like in Kazuo Ishiguro novel, *The Remains of the Day*. This novel is unique because the novel takes place in real time. Although only one narrator speaks in the novel, one can infer from what he says the reaction of the person to whom he is speaking. The other person who remains silent all through the novel becomes real. We learn a great deal about him. This kind of writing was mastered and perfected by Victorian poet Robert Browning in poetry famously known as dramatic monologue. Dramatic monologue in a novel is a unique and refreshing structural achievement.

The entire novel takes place at a café in Lahore. It comprises of a single conversation between a bearded Pakistani named interestingly as Changez and an American. This brief, charming, and quietly furious conversation recasts a story so familiar as to seem almost banal: A young man arrives in a great metropolis to seek his fortune, at length realizes that the new life he has adopted constitutes a betrayal of his deepest self, and finally-sadder, wiser-returns home. But Hamid handles his material deftly and stylishly to produce a multilayered and thoroughly gripping book which works as a poignant love story, a powerful dissection of how US imperialist machinations, it's never ending quest for profit have turned so many people against the world's superpower. It turns out to be nerve wracking tale of disenchantment and disillusionment. Novel goes to the heart of the most important issue of our time-Clash of civilization, two cultures and world views. Novel is not judgmental nor it offers any answers but it does pose many questions to traditional Judeo-Christian west.

The protagonist of the novel Changez is a Pakistani. Though he hails from a rich family, the wealth had dwindled over-a period of time. So studies hard and obtains a full scholarship at Princeton University. In order to support his expenses at Princeton he takes up three part time jobs. He makes sure that he gets jobs at places where nobody goes. One of the jobs he takes up is at "Library of near eastern studies." This is the first masterful hint Hamid gives to highlight the fact that Americans have no interest in studying other cultures other than their own. Changez sees gothic buildings at Princeton which are artificially aged by acid treatment. Deliberate false aging process of buildings at Princeton stands out as a sign of America trying to create history where





there is none. These are early signs of crack appearing in the façade of paradise called America. The disillusionment only deepens as the novel progresses. Very soon Changez realizes that his professors at Princeton are neither titans nor does America is brimming with generosity.

Changez's extraordinary talent fetches him a job in a company called Underwood Samson. Interestingly it is a company which values the ailing target companies supposed to be taken over by a much bigger thriving company. The guiding principle of the Underwood Samson is to rely upon fundamentals, to get to the core, foundation of the target company. Changez excels, becomes an expert business investigator. He becomes an expert business fundamentalist. Reluctance in what he is doing only comes later. Thus, the title The Reluctant Fundamentalist. The title doesn't refer to religion. Contrary to expectation not once in the novel does Hamid mention words like religion, faith, spirituality. The name 'Changez' is also carefully chosen. Hamid completely disagrees with western critics who look at name 'Changez' as 'changes' Hamid comments:

"Changez" is the Urdu name for Genghis, as in Genghis Khan. It's the name of a warrior, and the novel plays with the notion of a parallel between war and international finance, which is Changez occupation. But at the same time, the name cautions against a particular reading of the novel. Genghis attacked the Arab Muslim civilization of his time, so Changez would be an odd choice of name for a Muslim fundamentalist ("Mohsin Hamid: 'We Are Already Afraid'")

Changez initially loves New York for its Cosmopolitan nature. His office in a high rising building, forty second floor to be precise, fills him with a sense of pride. He feels that America is another world from Pakistan. He feels that his feet were supported by the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known. But such comparisons often lead him to more troubles. He thinks of his ancestral land of Indus Valley civilization where well planned cities flourished even while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. The topsy-turvy position of the present makes him feel ashamed. His disenchantment with America and its citizen further grows when he is holidaying in Greece along with his companions. Their lack of deference and refinement appals him. The Americans behave as if they "were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class." (Hamid 21)

While in Manila on a business trip Changez Witnessing the horror of 9/11 on TV smiles. He is remarkably pleased at the sight of collapsing Twin towers. To be fair to Changez, his pleasure was about a smug, defiant America being "visibly brought to her knees", (Hamid 73) and not about havoc the attack caused to innocents, as it may seem. When he returns to America he sees a different America. On his arrival he is separated from his team at immigration. While his colleagues join queue for American citizens, he is asked join the one for foreigners. His beloved New York is no longer cosmopolitan. He sees New York being invaded by flags. Changez observes that America is being gripped by super over patriotism. He sees Pakistani cabdrivers being beaten, the FBI raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. He hears tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world-stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals. He sees a country possessed by xenophobia, distrust, suspicion and hostility. Underwood Samson itself takes serious objection to him growing beard. In the meantime, war looms large over Pakistan because of attacks on Indian parliament. Yet Changez continues to ignore and be clad in his armour of denial.

This armour is pierced on his next mission to Valparaiso, Chile. He arrives there to value a publishing company about to be taken over. The publishing company's chief Jaun- Bautista asks some poignant pointed personal questions and pushes Changez into a deep bout of introspection.





"Does it trouble you," he inquired, "to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?" "We just value," I replied. "We do not decide whether to buy or to sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it." He nodded; he lit a cigarette and took a sip from his glass of wine. Then he asked, "Have you heard of the janissaries?" "No" I said. "They were Christian boys," he explained, "captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations so they had nothing else to turn to." (Hamid 151)

The conversation leaves him with no doubt that he was a modern day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to him. Interestingly abbreviation of Underwood Samson is U.S. Underwood Samson just like U.S believes in ruthless evaluation of ailing company. It facilitates taking over. It's over insistence on relying on fundamentals goes well with US's excessive attachment to maxim of maximum returns. US and its capitalistic attitude, its constant interference in the affairs of others-Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iraq, the manner in which America conducted itself in the SUNDAY TIMES BE

World emerges to be real reasons for rise and growth of fundamentalism. Changez decides to refuse So participate any longer in facilitating US project of domination. He returns to Pakistan and takes up a job as a lecturer in a university. He furiously advocates disengagement of his country with America. Soon he gathers followers. He persuades many to participate in demonstrations for greater independence in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs. These demonstrations are, as usual, projected by the foreign press as anti-American.

There is a parallel narrative in the novel-Changez's strained relationship with Erica. Erica often retreats into nostalgic fantasies about her childhood sweetheart-Charls, who had died of cancer two years earlier. She has difficulty in making love with Changez. This becomes possible only when he pretends to be Chris. Erica can be seen as a contraction of "Am-Erica." Even when presented with a considerate, highly capable, and attractive new potential partner, Erica keeps looking longingly back in time for her dead love. That he was named "Chris" seems no coincidence either. America, the novel hints, clings in isolation to its own cultural shreds, Christianity among them, instead of entering into genuine cultural, political, and economic exchange. Erica's depression and apparent disappearance refers to recent loss of direction, sense of uncertainty after the trauma of 9/11. The Reluctant Fundamentalist's nuanced treatment of Erica parallels its presentation of America as endlessly attractive and self-absorbed rather than wilfully destructive of self or others. Another important character in the novel is an American to whom Changez narrates the whole story to in a café in Lahore. He is a burly man with commanding presence. We can infer from what Changez says that American is nervous and suspicious. He prefers to sit with his backs to the wall. There is an ominous bulge on his jacket. Can it be up-jacket holster favoured by many CIA agents? Is he a CIA agent sent to assassinate Changez? One inescapable reference is of Kurtz and Marlowe from Conrad's novel "The Heart of Darkness." Changez says that he felt like a "Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe" (Hamid 183) It is not clear whether Changez also intends to kill the American. The tourist is escorted to his hotel "The Pearl Continental" at the end of the novel. Could the word "Pearl" allude to a certain execution of the listener at the end? The novel ends on this delicious note of uncertainty. Who is predator and who is the prey? Who is the assassin and who is victim? Who will triumph in this clash which has begun after 9/11? Answer is not simple. No one is absolutely sure. What Hamid's novel does is to hold up a mirror to the reader and say you are complicated, the way you are reading is complicated and the characters are complicated and that is the world.

Through Changez, Hamid simply tries to tell the Big brother the answer to the question Americans pose regularly - "Why does everyone hate us?" And he does so with a certain conviction that would make many





uncomfortable or unsettled about how they can repair a damage that seems to be getting more serious with every "progressive" step - A case in point being handling of the current conflicts in. Pakistan between the government and the radical rebels (Are the steps taken there well thought-out and planned? Will they yield the results that are desired?). More alienation from people in such troubled countries would not only mean more Osamas, but possibly more Changezs as well.

Hamid should be commended for writing two novels which highlights that increasing class divide inequality in a society caused due to invasion of capitalism and America's xenophobic attitude suspicion, hostility towards other cultures, its relentless quest for profit, its obsession to dwell on the glorious past, its predatory intent, do encourage contempt in others is the main source aiding the birth and growth of fundamentalism, terrorism and not religion. Hamid's novels also warn that it is crucial to avoid stereotypes that simplistically presume that anti-Americanism on the part of a Muslim must be produced by Islamic indoctrination. The novels quiet convincingly demonstrates that it is possible for a Muslim to develop contempt for America on substantially non-religious grounds. Novel also highlights what many have failed to grasp - that globalization and capitalism has not led to a flat world marked by increasingly cosmopolitan openness. Rather it has sharpened old antipathies and incited new ones and unleashed a cacophony of opposed interest and claims which ultimately lead to 9/11.

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