

Original Article

Displacement and Rootlessness: A Study of Cultural Identity in the Reluctant Fundamentalist

Dr. Prakash B. Bhange

Associate Prof. & Head Dept. of English Shri Guru Buddhiswami Mahavidyalaya, Purna (jn.)Dist. Parbhani

Email: bhangeprakash@gmail.com

Manuscript ID:

JRD -2025-171108

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 17

Issue 11

Pp. 48-50

November. 2025

Submitted: 15 Oct. 2025

Revised: 25 Oct. 2025

Accepted: 10 Nov. 2025

Published: 30 Nov. 2025

Abstract

Mohsin Hamid, born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1971, is a famous novelist in English literature. His famous voice in literature is focusing on themes like identity, migration, globalization, and cultural displacement. His second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize, published in 2007, earned him international acknowledgment. This novel is the form of a dramatic monologue. It looks at identity crises after 9/11, the suspicion directed at Muslims in the West, and the fragility of belonging. It's simple yet unclear style prompts readers to challenge stereotypes and face the insecurity of cultural identities. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* points out the themes of identity, displacement by the world-famous events of September 11, 2001, Islamist terrorist suicide attacks by al-Qaeda against the World-Trade Center in New York City, America in 2001. The chief character, Changez, Pakistani young man, comes to the United States in search of academic success and professional recognition. However, his sentiment of belonging step by step falls apart as he faces ethnic discrimination, political dislike, and personal failure. This paper argues that both physical migration and psychological separation make a lasting sense of rootlessness, which destabilizes cultural identity. Hamid shows the broken and unsettled nature of belonging in a globalized world filled with neo-imperialism, suspicion, and cultural distrust through Changez's stressed relationship with America, his love for Erica, and his rediscovery of his homeland.

Keywords: Displacement, Rootlessness, Cultural Identity, Postcolonialism, Diaspora.

Introduction

Literature mirrors society, revealing its anxieties, aspirations, and contradictions, providing enjoyment while documenting the essence of a time, illustrating the intricate connection between historical occurrences and individual experiences. Here public tensions have been very cleverly converted into challenges making clearer to broader cultural disputes. Islamic terrorist suicidal attacks by al-Qaeda against the United States on 11 Sept., 2001 devastated the International solidarity. And overall international politics went in against of Muslims and Muslim countries extensively. As a result Islam phobia, and suspicion emerged as burning concerns for Muslim immigrants. And the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid is the voice of Muslim immigrants especially in USA. The novelist used a dramatic monologue as a narrative technique, and compels readers to derive their own opinions in regard if the issue. Changez, protagonist, as a representative of Muslim Community, a young Pakistani had a dream of settling in American but that unraveled following 9/11 attack. Changez's experiences and challenges faced by numerous displaced individuals carrying cultural diversions. The novelist, Hamid projected how displacement interrupts belonging and renders identity political via Changez's experiences in American corporate culture, his unsuccessful relationship with Erica, his American partner, and his eventual return to Pakistan revealed a feeling of an alien from another planet. The novel exposed postcolonial concepts of hybridity, diaspora, and cultural reconciliation by pointing out how lonesomeness can segregate and empower persons, transforming dislocation into an opportunity for introspection and assessment and so on. Changez nurtured a dream of enrolling at Princeton University, the center of America's intellectual and cultural beat or community.



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrvb.org/>

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.17836774



Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Prakash B. Bhange, Associate Prof. & Head Dept. of English Shri Guru Buddhiswami Mahavidyalaya, Purna (jn.)Dist. Parbhani

How to cite this article:

Bhange, P. B. (2025). Displacement and Rootlessness: A Study of Cultural Identity in the Reluctant Fundamentalist. *Journal of Research and Development*, 17(11), 48–50.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17836774>

For him from Lahore's vanishing dignity, this success offers acknowledgment and the chance for transformation and framing his career as an elite one and he preferred the Princeton University was an emblem of excellence and status, paves the way for a bright future in those days and the novelist Hamid illustrated it as the American Dream. Changez, our protagonist, proves his metal and secures a top position at Underwood Samson, a valuating company and embodying American entrepreneurship. Initially Changez seizes this discipline as liberating one and a feeling of inclusion in a competitive setting and connects him to esteemed social groups. In America, belonging has basics and is linked to the immigrant's willingness to conform. Changez begins to embrace behaviors and attitudes that conceal his cultural origins. He exercises detachment, restrains his feelings, and prioritizes the principles of profit and efficiency. Despite this exterior, his Pakistani heritage stays concealed yet relentless. This period emphasizes the illusion of immersion. America asserts that it values merit. Immigrants must constantly modify their identities to align with implicit cultural norms. Changez's feeling of belonging is insecure; it relies not on his real value but on his capacity to remove his distinctions. In Changez's smooth career the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 occurs and his dream has been shattered. This incidence changes overall political ground and transforms the cultural climate in America. And for Changez, it was a alarming response: he confesses while observing the Twin Towers collapsed. It reveals a concealed rage against American supremacy and an acknowledgment of the liability of a superpower. Following 9/11, America experiences a significant cultural transformation. Then onward everywhere suspension was leading to stereotypes and antagonism towards Muslim immigrants in America. For Changez, a Muslim look, his overall appearance - long beard, obviously the most noticeable symbol of his peculiarity now sets him apart as an outsider. He observes the looks of others with suspension the way they look at him. As a result whenever he went airport the staff and coworkers were maintaining distance. He observes the crises exposing the brittle quality of multiculturalism. In normal condition, immigrants may be welcomed, but in times of crisis, they seem as "Others." A number of immigrants unexpectedly feel alienated by a society.

An important aspect of the novel is Changez's relationship with Via Erica, his American female partner, who is totally disappointed by the loss of her ex-boyfriend Chris. Similarly, Erica seems in confusion to accept Changez completely, it symbolically implies that Americans are not in position to accept its immigrants openheartedly. Changez zeals for intimacy with Erica but her feelings for Chris didn't allow it as a genuine bond. Here she embodies America—fascinating, strong, and attractive, but ultimately difficult to get to outsiders. Here Erica and Hamid demonstrate the emotional and cultural disconnection that foreigner's prejudiced experience.

Eventually, disappointed with America, Changez finally decides to go back to Lahore, his native. This symbolizes a discharge of America's imperialistic nature, dominating nation on outside peoples or countries. On the contrary, years spent living in America have transformed him, he was too dislocated by his own people. Here Changez represents his diasporic experience and found in a state of belonging to neither his native land, Lahore nor his chosen nation, America. In Lahore, he experiences a sense of seclusion due to the political turmoil and conservatism and in the United States, he is treated as an outsider. Here Hamid employs this in-betweenness to reflect on globalization, resulting in individuals who are everlastingly unsettled. For Changez, a lack of roots transforms into a continual state of disturbance and disruption. Now he was neither of the sides.

The novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, represents the themes of hybridity, immigrational discrimination, harassment and cultural despair and distress. Homi K. Bhabha, one of the prominent scholars of Cultural Studies, used the concept "Third Space": a concept of cultural hybridity (mixture) where different cultures interconnect to form new, mix identities. Here, the protagonist Changez appeared caught between East and West, not completely American and not fully Pakistani at all. The novelist develops a dramatic monologue, a narrative technique. Changez addresses an unknown American in a coffee shop in Lahore where he merely shares his history and discreetly intimidates his readers. Here it is not easy to be classified Changez as peaceful or aggressive, assimilated or defiant, loyal or disloyal. The novel illustrates how postcolonial literature destabilizes unyielding classifications and categorization.

The most noteworthy transformation in Changez is his transition from personal dislocation to political realization and consciousness. His sense of isolation from America develops a sense of criticism of its imperialistic nature. Changez begins instructing in Lahore and motivates his students to question American supremacy in regard of it. This alteration illustrates how displacement can result in increased awareness

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* points out crucially how literature reflects society and its anxieties, particularly after the terrorist attack of 9/11. Through Changez's narrative, Hamid exposes the delicate essence of immigrant's self-identity, the indefinite aspect of multiculturalism, and the hardships encompassed by persons situated between cultural mixtures. It is emphasized in the novel that how globalization and post-9/11 attacks politics increased political vulnerability of migrant identity, turning rootlessness into isolation and rebelliousness. The novelist demonstrates that identity frequently revolves, through the combination of personal experiences and political themes. It is acrossed the prejudiced treatment by the different cultures and national policy. Changez's journey—from absorption to isolation, from love to anguish, and from displacement to providing disapproval—represents the multifaceted spirit of belonging by cynicism and colonialism. In the end, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* illustrates more than merely a story of an individual's experiences as well. It represents the journeys of several migrants facing the volatility of

globalization and the penalty of political conflict. It noteworthy to remind to readers ever that literature can encapsulate the details of identity, displacement, and belonging during historical havoc. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a forceful examination of dislocation and lack of belonging in the post-9/11 era in the world.

Hamid emphasizes the immigrant identity, trapped between the desire to belong and the truth of segregation through Changez's bitter experiences. Here Changez's story illustrates the irony of immigrants: migrants habitually the sense they belong nowhere, but their rootlessness makes them to become keen critics of prejudiced authority. Changez's associations—with America, with Erica, and with Pakistan—reveal the fragmented essence of belonging in a world influenced by empire and mistrust. Although rootlessness brings suffering in one's life, it also makes compatible for diagnostic deliberation and political authority. Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, featuring a complex design and significant themes, makes clear of straightforward answers, encouraging readers to tackle the uncertainty of cultural identity in a globalized society. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals how displacement reshapes identity and how lack of roots serves as both a pain and a means through combination of personal story with political analysis. In nutshell the novel stands as an important piece in postcolonial literature, asking questions through focusing the struggles of migrants from all over the world while facing the assurances of belonging associated with the American Dream.

References

1. Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.
2. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
3. Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 2002.
4. Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge, 2007.
5. Upstone, Sara. "Globalization, Postcolonialism and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 46, 2010.
6. Ghosh-Schellhorn, Martina. *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Rodopi, 2009.
7. Morey, Peter. "The Rules of the Game Have Changed: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Post-9/11 Fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, 2011.