

# Dominance And Imbalance Of Power In The Reluctant Fundamentalist: A New Historicist Critical Study

Sobia Rana<sup>1</sup>, Sara Anwar<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Abdul Waheed Qureshi<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Rab Nawaz Khan<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD scholar, Area Study Center, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad.

<sup>2</sup>PhD Scholar, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Email: [waheedqureshi@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:waheedqureshi@awkum.edu.pk)

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Email: [rabnawaz@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:rabnawaz@awkum.edu.pk)

## Abstract

New Historicism (NH) has emerged in the practice of criticism since 1990s with Stephen Greenblatt's introduction of the term in 1982 (Nasrullah Mambrol, 2017). The theory describes the constituents of the history and says that history is the self-contained and whole entity rather than the series of incidents. Present study is also being conducted in the perspective of NH being employed on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) of Mohsin Hamid. The novel comparatively analyzes the core values of native and USA culture and intention soon after 9/11 incident. The elements of NH are being described in the present study to highlight the presence of core values of the theory for the purpose of manipulation of power relations between powerful and marginalized nations, attitude of capitalist society and the system of marginalizing the values through systematic intentions. The findings of the study describe that New Historicist elements are present in the novel under study.

**Keywords:** Capitalist Society; History; Marginalized Nations; New Historicism; Power Relations

## Introduction

New Historicism (NH) is also kept as the new strategic interpretation of the text which was firstly recorded in 1972. NH can be defined as the "a cultural analysis form through which the text (as the product of culture) is being analyzed under the shade of power and interaction in historical perspectives being operated within a society (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). Although, being formerly defined as the philosophy, yet, later on it has been considered as the theory and employed as the type of criticism. Brannigan (1998) says that though, NH is not a new case of study, yet, it could be employed to the Greek stories and heroes. Cantor says that NH has the motto that there can be a connectivity of anything to other in the same series of events (1993). Kramer and Maza (2006) are of the view that NH reconceives the history on literature model. Basically,

historicists describe that there can be no change in the notions of historical facts and behaviors but the New Historicists say that the historical values change over time. The rise of NH was based on Post-Structuralism as Mukesh (2003) says that the shifting of closed discourse to the opened systems is the main aspect of NH as it manipulates the discourse in which it is produced and compares it with the most powerful discourse of the world.

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is known as the masterpiece of Hamid which is also called as autobiography of the writer. Hamid is among those writers who wrote about the contemporary society and history of Pakistan in his novels. The writing style has been shifted after the emergence of new global life in the world especially after 9/11 air attacks in USA. The novel revolves around the life of Changez who has been studying business and has been

working in an international firm. Changez has to come back to Pakistan after 9/11. It affects his life; his philosophy changes and becomes a mentor and a professor of finance at a local university. There, he critically examines the new emerging trends and thoughts and teaches them to his students. The present study focuses on Hamid's depiction of the history and the new historical views in the novel.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Though modern society believes in equal choice of living and opportunities but it lacks the values when it comes to capitalistic thoughts. New ways of marginalizing people come to be flourished in society for unequal power and in the name of values. This inequality, in the modern age, make people marginalized in thoughts and living.

### Objectives

- To explore the notion of power and inequality presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
- To understand the ways in which social inequalities marginalize nations in an age of capitalism.

### Research Questions

1. What facets of New Historicism are presented in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?
2. How does a capitalist society marginalize middle classes through unequal power and values in the context of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*?

### Significance of the Study

The present study helps to understand the inlaid inequalities in modern society which leads towards the thoughts of equal chance of living and opportunities. The study is significant as it helps to understand the modern society i.e., how the global (Western) society marginalized the middle class and Eastern people in terms of values and power.

### Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative and is conducted to understand the existence of new historicism in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). The study has adopted the theory of New Historicism proposed by Greenblatt (1990). Close reading of the selected text is done through the method of critical analysis.

### Elements of New Historicism

Following are some of the elements of NH (tebj4, 2014):

- Literature is used as showcase of cultural and historical context.
- History is the whole entity rather than series of events.
- No text has single background.
- All types of criticism are due the circumstances of the time and it cannot be unchangeable meanings in any literature.
- It focuses on the government, culture and upper-class society, and analyzes their institutions which are based on the strong political and anthropological basis.

Holloway (2020) describes the following elements of NH:

- This school of thought focuses on the history as well as on the historical events.
- The text can be studied on its merits and demerits solely.
- The textual work can be understood in the social and cultural context of production.

### Analysis of Data

“It seems an obvious thing to say, but you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins.”

The lines describe the inter-textually and the ironical interpretation in the perspectives of elements of comparing 'native culture' to the 'strong culture'. Pakistanis are called as "terrorists" soon after 9/11 which was postulated and propagated by the media with the self-experience in the shape of being native and threatened by the American 'noble' citizens, the writer is tended to call them as "assassins". The trend behind this recognition is the comparison of the terms being employed to one nation against the other. The textual description is there when the employed terms to the one nation are being strongly accepted by the world but at the same time, the alligators have to be called by their names. This piece of text also describes the showcasing of culture where the Americans are also called as assassins. The inclusion of such terms as "assassins" is the mouthpiece of the nation which is blamed. The historical event is not described here where the 9/11 is being produced beyond the scene while the things are also reverted to the natives who internally blame the nonnative nations. This event of 9/11 has changed the minds of the people as a whole so the piece of text is also describing that there is the need of study of the whole history where the nonnatives especially Pakistanis had not been able to retrieve the noble status in USA.

"When my turn came, I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the others appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking."

The intended semantics in the text is about the interpretations of the challenge to the global democracy where the state of Islamic republic is known as the state of fundamentalists where the ruler would be moderated rather than extremist or democratic. The dictatorship of Pakistan is not in favor to the whole world because the world needs the moderated rulers in Pakistan. The answer of the question in these lines truly illustrate the inter-textuality i.e., if

the perceptions of any (foreign) cultural group are not fulfilled by the natives of the Pakistan, then they seek to overthrow the regime and opt for their own selectee. As the nuclear capability of the state of Pakistan is not favoring the other states' rulers of the West, therefore, they keep it be in the safe hands rather than in the hands of one person who could be fundamentalist. The political anthropology is too clear here when the global politicians are not in favor of the Islamic Nuclear state. The cultural interpretation of the lines is that most of the natives of Pakistan are in favor of dictatorship rather than democracy, as the essential Islamic teachings are appropriate for presidential system of governance, while the global politicians and the global establishment do not want to see the same thoughts in the country. The NH is quite clear here where the diversity of the cultural aspects is much evident in the state to state as is described.

"Time only moves in one direction. Remember that. Things always change."

NH has the aspects of changing rather than of the maintaining. The cultural diversity is much in line here with the novel being described while the names of the people are being alternated because the things seem changing. The times (history) have the linear direction as the whole entity moves in one direction but the important aspects which are the ideas and theory, according to NH, change and vary ever because the perceptions of the people, standards, statuses and intentions have to be guided through the systems and the situation being described in the diversity of the scenario. These lines themselves describe that there are certain elements of NH in the novel where the behaviors and intentions of the people vary from time to time and the whole history never changes. The history is sequential and the incidents are part and parcel of the time being described in the novel.

"... status, as in any traditional, class-conscious society, declines more slowly than wealth."

The marginalization of nonnative social status is always there when in the West, the native society is quite opposite. The personal and historical experiences in the perspectives of NH are being described here when it comes to the analysis of the upper-class and status conscious society. The observation against the upper-class conscious society is there as it is being considered the US society where the wealth and capital have great importance to maintain the relations while on the other hand, the nonnative society is going to transform itself in the West. The perspectives of describing the present situation in the novel are that the nonnatives i.e., the Pakistani society would not be status-conscious as they are going to be. The cultural ethnicity must be followed with regard to the preservation of the values and traditions of the natives.

“It is remarkable indeed how we human beings are capable of delighting in the mating call of a flower while we are surrounded by the charred carcasses of our fellow animals.”

Social as well as the constructed society is being satirized here by calling it with the name of “animals”, who almost always remain in concern with the capitalist ideals rather than making relations with the nonnatives’ average class people. True “humans” in these lines are told to make the calls and relations with the same class people by presenting them the flowers and wishing them good. At the same time, the author is going to describe the upper-class people who are unaware from such type of feelings and remain concerned with making the middle and other classes marginalized through their system of administration and values. The constructive values which are being presented to them are almost of the hollowness where the fragrance of meeting and relations is too abandoned. The satire is there on the society which has the true humanistic feelings and values while it is being marginalized by the social apparatuses who belongs to the high capital. The author has analyzed the social and

state systems in which cruel people do administer while the fair and loving people have to work under them.

“[...] I stated to them among other things that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America.”

The ruling and powerful class is being studied and analyzed in NH where power plays significant role in the manipulation of the ideas and values. The humanistic feelings are described as abandoned in the contemporary society of USA where the prestige rests with the natives while the other(s) are being subdued to be the colonized or frightened beings, only for killing or to be assassinated. The power relations and the constructed values, which are dimensions and core subject of NH, are being called as the “snatching of living” rights by the powerful state of USA. The novel intentionally calls such people as the controllers of other people through fear and their killing. The history itself proceeds with the refine ideas that as the nonnatives do not reach to the standard of the progressive people, so, they need to be taught (harsh lesson) so that they would rush towards progressivism.

“But surely it is the gist that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you — an American — will agree, it is the thrust of one’s narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one’s details.”

NH has a view that history is not the sequence of the incidents rather, it is the constructed and as a whole entity which is needed to be discussed in the spectrum of the describing people. The natives of USA define history in their own view without taking care of the past and incidents or the social norms. Its people are only concerned to describe the things as they are supposed to be the true tellers and that there cannot be existing description or fair description of the society, they tell others. “The

thrust of one” which “counts” means to say that the desire of description would only be acceptable in the USA, while others would be at the state of obeying and accepting. On the other hand, the writer intends to illustrate that the Americans describe the events and history in their own way in the same fashion in which NH works regarding description of the history.

“Glaring is something we men of Lahore take seriously...”

Comparison of the cultural norms is being made here in the perspective of Pakistani and Western society. “Glaring” is being referred to as the ‘gazing’ or looking over a person — the usual phenomenon where people evaluate one’s personality or beauty while the same phenomenon is supposed to be a pride when someone’s personality is being analyzed in the perspectives of looking into the ability, qualification, beauty or honor of someone. Gazing and glaring are supposed to be the bad names in contemporary Pakistani society where the norms are not same as are in the West. The comparison of a culture in view of other culture is the main aspect of NH which is employed here and the standards are being told to the contemporary Pakistani society.

“It seemed to me then — and to be honest, sir seems to me still — that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority.... Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only in the rest of humanity, but also in your own.”

NH describes the comparison of the one culture with the most powerful and acknowledged another culture in the world. In the present lines, the values are being illustrated in such a way that the “shared pain” is not there in the society and the thing which is much evident, is

the posturing of the society as the most progressive in the world without the community or social structure. The structure which is being described here is the structure of capitalism and “superiority” in which the domination of other culture(s) and society has been the idea of the Americans. The description of the American society is being described here if it becomes helping and supporting to share the pains and hardships of other nonnative societies in the form of care and engagement but these elements are abandoned in USA. The suggestion being made in these lines is that the US society by considering the hardships of the people equally and considering the whole society members as humans can also be helpful for its own natives purely as by doing so, it will make a history and US society is the most thrilling with regard to preservation of its own ideas and beliefs.

“They try to resist change. Power comes from becoming change.”

US society is the most satirized one in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in which the whole society revolves around the concept of ‘no change’; it follows the rash attitude towards ruling the world and wants this the same forever. The ethnicity and culture which are being described in the novel, highlight the existing culture of the US who are not in favor to modify their policies and behaviors to handle the world. The unequal power relations of the capitalist and marginalized nations are being described here when the social norms and values become quite alarming for the rest of the world. The same message is being illustrated in these lines to the nonnative society of Pakistan that they would modify their behaviors and intentions so that the power could be earned as the earning of the power is totally dependent upon the change of the behavior.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the theory of New Historicism exposes the hidden inequalities of power and history in which the upper and dominant nations try to control the beliefs of the

marginalized societies or nations. The analysis describes that Hamid has truly depicted and made comparison of both the cultures of Pakistan and USA in which the elements of NH are too evident. The study also describes that the dominant society highlights its own culture in a biased way or in its own perspectives rather than the natives. As unequal power relations and the systematic marginalization has been the core subject of NH since its emergence, same is the case with this study where inequalities have been the part and parcel of the history which are being described here that the middle class has concern to each other while the upper and capitalist society has different behavior which is free from the feelings, love and care of each other but it still constitutes the history as (their) prominent one.

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