

Study Of Tendency of Repression of the Protagonist in the Novel the Reluctant Fundamentalist

Aashay A. Yawale

M.A English Semester 3, Dept. Of English, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur

Abstract: Literature has long been seen as a reflection of human existence due to its interaction with human thoughts, action and growth, Readers occasionally encounter challenging characters who are not very vocal about their problems and situations. One such character is Changez from the 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. This study seeks to analyze Changez's tendency to repress his emotions and feelings. This paper uses The Theory of Repression and Freudian Slips to examine and understand Changez's personality and his way of dealing with situations.

Keywords : Repression, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Freudian Slips, Changez, Psychoanalysis

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Introduction to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is a novel by Mohsin Hamid published in 2007. Pakistani by nationality, the author spent part of his childhood in the United States before moving back to Lahore with his family. He returned to the US at the age of 18 to continue his education. He graduated from Princeton University in 1993. In 2001, he moved to London where he published his second novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in 2007. The novel addresses the clash of civilizations, a topic that is quite current today. People often exhibit the quality of being unsure of which side to take in the current war of civilizations. They experience intense mental conflict. Changez, the main character of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is one such figure.

Changez, a twenty-five year old man, who attended Princeton University, one of America's prestigious colleges, on a full scholarship, and now works for the prestigious Underwood Samson firm. Changez eventually encounters some difficult circumstances that make him uncertain about his acts and identity. The novel addresses how his life changed after an event.

Introduction to The Theory of Repression

The concept of repression was originally developed by Sigmund Freud as part of his psychoanalytic theory. "Repression occurs when a thought, memory, or feeling is too painful for an individual, so the person unconsciously pushes the information out of consciousness and becomes unaware of its existence. The repressed thought may still affect behavior, but the person who repressed the thought is completely unaware of its existence or effect." (GoodTherapy)

Repression can be considered as a defense mechanism to protect the conscious mind from stress inducing thoughts. "Repression refers to the ego's efforts to subconsciously keep anxious thoughts and impulses out of our awareness and keep them buried and hidden. By repressing certain thoughts and impulses, the Ego is attempting to avoid facing and dealing with them." (Freudian Repression: Definition & Overview)

One of the effects of Repression is 'Freudian Slip' The American Psychological Association (APA) defines a Freudian slip as: "an unconscious error or oversight in writing, speech, or action that is held to be caused by unacceptable impulses breaking through the ego's defenses and exposing the individual's true wishes or feelings." Freudian slip is an action or a slip of tongue that accidentally reveals a person's secret and hidden desires.

OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

This research paper aims to examine the unconsciously repressed thought of the protagonist *Changez Khan* who experienced painful incidents that could potentially arouse anxiety and unconsciously pushed those thoughts and memories out of consciousness. Which later came out in his conscious thoughts and actions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of exploration is done on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through a Psychoanalytic approach.

1. A Research Paper in American Journal of Arts and Human Sciences submitted by Naziat Mustari provides a Psychoanalytic approach to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* where he examined the psychological pressure and its consequences on *Changez* as an individual who faces a sudden and unexpected social change in America. He tried to analyze the interaction of Id and Ego of the protagonist *Changez's* mind.
2. Another study has been done on Mohsin Hamid's two novels *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The research scholars explored the lead characters of both novels and studied the outer incidents that happened to the heroes and their inner responses to the situations. The paper was published in Journal of Education and Practice - 'Transformation of Heroes in Mohsin Hamid's Novels *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'

JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH

Many works have been done on Psychoanalysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* but no work on Theory of Repression under Psychoanalysis was found during the literature review. This study will provide a new point of view to look at the novel and will give a new way of analyzing the protagonist of the novel.

CHAPTER 2 - REPRESSION

The novel is about Changez Khan, a Pakistani boy who came to study in Princeton University in the United States and later got a job at Underwood Samson and Company, a valuation firm. It was a "dream come true" for him (Hamid, p 03).

But, there are many incidents and events that happened with Changez that he seems to have repressed and pushed out of his conscious mind to unconsciously protect himself from feeling anxiety. These events led to an unconscious disappointment and hatred towards America and Americans.

Changez while talking to the stranger about the admission process of Princeton University mentions that Americans were getting more facilities in the process of admission on account of their nationality. "Americans faced much less daunting odds in the selection process" (Hamid,03) This feeling of discrimination was repressed and it remained in his unconscious mind.

Though he mentions the "open-mindedness and that overused word - *cosmopolitan* nature of New York"(Hamid,48) which made him feel completely comfortable wearing a kurta on the subway, He also brings up the stereotypical and racist side of America while narrating his conversation with Erica's father.

"You drink?" "He's twenty two," Erica's mother said on my behalf, in a tone that suggested, *So of course he drinks*. "I had a Pakistani working for me once," Erica's father said. "Never Drank." "I do, sir," I assured him. "Thank you."(Hamid,53)

Changez further narrates how he became annoyed at one point in the discussion.

Erica's father has asked me how things were back home, and I had replied that they were good, thank you, when he said, "Economy's falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people, don't get me wrong. I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And Fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism." (Hamid,54-55)

These racist remarks by him annoyed Changez, His tone was "typically American undercurrent of condescension" (55) but this memory was also repressed by him as Erica asks him if he is upset by her father's remarks for which he replies that he is not.

When he arrives at Manila, Phillipines for a business trip he notices that his 'American born' colleagues are receiving more respect than him, even though he is far more capable than all of them. "His repressed thoughts

of insecurity of not being an American, not being treated as his colleague, feeling like an outsider provoked his id that wants to receive the same attention of a person holding American nationality” (Mustari)

All these incidents were repressed by Changez which later came out as ‘Freudian Slips’

One such example can be seen when a group of Princetonians go on a trip to Greece and during a dinner one evening Chuck his classmate makes everyone laugh with impersonations, which Changez finds exaggerated and when they go around the table asking everyone their dream of what they would most like to be. Changez says “I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic Republic with nuclear capability.”(Hamid,29) this shocked everyone and though Changez claims that it was a joke, it can be considered as a slip of tongue revealing his deep, hidden desires. As Freud’s theory suggests “pieces of the unconscious mind make their way into conscious behaviors.” (Freudian Slip)

Another prominent example of Freudian Slip that came out due to Repressed memories is when he saw the attack of 9/11 on news in Manila.

I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one - and then the other - of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Centre collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. (Hamid, 72)

“Freudian slips are commonly associated with saying the wrong word. However, these slips can also take the form of physical blunders” (Freudian slip) that was seen in his smile as he was pleased “at the slaughter of thousands of innocents” (Hamid,73). This slip or reaction was the result of all the hatred and resentment he had for America and Americans that he repressed with those memories.

CHAPTER 3 - AFTER 9/11

After the attacks of 9/11, there was a visible change in the way Americans treated Non-Americans and specially the Muslims. This also affected Changez, when he was returning back to New York, at the airport, he was escorted by armed guards into a room where he was made to strip down and was checked. He was the last person to board that flight.

And when they arrived at New York, he was separated from his team at immigration. They joined the queue of Americans and he had to join the queue of Foreigners. Where he was again interrogated by the officer “What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?” she asked me.

“I live here,” I replied. “That is not what I asked you, sir,” she said. “What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?” (Hamid,75) He was detained by the customs and by the time he got out, his colleagues left.

These incidents were also unconsciously repressed by Changez as there are no mentions of him being upset or sad at that moment.

After a while, he went to visit his parents in Pakistan, at a time when there were chances of war with India. It was due to the Parliament Attacks on India. Indians claimed that Pakistan has a hand in terrorist attack. This increased border tension between India and Pakistan. Convoys of trucks passing through Lahore bearing supplies to the troops. “We could hear the sounds of military helicopters flying low overhead.” (Hamid,127)

Changez all this time only thinking that despite the assistance they had given to America in Afghanistan, America would not fight at their side. “All America would have to do would be to inform India that an attack on Pakistan would be treated as an attack on any American ally and would be responded to by the overwhelming force of America’s military” (Hamid,143). America did not do that which disappointed Changez.

This disappointment and the Repressed Memories of incidents that happened with him led to him revolting against America by growing a beard.

“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; I do not now recall my precise motivations. I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my co-workers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry.” (Hamid,130)

“Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.” – Sigmund Freud (Juma)

CONCLUSION

Repression and its effects on the protagonist can be divided into two parts, one - before 9/11 and second - after 9/11. Both of the times there were some events or incidents that Changez repressed as a defense mechanism to protect his conscious feelings. But both of the times the repressed thoughts came out through freudian slips.

REFERENCES

1. Hamid, Mohsin. *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, (PB). Penguin Group, 2015.
2. Mustari, N. . "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist". *International Journal of Islamic Thoughts*, vol. 10, no. 1 and 2, Nov. 2022, <http://ijits.net/ojs3/index.php/ijits/article/view/124>.
3. Repression, GoodTherapy, 2015, <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/repression>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2022.
4. "Freudian Repression: Definition & Overview." Study.com, 30 December 2015, www.study.com/academy/lesson/freudian-repression-definition-lesson-quiz.html
5. "Freudian Slip: Definition, Origin, and More." *Medical News Today*, MediLexicon International, 2022, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/freudian-slip>.