



CHOICES AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE: GLASSER'S CRITIQUE OF MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

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Abstract

The current research paper employs William Glasser's (1998) theory of choices to investigate Changez' behavioural change. The study uses qualitative research paradigms to probe his dispersed personality, and the text is analysed through Greenham's (2018) proposed six contexts. The protagonist was exposed to numerous choices which brought about a sea change in his perception and behaviour. In his initial response he found his dream country to be a progressive, developed, and civilized nation. He thought they were geniuses, scholars and intellectual people who always look forward. However, later, all a sudden everything changed with disastrous attacks. He was found foreigner, strange and terrorist who was held responsible for the attacks. He was subjected to constant investigation and his identity is suspected over again. Hence, the failure, rejection and labelling turned his behaviour changed. He returned to his indigenous roots as a reactionary figure and started portraying the true picture of our idealized and admired dream land.

Keywords: *Behavioral Change, Choices Theory, Disastrous Attacks, Dreamland, Progressive Nation*

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1. Introduction

Changez, the young protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is exposed to numerous psychological and emotional conditions. He was compelled to take certain decisions to bring about changes in his life. He was a man of strong emotional and psychological capacity that he wants to employ for the accomplishment of his dream life. Therefore, he took certain decisions which depicted his psychological unrest and emotional response to both his native and foreign lands. Changez's like other immigrants was driven by his own love for America that he decided to study in one of the top institutes of America. America provides comfort, peaceful life, opportunities and after all freedom for all individuals.

Glasser's (1998) theory of choices is employed to trace changes in his psychological unrest and emotional response to the foreign land. The current study seeks to explore Changez's choices of decisions and its effects on his physical, emotional, and psychological being. He was exposed to certain decisions to be taken which proved to be the central part of his psychological unrest. Similarly, he decided to take admission to one of the most privileged institutions in America through financial aid. Then, he decided to join Underwood Samson, a financial firm for assessing the net worth of farming businesses. He was quite relaxed but then suddenly the attacks shaken everything and was imposed to decide his fate by resigning from his job.

Glasser's theory of choices is employed to probe Changez's psychological dilemma which compelled him to take a variety of decisions. The choices theory is related to basic survival, need, freedom and liberty, opportunities, and safety of life. These core components of choice theory are analyzed and are linked to Changez's decisions and its consequences waiting for him in the later portion of the novel. Hence, Glasser's theory best serves the purpose of revealing his psychological urges and need.

The current study is important because it lays down ground to understand Changez's psychological dilemma of taking certain decisions. The decisions have numerous consequences on his holistic personality. The reader finds the major reasons for Changez's choices of decisions and its effects on his native and foreign identity.

1.1. Research Objective

The present study seeks to explore the effects of choices which had led Changez to change in behavior.

1.2. Research Question

How does the Changez' choices change his identity and behavior in the novel under study?

2. Research Methodology

The current research paper employs qualitative research paradigms to probe Changez' psychological and behavioral turbulence. Gonzales, Brown, and Slate (2008) argued that qualitative research enables researchers to explore a phenomenon, a situation (psychological or emotional) and provide answers to our questions. Hence, the researcher wants to analyze the protagonist state of mind and his behavioral and emotional response to the decision he took for his survival and safety of life.

Glasser's (1998) theory of choices is employed as a main theoretical lens to explore the protagonist's taken decisions and its effects his stay both in the foreign country. The theory states that our behavior is the outcome of our actions. It means whatever actions we take lead to our behavioral pattern. The second point discussed in the theory is that our behavior is chosen. We choose certain types of behavior and then we behave in accordance with our chosen behavioral pattern. The last point he discussed was that our behavioral change is determined by our genes and instincts for the satisfaction of our biological and basic needs. Glasser has also given a list of basic needs which compel us to mold our behavior with accordance with our choice. The list is comprised of survival, love and belonging, power, pleasure, and freedom. The researcher aims to explore how Changez's choices affected his behavioral change and his emotional response to his dream land (America). And importantly, the research technique is close reading which enables us to grasp the text from multiple perspectives. The researcher applied Greenham (2018) suggested six levels of comprehending a text to have a holistic picture of the problem being discussed. The six levels discussed by Greenham are: the syntactic level, the semantic level, the thematic level, the iterative level, the generic level, and the adversarial level.

3. Literature Review

Glasser's (1998) choice theory has a wide range of applications across disciplines. It has been inclusively used in psychology, education, philosophy, politics, and literature. Zeeman (2006) has explored the usefulness of the theory for academic purposes. He has talked about the real purpose of education which has to bring about success in students' lives but "Success is defined as doing well academically, behaviorally and socially" (p. 48). Students success would be measured in terms of their changed behavior. Hence, he applied this concept to students with differently abled features in New Jersey, USA. Although they were people with different abilities still, they were treated as normal human

beings. The teachers and management greeted them with considerable respect and gave them space in their conversation. Consequently, with the passage of time there was seen a considerable change in their behavior. The students were given choices of their own. They were allowed to do whatever please them. They were provided with their favorite food, games and clothing inside their school environment which enhances their skills and learning capacity. Thus, the researcher concluded that Glasser's concept of survival, love and freedom enabled them to enhance their learning and skills. The theory has viable application in academia.

Similarly, in other study conducted by Omar and Barzan (2012) the effectiveness of teaching and learning is analyzed. They conducted pre and posttests and interviewed teachers. They find out the effectiveness of students learning lie in the school environment and teachers' behavior with students. Thus, they stated Glasser's view on the effectiveness of learning is that "love, belonging and safety is essential for students to experience positive educational outcomes" (Glasser as cited by Omar & Barzan, 2012, p. 120). As we have discussed earlier that Glasser's theory of choices and behavioral change has viable applications in educational environment. Thus, the upper mentioned study grasped the importance of theory in the classroom environment. They find out that teaching and learning are associated with positive classroom environment. The teachers tend to invoke the feeling of safety, love and belonging that the students feel peaceful and comfortable inside their classroom premises. Then they can learn and can enhance their learning and other social skills.

Glasser's theory is related to feelings, needs and personal urges that drive individual to mold their behavior (Wubbolding, 2017). Individuals often strive for the accomplishment of their personal needs and wants. The desire to get something is the first step at the back of our choices. Choices are often made because we personally endeavor to get something. Consequently, in literary studies, choices are made for the fulfillment of the characters desires. The characters toil hard to accomplish their basic needs and personal urges. Similarly, in the context of present study, Changez was also caught between his personal urges for the host country and his selection of choices which changed his behavior. He was desperate for the host country and took certain decisions which affected his identity and behavior.

Subsequently, behavioral change is a psychological dilemma Glasser (1965). It has direct connection to what we think and how we are affected by the external environment. He is of the view that sometimes the external forces are so strong that they compel individuals to behave in a certain manner. In the current scenario, the protagonist is thoroughly affected by the external forces appeared in the post 9/11 America. The natives' nuanced behavior affected his initial perception which psychologically tortured him. He

then neither enjoyed his prosperous job nor his American status quo. Thus, Glasser's choice theory also considers the external forces and psychological upheavals that compel individuals to change their behavior.

The chosen narrative has been widely acknowledged due to its themes and subject matter. The narrative viably stands for the Muslims dispersed identities in the post 9/11 America. It was the period of greater hardships and drudgeries for the whole Muslim Ummah (Khan & Awan, 2017), where they were held responsible for the destruction. Thus, they find out that the narrative depicts the post 9/11 in terms of hardships and sufferings. The Muslim identities were renegotiated, and they were associated with terrorism and fundamentalism.

Similarly, Kanwal (2017) also stated about the Muslims sufferings in the post 9/11 Euro-America. She argued that Hamid put huge responsibility on his protagonist to stand for the Muslims' world and depict their dislodged space. She finds out that Muslims were severely targeted and their Muslimness has been linked with terrorism. Consequently, Changez' growing of beard became the main concern in his office and even in public. Growing of beard, *Shalwar Qameez*, counting beads and offering prayers were tagged as the sign of their terrorist disposition. In short, the post 9/11 scenario tagged the Islamic customs with fundamentalism and terrorism.

Hamid's narrative is responsive to the tragedy from the 'others' perspective Zindziuvienne (2014). He discussed that the 9/11 discourse has been widely explored by different literary personas, critics, and analysts but Hamid gave a new direction to discourse and raised the issue from 'othering' perspective. Hence, the narrative reports how do the 'others' find the tragedy. The 'others' have suffered the most in the tragedy. They were targeted and were held responsible for the disaster. They were fired from their jobs. They faced public swearing and abuse. They were interrogated and their identity was frequently suspected. In short, he discussed that the narrative stands for the marginalized voice. The narrative suggests how the 'others' found the tragedy and how do they suffer. Thus, the narrative bridges the East and West. Muslims were blindly targeted which was an act injustice and humiliation. The Eastern admire the Western people, their culture, language, and geography. They call her their dream land. Changez hostile behavior and reaction put a heavy question mark on the Western countries that how their lover, who has been educated by their country turned against them. The protagonist neither belong to any religious group, he was not a religious scholar or a member of Taliban or Al-Qaida. Then, how, and why he turned against his dream land and returned to his indigenous roots as a reactionary figure. In fact, the narrative put these questions on the western countries and their policies against Muslims.

Similarly, America utilized ‘soft power’ to attract people world widely. Nye (1980) proposed that the use of soft power is to engage the attraction of people towards one cultural charm, political stability, and foreign policies. Similarly, Ara and Gul (2022) have argued that Hamid’s protagonist was emotionally arrested by the external charm of American culture. The tall buildings, educational opportunities and freedom attracted him that he burst out it as his dream land. Further, they are of the view that the protagonist’s identity clash really starts from his adoration of the host country. He thought it supreme and sublime than his previous Indigenous culture. Thus, there arouses a struggle of identity.

The protagonist also faced the tussle between ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Said (1978) coined the word to describe the cultural clash between self and others. Bibi et al. (2021) have stated about Changez inner struggle with his own self and the American culture (other). The major reason of their tussle was the tragedy of 9/11 which divided the globe into two halves. The Muslims are tagged as ‘others’ while the rest of the globe forms the alliance of ‘us.’ This struggle can be seen right from the beginning of the novel when the protagonist disclosed him not to fear his beard and his Eastern Islamic look, he used to be the lover of America.

Gohar et al. (2018) have also applied communication theory of identity (CTI) to probe the four personality traits or layers of Changez’ personality. The four layers included: the personal layer, enacted layer, relational and communal layers. In the personal layer, Changez himself perceived his own self. It was the stage in which he personally identified himself. Firstly, he perceived himself as a young New Yorker, while later he thought he suspected himself in the host country. The second enacted stage he expresses himself accordingly in both the West and his native country. In relational layer, there is comparison and contrast of the host and native countries. He viewed his personality in both countries. The westerners also treated him while comparing his cultural and religious background to that of their own. While in the last stage, the whole community is taken into consideration as we have seen in the narrative that in the post 9/11 world order the Muslims Ummah (brotherhood) are tagged as terrorists and fundamentalists. The researchers illustrated the four personality traits and their effects on the protagonist in America.

The current study can be excluded from the previous studies conducted on the Glasser’s choice theory as they are mostly dealing with the classroom environment. They stress how to manipulate a learner friendly environment where they can easily highlight their competencies. There are very few studies conducted on the application of choice theory on literary work. Hence, the current study provides a platform to apply Glasser’s theory on fiction. The theory is based on Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The protagonist Changez has been analyzed in terms of change in his

behavior due to the decisions he took for his survival, belonging, freedom of life, and the opportunities he wishes to avail in the global north.

4. Analysis

Choices determined our behavior and prospered by our personal urges, emotions and needs Gabriel and Matthews (2011). Hence, the young Changez, in search of a luxurious life, decided to make his future in one of the top universities of America. He has many choices to make his future bright, but he goes for America. This choice could be interpreted in several ways. America has been regarded as the most technologically advanced country as Changez expresses his feelings that “This, I realized, was another world from Pakistan; supporting my feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known” (Hamid, 2007, p. 17). This quote shows his deep feelings and sensation about the host country. He thought, it a different complete world of its own. Greenham’s semantic level of interpretation enables readers to go beyond the surface meanings and understand the author’s hidden motives and intentions. He opted for America because it has been a perfect place to make his future bright. He had the idea that America has the potential to transform him into a successful person. Ha had confidence on his American degree that he can easily get a prosperous job as he stated, “I was confident of getting any job” (Hamid, 2007, p. 2). He knew that American degrees are valued throughout the globe. Apart, from American education he also preoccupied himself that American is the most technologically advanced nation in the world. No one can compete with technology and machines.

The importance of American values and supremacy compelled him to decide his education, job, and career in Euro America. Further, Princeton University offered him a scholarship which further added feathers to his cap. The Pakistani people applaud Americans for being genius, hardworking and progressive nation. Similarly, Changez also had remarkable thoughts for them as he stated, “I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher kings in the making” (Hamid, 2007, p. 2). The Generic context of interpreting a text states the repetition of certain ideas, concepts and words suggests a variety of meanings. Changez has used philosophers, scholars, titans, progressive nation and toiling while describing the Americans. It depicts his deep sensation and admiration for the host country.

Changez was so overwhelmed and enthusiastic about his decision that he left no space in his admiration. He whole heartedly enjoyed his American education. He was proud of his decision as he shared his feelings as: “This is a dream come true. Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything

was possible” (Hamid, 2007, p. 2). The Americanness changed Changez’ behavior. He makes himself fly in the air. The American society gives freedom and liberty to its people regardless of their race, creed, and nationality. Thus, the surface charm and beauty of American culture affected him that he thought of himself as a center of attraction. There seems to be viable change in his behavior. He was so involved in the host city that he thought himself a part of it. He expressed his sentiments as: “I was immediately a New Yorker. What? My voice is rising. You are right; I tend to become sentimental when I think of that city” (Hamid, 2007, p. 17). This change of behavior is the outcome of his dream city and institution. He enjoyed each moment of his stay in his dream city. He thought of himself as a New Yorker instead of his native identity (Pakistani). This idea of belongingness is put forward by Glasser (1998). He argued that belonging is central to our choices. We choose something that appeals to our belongingness. The protagonist has internalized the same sentiments. The city appeals to him that he considered it his belonging. His sense of belongingness is satisfied that viably contributed to his changed behavior.

The next decision Changez took was to join the prestigious evaluation form, the Underwood Samson (US). It was not an easy task to get hired by them, rather, they select the most intelligent, abled, and hardworking individuals. The protagonist was a hardworking and abled person thus hired by them. Glasser’s choice theory also values the job opportunities and its importance. Hence, getting such a prestigious job was an overwhelming opportunity for the protagonist. Thus, he filled with overwhelming joy as he screams out his joy: “But not on that day. On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm’s impressive offices made me proud. I wished I could show my parents and my brother” (Hamid, 2007, p.17). This discourse depicts his proud mind. He thought of himself on the top of heaven, and he wished to show his parents the remarkable view and look of his office building. He was relaxed and peaceful mind as Glasser (1998) stated that we often take decisions for betterment of life and opportunities. Consequently, the same was true for Changez. He was almost getting all those things for which he wished. Everything was normal and going in his way as he commented that: “Yes, I was happy in that moment. I felt bathed in a warm sense of accomplishment. Nothing troubled me; I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet” (Hamid, 2007, p. 23). He accomplished his life goal. He behaves like them and wants equal share of respect from others as: “I attempted to act and speak, as much as my dignity would permit, more like an American” (Hamid, 2007, p. 33). The researcher has observed a complete change in his behavior. He adopts an acceptable personality which paves his way for the achievement of his goals. In short, he takes decisions, and all goes in his favor. He goes for better choices, and he was not disheartened.

The protagonist's choices turned against him with the disastrous attacks of 9/11. He was no longer belonging to the host country. His New Yorker identity was question over again, instead he was treated differently. He reported his dispersed feelings as: "When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners" (Hamid, 2007, p. 38). He was treated differently at the airport by considering him foreigner. The protagonist feels regret as if he had committed a crime. Everyone stared him with questionable gaze as he has some connection with the terrorist group. Changez was disheartened by the naïve attitude adopted by the host country. Consequently, ignoring and rejecting people will change his behavior Glasser (1998). The host country treated Changez with different attitudes which changed his behavior.

The change in his initial perception occurred due to the strangeness of his dream city. His colleagues also ignored him and suspected him of being foreigner, strange and outcaste non Americans. Erica also keeps distance with him as he observed that "her body had rejected me" (Hamid, 2007, p. 46). He was ignored and rejected by his dream land. Hence, Glasser stated that change in behavior occurs because of ignoring someone. The protagonist experienced the same psychological and emotional turbulence which has caused a change in his behavior. He was ridiculed in public as the "Fucking Arab" (Hamid, 2007, p. 60). Although, he was not Arab but still he did not know why the common people are so angry at him. In short, Changez who came to make his future bright by studying and working for his dream country. But he is rejected by scolding and ridiculing him in public. Hence, it changed his behavior.

Changez background made him suffer in the global north. He changed his initial insight into the host country from being liberal and peaceful to being nostalgic and conservative. Sufferings made us believe that something is not as we assume him. Thus, change our perception of the Glasser (1998). The host country tortured, scolded and ridiculed the protagonist, hence changing his initial insight. He was confused and caught between his native and foreign lands as he expressed his heartache that: "I was not certain where I belonged—in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither" (Hamid, 2007, p. 76). He has confused identity neither of the native nor the foreign. He feels himself in a threshold. His sense of belonging, prosperous life and his freedom was dislodged causing change his behavior.

The protagonist felt suffocation in his dream city and prestigious job. He thought something had fallen on him due to native hostile behavior. He quit his trip to Manali to evaluate a company. He did not want to continue his job anymore as he stated: "I told the vice president that I refused to work any further. He was baffled" (Hamid, 2007, p. 78). The host country disheartened him that he changed his prior perception and admiration.

He spoiled his association with his dream city by: “Besides, without my job—which I was certain to lose—my visa would expire, and I would be compelled to leave the United States” (Hamid, 2007, p. 79). He could not bear the hostility of his dream city that he announced his return to his indigenous country. This dilemmic situation has also stated by Glasser (1998) that rejection and prejudice are the root cause of failure. Although, he stated it in the academic context, this can be applied to the protagonist’s situation as well. His failure to settle and promote his life dream in America has been stagnant because of their envious behavior. He was treated as a foreigner and his terrorist disposition further inflame his change behavior as he reported: “being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection” (Hamid, 2007, p. 81).

Glasser’s choice theory is based on behavioral change aroused from negativity and hatred. Scolding, cursing, envy, and hostility thus lead to pessimism and failure Glasser (2005). He stated that acceptance, support, encouragement, negotiating differences, respect and trust are the seven core components leading to a prosperous life. Consequently, Changez was confronted with such emotional and psychological torture. He was treated as if he had committed a blunder. He felt pessimist as if he had killed and crushed the two towers. The upper mentioned components were violated thus leading to his dispersed identity and behavioral change. He was a young talented man with strong determination to peruse his life in the most developed country of the world. He was disheartened and came as anti-American lecturer as:

I had in the meanwhile gotten a job as a university lecturer, and I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine. I was popular among my students—perhaps because I was young, or perhaps because they could see the practical value of my ex-janissary’s skills. (Hamid, 2007, p. 91)

He wanted to depict the true portrayal of his dream country. Whatever we dreamt of is not always perfect and superior. Our admiration can be wrong and false. America is also a state focusing on the fundamentals. She has enmity and envious nature as other countries have. Blindly following or admiring the wrong person can lead to failure and dismay.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the current paper is to analyze the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) in terms of his pronouncement choices which had changed his perception about the host country. Glasser (1998) theory of choices state the

change in behavior due to numerous reasons. The feelings of regret and dismay are central to Changez personality. These feelings were aroused in him because of the tragedy of 9/11. The tragedy plays a key role in his disheartening character. He labelled a terrorist and was held responsible for the destruction. Hence, the protagonist was exposed to certain choices which brought viable changes in his behavior. First, he was proud of being selected for Princeton university via scholarship. He thought it the most genius and scholarly figures who focusses on practicality of life and enhances vocational skill. Furthermore, Changez was proud of his job and thought it was the accomplishment of his life goal. He admired the impressive and well-furnished offices. Similarly, he thought his dream country was the most technologically advanced nation who always looks forward to progress. But after the tragedy, his sense of belonging is spoiled when he has ridiculed in public. He was rejected by his dream country. His presence was questioned over again in public. He was sworn as “fucking Arab.” He did not bear his insult anymore, so he decided to return to his roots. Consequently, he came back and as a reactionary started to convey the tur portrayal of the most technologically nation of the world. He taught we should not blindly go for the surface charm we should know what’s going on behind the curtain.

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