

# Literary Presentations of Influence of 9/11 on Muslim Migrants in United States

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**Received: 2017-05-10**

**Accepted: 2017-06-20**

**Published online: 2017-07-30**

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## **Abstract**

The attack on Twin Tower in United States on 11th September 2011 was a disastrous and cowardly attack claiming the lives of many innocent victims. It also had led to the rise various discourses around the world. The attack was regulated by a handful of misguided Muslim men which led to the suspicion on the entire Muslim community. Muslim community who were living in West especially America was looked upon suspiciously. The aftermath of 9/11 was very disastrous for many innocent Muslims as they were threatened, beaten and even killed by angry American who wanted to take revenge from anybody on ethnic ground. Many innocent Muslims were persecuted on just suspicious ground and some were abducted and had never return back.

**Keywords:** 9/11, Muslim migrants, United States, Xenophobia, Racism.

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There are times in history when savage things have happened leading to the rise of various chaos and catastrophes: 9/11 is also one such incident which has given rise to xenophobia in America. After this disastrous incident, the President of Superpower America declared "War on Terror" which was open ended giving rise to American nationalism in a disastrous way which led to the attacks on Muslims, particularly and those whom they perceived to be Muslims like Sikhs because they have beard.

Not only this but American policies and orders became biased and full of prejudices against Muslims or targeting them. Soon after the terror attack, the then President of America George W. Bush (Junior) addressed his nation through television encouraging his people: Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. (6)

Further giving references to US Military, he declared, "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them." (6)



Such incidents are highly condemnable but this is also the outcome and failure of the American policy of intervention. For maintaining their supremacy, the Superpower United States of America interferes in the internal matter of other countries by trying to change the regime existing in the country, encouraging the warring groups for their own selfish interest and bombing any country whenever they desire, leading to the killings of many innocent civilians. Is this the new form of imperialism? Earlier during the time of Cold-war when there was a clash between Russia and Afghanistan; America involved itself by encouraging the local warring groups of Afghanistan which further developed itself into a Terrorist group.

The reaction of many American towards their fellow Muslim citizens' aftermath was very savage. This is quite surprising as Americans are considered as very civilized, liberals and modern. Since its occurrence 9/11 and its aftermath has been the subject of many writers around the world. Many South Asia novelists have portrayed the influence of 9/11 on South Asian Muslims living in West particularly in America in their novels like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* and Nadeem Aslam's *Map of Lost Lovers*. While some Arab writers like Laila Halaby's in her novel, *Once in a Promised Land* has discussed the discrimination and racism which Arabs have faced after 9/11.

These writers have voice their narratives against the injustice towards innocent Muslim who were held guilty for the crime which they have not committed. In this way they have responded to the challenge of writing about their Islamic faith in the decade of the "war on terror". The present paper seeks to study some novels in the light of this issue on humanitarian basis. As Claire Chambers says: In this century's climate of Islamophobia, wars of questionable legality, and oppressive counter terror legislation, more writers are representing Muslim identity than ever before. (7-8)

*Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is Mohsin Hamid's second novel and was nominated for Booker Prize. It tells the story of a young Pakistani, Changez Khan who has a dream like many other youths of third world countries to study, world and be settle in country like America which give much better opportunities like their own countries. So when he received the news that he has got admission in Princeton University, his happiness was no ending. As he speaks: 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. I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought, to Professors who were titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher-kings in the making. (3)

After taking admission he worked very hard and secured good position in his degree and further receiving a good position at Underwood Samson-an elite firm. It is due to his hard work that he continues to rise if good position at his firm and even in friendship with his American friend, Erica. But suddenly with the Twin tower attack,



everything started collapsing and his dreams shattered. One day, while on his business tour to Manila, he witnesses the deadly scene: I stared as one—and then the other—of the two towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. (72)

At first, he did not believe that such an incident happened but later he realized that it is not a movie but a reality. At this time, he was confused at how to react in such a situation as it America, the supreme powerful country which always brings destructions in other countries but for the first time it is United States which has been targeted by a handful of people: ....my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack—death on television moves me when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes—no, I was caught up, in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (73)

The next day, there was condolences worldwide because their lives matters mostly being the citizens of world most powerful country. And for New York, it was like the most dreadful day in their history: New York was in mourning after the destruction of the World Trade Center, and floral motifs figured prominently in the shrines to the dead and the missing that had sprung up in my absence. I would often glance at them as I walked by: photos, bouquets, words of condolence—nestled into street corners and between shops and along the railings of public squares. They reminded me of my own uncharitable—indeed, inhumane—response to the tragedy, and I felt from them a constant murmur of reproach. (79)

Being a sympathetic person, Changez had full sympathy with the innocent people who lost their lives and with the bereaved families. He too was one of the mourners. But American citizens retaliated very badly with their fellow Muslim citizens who were living there from a long time and who were not involved in any kind of terror activity. But they put the blame on entire Muslim community.

In the novel, Hamid gives true images of the happenings occurring in American society in the novel in the following lines: America was gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage in those weeks of September and October as I cavorted about with Erica; the mighty host I had expected of your country was duly raised and dispatched— but homeward, towards my family in Pakistan. When I spoke to them on the phone, my mother was frightened, my brother was angry, and my father was stoical—this would all pass, he said. (94)

We see Hamid himself speaking through the mouth of the protagonist, Changez as he has witnessed all these things while living in America in those turbulent days: I ignored at best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistan cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. (94)

Deepa Kumar, an Associate Professor of Media Studies and Middle-East Studies at Rutgers University gives her view regarding the rise of Islamophobia in her book,



*Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* states by saying that: The aftermath of 9/11 witnessed the convergence of domestic and foreign policy, resulting in the construction of the overarching “Islamic terrorist” enemy that must be fought abroad and at home. (5)

But since Changez had lived in America for some years he was sure that all things are momentary and will end soon because he always thought America as a multi-cultural and liberal country: I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back. Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about the Second World War; I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Techni color but in grainy black and white. (115)

He thought that thing will become favorable as he says to Joe, “things at home are a little unsettled, but it will pass” (120). Although being worried about his family but having an optimistic attitude about his stay in America, he could not resist himself from paying attention to various rumors associating his community there, as Hamid himself speaks through the character: I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world—stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals—and I did not wish to have a position at Underwood Samson compromised. (120)

This experience is the outcome of Hamid’s own experiences in United States in those days xenophobia increased to a profound level.

After the incident, the Superpower America retaliated by sending its troops and Bombing Afghanistan and further Iraq: The bombing of Afghanistan had already been under way for a fortnight, and I had been avoiding the evening news... I chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post. My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbour, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides... (99-100)

After seeing the deadly attack of Afghanistan leading to collateral damages and resulting in the deaths of many innocent civilians, Changez was very much disturbed and infuriated as Afghanistan not only shares the boundary with his homeland but also culture. He felt emotional as Afghanistan was a fellow Muslim country next to his homeland, Pakistan.

This retaliation of America as a revenge of 9/11 which they called it a ‘War on Terror’ had led to the lives of many innocent civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq. It has been highly criticized by Human Rights activists, writers and scholars all around the world. Harold Pinter, the great British writer famous for his absurdist drama wrote a small poetry anthology entitled as *War* in which he has reflected his concern for the people of Iraq and has criticized American bombing on Iraq. He denounces American foreign policies which legalize American intervention in the affairs of other countries leading to the invasion of Iraq, Libya and Syria. Describing the brutality of war and the role of American troops in his poem, *After Lunch* (2002), he expresses his despair: And



after noon the well-dressed creatures come to sniff among the dead and have their lunch. And all the many well-dressed creatures pluck the swollen avocados from the dust and stir the minestrone with stray bones ... (Pinter 2003, np)

This is a symbolic interpretation of the war-situation in Iraq being led by American forces to counter terror attack. Pinter has expressed his anti-war opinion in his poems giving brutal images of consequences and results of war which is very real.

Laila Halaby in *Once in a Promised Land* has portrayed such Arab characters which are totally assimilated in the American society as both the protagonists, Jassim and Salwa being Arab considered themselves as American citizen and America as their own home but this proved to be a myth for them after 9/11 and their identities were questioned. The land which they considered belong to them suddenly transformed into alien and the feeling of unbelonging stemmed in them so much that they decided to return back to their native land, Jordan. Before the terror attack, they were living a comfortable life, Jassim, a hydrologist and his wife Salwa as a banker and also a trainee real estate broker. They have been living a very good life at Tucson since ten years before this tragedy took place. And after the incident, their dreams shattered and they experience racism at workplaces, markets, public places and elsewhere. In such an atmosphere it was difficult for them to survive as the question of identity arisen leading them to miserable state with no other option just to leave America and go to their homeland.

Pakistani born and London-based novelist, Kamila Shamsie in her novel, *Burnt Shadows* states: War is like disease. Until you've had it, you don't know it. But no. That's a bad companion. At least with disease everyone think it might happen to them one day. You have a pain here, swelling there, a cold which stays and stays. You start to think maybe this is something really bad. But war—countries like yours; they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. This is why you fight more wars than anyone else. The disease always happen somewhere else. It's why you fight more wars than anyone else; because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better. (344)

The novel, *Burnt Shadow* though entirely is not based on 9/11 but the fourth part of her novel deals with the aftermath of 9/11. In this part, she describes about the circumstances which suddenly arises due to the attack on Twin tower resulting in various chaos and discrimination against Muslims communities living in America. She, being a Pakistani very well can give an account of the situations as she herself must have face some kind of discrimination living in West.

But all these discriminations are mostly due to political reasons though ethnicity is more held responsible. As Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in their book, *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing* say: Muslim communities in the modern western societies are often read through the lens of race and politics, filters that frequently



cast them them as silent objects or a problem to be solved. Literature offers an interesting counterpart to challenge some of these stereotypical views. (1)

Writers like Mohsin Hamid, Laila Halaby, Nadeem Aslam, Kamila Shamsie, Shahla Abdullah, Monica Ali, TehminaAnamand many others have given answers to such wrong notion existing in the Western societies regarding Muslims through their literary creations.

This rising tide of Xenophobia in the form of Islamophobia which has currently swept across the Western world is creating a wide gulf between Western world and the Muslim communities. We are living in a highly-advanced world and hence it is very unfortunate that such things are still happenings. We as human beings should try to build a world which rests on the principle of peace, equality and free from all kinds of prejudices.

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