

## ENGLISH: *TEXT RESPONSE*

**'The Reluctant Fundamentalist explores the relationship between the personal and the political.' Discuss.**

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Set in post-9/11 New York, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores how deeply the terrorist attacks affect the protagonist Changez and the American world around him. After the collapse of New York's World Trade Centre, there was an increased suspicion directed at those of Middle Eastern appearance and Changez's treatment after this key event affects him personally. The bombing of the Indian Parliament also resulted in an intense political tension between Pakistan and India. While closely monitoring the event, Changez is unable to focus on his immediate work at Underwood Samson. Yet, in the present, where Changez is a university lecturer who accosts the American guest, it is clear that the political world still has a large impact on his personal life, being a political activist who is fundamentally opposed to the heavy-handedness of American foreign policy. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows how the personal and political worlds of Changez are deeply intertwined.

Hamid shows his readers how there was an increased suspicion towards those of Middle Eastern appearance after the 9/11 attacks by making the protagonist Changez a victim of hate crimes and placing him in uncomfortable situations. Changez's appearance stereotype him as a religious extremist, being of a Pakistani identity and having a beard, "a symbol of [his] identity." Yet, it is ultimately clear that Changez is a secular person who is not involved with religion; after being offered a job at Underwood Samson, Changez's exclamation of "Thank you, God" surprises him. Despite this, Changez is still treated with suspicion and subject to hate crimes that are a direct result of the 9/11 attacks. Immediately after the collapse, Changez recounts how he was "forced to strip down to his boxers" and dispatched for "secondary inspection", as the official refused to accept his life and work in America as a legitimate "purpose" for entering New York. On assignment for Underwood Samson, Changez is called a "fucking Arab" in an unprovoked attack. Through the use of the monologue structure and first person narration, Changez even comments on how he felt "uncomfortable in his own skin" during the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and how he was not. The collapse of New York's World Trade Centre is an event that is heavily associated with politics and has a large impact of Changez's personal life.

Furthermore, there were also terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament in the post-9/11 world, resulting in an intense political tension developing between India and Pakistan. This event has significant impact upon Changez's professional life; he is unable to focus on his work as he is closely monitoring recent developments and reading news articles online about the political impasse. Yet, Changez is unable to understand why America, an extremely powerful country with a strong global influence, refuses to diffuse the conflict and prevent the war that could have potentially ensued. Ultimately, it becomes clear to Changez: America is a political fundamentalist. It maintained a "position that favoured the larger...and more belligerent" of India and Pakistan, simply because of a desire for more political power. The way that "America conducted itself in the world" is "insufferable" to Changez, ultimately causing a better resentment and his rejection of his own American dream. The political tension between Pakistan and India was a source of confusion for Changez, making him unsure of what he felt about his elite American lifestyle. It would finally result in Changez making a life-changing decision about his personal life as he estranges himself from the American world and moves back to Pakistan.

Yet, the political world continues to have a large impact on Changez's personal life when he lives in Pakistan. As a university lecturer, he continued to be heavily involved in the political sphere, protesting for "the greater independence of Pakistan" in domestic and international issues that would go on to provoke anti-American sentiments. In the present tense of Changez's framed narrative, he accosts a mysterious and unnamed American guest, frequently alluding to his guest's military appearance and typically American "bearing". It is unknown whether the American is an agent sent to deal with Changez for provoking anti-American feelings in his protests. To further

exaggerate these mutual suspicions, Hamid crafts a predator/prey relationship between the two individuals that effectively symbolises the political tension between the Western world and Muslim world. It is unknown who the predator and prey is between Changez and the American; Changez comments on the American's discomfort, being like that of an "animal that has ventured too far...uncertain of whether it is predator or prey", yet also compares his sense to being "as acute as a fox in the wild." With the use of subtle irony that simultaneously unsettles, patronises, and taunts the American, a predator/prey relationship is established between the two characters. In the present tense of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's personal life is shown to be deeply intertwined with the political world as he becomes a university lecturer that protests of Pakistan's independence.

In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the personal and political world of Changez is shown to be deeply connected. After the 9/11 attacks, Changez was victimised for appearing to be a religious extremist, a target of increased suspicion and hate crimes. Furthermore, the political tension between Pakistan and India would ultimately cause him to realise that America is a political fundamentalist, resulting in his subsequent rejection of his American dream. Yet, as a university lecturer in the present, Changez's personal life continues to be deeply involved with political affairs. Through his portrayal of Changez, Hamid shows readers of how the 9/11 attacks had a significant impact on Changez's personal and political world as an ethnic foreigner who longer for the elite American life.