



## DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN CHENGIZ'S CHARACTER AND THEIR IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS IN *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

Iram Zahra

M.Phil. English Scholar, Department of English, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad

[iramzahra1472@gmail.com](mailto:iramzahra1472@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*In psychoanalytical studies "DEFENCE MECHANISMS" refer to unconscious psychological responses that help people to protect themselves from anxiety production thoughts. This research paper examines the defense mechanisms displayed in Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," by Changez, the protagonist and investigates how these mechanisms shape his relationships. The analysis is made by focusing on Changez's interactions with some characters, including his girlfriend Erica, his colleagues and his family. The textual analysis illustrates that these defense mechanisms are not only responsible for the emotional and psychological dynamics that drive Changez's behavior but also have the subsequent effects on his personal and professional relationships throughout the novel.*

### Introduction

In Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," the protagonist, Changez, the central character and narrator of the story exhibits a tumultuous journey of self-discovery and identity crisis against the backdrop of post-9/11 in America. Being a Pakistani person, who at first embraces the American Dream, he got admission in Princeton University and was an outstanding student and was able to start his career in New York at Underwood Samson Company. He was skilled person and he made his distinguished career at the company. Changez's life takes a radical turn after 9/11 incident as he becomes an outsider in the eyes of native people. The outsiders who have to struggle with cultural disharmony and rising political tensions. The proposed narrative is not only a personal story of Chengiz's sufferings and hardships but also a reflection on broader themes such as cultural conflicts, globalization, and how socio-political events have impacts on people's lives. Key elements undertaken in this study to understand Changez's character and his relationships are searching for the defense mechanisms which he employs throughout the novel.

Defense mechanisms are those unconscious psychological schemes that are used by individuals minds to protect themselves from anxiety and to sustain a stable self-image. These defense mechanisms become crucial for the protagonist Chengiz as he tackles the disparity between his dreams or expectations and the reality he faces expectations. The purpose of this research paper is to delve into some specific defense mechanisms exhibited by Changez and to examine influence of these mechanisms on his interactions with key characters, including his girlfriend Erica, his colleagues, and his family. Through deep analysis of Changez's psychological strategies, the paper aims to shed light on the complex interplay between his internal conflicts and the external pressures he encounters. Through this lens, we gain a deeper understanding of the impact of his defense mechanisms on his relationships and the broader thematic elements of "The Reluctant Fundamentalist."

### Research Problem

To know the impacts of defense mechanisms to maintain personal and professional relationships of the central character of the novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist." Chengiz' after the incident of World Trade Center 9/11 while being treated as outsider at the place where he was accepted first.



### **Research Objective**

To analyze the defense mechanisms in Reluctant Fundamentalist exhibited by Chengiz in the novel by considering their impact on his relationships with other characters.

### **Research Question**

How do in “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” by Mohsin Hamid, defense mechanisms, exhibited in Chengiz’s character, impact his relationships with others?

### **Significance**

The significance of this study to explore how defense mechanisms in Chengiz’s character impact his relationships in “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” have foundation in understanding the complexities of human behavior, especially in the context of and cultural identity. Through analysis of Chengiz’s defense mechanisms, study provides insights into how individuals cope with internal and external conflicts, how their interactions with others are shaped by these mechanisms, and how they help to understand the larger themes in the novel. This research paper can help to provide a deeper understanding of the characters mental ability to adjust in unwanted or changing situations in order to avoid anxiety and stress arising feelings. By offering valuable perspectives on identity, relationships, and the impact of personal struggles on a broader scale it can further help to explore themes, and socio-political issues presented in the story .

### **Literature Review**

Psychological complexities of its protagonist, Changez, are explored in the post-9/11 novel “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” as he undergoes identity crises and cultural conflicts in America. Throughout the story the key elements working in development of Changez’s character are the defense mechanisms which he employs to deal with the emerging tensions between his experiences in the United States and his Pakistani heritage. Defense mechanisms are unconscious efforts of ego that mediates between expectations and reality in order to gain a better perception of self within a society. This literature review critically examines existing research on Changez’s defense mechanisms, their psychological effects, and their implications for maintaining relationships within the novel.

Smith (2010) examines in “Psychological Perspectives in Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist” His paper explored the defense mechanisms used by Changez as a response to identity crisis and cultural dislocation. Smith identifies two key strategies; rationalization and projection as which are employed by Changez to restore his Pakistani heritage with his American aspirations. This analysis highlights how insecurities of Changez are projected onto his colleagues, lover and American society. He explores that at large fosters a sense of resentment and alienation, ultimately impacts his interpersonal relationships. He aimed to explore the role of defense mechanisms as savior of individuals from alienation by examining projection and rationalization. The present paper delves into these mechanisms in broader perspectives of Changez relationship with lover Erica, colleagues and family members.

Miller (2015), in his article “Post-9/11 Trauma and Defense Mechanisms in The Reluctant Fundamentalist” talked about defense mechanisms. In his research, he investigated the post-9/11 sociopolitical climate's impact on psychological state of Changez’s character. Miller explored that the use of defense mechanisms such as sublimation and rationalization by Chengiz were responses to the discrimination and trauma the Muslims experienced in America. Changez navigates his identity that was evolving through mechanism of rationalization of his initial pursuit of the American Dream and later, to gain political consciousness, he was helped by the mechanism of sublimation of his disillusionment into activism in Pakistan. The study



talked about use of two defense mechanisms and focused on identity crisis as result of traumatic experiences. While present research pores on role of mechanisms to help character with his relationship struggle.

Ahmed (2018), in his article, “Defense Mechanisms in Postcolonial Literature: A Comparative Study” had aimed to compare the characters of postcolonial novels by analyzing their psychological strategies. Ahmed (2018) explored common the mechanisms of rationalization projection, and reaction formation in characters from postcolonial identities. This comparative analysis situates Changez within a broader literary context, highlighting how defense mechanisms are employed by individuals to cope with cultural and psychological conflicts. The reviewed research examined the defense mechanisms as tools to cope with psychological conflicts within the characters of postcolonial novels. The present research aims to explore the postcolonial, post -9/11 character of Changez by focusing on defense mechanisms that help him to have relationships with other characters of the novel .

This research aims to address the gaps in existing studies on Mohsin Hamid’s “The Reluctant Fundamentalist” by providing a detailed and comprehensive analysis of specific defense mechanisms exhibited by Changez, the psychological underpinnings and long-term impacts of these mechanisms on Changez’s personal and professional relationships. The study examines how individuals in foreign societies try to adjust themselves in case when they have to face discriminations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present research has been done in light of the Theory of Psychoanalysis proposed by Sigmund Freud. Sigmund Freud categorizes human mind in three parts; conscious, sub conscious and unconscious. Much more focus was laid on unconscious which comprises of repressed emotions and desires. He gives the concept of Defense Mechanisms which are unconscious psychological responses to help people protect themselves from anxiety production thoughts. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that our minds use to cope with conflicts and stress. Sigmund Freud identified several key defense mechanisms. *Repression* is when we unconsciously push unwanted thoughts or memories out of our awareness. It’s like burying them deep down to avoid dealing with them.

*Denial* in which people refuse to accept reality or facts. It’s a way of protecting from unpleasant truths. *Projection* which happens when someone attributes their own thoughts, feelings, or motives onto another person. It helps avoid facing those feelings within themselves. *Displacement* where emotions or impulses are redirected from their original source to a less threatening target. *Rationalization* that involves creating logical explanations for behaviors that are actually driven by unconscious motives. It’s a way of justifying actions that might otherwise seem unacceptable. *Regression* happens when faced with stress or conflict, some people revert to behaviors from an earlier stage of development.

These sort of defense mechanisms are observed in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that are explored in the current research that how people are helped by these mechanisms to cope with stress and anxiety and also save their relationships.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research method has been adopted to have a deep insight of the text of the novel for accomplishment of research objectives. The key concepts of Sigmund Freud’s theory have been comprehended firstly and then linked to the novel to unravel the main issue.

## Analysis

In Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," the character Changez exhibits a variety of defense mechanisms as he navigates his identity and experiences in a post-9/11 world. Changez, a young Pakistani man working in the corporate world in America, grapples with feelings of displacement and disillusionment, leading him to employ defense mechanisms to cope with his internal conflicts.

Projection is a defense mechanism where individuals attribute their own unacceptable feelings to others. Changez projects his insecurities onto his colleagues and the American society. Early in the novel, Changez's projection is evident when he feels threatened by his colleagues' confidence and success. For instance, he describes feeling "uncomfortable in his own skin" and viewing others as superior (Hamid, 2007, p. 35). This projection of his insecurities creates a barrier in his relationships, isolating him despite his outward success. As Changez becomes more disillusioned, he begins to see America as hostile and discriminatory, projecting his internal conflict onto the external environment. This projection is exemplified when he admits to feeling a "sense of impending doom" and seeing America as a "giant, with its head in the clouds and its feet planted firmly on the ground" (Hamid, 2007, p. 99).

*"As I criticized the American way of life, I conveniently overlooked my own role in perpetuating the same values I condemned. By shifting the blame onto others, I avoided confronting my own internal contradictions and the discomfort of acknowledging my complicity in the system I criticized."*

Rationalization involves justifying behaviors or feelings with seemingly logical reasons, often avoiding the true underlying motives. Changez rationalizes his pursuit of the American Dream by downplaying the cultural and ethical compromises he makes. He initially justifies his role at Underwood Samson by focusing on the financial rewards and the prestige it brings. He says, "I wanted to be successful... and I was willing to work hard to achieve that success" (Hamid, 2007, p. 48). For example, after witnessing the impact of American policies in the Philippines, he admits, "I was... caught up in the symbolism of my activity" (Hamid, 2007, p. 98). This breakdown in rationalization marks the beginning of his ideological shift.

*"When faced with the reality of my changing beliefs and growing disillusionment, I resorted to intellectualization as a defense mechanism. I intellectualized my emotions, analyzing them from a detached perspective rather than allowing myself to fully experience and process the underlying feelings of uncertainty and conflict."*

Regression involves reverting to an earlier stage of development for comfort. Changez exhibits regression through his nostalgia for Pakistan. As he becomes more disillusioned with his life in America, he increasingly longs for his homeland. This is evident when he describes his return to Pakistan as "like coming home to a place I had never left" (Hamid, 2007, p. 155).

Sublimation involves channeling unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable activities. Changez channels his disillusionment and anger into activism upon returning to Pakistan. He becomes a university lecturer, encouraging students to critically engage with their cultural and political realities: "I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine" (Hamid, 2007, p. 182). Through his activism, Changez finds a sense of purpose and agency, fostering stronger relationships within his community and redefining his role in the world.

One prominent defense mechanism displayed by Changez is denial. Throughout the novel, Changez often denies his true feelings and suppresses his emotions, especially regarding his



sense of belonging and cultural identity. This denial serves as a shield against the discomfort and uncertainty he faces in a society that increasingly marginalizes individuals like him.

The mechanism of denial is evident here because if he look with the reality principle then he would have tried to learn what is happening around him but he simply tried to ignore those things that cause him mental disturbance.

Changez, at first, denies the cultural and emotional barriers between Erica and himself. He looks at her as a symbol of acceptance into the American society, by refusing to accept the depth of her grief over Chris's death. This denial protects him from the reality that their relationship is built on cultural differences and unfulfilled expectations. Changez uses projection of his desire for validation onto Erica, He believes that helping her in overcoming her grief will solidify his place in American society. He attributes his own acceptance needs onto her, which results in frustration and misunderstandings when Erica did not reciprocate his feelings. Despite her emotional unavailability, Changez rationalizes his continued pursuit of a relationship with Erica. He justifies his efforts to integrate into American culture through her, by explaining that these difficulties are temporary obstacles that will eventually be overcome. As he struggles with his growing disillusionment, Changez's initial enthusiasm and dedication to his job at Underwood Samson, gradually wane. His colleagues' unwavering commitment to American corporate success contrasts sharply with his emerging skepticism. As Changez can no longer reconcile his values with those of his workplace, this divergence creates a sense of alienation and isolation in his character. Here defense mechanisms are implied by his ego to maintain a balance in his mental state and save him from severe effect of anxiety.

Changez's relationships with his family and friends in Pakistan are also effected by these defense mechanisms. Dispite of his mothers pursuit he prefers to have a beard to save and main his identity. His success in America brings a sense of pride but also guilt and responsibility. His internal conflict manifests as a struggle to balance his professional aspirations with his cultural and familial obligations, leading to a strained sense of belonging.

### **Conclusion**

To understand his psychological journey and their impact on his relationships with others the defense mechanisms exhibited by Changez the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist". The defense mechanisms of projection, rationalization, regression, reaction formation, and sublimation are examined playing a role in his adaptation to and rejection of his American experience. Furthermore it is explored that defense mechanisms direct Changez's relationships according to their psychological functions; such as projection helps to displace his insecurities onto others, denial shields him from reality, displacement redirects his emotions and rationalization justifies his action.

The immigrants can cope with discrimination faced by them through the use of these mechanisms by overcoming relationship gaps and insecurities in different situations. Together, these mechanisms illustrate the complexities of identity formation, cultural assimilation, and the psychological toll of navigating a divided world in "The Reluctant Fundamentalist." These mechanisms not It only illustrates his internal struggles but also highlights the broader themes of identity, belonging, and resistance in a post-9/11 context. Through Changez's character, Hamid offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of immigrant experiences and the psychological resilience required to navigate conflicting cultural landscapes.



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