

## MIGRATION AS A DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE - A STUDY MOHSIN HAMID'S LITERARY FICTIONS

Inderpreet Kaur,  
Faculty of English,  
University of Delhi, New Delhi.

---

### Abstract

*The present paper proposed to present the Middle East crisis in the novels of Mohsin Hamid. The stories of immigrants articulated as a larger part of the Unites States. The appearance of the real and the surreal is evolved into imagination. Into the context of refugee asylums, citizens are looking for a better future. The sense of geographical unsettlement is evident. Whether a immigration is a difficult experience or an indisputable part of a life, is subject to the argument*

---

**Keywords:** Refugee, displacement, Migration, Migrant.

---

### Introduction

Few novels tell the story about the refugee condition. It is to the credit of Mohsin Hamid, a British Pakistani novelist, who has recently published a book called 'Exist West' in 2017 that deals with the refugee crisis at the global level. The novel is autobiographical in nature, reflecting his sense of displacement from one place to another. Born in Lahore, moved to California at the age of 3, travelling through Sydney, then came back to Lahore again, his coming and going forms an inevitable part of his life. This condition of dislocation has been depicted in his other works, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007, and an essay titled *How I Solved It: New York or Lahore*, that reflects his 'pull of New York City' as 'universally understood' But the "...pull of Lahore perhaps requires a little more explanation...".

Taking a quote from the novel 'Exit West',

"The news in those days was full of war and migrants and nativists, and it was full of fracturing too, of regions pulling away from nations, and cities pulling away from hinterlands, and it seemed that as everyone was coming together everyone was also moving apart. Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play."

It throws back a light on the lives of those citizens, who was living in harmony yesterday, but at the turn of the hour of war, are subjected to forceful segregation from the land they had inhabited since birth. There is a sheer resistance at the heart of characters who are prone to become unknown individuals from the native citizens. In the novel, there is an unnamed city and the plot has been set against the love of the two protagonists, namely Nadia and Saeed. Unfortunately, their love stood the time of war and violence. That the warfare would be happening anytime soon makes them realize of the idea that their families and relationships must be prevented from tearing apart. In order to save the family bonds, they turn to find a refuge. Migration appears as the new solution to them. Yet the pathway to migration does not ensure destination.

The Book has been written in a lyrical style, packed with evasive allusions and supporting many digressions. This challenges the conventional tone of the Novel. It creates a political space between the near future and the nostalgic past. The vague mood demonstrates the refugee mood who is moving away from “...once fertile plains cracking with dryness, from seaside villages gasping beneath tidal surges, from overcrowded cities and murderous battlefields...”. It is a tumultuous state of his mind, which has gone through this undesirable shift from being a native to a newcomer.

The title of the novel ‘*Exit west*’ alludes to the literary technique of Magic Realism. This combination of a real and surreal is unique. The reality is happening in the background- car bombings, violent crashes, whereas the surrealism is the presence of the rectangular black Doors. These doors can become one of those doors overnight that could help them lead to the passages their heart wishes to walk on. The individuals could step up into it and the door would transcend them to the countries like Washington, London, Lahore and Sydney. One may see billions of people walking through this door simultaneously. This creates an apocalyptic situation for both the migrants and the readers that the civilization is on the verge of being collapsed. This is a man-made event. Instead of trying to save the whole civilization from this apocalypse, each one of them is adopting the ways of escaping from the door. Travelling through space and time, they have been caught in the catastrophic situation, which focus on the psychology of the survivors. Constantly, attempts are being made to bring the human race into life and together as one. Though the author has refused to label anything as magic realism, yet it is the creativity of the readers to understand the catastrophe. Meanwhile, whatever the solution comes in between could be acknowledged as a Magic realism.

On the other hand, it could be said that the notions of the characters regarding reality is such a limited concept, that it automatically includes the use of miracles, monsters, and fairies into it. The certainties towards the citizens and their community are being examined. The true fact is that the death is a certainty; instead of realizing it, one starts looking for the pathways to avoid it. This death is seen as a war in the novel and the door is visualized as a deliverance from it. The appearance of

anything like this is known as the alternative belief system, which defies the rational approach towards the mainstream idea of the violence by radicals and extremists. Such combination of a Ninety Nine percent reality and One percent magic is heartily appreciated by the readers. The door in the novel assures the migrant characters a possibility of refugee asylums, but the real exit from the grief never took place in the book. That's why the individuals kept struggling for the getaway, unable to escape, bear the loss of their origin, their own country due to militancy.

The constant reference to the United States by Hamid is that the country has shown the indifferent attitude towards the Muslim refugees in the past. "...Despite what you may hear from alarmists, it's not easy for refugees to get to the United States — or really anywhere, for that matter. If they're even able to escape their own country, they face constant roadblocks and long waiting lists before they're able to establish themselves, however precariously, in another country. There are no magic doorways they can walk through that will just bring them to another land..."

This has set the plot of most of his fiction. Other work by the author is *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007 that describes the similar condition of a Pakistani man, Changez, who gets abandoned, first by his British Girlfriend and then by America. "... It seemed to me then—and to be honest, sir, seems to me still—that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away..."

The novel particularly, revolves around the 9/11 terror attack. Later, this has ingrained fear in the mind of Americans against Muslims, thereby encouraging the violent assaults and racial discrimination against the community. Compared to the *Exist West*, this novel does not advocate the journey of the Changez, but it explores it. He travels to Chile, New York, where he serves American empire, but in the return, gets manipulation of his homeland.

"You have reminded me of how alien I found the concept of acquaintances splitting the bill when I first arrived in your country. I had been raised to favour mutual generosity over mathematical precision in such matters; given time both work equally well to even a score."

Changez suffered from multiple clashes. He is incapable of taking a decision, whether to leave the country or stay behind. "...Such journeys have convinced me that it is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be..."

In the past, the country has taken billions of refugees; they form an important part of the United States. On the other hand, America could be seen as the unhappy country in the world. Whosoever is coming into this country is actually leaving their families, children behind whom they might never see again. With respect to these stories of immigrants, the sorrow is something that forms the undeniable segment of American Prosperity.

Moreover, what goes in the mind of the refugee has been displayed in his 2017 essay, *How I Solved It: New York or Lahore*, although it deliberates upon the condition of how it feels like to “..Ah, I loved New York. And that was the problem. For I loved Lahore, too...” . A reader could see his own connection with the concept of a migrant with both the places and his dilemma of where to go”... In London, I didn’t just miss Lahore. I missed New York, too...”

It is a typical modern story set in a contemporary lifestyle. The appearance of the real and surreal can increase the imagination power of anyone who is looking for the suitable world. Here, citizens start visualizing the experience of passing through the Exit as a sole way to obtain a desirable future. Saeed has faith in the power of a prayer and feels a better world is getting rebuilt outside the door. Though he did not express this to Nadia, yet it is the only consolation and hope that is making the millions of migrants move outside their homeland. Also, the idea of restoration to their native land could not be met. It is considered dangerous to go back to the town, since it is not the same but became worse. The realization that “...In this group, everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was...” makes the situation more dismal.

The idea of departure could result into a shocking reality if they would get the hostile atmosphere of the host country. They are looked down upon as if they have come to take the advantage of the country, they are being admitted to. Such animosity and verbal abuses that they have come to snatch the dream jobs of the other people, put them into sideline and denied them of equal rights and opportunities. Who is to think that they are displaced entity who has left behind their families and relatives, do not only aspire to seek refugee asylum, but are willing to contribute to the economic, political and social development of the country as well. Hence, migrating from one place to another, twice or thrice, begins to take a shape of the long story of survival, where the struggle is imminent.

“It has been said that depression is a failure to imagine a plausible desirable future for oneself,

and, not just in Marin, but in the whole region, in the Bay Area, and in many other places too, places both near and far, the apocalypse appeared to have arrived and yet it was not apocalyptic, which is to say that while the changes were jarring they were not the end, and life went on, and people found things to do and ways to be and people to be with, and plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now, and the result was something not unlike relief.”

Considering oneself as a refugee is difficult. But realizing the fact that one is on the verge of becoming a refugee is more difficult. It cannot be accepted easily by anyone who has loves his homeland. While there is Saeed retaining his religious belief “...When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched, and he touched a feeling that we are all children who lose our parents, all of us, every man and woman and boy and girl, and we too will all be lost by those who came after us and love us, and this loss unites humanity, unites every human being.” The union of humankind could be observed when the country would fall apart in the wake of terrorist activities.

Being himself a migrant from one land to another, his autobiographical elements establish a set pattern of his works. ”...I’m Very Comfortable as a Hybridized Mongrel...”. They provide the opportunity for the readers to engage them within the story as a protagonist like Nadia, who is in the middle of a dilemma whether to go, but where to go or Changez Khan who feels “...Time only moves in one direction. Remember that. Things always change...”.

### **Conclusion**

The geographical unsettlement is apparent in the literary fictions of Mohsin Hamid. The paper had analyzed the number of ways in which author has described- how difficult it is to bear a migrant experience in one’s life. Such fiction and non-fiction constitute the major themes about the crisis of Middle- Eastern refugee. Why do the citizens of the country have to take an exit from West and where would they go afterwards? What the Magical door would offer them that the West has failed to provide? Is it the only condition of the people that they are supposed to leave their inhabitant lands once the trumpet of the war is blown? The conflict of undergoing a panorama from native to newcomers is vital to the argument presented above.



### Works Cited

1. Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. London: Penguin, 2013. Print.
2. Hamid, Mohsin. "How I Solved It: New York or Lahore?" *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, 06 June 2017. Web. 14 April 2017
3. Sandhu, Sukhdev. "Exit West by Mohsin Hamid – Magical Vision of the Refugee Crisis." *The Guardian*. N.p., 02 May 2017. Web. 29 March 2017.
4. "Mohsin Hamid's Novel 'Exit West' Raises Immigration Issues." *NPR*. N.p., 06 Mar. 2017. Web. 4 April 2017.
5. Motion, Andrew. "Exit West by Mohsin Hamid Review – Magic and Violence in Migrants' Tale." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 02 Mar. 2017. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.