

Depiction of Society and Economy in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke

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Abstract

Pakistani English literature has gained worldwide recognition in the past two decades. It became more popular in the 1980s with early writers like Ahmed Ali, Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Zulfikar Ghose, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Tariq Ali, who played a big role in shaping it. Contemporary writers like Mohsin Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2007) and Kamila Shamsie have brought Pakistani English literature to a global audience. Their works explore themes like identity, migration, and political conflict. Mohsin Hamid use unique storytelling techniques, such as second-person narration and one sided conversations. His simple yet powerful writing blends local and global themes, making his stories relatable to reader. *Moth Smoke* explores alienation and identity crisis through Daru, who falls from privilege to poverty, addiction, and crime. His self-destruction mirrors a moth drawn to a flame, symbolizing his downfall. This study examines the societal pressures, financial struggles, and identity crises that shape a protagonist, Daru, showing alienation can put Daru toward self-destruction and change in his identity.

Keywords: Alienation, Identity, Culture, Economic, Struggles.

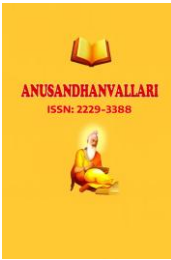
Introduction

Mohsin Hamid is a British-Pakistani writer; he was born in Lahore 1971. He enrolls in American School in Pakistan. At the age of eighteen, he moved to the United States to get his degree from Princeton University. While, at Princeton University he attends the workshop conducted by Toni Morrison, where he writes draft for his first fiction. He takes one year for writing, and he publishes his first debut novel, *Moth Smoke* in 2000. The novel wins a Betty Trask award and finalist for the PEN/Hemingway award. It is also a New York Times "Notable Book of the Year", featured on bestseller lists, adapted for cinema, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and translated into over thirty languages.

Moth Smoke is Mohsin Hamid's debut novel. It is about the story of Darashikoh, known as Daru, a young man from a wealthy family in Lahore, Pakistan. After his father's death he

finds it difficult to live his life. He gets a bank job with the help of his best friend Ozi's father. However, he soon loses his job and he gets addicted to drugs, which leads him into poverty and he has an affair with his Friend Ozi's wife Mumtaz. The life falls upside down, Daru has completely lost his identity. The story explores the class divide between the rich and the poor, along with societal pressures, which can make Daru feel lost and unsure of his

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Identity and feeling alienated.

Jasmin Allen states that “alienation happens when a person struggles to find meaning and a clear sense of identity, which is shaped by their social and work environment. The effect of alienation changes depending on different stages of capitalism; industrial, monopoly and flexible, each affecting identity in different ways. In the industrial stage, workers had a structured routine but lacked a personal sense of purpose. In the monopoly stage, workers had access to education and career opportunities, but if they failed to take advantage of them, they often lost their sense of identity. In flexible capitalism, alienation is even worse, leading to an identity crisis. Workers believe they have freedom in the workplace, but in reality, they still

face hidden struggles and feel disconnected” (2019). Allen's article connects with the protagonist Daru in *Moth Smoke*, experiencing a major shift in his social and economic status. Once part of Lahore’s privileged class, he loses his job and falls into poverty, making him feel isolated. Like workers under flexible capitalism, Daru believes his choices, but in reality, he becomes trapped in a cycle of financial struggle, crime, and addiction, ultimately leading to his downfall.

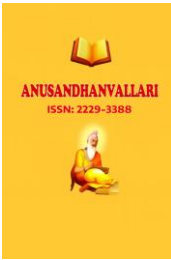
Review of Literature

Somy Manzoor and Dr. Balkar Singh, in their article “Hegemony and Alienation in Mohsin Hamid’s Novel *Moth Smoke*”, examine the intricacies of power, class, hegemony, and alienation. The authors argue that socio-political structure inequality and economic disparity exist in Pakistan. Through the protagonist, Darashikoh Shehzad, the novel exposes individuals from marginalized social positions struggle against dominant hegemonic forces. Daru’s descent into crime and moral decay symbolizes the alienation experienced by those excluded from elite circles. The article Provides valuable insight into the intersection of power and identity, contributing to the broader discourse on class struggles.

Farhat Nawaz, Seema Safeer, and Zeeshan Shahjehan, in their 2023 article "Exploring Politically Historic Allegory in Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke*," discuss Pakistan’s political and historical landscape. They argue that *Moth Smoke* is more than just a personal story, it serves as an allegory for the corruption, power struggles, and class divide in Pakistan. Through Darashikoh’s downfall, the novel critiques the country’s socio-political system, where the elite maintain control while the less privileged suffer. The authors’ uses symbolism and historical references to expose these issues, making the novel a reflection of Pakistan’s past and present political realities.

Singh, Sukheeja, and Bhangu in their study "Class Struggle and Social Identity in Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke*," portray economic inequality and its impact on a person's identity. They argue that Hamid presents a society where wealth and power determine a person’s status and opportunities. Through the character of Darashikoh, lower economic backgrounds face challenges that lead to isolation and moral downfall. The authors also point out that the novel criticizes the gap between the rich and the poor, showing how money and influence affect social relationships and justice. This idea connects to the larger theme of cultural conflict, especially the struggle between modern ambitions and traditional social structures in postcolonial Pakistan. Objectives:

1. Examine Daru’s transition from Privileged to poverty and its impact on his alienation and identity crisis in *Moth Smoke*.



2. To examine cultural conflict between traditional and modern values in shaping Daru's identity and relationships.
3. To analyze economic inequalities their impact on Daru's life in society
4. To investigate Daru's descent into addiction leads him to be "Lost in Smoke" symbolizing his struggle with identity.

Methodology

The theoretical frame work for this research is based on the alienation and identity crisis by Karl Marx's theory of class struggle to examine economic disparity and social exclusion shape Daru's downfall, while Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity and identity crisis help analyze the cultural conflict between tradition and modernity in Moth Smoke

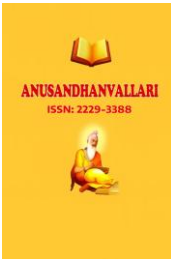
Daru's Loss of Privilege:

In Moth Smoke by Mohsin Hamid, the story is about the protagonist Darashikoh, known as Daru, a young man from a wealthy family in Lahore, Pakistan. After his father's death he finds it difficult to maintain the status and the life he grew up in, feeling pressure in the socially judgmental world Daru says "I'm doing a little social climbing (102)". He gets the bank job with the help of his best friend's Ozi's father from the elite circle. He finds it difficult to adjust to a society where people are judged based on their social position.

Daru secures a bank job with the help of his best friend Ozi's father, from part of the elite circle. However, when Daru loses his job, he falls into poverty. His once-privileged lifestyle quickly fades away, and the social divide between him and his best friend Ozi becomes more apparent. As Daru struggles with his reality, between his past and present becomes overwhelming. This Change makes him to feel alienated and disconnected from his former life and friends. Daru's life turns upside down after losing his job; he gets addicted to drugs to avoid the feeling of isolation and loss. The drug provides a temporary escape from his problem, but it make him get worse, and he starts to sell the drugs. He expresses the drowsy feeling of Daru after taking drugs. Daru says "I roll a jay, or maybe I should call it an aitch, since I'm using hairy. I light up a puff delicately... I'm in a good mood. My head is clear. Thoughts are coming one at a time, nicely formed. I like this; well, I might as well admit it: this hairy is damn pleasant (162). This temporary escape reflects how Daru is trying to avoid dealing with his changing identity and the loneliness that comes with it.

Daru's shift from wealth to poverty in Moth Smoke deeply affects his sense of identity.

Losing his wealth and status leaves him feeling lost and disconnected from his past life. To overcome this, he turns to drugs as a way to escape his pain. This addiction changes Daru's identity, making him feel even more lost and alienated in a society that places so much importance on social status.



Traditional and Modern Values:

In Moth Smoke, Daru represent the conflict between Traditional values and the Modern in the Pakistan society. He comes from Lahore, Pakistan, where financial security and social responsibility is highly valued. However, after his father's death, Daru struggles to maintain his social status. The society around him changes, becoming modern and materialistic, success is measured by wealth rather than traditional values. Without a job, Daru feels unable to adapt to the modern world, leaving him alienated and lost. Daru says, "My father had given me only the keys to a memory" (135). Daru feels from his past and enjoys the privilege that he had and to adopt in the modern world.

Daru feels left behind especially after losing his job and falling into poverty. Daru starts to feel left out and different from his best friend Ozi. Daru falls into financial troubles, Ozi distance from him. This shows that modern society prioritizes success and privileged over friendship. This shows the difference between traditional values where loyalty and support are important and modern values, where wealth and status are prioritized.

Daru is attracted to modern life because he it as a way of rebel, be independent and break the old traditions. He is excited by the freedom and the new opportunities in the modern society offers, but he struggles to fully accept it. Ozi on the other hand has the chance to live a modern life and gets his education from the United States hence he follows the traditional values.

Ozi's wife Mumtaz struggles with traditional expectation by her husband. Ozi wants her to be traditional wife, while she gets her education from the United States with the modern thoughts she wants to live an independent and freedom. She has an affair with Daru, who is with the modern ideas, shows her desire to break away from these traditional norms. Mumtaz's action reflects the struggles between modern and traditional values as she tries to find a way to be true

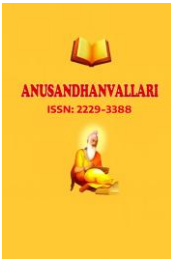
her in a society that expects woman to follow traditional roles. At the same time Daru feels Alienated as he struggles to find his place between traditional and modern society. His affair with Mumtaz offers him a temporary escape, but it also makes him sense of isolation. He feels both he and mumtaz caught in the society over traditional and modern values.

Economic Inequality

Daru leads a wealthy life after he loses his job, his life changes upside down, because of his pride. He lives in the society where status is based on the wealth. Meanwhile his best friend Ozi, enjoys the luxurious life with car and house and gets his degree from America, where Daru could not afford and struggle to pay his bills. The difference between rich and poor makes Daru feel like outsiders among the rich.

To maintain his status in the society and to show no way less than wealthy people, he hosts the dinner party, despite of his financial struggles, to show he is rich. To conduct the party he borrows the money from his servant to purchase wine is the irony and shame. This shows how for Daru goes to pretend he's still the part of wealthy class is. In the society he lives the people are judged based on their material wealth.

The difference between rich and poverty make him to feel isolated. To make more money, he pushes him to do the illegal activities like selling drugs and addicted to drugs to make an escape from the reality. He even sells the drugs



to the young people of Pakistan and the illegal activities. He turns to crime because he feels desperate and unable to fit in the wealthy people and maintain his social status. His choice to sell drugs shows the struggle to living in the poverty which can force someone into making desperate decision.

Air Condition can be serves as a symbol of division between rich and poor. For wealthy air condition is common house hold appliance and gives a comfort during the hot summers. For people with living in poverty, air conditioning is luxury and they cannot afford the cool air in the hot summer. Daru says, ...“There are two social classes in Pakistan, Professor Superb said to his unsuspecting

audience, gripping the podium with both hands as he spoke. ‘ The first group, large and sweaty, contains those referred to as the masses. The second group is much smaller, but its member exercise vastly greater control over their immediate environment and are collectively termed the elite (126).

This difference shows the inequality in the society, the elite class enjoys the modern comforts like air-conditioning, while other class can barely afford their needs, where air conditioning is luxury for them; this reveals the divide between different social classes. Lost in Smoke:

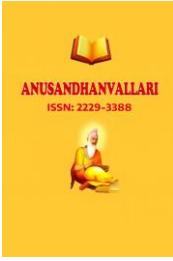
In Moth smoke Hamid uses the image of a moth flying towards the flame to symbolize Daru’s self- destruction path. In the novel Daru watches the moth flies around the candle and it dives into the flame and burns, left smoke. Like moth, Daru knows his choices will destroy him, but he cannot stop himself. His down fall is happening by the division between the modern and traditional values, economic inequality, and his struggle with the loss of his privilege.

Daru lives in the society where the rich people enjoy the luxury while the less privileged people struggle to survive. He is from the wealthy class after his father’s death and after losing his job he loses the privilege of luxury and he finds it difficult to pay his bills. His best friend Ozi enjoys the power and luxurious life under the shell of his father. His father has the political power and the wealth. Daru has no support and losses everything. As he gets addicted to drugs and crime, he becomes like the moth struck in the world where the wealthy can survive.

In the end, Daru’s journey shows the way poverty consumes the person, just like the fire burns the moth. Losing his comfortable life leaves him no support in the society he lives. Anger, addiction, bad choice pulls him towards the destruction, like the moth burns itself in the flame. In the end the smoke only remains.

Conclusion

Moth Smoke tells a powerful story about loneliness and identity struggles through Daru’s life. His fall from wealth to poverty shows the harsh reality of social divisions. The novel criticizes economic inequality, societal pressures, and the search for purpose in a changing world. In the end, Daru’s downfall is a warning about how isolation can lead to self-destruction. Hamid uses the image of a moth drawn to a flame to show how both society and personal choices can push someone toward ruin. The story ultimately reveals a world where the rich remain secure, while those who lose their status are left to struggle and disappear.



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