

Economic Crises and Marx's Theory of Alienation from Self and Society in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*

Abstract

This research paper delves deep into Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke to provide an in-depth examination of colonial capitalist model, the clash between haves and have not, and the exploitation with modes of production that bring disenchantment and disillusionment from self and society, highlighted by Karl Marx, a German philosopher. Marx defines alienation as estrangement from true human nature and the inability to determine relationships due to social stratification and class divisions. As Mohsin Hamid in Moth Smoke also satirizes the fickleness, cold-bloodedness, and reduction of human status to commercial transaction due to the ideological and hegemonic control of the bourgeoisie class. In this way, the research paper evaluates the deceptive modesty, white-collar crime, and oligarchy of elites through sarcasm and playful humor with pathos reflected in Moth Smoke. Moreover, this research paper wishes to reconstruct society based on equity by reclaiming the lost identity, promoting indigenization, and revisiting the history of Pakistan. In addition, this research paper stresses the necessity to strive against capitalism, imperialism, and globalization through the rhetoric of resistance and struggle for liberation. Resultantly, this research paper finds out that theoretical pedagogies along with systematic criticism are required to sort out the messed things as there is a post-post-colonial generation who does not have any colonial experience, so, it depends on us to deconstruct and unveil dark realities to reconstruct them for the betterment of all despite class, color, race, and gender.

Key Words: Alienation, Colonialism, Capitalism, Decolonization, Globalization, Marxism

Mohsin Hamid is a British-Pakistani novelist who explores identity crises, injustice, power dynamics, cultural and religious conflicts, impacts of globalization and colonialism, and alienation of man under modern capitalist society. *Moth Smoke* is his debut novel published in 2000 which revolves around the story of Darashikoh Shezad who, after losing his job, moves towards a life of crime and punishment in order to fulfill his needs in this class-oriented society. Moreover, *Moth Smoke* is a political allegory that depicts the staggering circumstances of Pakistan at the time of 1998 nuclear testing by using a historical trial of the liberal Mughal empire Darashikoh by his brother Aurangzeb. To shed light on class division, Mohsin Hamid exhibits that there are two social classes, "air conditioning" and non-air conditioning. The first ones are those whose lives

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are full of comfort, wealth, and coolness as Ozi and Mumtaz while the second ones are those who face sleepless nights due to load shedding and energy crises like Daru in the text.

The neo colonial capitalist oligarchs use air conditioners in houses, cars, offices, restaurants, and lounges to see wide TVs screens. If these people have some realization for the poor, they satisfy themselves by saying that, there are five times prayers a day that will send them to air-conditioned heaven (Hamid 126) which highlights their selfishness and ill morality in this colonial capitalist society. Another relatable textual piece of evidence from *Moth Smoke* is "Murad Badshah was never fond of ACs. He was a man who liked to sweat" (127) which reveals the conditioned body of the poor to encounter troublesome life with miseries.

In addition to it, "air conditioning was more important to Darashikoh, it took his mother from him and propelled him inexorably toward a life of crime" (Hamid 131) which gives the saddest glimpse of Daru's life who lost his mother when they slept on a roof because of non-air conditioning but unfortunately, she died due to a bullet attack. He needs money to be powerful to get air conditioning security as Daru thinks that "He, a man who hated guns came to accept that he would have to use one" to take revenge (Hamid 134) which also discovers how the environment conditions a person to act in a certain way. The textual references such as "she bled to death in silence", "human howl" and "the pool of her blood was already dry when the lightning sky roused Darashikoh from his sleep" reflects the gloomy and brutal life faced by Darashikoh. Thus, a society surrounded by evils remains backward and its growth becomes stagnant due to the unfair and imbalanced distribution of wealth as highlighted by Karl Marx In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1932).

Thus, class stratification and capitalist structures are the root of every social evil as also described through this textual reference from *Moth Smoke*, "Things are tight these days and favors are expensive" (Hamid 63) as the prices of things are skyrocketing shown both in the fact and fiction based on Pakistani narratives. The standard of living cannot be maintained in the meager number of wages as Daru sadly highlights that "The very poor have the right to steal from the very rich" (Hamid 71) and "The economy is completely dead right now, with the rupee skyrocketing on the black market and bank accounts frozen" (Hamid 206). Murad Badshah also sheds light on turbulent circumstances of proletariat class and their struggle of survival in such class-oriented society as he says "we can't pay for the rent of this depot and our rickshaws breakdown and the only thing for sale at Lakshmi are boiled onions" (Hamid 167) which reflects stark social realities and cruelties. Another thought provoking and striking image that Daru highlights is a "woman walks by the gate, leading a little boy with a balloon of hunger in his belly and hair bleached by malnutrition" (Hamid 224) that sheds light on social challenges face by poor and manipulation with modes of production by elites that bring lower class on the verge of death and hunger.

The world is like a 'pie' where whosoever comes first, gets the best while others live in the hope of getting a chunk or a bite of it. For instance, according to Ozi, "People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller" (Hamid 231). With an analytic gaze, it seems that this pie is merely for the elite, the political figures, the officials, and the opportunist whereas the lower ones like Daru are fired everywhere. In this way, existence has become agony for Daru with

a passage of sufferings in his life on a micro level while for proletariat masses on a macro scale. Critically, Daru's erotic affair with his master-like friend Aurangzeb's wife can be interpreted as a revolt of the proletariat class against the bourgeoisie as symbolic representative of Marxist's dialectical war.

A lot of scholarly reviews have reviewed on this text; thus, an extensive literature review has been mentioned in this section of the research paper.

Rachel Aspden in *The Guardian* highlights that on one hand, the clash of cultures in *Moth Smoke* brings violence and chaos in Indigenous culture while on the other hand, he substantiates the title's significance by highlighting that Moths lose their lives due to deadly attraction with candle flames as Daru brings his self-destruction through his own hands by involving in drug addiction and a love affair with Ozi's wife. Moreover, Aspden also indicates excessive greed, power abuse, and insecurity of Pakistan's rich, and their negative repercussions on their poorer neighbors.

Furthermore, Tariq Khan and Inayat Ullah in the *World-Wide Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, write on the formalistic analysis of *Moth Smoke* (Khan 27). They highlight the interpretations of certain symbols such as Pajero, which reflects class snobbishness and elites' status while they also shed light on the causes of crimes and its psychological impacts as Daru's unemployment, his deprivation of necessities of life, social injustice, power, greed and lust that cause this main character's downfall (Khan 39).

In addition to it, Khamsa Qasim and Afshan Moin in the article entitled as "Discerning Hyper Reality in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*: A Postmodernist Reading", investigate the character's deceptive and split personalities, their shattered dreams, blurred destinies, and their clash with self and society due to the hyperreal world of simulation and simulacra (Qasim 109). Resultantly, Darashikoh faces poverty and unemployment because in such a technological world, machines take humans place. Soon, Daru realizes that human dignity can only be calculated through commercial transactions as Ozi, being rich, is beneficiary of every charm that a person is desirous of. She inquiries into Baudrillard's view on fakeness and lost originality in the modernistic world that brings hollowness in the modern world (Qasim 119). For instance, Darashikoh suffers from a clash of physical reality with hyper-reality when he visits Ozi's luxurious house possessing two Pajero which causes depravity and sense of discrimination due to these simulated realities.

Furthermore, Maëlle Jeanniard in his article highlights that this novel expresses "drug dealing, corruption, and class warfare by casting a sharp gaze on 1998 Pakistan which was in the throes of its nuclear competition with India" (Jeanniard). Moreover, he elucidates that years have passed away but Pakistan's economic and democratic instability remains the same since its so-called independence. In addition, he delineates that Mohsin Hamid highlights the misuse of public infrastructure and the political alliances between landowners and military and judiciary powers that are often left unpunished.

Additionally, in the article "Human Perversion and Environmental Space: An Ecocritical reading of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*", Munazza Yaqoob highlights the after impacts of pollution on human psychology. She highlights that how such poisonous environment of Lahore filled with heat, burning stench, sweating, dust

and smoke is disrupting human reasoning and emotions (Yaqoob 93). Moreover, she delineates that an individual and his environment are inseparable entities. Daru's drug addiction, his sexual affair with Mumtaz, police corruption, and Ozi's superficial life and money laundering are parallel to the contaminated environment of 1988 atomic attacks and consumerist culture that they lived in as human beings are products of their environment (Yaqoob 100). In this regard, the linkage between the human body, psyche, and soul is lost in such an incoherent world of the class system.

Thus, Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* is analyzed through various aspects such as post-colonialism, hyper reality, institutional corruption, systematic injustices, class structures and cold materialism due to modernization & globalization. While this research is a detailed investigation of another important topic which sheds light on the remaking of self through the rhetoric of resistance and struggle for liberation against oppressive hierarchical structures by evaluating Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* through Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation from self and society. Moreover, it evaluates financial instabilities and depravities which are doom & gloom to lead one towards dissatisfaction and detachment from his own self individually and from society collectively. Thus, this above mentioned critically engaging moot point makes this research meaningful and a valuable addition to the existing corpus of literary critiques.

This paper provides a qualitative text-based research methodology. It has selected a contemporary twenty first century literary text *Moth Smoke* by a Pakistani born British author Mohsin Hamid as a primary source of study. This research project utilizes the theoretical pedagogy of Marx in terms of Alienation of self from the society. Secondly, the scholarly journal articles and critical & analytical reviews are consulted as secondary sources to frame the pattern of this research paper. Karl Marx conceptualize alienation as an extended outcome of economic class conflict that creates a binary opposition of the two main classes that eventually find resistance in the dialectical war for material benefits against the bourgeoisie. Through the Marxist lens, it seems that Ozi's overnight wealth is a product of kickbacks and hush money to become the "ultra-rich" jacket of the country. He announces the realistic perspective that he returns to Pakistan to strengthen his father's "assets" gained through the illegitimate ways & means. Ozi confesses that "some say my dad's corrupt and I am his money launderer. Well, It's true enough" (Hamid 230). Marx's theory of alienation utters that "the alienation of man thus appeared as the fundamental evil of capitalist society". It is just like the inherent oligarchy from generation to generation in our historical and contemporary political system of Pakistan that is based on the western colonial setup. Hamid articulates that this is actually the contemporary re-alignment of the classes as the historical model of European and Western colonialism. Thus, the Marxist war is complicated between the "contactors" and the "contractors" forever. Consequently, in *Moth Smoke*, there is the impact of an increasing sense of globalization and McDonaldization which are modern ways of consumption to a larger extent to cause financial bankruptcy for Daru, a spasmodic symptom of "have not" in words of the theorist, Marx. Consequently, this effect is decreasing class solidarity as it is built exactly on the neo-liberal strange of extraction impressively and exclusion illegally.

Thus, this research paper raises some significant rhetorical questions such as:

How does *Moth Smoke* challenge the hegemonic power structure and shake the state narratives by the rhetoric of resistance?

Is Darashikoh merely a passive receiver of the “slow violence” in form of societal and financial injustices or the resistor to stand against it for “slow revolution” that contributes to shape the novel as a post post colonial text?

How does Mohsin Hamid represent alienation of the peripheral class as a result of imbalances in the modes of production?

Mohsin Hamid critically analyzes the socio-economic and political problems in Pakistani society which arrest the poor naïve while, on the contrary, rich criminals remain free due to their power and hegemony. Marx explores the exploitation with means of production by hierarchical structures as Mohsin Hamid, by critiquing imperial regimes and capitalistic structures, highlights that they “gunned us down when we tried to protest” (Hamid 233) as “our political system is at fault. We are at the mercy of the powerful” (Hamid 283). Thus, no institution is taking responsibility to call into account such dictatorship, monarchy, oppression, corruption, and lawlessness which pave the way for such structural & “systematic” inequalities. Another textual reference “Ozi, a man capable of anything and afraid of nothing” (Hamid 6) explores the fearlessness and immorality of human beings who now believe that dishonesty is the best policy.

Additionally, Ozi, a friend of Darashikoh came back to Pakistan from America after getting higher education, with his wife Mumtaz and his son to continue the illicit means of money making. He kills a boy on the road due to the fast speed of his Pajero but no one cares for the victim because Ozi is a ruthless man from the elite class as this textual evidence highlights that “he killed because his nature is to kill, the death of a child has no meaning for him. Tender humanity screams in fear, confronted by such a monster” (Hamid 7) which explores the philosophy of might is right, social Darwinism, and survival of the fittest policy.

Furthermore, Darashikoh evaluates his life and status according to the living standards of Ozi as he discovers that “my house is the same size it was when he left” (Hamid 9) which implies his jealousy and helplessness and on a broader level, it represents the aggression of middle class of Pakistani society as Marx highlights the rebellion of Proletariats for the establishment of a ‘classless’ society. Darashikoh loses his temperament when his boss treated him with dehumanization as Daru accentuates that “I am not of your serfs, attempt to impose feudal hierarchy” (Hamid 21-22). Karl Marx explicitly quotes that “the less you express your own life, the greater is your alienated life-the greater is the store of your estranged being”. Thus, this novel exhibits the conflict between Marx’s bourgeoisie and proletariats through the usage of the Pajero as a symbolic representative of aristocracy as Daru describes that “I have never been in a Pajero before. Costs more than my house and moves like a bull, powerful and single-minded, trusting that bigger cars have the right of way” (Hamid 27). Another textual reference is that “Pajero give Ozi’s words authority. If anyone tries to get in, hit them. He has forgotten his roots” (Hamid 31) which investigates that if a person has Pajero, he has a right to ruin others’ life. When Daru meets Ozi after his return from America, he sees that he has “not one but two lovelies new Pajeros”. Ozi's Pajero is also compared with Daru's Suzuki. As Daru discovers, “I notice the difference in the sounds of slamming car doors the deep thuds of the

Pajero and Land Cruiser, the nervous cough of my Suzuki". Thus, Ozi achieves what he wants through "industry, drive, dexterity, and cunning" (Hamid 71) which reflects Marx's criticism of the devastating economic base through the superstructures of politics and hegemonic cultures.

In addition to it, Mohsin Hamid defines Globalization as "brutal phenomenon that brings mass displacement, wars, terrorism, unchecked financial capitalism, inequality, xenophobia, climate change (Hamid 10) in his book *Discontent and its Civilization*. In the modern world, fashion industry is on the peak and move like windstorm where lavish expenditures on ceremonies have become the model of modern rituals. The outward gleam and glamour of western civilization has urged the public masses to adopt some standards of life. Similarly, to live a life of glitter and glow, Ozi tries to make money by fair and foul means. That's why Mohsin Hamid questions the deepening impacts of globalization and western culture on Pakistani society which has rotten our economy and civilization. In *Moth Smoke*, Ozi enjoys his luxurious life with alcoholic drinks, parties, girls, and music while Darashikoh feels discomfort and incompatible by being alienated and outcaste. Theoretically, it is based on the dialectical contestation among the Marxist classes where the survivalist struggles are in perpetual conflict with each other.

Sadly, Mohsin Hamid displays that Pakistani society and its people are following Machiavellian politics by prioritizing materialism and disrespecting the sanctity of relationships (30) such as "Malik Jawan a rural landlord with half a million U.S in his account, a seat in the provincial assembly" (Hamid 20) highlights the corrupt politicians and collection of money for their self-interests rather than serving others even though they are the protectors and guardians of the public. Karl Marx also explains the unequal distribution of wealth by providing the idea of surplus value, profit gaining through labor's products that cause estrangement and alienation in working class, the real owners of the product. The privileged class enjoys their aristocratic life due to their high social position as Ozi gets his higher education from abroad while Daru gets it from a local institution which also exposes the system of connections that are necessary for one to uplift his status in society. Moreover, Daru is unable to get a job because he lacks foreign qualifications or an MBA degree which Murad Badshah mentions that it's all about social connections. Thus, Mohsin Hamid tries his best to derive attention towards entangled survival strategies and sustenance methodologies as depicted through this reference "unbearable drudgery of the tribe's struggle to subsist" (Hamid 95) exhibits the worsening effects of globalization on the economy which determines the relationships.

Mohsin Hamid describes that ironically, Pakistan emerged in the name of Islam but unfortunately, its fundamentals are forgotten and it is used just as Marx denotes that "religion is the opium of the masses". Islam stresses social justice and the treatment of all people equally, but they are divided into economic terms as upper, middle, and lower class, bourgeoisie and proletariats, air conditioning and non-air-conditioning. As a result, economic disparity has eaten the very vitals of society. The whole system of moral, ethical, and religious values is impaired by vanishing the distinction between right and wrong as explicitly portrayed in the character of Aurangzeb. Moreover, society's unrest is linked to our social and economic conditions which are changing rapidly. Our country is adopting globalization and capitalism which cause unemployment, inflation, poverty,

homelessness and the loss of moral and spiritual codes as Mohsin Hamid criticizes that “they are rich enough not to work unless they feel like it, so they think the rest of us are idiots settling for jobs we don’t love” (Hamid 30). So, the abnormal rise in the cost of living has hit the poorer sections of society and it is responsible to a great extent for the prevailing poverty, anxiety, and anarchy and to create the stark contrast between haves and have not’s, the idea provided by Karl Marx. For instance, Daru in *Moth Smoke* explores that “Labor hurt like hell” (Hamid 187), “I don’t want to face anyone at home, with no electricity and nothing to offer, unshaven because I don’t have a job” (Hamid 203).

In short, the novel delineates the dreadful impacts of lawlessness, unaccountability, underlying imperial structures, power imbalances, dictatorship and oppression on marginalized & stigmatized class by ultra elites. Thus, Mohsin Hamid demands resistance against unjust status quo to uplift that social ladder. Daru complains that he has “no job, no electricity, no telephone (Hamid 265) that’s why he is compelled to mention the terms such as unrefrigerated food and face swarm of mosquitoes (267) which gives a clear reflection of working-class difficulties. Another textual evidence that “White colonialists who didn’t let niggers like us into their clubs or their parliaments who gunned us down in gardens when we tried to protest “(Hamid 233) shows the fear of being captured by hegemonic structures to raise voice against them that causes identity crises, disconnection and class consciousness in lower strata of society as Daru feels a sense of being rejected or being belong to a powerless state due to the binaries of us vs them and the economic ‘other’. In this regard, the division of labor is contrary to man’s real essence that eradicate the unity and bring social identification markers. It highlights another significant element that when evil is the hallmark of institutional proceeding, then, the crime of individuals is obvious. Thus, as a rebellious stance against the system, Daru becomes a drug dealer and consumer of heroin and "Charas" as during Daru and Murad Badshah's conversation, he says "I want to rob high-end, high fashion, exclusive boutiques" (Hamid 268). The reason lies in the fact that elite-class boutiques are the symbol of that bank balance and the "ultimate hypocrisy" (Hamid 269) of the so-called developers of the nation.

Analytically, Hamid’s argument “stop blaming colonialism” throws the burden of Pakistani problems over the elite agencies and state narratives by demystifying that “they are robbing the country blind” (Hamid 230). The author continues that the administrators, executives and even the judiciary is evil as he targets that “the police are corrupt and ineffective” (Hamid 231) who proceed with the hypocritical masquerade of law and order. Thus, Marxism as a social, political, and economic theory focuses on the struggle between the capitalists and the working class’ power relationships that are exploitative and inevitably create the class conflict. Thus, he believes that everyone should contribute for what they can, and everyone should get what they need as Daru in *Moth Smoke*.

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that this research paper has critically explored the concept of alienation from self and society as a result of doom bankruptcy and economic regression through Marxist interpretations of the mode of production and alienation at length. In the selected text, *Moth Smoke*, when Daru meets a fundo, his fellow Mujahid Alam, he provides a narrative that is assertive and appealing as a solving praxis. He remarks that "we need a system...where a man

can rely on the law for justice, where he is given basic dignity as a human being and the opportunity to protest regardless of his status" (Hamid 284). Ironically, in Pakistan, the law-and-order work as "state-sponsored oppression" for the poor masses like Daru and as a sweet morsel for the rich like Ozi. To conclude, the problems can be rooted out by adopting simplicity and contentment in life as initial step and systematic changings and "slow revolution" as the practical stance to shift the mode of contemporary paradigm. For example, the opportunities of employment must be produced on an equal basis which will ultimately eradicate the roots of poverty and crooked ways of wealth centering. In order to have a society free of social evils in the true sense, the magnitude of "pie" should be enlarged for the poor and alienated sections of the society as well.

Thus, Mohsin Hamid ends on a wistful note on reformation, empowerment, and solidarity as Darashikoh discovers that "a lot can be done. There is just a shortage of good people willing to do it" (Hamid 207) & "We need a system, the time has come for change" (Hamid 284). In this way, all aforementioned arguments explore the critique by Mohsin Hamid on the stark & darker sides of globalization, westernization, and capitalism on Pakistani society and human relationships through his novel *Moth Smoke* by highlighting poverty, turbulent economic conditions, inequities, power hierarchies and joblessness that generally come out in the form of alienation. In short, to save working class from identity crises, depression and estrangement, Marx suggests that through communism, there would be equality and intersectional reallocation of opportunities for all that create the world non-conflictual, thus the worker's self and true humanity (Gattungswesen) will be respected and cherished.

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Notes & References