

Analyzing Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*: Unveiling Internal Colonialization



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Abstract: *The present research paper discusses Hamid's *Moth Smoke* and unveils colonial practices within the state. The paper aims at exploring socio-economic and political structures which result in class system within a state where the elites exploit commoners financially and segregate them socially. Post-colonial theory has been used as theoretical framework and content analysis technique has been used to analyze the select text. The study concludes that though the country has been liberated from physical colonization of colonizers yet the internal national leaders and so called nationalists have continued the same colonial practices through segregated socio-economic and hegemonic political structure.*

Keywords: Colonization, Socio-Economic Structures, Political Hegemony

Introduction

South Asia has remained under the rule of colonization for a long term and its effects can be seen even today in the postcolonial era. In this regard Derek Gregory argues “we live in a colonial present” a world where power matters a lot although it has been redefined again and again yet it is imposed on the powerless people. In the view of Gregory the production of knowledge, information and media images are unjustly distributed between East and West. The Present Research debates the socio-political, economic and cultural effects of colonialism in India and Pakistan and in this regard men and women fiction writers contributed significant role in highlighting the effects of colonialism. Even colonialism is still present to this day. During colonization the indigenous cultures of those countries subjected to foreign rule were

often sidelined, suppressed, and openly denigrated in favor of elevating the social and cultural preferences and conventions of the colonizers. In response, postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of indigenous cultures in an effort to restore pride in practices and traditions that were systematically degraded under colonialism. Colonizers often depicted colonial subjects as existing “outside of history” in unchanging, timeless societies, unable to progress or develop without intervention and assistance. In this way, they justified their actions, including violence against those who resisted the colonial rule. Revising history to tell things from the perspective of those colonized is a major preoccupation of postcolonial writing. Postcolonial writers used detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or “resist” the stereotypes,

inaccuracies, and generalizations which the colonizers circulated in educational, legal, political, social texts and settings. As a genre of contemporary history, Post-Colonialism questions and re-invents the modes of cultural perception, the ways of viewing and of being viewed. As anthropology, it records human relations between colonial nations and the subaltern people. Anti-colonial theory challenges the legacy of colonial power that exists in literary writings. In the words of Bill Ashcroft in *The Empire Write-back*, Post-Colonial Theory is a discussion of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being”. Colonial literary theory analyzes the colonial texts also known as ¹master-narrative. This is an admirable ambition and very much within the tradition of the cultural imperialism model. Moreover, Anne Maxwell (1994) argued that revisionist historians 'make it business to trace the hidden links between writing and production of empirical history and the maintenance of global regimes based on colonization': (p.71).

Though Pakistan was created as an independent state after getting liberation from British Raj in 1947 yet the country seems, after many years of independence, fettered with the chains of slavery, miseries and internal colonization by the elites. The present study aims at exploring internal colonization in the selected text where class system and socio-economic structures have made poor colonized at the hand of elites.

Research Objectives

To explore internal colonization in the selected text

To analyze the impact of internal colonization in the selected novel

Analysis and Discussion

¹ master-narrative refers the writing which is composed by colonial writers in order to dominate their values and perceptions while counter-

Moth Smoke is one of the Post-Colonial texts written by Mohsin Hamid. The novel deals with the socio-political aspects in Pakistan and it can be read as a political text in the context of anti-globalization and domestic unequal socio-political structure of Pakistani society. Hamid indirectly indicates to Pakistan's post-colonial problems through his use of satirical literary devices such as irony, understatement and ambivalent narrator. The writer, in his novel, *Moth Smoke* (2000) sets the history of Pakistan when its socio-political and economic problems were emerging. He discusses a number of political issues in the novel such as political instability and internal strife because of bitter political issues between the two mainstream parties i.e. Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League.

Similarly, nuclear standoff with India in 1998 and the resultant economic sanctions by the international community, further, September/11 2001 attacks in America, the resultant War on Terror and its impact on Pakistan's society, politics and economics are discussed. Economic crisis due to capital issue, testing explosion of Nuclear 1998 and the dismissal of Nawaz's government the imposition of Martial Law by General Musharraf are discussed by the writer. *Moth Smoke* is severe criticism on ruling elite of Pakistan and neo-colonialism which emerged after the British division of India. The writer, in the novel presents 'other Pakistan' which is indulged in drug, adultery, betrayals and discriminated class relation.

Significance behind the Setting of the Novel

The setting of the novel is Lahore, Pakistan and it mostly revolves around Darashikoh, the protagonist of the novel who represents historical allusion back to Mughals emperors. This is the irony of fate that Daru is a poor while his gathering such as his friends Mumtaz and Aurangzeb are rich enough to entertain the life. The setting time of *Moth Smoke* is 1990s, the period when socio-political condition of Pakistan was in complexities. The novel talks on

narrative is contrary term and it refers the writings composed by colonized writers in response to colonizer writers.

several post-colonial issues which are the results of colonial power before partition and it also debates new irresponsible ruling elite class in the field of Pakistani politics.

Hamid's *Moth Smoke* deals with a number of political events and it works as political satire on the instable political governance. As the novel is written in the background of nuclear explosion of 1998, it can also be taken as a parable of the relationship between the two major governments of the Sub-Continent. The writer has allegorically represented the characters as Daru who represents Pakistan while Ozi represents India while Mumtaz being a bone of contention between Daru and Ozi, represents Kashmir. She marries one yet has an affair with the other but she is independent of both and consequently goes her own way.

Hamid in *Moth Smoke* constructs more central problems which unite the people in the global capitalist system. While in the view of Jay, "his writings present a profoundly ambivalent relationship to globalization". Further, Paul Jay's *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in literary Studies*, an essay on Hamid, implies that with the focus on the effects of economic globalization, *Moth Smoke* stands apart from many South Asian English language novels popular with readers and academics in the West"

Moth Smoke is a novel about socio-political and economic condition of Pakistan after independence of 1947. It is political allegory devised with satirical tone. The story revolves around the protagonist namely Darashikoh or Daru who is the representation of Mughals emperor. The protagonist is a middle class man who after getting education manages to get job in bank. He has two friends Aurangzeb and his wife Mumtaz who also symbolizes historical Mughals figures. Mumtaz and Daru have secret relations with each other where the later soon loses his job and becomes the victim of poverty and hence dependent on the former. Both are drawn to each other like the relation of light/fire and moth as the title of novel-Moth Smoke metaphorically refers to. The protagonist speaks this attraction as following:

She's drawn to me just as I am drawn to her, she

circles forced to keep her distance, afraid of abandoning and even more her. But she keeps coming like a moth to my candle staying long than she could, leaving late for dinner and birthday parties. And I the moth circling her candle realize that she is not just a candle. She is a moth as well circling me (203-204)

The downfall of Daru metaphorically indicates the downfall of Mughals ruling in Sub-Continent. From historical point of view the novel shows historical allusions such as Shah Jahan's imprisonment in Agra from where he looks at the Taj Mahal that he had built for his wife Mumtaz. He receives the news of his eldest son Darashikuh's murder by his youngest son Aurangzeb. So the allegorical construction of Daru's character provides a political satire on Mughal's rule.

Political Satire on elite ruling-class

The novel is also a political satire on the elite ruling class in Pakistan who are shown as irresponsible towards common people. The novelist comments that the upper class people are driving around the city in white BMWs by indulging in drugs and alcohol and by wasting the wealth of Pakistan which it takes as a loan every year from western powers. Similarly the novelist makes satiric target in the novel about neo-colonialism where the economy of Pakistan is controlled by multi-national companies. In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid presents the newly created state- Pakistan struggling to numerous problems. Although this newly born state has got rid of imperial ruling of British yet it is under a satiric target of a neo-colonialism and that was domestic and local rather foreign rule. Hamid much focuses on the economic structure of the country where the economy of the state is harnessed by multi-national corporations that provide chance to those who are already rich and with surplus capital.

Similarly, in the domain of education again it is seen that Macaulay's education model is being blindly followed in which the absence of equity of education is clear and further in the field of education there are separate schools and colleges for the rich and the poor and it is itself against the spirit of education that there is

discrimination even in the learning of education which teaches the lesson of equality. So all these problems are again in the form of colonialism but in a new form i.e. what the writer terms as neo-colonialism. Similarly, corruption and governance of the state go side by side and there is manipulation of democratic values through political inheritance and feudal system. There is scarcity of security for common citizen while there is abundance of guardship for elites. Economic packages are being announced for those who have already enough resources. In *Moth Smoke* we see that the Pakistani society is majorly divided into two social classes: first is the rich who make the rules, have the connections, get the jobs and grow wealth while the second class is the poor who must follow the rules, are often oppressed, they don't have influential connections, don't get job and ultimately they are supposed to live the life of poverty and starvation.

This socio-economic clash has been demonstrated by Butt Saad who says, "We have more people than we need right now. And the boys we are hiring have good connections worth more salaries. The conflict among different classes can be seen due to the unequal distribution of wealth in society and this clash is described by Orrin C. Judd (2006) in these words, "The frustration and anger of the less fortunate in a country whose ruling class is thoroughly corrupt and where the economic divide is so vast that the wealthy can insulate themselves from the rules that bind the rest of the society, and can nearly avoid physical contact with the lower classes. We are just giving them the respectability of a job here in exchange for families' business" So the mentioned lines best indicate a so-called social status of the rich and the honor they are endowed with due to their superior rank in the society.

In *Moth Smoke* Hamid, likes many post-colonial writers such as Thiango and Zulfikar Ghose portray and illustrate the division between the rich and the poor. The novelist presents that in Pakistan there are three types of classes including; elite, middle and lower class. In the novel Darushikoh is a poor person but has relation with rich people and this thing allows

him to imitate the life style of wealthy, which highlights the bridge between the rich and the poor. In this regard Bose (2000) argues that like the atom that must be split for a fission bomb to explode. In the same way modern day Lahore itself divided between old and new, rich and poor, conservative and liberal. In the novel the relation between Ozi and Daru can be considered as a relation between India and Daru represents the present day's Pakistan that is always in conflict with India Pakistan.

Class tussle can be seen in the novel through the supply of electric power. Lower class faces problem of load-shedding and can't afford generator like upper class. Murad Badasha in novel amuses himself with the idea of being rich "It amused him to see the rich people on the grounds of their mansions fanning themselves in the darkness...Indeed, nothing made Murad Badshah happier than the distress of the rich" (p, 104).

This clash is additionally discussed through the system of education. Rich people send their children to advanced European country while on the other hand the poor are stuck with poor educational system that gives them the chance for social mobility. In the novel this is shown through Ozi and Daru. Ozi is a rich and avails the facility of foreign education while Daru is poor and he is left back to attend the government college.

This class conflict is also shown through the night party and illegal activities like breaking of law. Hamid blames the upper class through this entire comparison. Most thrilling incident in the novel which shows the inhumanity of elite is one where Ozi crashes the teenager boy to death while driving Pajero. Daru is witness of this event by saying "the boy's body rolls to traffic signal that winks green unnoticed by receding pajero".

Similarly close reading of the novel shows that corruption in the society through thrilling and heartbroken incident is clear. The war between Rukasha and Yellow is most convincing example of corruption in the society. Everywhere in Lahore narrow roads, criminal activities, frequent load-shedding, gun powders,

tear gas by police and absence of law are witnessed. Hamid also like Roy sees with contempt the participation of Pakistan in the war on terror under American bidding which brings destruction for the state. As Thiongo (1981) states that no people can develop a meaningful national culture under any form of foreign economic domination. Hamid in *Moth Smoke* draws a society where he through the difference of upper class and the lower class, recalls the era of colonialism. His novel well presents the line of discrimination between the rich and the poor of Pakistan. In the novel the protagonist Darashikoh is not inherently rich rather he has the company with wealthy fellows but with the passage of time his ceaseless awareness of wealth around him creates a gulf among the haves and have nots. According to Bose (2000) Hamid unfold the tragedy of a whole nation by unfolding the personal story and with the help of nuclear metaphor and like this atom bomb which splits, modern day Lahore is also divided into old and new.

Further, in Marxist terms there is unequal wealth's distribution as this thing has been pointed out by Orin C. Judd (2006) who argues at the frustration and anger of the less fortunate in the country is so vast that the wealthy can isolate themselves for the rules while the rest abide by it. Further if the lower class is not provided with the fundamental rights and moreover they are exploited then they find their own ways to get justice and this thing leads towards poverty, crimes, war and many other social issues.

Significance of Mughal's history in the Novel

Hamid starts the novel with a reference from imperial history of the Mughals. By looking at the book from historical point of view it is revealed that figure like Shah Jahan imprisoned in Agra is an historical figure. The novel shows clash of power sharing in South Asian history which has been a problem during the rule of Mughal. in respect of globalization that is the center of *Moth Smoke*, Hamid doesn't make criticism directly rather he seeks some bypass to highlight colonialism, as Miyoshi suggests Hamid invokes the Mughals Empire at the outset of the novel in order to "bypass colonialism"

(*The Chronicle Online* np.) Though it may seem problematic that Hamid is overlooking colonialism, it is "colonialism" in the very strict and explicit sense, where a group of people are physically occupied, controlled, and exploited another. In this sense, this is not the experience of most born in Pakistan after the late 1940s. Hamid instead explores the deep, implicit, and inescapable situation of neocolonialism. Jay observes "*Moth Smoke* focuses on a group of thoroughly Westernized young men and women from financially well-off families with American Master of Business Administration degrees (MBAs)" (p, 52). This kind of historical contextualization downplays the relationship between British colonialism and the plight of the characters in the novel, something that is reinforced by the novel's complete inattention to the British occupation of South Asia and the economic, cultural, and political effects of the British Raj.

The Mughals Empire was itself a colonialist empire. In Miyoshi's words the history of colonialism in South Asia did not begin with the British Raj but in fact has a much longer history, one that includes Persian and Islamic invasions from the North and suggests that the forces of globalization were at work on the continent long before global capitalism. Much of the story revolves around Daru. He is a very intricate character to whom one can't predict clearly. Daru is an employee in a bank and soon he gets fired and indulged himself in affair with Ozi's wife Mumtaz. He starts drinking alcohol but his pocket does permit him to fulfill his addiction. In respect of Daru's complex character Jhumpa Lahiri writes in a review article in *The New York Times*:

Daru's fatal flaw ... is that while he's contemptuous of the idle rich, he feels nevertheless entitled to join their ranks. Desperate to be what he's not, he's hooked on drugs that relieve him only temporarily from the burden of being who he is. But behind the toxic haze emerges the emotional architecture of this trenchant novel: a lost friendship, a mother's death, a broken marriage, a doomed love affair. (Lahiri 2000)

Moth Smoke is also considered as Pakistan's

post nuclear text. The time of its composition shows the restless period of nuclear trial. At that time the nuclear competition between India and Pakistan was going on and this element has been symbolically implied in the novel through Daru's relationship with Ozi who build the tension and restlessness in the environment. The writer satirically discusses the Pakistani ruling class who badly and mercilessly exploit the poor. Ozi and Daru also debate the political scenario after India tested nuclear trial on 11 May 1998.

The novel also satirizes the great outpourings of joy on the part of the members and sympathizers who organized festivities and handed out celebratory sweetmeats on the streets after the successful nuclear tests. Hamid like Roy criticizes the celebration of nuclear because common people are being crashed in the political tussle. As Arunthathi Roy is her book *The End of Imagination* (1999) criticizes the madness that gripped India and Pakistan as they decided to show the nuclear muscles: Similarly Iqbal Ahmad argued that nuclearization of nationalism has further worsened India's environment (1998).

May 1998. It'll go down in history books, provided of course we have history books to go down in. Provided, of course, we have a future. There is nothing new or original to be said about nuclear weapons. There can be nothing more humiliating for a writer of fiction to have to do than restate a case that has, over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world, and made passionately, eloquently and knowledgeably.

Later on, when Pakistan tested nuclear test then Ahmad (1998) argued: "I saw on television a picture more awesome than the familiar mushroom cloud of nuclear explosion. The mountain had turned white. I wondered how much pain had been felt by nature, God's most wondrous creation". In the views of Hamid politicians through the fake concept of nationalism create war euphoria among the common people to achieve specific agenda.

Truly speaking, *Moth Smoke* broke a new ground by not only writing about drugs and

partying instead of purple prose full of odes to mustard fields, mountain ranges and innocent village belles, but also in structure and narrative POVS. Daru's story is narrated in the traditional 1st person linear story telling mode is broken up by chapters from the other characters points of view which are presented as an interview of a Professor, an essay on air conditioning, confessionals in which Mumtaz and Ozi spill guts, and chapters written in the 2nd person where 'you' literally turns the reader into a character.

Conclusion

Hamid in *Moth Smoke* has made political satire on elite class living in Pakistan. He has presented the worse condition of Pakistani society where the rich class is authoritative to frame the laws and to violate them carelessly while the poor class is bound to observe the sanctity of the rich's made rules. The novelist comments that the upper class people are driving around the city in white BMWs by indulging in drugs and alcohol and by wasting the wealth of Pakistan which it takes as loan every year from western powers. Hamid has discussed the Mughal's era which goes back to remind us the colonialism of British Raj. The novelist makes satiric target in the novel about neo-colonialism where the economy of Pakistan is controlled by multi-national companies. Moreover, the commoners are ruled by national political leaders and treated worse than the earlier colonizers

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