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Class Struggle and Socio-Economic Dynamics: A Marxist Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

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Abstract

This research paper critically examines Mohsin Hamid's novels *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* through the lens of Marxist theory. The primary focus is to analyze socio-economic issues and class struggles depicted in the novels, highlighting the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie in a capitalist framework. The analysis draws attention to Hamid's portrayal of systemic inequality, wealth disparity, and the socio-political challenges faced by the lower classes in contemporary Pakistan. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, emphasizing textual analysis. Findings reveal that both novels vividly depict the entrenched social hierarchies and exploitative mechanisms in capitalist societies, mirroring real-world socio-economic conditions. This research contributes to understanding how literature critiques and reflects socio-economic realities in post-colonial contexts.

Research Questions

1. How does Mohsin Hamid depict socio-economic issues and class struggles in *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*?
2. How are the bourgeoisie portrayed in the selected novels?
3. How do the novels reflect the exploitation of the proletariat within a capitalist society?

Objectives

- To explore the socio-economic issues and class struggles in Hamid's novels.

- To analyze the portrayal of the bourgeoisie and their role in systemic inequality.
- To examine how Hamid's narratives reflect the lived realities of the proletariat in a capitalist context.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant as it provides an in-depth analysis of class struggle and socio-economic issues in Pakistani English literature--Mohsin Hamid's novels *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. By applying Marxist theory, the study enhances our understanding of systemic inequality in post-colonial societies and the way literature serves as a medium for socio-political critique. The findings also contribute to global discussions on capitalism and its impacts on marginalized communities.

Limitations of the Study

- The study is confined to two novels by Mohsin Hamid and does not include his other works.
- The focus is limited to Marxist theory, excluding other theoretical frameworks such as post-colonialism or feminism.
- The analysis is qualitative and does not incorporate quantitative socio-economic data for cross-referencing.

Literature Review

Karl Marx's critique of capitalism forms the bedrock of Marxist literary theory, which examines how literature reflects and critiques the economic systems, class dynamics, and social hierarchies that shape society. Marx posits that society divides into two primary classes in capitalist societies: the bourgeoisie, who own and control the means of production, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor to survive. Marx views this division as a source of systemic exploitation and class struggle, a critique that permeates literary and social thought since *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Marxist literary criticism investigates how texts expose the contradictions and power dynamics inherent in capitalist systems, often revealing the ways in which literature either reflects or challenges prevailing ideologies.

Raymond Williams, in his seminal work *Marxism and Literature* (1977), emphasizes that literature is not just a product of the socio-economic context but also a

commentary on it. According to Williams, texts are "social documents" that reflect the lived experiences of people within specific economic structures and reveal the tensions and contradictions that arise from these structures. Williams argues that literature can be both an expression of and a critique of societal norms. Terry Eagleton's analysis in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976) further builds on this by explaining that Marxist criticism reveals the ideological underpinnings of literary works and examines their relationship to the larger social order. For Eagleton, literary texts act as both a reflection of and a response to the power relations embedded within society.

South Asian literature, particularly that from post-colonial Pakistan, often engages with issues of class struggle, economic disparity, and the continuing impact of colonialism. Works such as Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) lay the foundation for exploring the socio-political and economic challenges in Pakistan, critiquing not just the colonial structures but also the power dynamics in the post-colonial context. Mohsin Hamid, a prominent voice in contemporary Pakistani literature, builds on these critiques through his novels *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), both of which engage deeply with issues of class, capitalism, and inequality.

In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid presents a harsh critique of the moral decay and disillusionment within the socio-economic framework of modern Lahore. Through the character of Darashikoh Shezad (Daru), Hamid exposes the grinding realities of class division, with Daru representing the proletariat and characters like Ozi embodying the bourgeoisie, whose wealth and privilege allow them to ignore the suffering of the working class. Critics such as McLeod (2000) argue that Hamid portrays the psychological toll that wealth disparity takes on individuals, highlighting how such disparity breeds both resentment and moral disintegration. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, on the other hand, critiques the very notion of upward mobility in a capitalist society. Told in the form of a self-help guide, the novel follows the unnamed protagonist's journey from poverty to fleeting wealth, revealing the exploitative practices and moral compromises that underpin his success. Scholars like Iftikhar and Imran (2016) argue that Hamid's depiction of South Asia serves as a critique of the

socio-economic conditions in the region, specifically the widening gap between rich and poor.

Both novels reflect Marx's belief that capitalism, with its inherent inequalities, thrives on exploitation. By focusing on the lives of characters caught in the web of economic inequality, Hamid exposes the ways in which socio-political systems in post-colonial societies perpetuate class divides. These works offer critical insights into the human cost of systemic oppression, making them vital texts for understanding class dynamics in contemporary South Asia.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically focusing on textual analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. A Marxist theoretical framework serves as the guiding lens to understand how these novels critique class struggles and socio-economic inequalities. The analysis revolves around several key steps:

- The analysis begins by identifying the central themes in both novels related to class struggle, socio-economic inequality, exploitation, and the myth of upward mobility in capitalist societies.
- The portrayal of characters is examined through the lens of Marxist theory, focusing on how these characters represent the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and how their actions reflect larger socio-economic power dynamics.
- The study explores the socio-political environment in Pakistan as represented in both novels, analyzing how the novels reflect broader global capitalist dynamics while remaining rooted in a local, post-colonial context.

The main aim is to examine how Hamid's works reflect the ideological and economic forces of capitalism, with a specific focus on how these forces play out in post-colonial Pakistan.

Class Struggle in *Moth Smoke*

In *Moth Smoke*, Hamid paints a dark portrait of contemporary Lahore, where the protagonist, Darashikoh Shezad (Daru), is a disillusioned former banker who struggles to reconcile his desire for a better life with the harsh realities of class stratification. Daru's fall from privilege into poverty illustrates the precariousness of class status in capitalist societies. He represents the proletariat in a society where

economic success is largely determined by birth and privilege, not merit or effort. Daru's descent into crime and moral decay underscores the systemic nature of inequality, where the rich maintain their wealth through exploitation, while the poor remain trapped in cycles of poverty and desperation.

The character of Ozi, Daru's former friend, epitomizes the bourgeoisie—detached, wealthy, and indifferent to the struggles of the working class. Ozi's indifference to Daru's plight is a critical commentary on how those in power remain insulated from the suffering of the poor. Ozi's wealth allows him to manipulate and exploit others, while his moral detachment reveals the ideological foundations of capitalist society, where wealth both sustains and perpetuates social inequalities.

The novel critiques the idea of upward mobility, demonstrating how even a character like Daru, who aspires to improve his social standing, finds his efforts thwarted by the entrenched system of privilege that favors the wealthy. His repeated failures to escape his circumstances reveal the illusory nature of meritocracy in capitalist society. As Daru's bitterness toward the elite deepens, his moral decline serves as a metaphor for the broader psychological toll that wealth disparity takes on individuals in class-divided societies.

Social Issues in *Moth Smoke*

Hamid also uses *Moth Smoke* to highlight the social decay that arises from systemic inequality. Lahore's elite society is portrayed as morally bankrupt, engaging in acts of corruption, excess, and exploitation. The novel's vivid descriptions of the city's opulent spaces juxtaposed with the squalor of its underbelly serve as a stark visual representation of class disparity. The moral and social decay within the upper echelons of society is not just a reflection of individual choices but an indictment of a system that perpetuates inequality through nepotism, corruption, and the commodification of human life.

The character of Mumtaz, Ozi's mother, further illustrates this moral bankruptcy. She is a symbol of the Pakistani upper class, who is so entrenched in her wealth and power that she views the struggles of the poor as distant and irrelevant. Her wealth, like Ozi's, is secured through exploitation, yet she remains detached from the suffering that underpins her privilege. Through Mumtaz's character, Hamid

critiques how the upper class not only benefits from but actively perpetuates the status quo, maintaining their power at the expense of the marginalized.

Economic and Social Struggles in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid shifts his focus from the microcosm of Lahore's elite to a broader examination of capitalism's impact on individuals striving for upward mobility in South Asia. The novel, structured as a self-help guide, chronicles the unnamed protagonist's rise from poverty to wealth, presenting a detailed account of his struggle to escape his humble beginnings. The narrative highlights the deceptive nature of the capitalist dream, where success is framed as attainable through hard work and perseverance, but in reality, the road to wealth is paved with exploitation and ethical compromises.

The protagonist's ascent from a rural village to an urban metropolis symbolizes the pursuit of the "rags-to-riches" ideal, but Hamid's portrayal complicates this narrative. The protagonist's success comes at the cost of personal relationships, ethical values, and ultimately, his own happiness. The "Pretty Girl" serves as a metaphor for unattainable desires, with the protagonist's unrequited love for her symbolizing the emptiness that accompanies wealth. Despite his financial success, the protagonist remains dissatisfied, constantly chasing after a sense of fulfillment that wealth cannot provide.

The betrayal by the protagonist's deputy is a key moment in the novel, illustrating the exploitative nature of capitalist enterprises. In a system that prioritizes profit over people, relationships are commodified, and trust is easily sacrificed. The betrayal underscores the emptiness of the capitalist pursuit, where success is not only fleeting but built upon the exploitation of others.

A central theme in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is the commodification of human relationships. The protagonist's relationships with others, whether personal or professional, are defined by transactional value rather than emotional connection. This commodification is emblematic of a capitalist system that treats individuals as means to an end, reducing them to their economic utility. The protagonist's eventual isolation and despair are direct consequences of his relentless pursuit of wealth, which strips him of his humanity. This isolation reflects the alienation that Marx describes in his analysis of capitalism—individuals become

alienated not only from their labor but from their social relationships and even from themselves.

Conclusion

In both *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Mohsin Hamid offers a powerful critique of capitalism and its socio-economic consequences. Through rich storytelling and complex characterizations, Hamid reveals the ways in which capitalism perpetuates class divisions and the exploitation of the working class. Both novels underscore the illusory nature of upward mobility in capitalist societies, where wealth and success are reserved for the privileged few, while the majority remain trapped in cycles of poverty and exploitation. The moral decay that results from wealth disparity is a central theme in both works, highlighting the deep psychological and social toll of inequality.

Hamid's novels resonate not only in the context of post-colonial Pakistan but also offer broader insights into the global dynamics of capitalism. His work serves as a poignant reminder of the human cost of systemic oppression, making *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* essential texts for understanding the ways in which capitalist societies shape and constrain individual lives.

Findings

- Both *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* critique the exploitative nature of capitalism and its impact on the working class.
- Characters such as Ozi, Mumtaz, and the unnamed protagonist in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* represent the bourgeoisie, whose wealth and power maintain systemic inequality.
- Socio-economic mobility is largely illusory, with characters like Daru and the unnamed protagonist unable to transcend their class positions despite their efforts.
- Hamid's narratives underscore the moral and social decay resulting from wealth disparity, showing how inequality corrodes both individual and societal integrity.
- The novels reflect the socio-political realities of Pakistan, including issues such as corruption, nepotism, and exploitation, while also offering a broader commentary on the global consequences of capitalism.



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