

A Deconstructive Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*

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Abstract: *The aim of the current study is to deconstruct the foremost idea of individuals' struggle in Moth Smoke by Mohsin Hamid. Deconstruction theory states that language is a system of signs (signifier/signified) and, more distinctively, a system of binary oppositions, differences and contradictions. With the application of the Difference, as a tool, the study tries to investigate the non-centricity and free play of signifiers in the novel. The study also identifies the binary oppositions in the novel and destabilizes them by the application of deconstruction theory, given by Jacques Derrida. The result suggests that the deconstructive interpretation of Moth Smoke is rarely definite; instead, it seeks to always problematize the meaning of the text and suggest the depth to which the text operates. The new standpoints regarding man's great effort to survive in society, desire, death, depravity, power, jealousy, redundancy, insatiability, desire, and injustice of our judiciary system are deconstructed.*

Key Words: Binary Opposition, Deconstruction, Derrida, Reference, Signs, Mohsin Hamid

Introduction

Literature, a written piece of work, has traditionally been applied to those imaginative workings of prose, poetry and novels illustrious by the intentions of their authors and the supposed aesthetic distinction of their implementation. It might be classified according to a range of systems, including languages, the origin of words, and the historical period of languages, genres, and subject material. It is more than a past or cultural image of societies; it can also provide us with an introduction to the experiences of the new world. Pakistani English literature

refers to English literature that has been developed and flourished in Pakistan, as well as by the writers of Pakistani expatriates (dispersed) who write in the English language. Pakistani literature in English is full of spirit and passion. Contents are esteemed across the world and writers received awards, gold medals and certificates of appreciation for their great achievements. Most of the writers are expatriates but they truly represent the

Pakistani culture in one or another. They have inventive talent which is why the world remembers them greatly.

The poetry flourished well as compared to the other genres due to the three towering poets like Tufiq Rafat, Daud Kamal and Alamgir Hashmi. The second phase is a remarkable period and this era is also a flowering era of novels. The most eminent novelists of Pakistani literature are Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Ahmad Ali, Ijaz Ahmad and Umera Ahmad.

The themes in Pakistani literature in English are connected with the practice of migration and which is not merely geological dislocation but a dislodgment of cultural values, history and ideas and causes deep emotional crises and internal and moral disagreement. This practice finds its gleaming illustration in the works of Nadim Aslam, Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie and Bapsi Sidhwa. They discuss the moral predicament arising from confusion between confinement and aggression that exists not only in our societies but also in our homes, between the generations. At the same time, it also represents the likelihood of living as a cultural mixture, the idea of immigration.

About the Author

Mohsin Hamid was born on July 23, 1971, in Lahore. He was a British Pakistani literary figure. He was the most famous Pakistani novelist, and writer. Belonging to a Punjabi family, Hamid spent most of his youth in the US, where he spent time from the age of 3 to 9 years. Hamid then shifted with his family back to Pakistan and started studying at the Lahore American School. He also worked as a brand consultant in New York. He moved to Lahore with his wife and daughter in 2009. Then he worked as a freelance journalist in Lahore. His major works include *Moth Smoke*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Exit West*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, *Discontent and its civilization* and *The Last Whiteman*.

Moth Smoke was his first novel was Award-winning and he was shortlisted for

the Hemingway Award. *Moth Smoke* was also prepared for a PTV series and operated in Italy. *Moth Smoke* had an imaginative composition, by means of several voices. Pioneering a trendy, English language Pakistani literature, it was painstaking by various critical thinkers designating it as "the most fascinating novel that came out of south Asian English writing." The setting of Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* is Lahore, it starts from jail and ends also at the jail and draws the real pictures of corruption and dishonesty we have of that world.

His second award-winning and major novel are *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, it narrates the story of a person who is ready to leave the outstanding lifestyle he is living in America after an unproductive love affair and then the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This novel became an international bestseller and millions of copies of it sold out over the world, getting 4th position on the New York Times Best Seller list. The *moth smoke* was also shortlisted for the "Booker Prize", and it won several awards together with the "Anisfield-Wolf Book Award" and the "Asian American Literary Award", its translations are made it into more than 25 languages. The Foreign Policy shortlisted him among the 100 leading Global thinkers in 2013 he was also named for Sitara-e-Imtiaz.

Plot Overview of *Moth Smoke*

Mohsin Hamid's first novel *Moth Smoke*, tells the story of a person who was a banker and was removed from his job after a complaint of misbehaving with a client. After losing his job Daru becomes a drug addict and falls in love with Mumtaz. She was the wife of his friend Ozzi. She has a son as well and she was a secret journalist. *Moth Smoke*

pioneered the use of frequent speeches with wide meanings that contact with insignificant problems and their values.

Mohsin Hamid declares that once upon a time it was a delusion that we have a country

based on Islamic values and beliefs. But when the ideals came true and Pakistan came into existence and became a state of Islamic religion, then no true morale was found. He further states that *Moth Smoke* presents the required portrait of the upper-class people of Pakistani societies and especially Lahore and their extreme indulgence in dishonesty and bribery. There are no such viewpoints, standards, moral values, moralities, or justice in this country, despite its name, "The Islamic Republic of Pakistan". This divided everything between the two classes. The rich were considered superior, high-born, open-minded and up to the mark. The poor were considered inferior, and low-born and were not permitted to think the same way as liberals and superiors.

Moth Smoke, chiefly pointing to the landed gentry and their differences from the rest of the societal arrangement, shows that the superiors are full of crooked people who pledge to the human privileges and lives of the lower class and inferiors. The privileged ones frequently expend a lot on their preservation of a lavish routine whereas mostly ignore their workers to give to eat them appropriately. As the trio gyrates through a succession of extravagant parties for the bored privileged of Lahore, Daru and Mumtaz instigate a devastating concern. Resembling the moths of the title in this novel, condensed to smoke by their fatal absorption with candle blaze, it seems that Daru has an aspiration for self-destruction. Besides an environment of escalating nuclear complications between India and Pakistan – the associates have the same opinion that "the primary position they'd nuke is Lahore" Daru has lost his social and economic position his status deteriorates as his practice of drugs and fascination with Mumtaz twisting. In this world, the value of a minute of chemical or sexual delight is not as much as eradication.

Significance of the Title

The title of this novel *Moth Smoke* is representative and figurative in nature. The title is discussed in parts like a moth: Moth is a kind of a bug. A feature of this creepy-crawly is that it is fascinated towards a resource of glow. The symbol Moth and Candle is also used in the Urdu language similarly Smoke: smoke is the further explanation remark in this title and it carries all the metaphoric individuality emotionally involved with this representation of smoke another feature of this remark is smoke that helps somebody to cover one's actuality at the backside of a drape. In spite of his up-to-date standard of living, he is still fixed fast to the earliest performance of the class. Hamid neither glorifies nor evaluates contemporary Pakistan and there's no sloppiness for custom. In Lahore, people get jobs, lose jobs, go to parties, fall in love, and be disloyal to friends as in other cities of the world. In *moth smoke*, though, was written during the gloominess of Pakistan's first nuclear experiment and you cannot overlook that Pakistan is one more temperament in Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

There lie both constructive and pessimistic aspects of someone's life portrayed in the selected novel which compels the reader to think that the issue presented. The symbolic portrayal of 'moth' and 'smoke' is meaningful and loaded with significant literary beauty. Like the moth that cannot help, but flutter close up to the flame, Daru cannot perceive his own uncontrolled behaviour. The competition shows his accelerating descending twist. Daru is not a marvellous gentleman or still a likeable one, but he is disarmingly unrealistic as to his adolescent house servant, refusing to disburse his wages for weeks at the end of a month. The deconstructive analysis would unfold multifold layers in the text.

Research Questions

The current research endeavours to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do various characters display contradictory dispositions in *Moth Smoke*?
- 2) How do the binary oppositions which are unstable and mutually dependent on one another, interweave in *Moth Smoke*?

Literature Review

Deconstruction theory is the breaking of a text when most likely puzzling concepts are there in the text. Deconstructionism is a literary theory originated by Jacques Derrida to depict subjective sense out of the text. It is used to deconstruct literary works and reconstruct them with appropriate meanings drawn from the cultural and social experiences of the reader.

Jacques Derrida (1966) was one of the prominent philosophers. He was also one of the most polarizing and influential philosophers of the twentieth century. With his means of "deconstruction," Derrida also gave the theory of post-structuralism, it is also a school of thought which gave a famous talk that questioned the idea of structuralism and also helped to form the basis for post-structuralism. Deconstructionism was anything more than a fancy name for a combination of half-understood thoughts and ideas. Walker (1933) opines that it is just like construction, taking it to pieces. The object is not destroyed completely but it is just dismantled, to consciously check elements one by one.

Norris (1987) defines deconstruction, that it includes the dismantling of different concepts in order to dismantle the ideas and uncover the hidden meanings. Deconstruction may be considered as a way to understand the connection between text and its meaning, society and environment,

dichotomies and the hierarchies formed by language. It is a form of literary and theoretical investigation that has been resulting from the works of the post-structuralist philosopher and theorist Jacques Derrida.

Deconstruction theory aims at creating new expressions and meanings of a text, this article explains why Jacques Derrida insists on coining the latest. Initially, he borrows the word 'deconstruction' from the work of Martin Heidegger and then he himself starts applying this theory to the reading of a text. Derrida presents the viewpoint that there is no meaning outside the text, anything off the page is not important only that interpretations are considered of great importance are on the page. By this, he wants to show that context is fundamental to his idea of difference. Jacques Derrida holds the claim that deconstruction was not a method or a theory, but it has been twisted into a method and a theory. Nealon (1988) states that the concept of deconstruction involves the dynamic trait of language that basically throws life on the whole civilization with multifaceted views.

Derrida states, "There are different meanings derived from signs of language. We think only in signs and signifiers." And that sign leads us to the other sign and then to another sign and we cannot reach to the signified, similarly there becomes a chain of words (meanings). So we can say that a text has no single and stable meaning. One of the two expressions always governs the other one, let's suppose, speech over writing. The first task of applying deconstruction theory is to uncover and knock down these governing and leading oppositions contained by a text or a body of texts. Deconstruction marks their differentiation and the everlasting association among the concepts and ideas in opposition.

Deconstructionists value writing over speech, according to their perception writing is superior and it shows the presence and

speech is inferior and shows the absence. Derrida considered writing a variety of profound formations; speech is only one image of it. The speech will be quickly lost, and its meaning will be also gone with it. Words soon run out except they are transferred into written signs, writing is, in reality, a requirement for and preceding speech. According to Derrida language becomes an exceptional type of writing. Derrida considers writing to be the basis of language. Writing is an intellectual procedure that governs speech which is but a subdivision of writing. This thought of language is related to De Saussure's linguistic ideas.

For critics, it is difficult to detain any exacting meaning of the text. That was why criticism kept on enhancing itself with new thoughts from diverse disciplines so as to survive with illusory productions and find a technique by which the content can be analyzed scientifically. Thus, the deconstructive theory is effective in the sense that meanings are finally, not fixed, uneven and not unified, and that a content, any content, contradicts take separately and still compact itself. Ghofur (2014) writes about deconstruction it is basically a study of material in a text that has not gained any attention. It is a kind of curious exploration of anything which being bound by one rule. He further says that in a deconstruction, reading can be started from anywhere, the beginning is not compulsory, and readers can take a section from anywhere.

Differance is a French word used by the French philosopher and deconstructionist, Derrida. The word or text is a free play of words on numerous other words that demonstrate Derrida's meaning. It is a common saying that when you play with words, the words will also play with you. We can understand it with help of an example, one cannot dive in a river twice because when you dive for the first time the water will flow and when you dive the next time, this time

you dive in new water. The theory of differance is a compound theory that tries to clarify the means terms are used and how their definite and exact meaning is resulting. Derrida says that the difference is neither a word nor a conception and he called differance a "neographism," meaning an expression that is used to describe a literary idea. Jacques Derrida gave the idea of difference and he states that Differance is the amalgamation of two words "differ" and "defer". Differ means something which is different and changing, and defer means something which is complete and continuous. So differance means something which is complete as well as continuous. For example, in PIN, BIN and SIN P, B, and S are changing and different and "in" is continuous in all three words so this is an example of differance.

A binary opposition is a couple of associated expressions or ideas that are contrary in meaning. Binary opposition is the method of language and idea by which two hypothetical opposite words or concepts are firmly defined and set out beside one another. In the white and black binary opposition in the United States, Africans and Americans are distinct as giving less value to the other. Derrida rejects the idea of binary opposition and says that this is injustice with words. Structuralists take the first word in a positive sense and the second one in a negative sense. In other words, we can say that the first one is dominant and the latter one is not dominant. So he rejected the idea of binary opposition. He says that each word has its own significance and no one is dominant or less important. 'Body' is debarred as impermanent and not important; 'form' is external and changeable; 'feminine' is an imperfect or deficient form of 'masculine'. Finally, the recently- asserted pecking order is itself replaced and is not acceptable to establish the newest 'truth'. Structuralists held the view that binary oppositions as "stable expressions" in a

proper arrangement, while Derrida referred to them as structured in an unbalanced way.

Research Methodologies

Research Design

The current reading employs a qualitative approach to investigation. Qualitative Research suggests comprehending communal phenomena inside their natural situation. By using a qualitative research technique, researchers desire to bring together enhanced information and acquire a further widespread picture of problems, situations or activities. They want to find the why and how of a scenario, not only what, where, and when. It is a layout of a research paper where you require talking about the topic and subject matter with great complicated information that is not identified to the commoner. You have to do a lot of meticulous profound study work with some cynical belief to have the finest identified data.

Theoretical Framework

For its theoretical framework, this research draws upon Mohsin Hamid's "Moth Smoke" in the light of the theory of Deconstruction. A textual deconstructive analysis is done to draw the required results out of this research.

Data Sources

"Moth Smoke" by Mohsin Hamid is used as the primary source of data for this study. Moreover, for the analysis of the novel, some terms of the deconstruction approach such as logocentrism, phono centrism, differance, and the concept of binary oppositions are included in this research.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is carried out by applying specific concepts of Deconstruction theory such as logocentrism, differance and binary opposition. The present study will find out

the traces of Derrida's deconstructive theory in Hamid's novel, *Moth Smoke* which will uncover the fact that it has no fixed meanings. The meanings are not fixed but one sign leads us to the other signifier and so on.

The Idea of Differance in the Novel

According to differance theory, a text has no originality and centrality. The significance of a literary text neither lies in the author's purpose nor in its concern for finding the truth. The concept of differance is helpful to find the ambiguity of human nature in this novel, which shows how the characters are indecisive and corrupt and unfaithful to each other.

Analysis of Characters

According to Derrida that the meanings are unstable and uncertain and not unified, and the meaning of a word can be derived from its relationship with the other words. Similarly, the characters of this novel are also not stable and certain, and the significance also comes from their interaction and relationship with the other characters. Which are themselves not stable certain and unified, and therefore the whole process results in a status of unresolved and unclear nature of the characters in the play. The most significant part of the novel is its characterization, so we discuss all of these characters one by one.

Darashikoh Shezad

He is the main character of the play as he is the protagonist around which the whole plot of the story revolves. He is the representation of a middle-class family, working for the bank. He was once a boxer in past. He becomes a heroin addict because he has lost his job. He falls in love with his best friend's wife Mumtaz. He also indulges in drug dealing and crime.

Aurangzeb

He is the childhood best friend of Daru. He went to America and did MBA and later on return back with his family. He is the son of a corrupt but rich father, he and his father is the representation of corrupt Pakistani society or corrupt Pakistani civil servant. He is the husband of Mumtaz. He believes in the power of money and he has no humanity in himself, and he is totally full of himself that he has money and he can do anything in Pakistan with the help of money.

Mumtaz

She represents the westernized women in Pakistan and symbolizes the westernized women in Pakistan. She is the wife of Ozzi, they met in New York and also the lover of Daru, so actually, Daru and Ozzi are friends, and the wife of Ozzi is the lover of Daru, how it shows the cheapness of Pakistani corrupt society. She has a secret life as a secret journalist and the name of that journalist is Zulfiqar Manto. All of her characteristics show that she is a very corrupt character in the way she represents the westernized women and she smokes as well, representing the type of cheap lifestyle that she prefers to live.

Murad Badshah

Murad Badshah is the most influential character in this novel with respect to the life-changing environment in the life of Daru. He is an M.A pass driver of a rickshaw. This is the true depiction of Pakistani society, where the people are educated but jobless. He corrupts Daru in the sense of not only a drug dealer but makes him a thief also. He is sincere to his friend Daru in a sense of usual illegal fidelity in each difficult time. Actually, he was loyal and in the scenario that he does not betray the protagonist Daru, he indulges him in criminal activities. He is also a class fellow of Daru.

Raider

Raider is a kind of minor character. He is the colleague of Daru, the leading character and the protagonist. He Supplies the addictive material to the elite class, at their private parties. He usually goes to private parties and tries to sell the drug and other addictive stuff to the elite and upper class, and once tries to sell drugs to Daru as well. His actual name was Haider and his nickname was Raider.

Muazzam

He is the young unfortunate son of Mumtaz and Ozzi, Mumtaz tries to love him but she cannot do that because she lacks motherhood because of having illicit relationships with his husband's friend Daru.

Malik

Malik is a significant character in this novel because he is the representative of money talks in Pakistan; you can have everything if you have money. His cheque gets delayed and he makes an argument with Daru, which makes him lose his job over his part of the wealth. It shows the bitter truth prevailing in Pakistan that one who has money can do anything in Pakistan. He gets rude to Daru and talks to the bank manager, and the manager throws Daru out of his job.

Uncle Khurram

The corrupt father of Ozzi is uncle Khurram. He was a civil servant and he takes care of Daru until he gets his job in a bank, in fact, he took care of him from his childhood to the time he gets a job. He also makes arrangements for Daru to get this job because of his influence and power.

Dil Aram

She is a Prostitute, Zulfiqar Manto (Mumtaz) takes her interview and listens to her story which is very sad and tragic that how she gets into this type of business.

Manucci

Manucci is the loyal servant of Daru.

Chachu (Uncle)

Chachu helps Daru sometime financially and he loves him. He is the uncle of Daru. He supports him psychologically and emotionally and he is very loyal to him also.

Binary Opposition in *Moth Smoke*

Binary opposition is basically a concept of structuralism that concedes an individual's propensity in regard to the opposition. For Saussure, binary opposition is a means of establishing the meaning of the language in which each unit is determined against what is not. While Derrida suggests that these are irrelevant oppositions. The structure itself moves towards the conflicts and consequently, the structure of a text shatters within the text. Deconstruction is against the idea of structuralism. In Hamid's novel, "Moth Smoke", there are many pairs of binary opposition such as strong and weak, gain and loss, and subordinate and independent. Some other examples of binary opposition in this novel are the male-female, rich and poor, day and night, life and death, prosperity and adversity, strength and weakness, good and bad etc. It is the confrontation of such contradictions that reveals the limitation of human minds and their disconnection from the world. The two poles in binary opposition exist for each other's existence, which forms an intense tension, thus ambiguity and paradox come into being.

Strong versus Weak

The novel *moth smoke* deals with the binary opposition of strong and weak very clearly. Firstly, it deals with the theme of becoming rich and money and wealth bring power in society as well. The main character Daru tries to become a rich person but he loses his job and unfortunately all his wealth. When Daru

was young he was totally dependent on his uncle for money and power, because he was his guardian and a guardian symbolizes protection, shelter and power as all these ideas are related to each other. When we see it from a deconstructive point of view other interpretations can be made by reversing the binary opposition. With the passage of time, the power and wealth transferred from the stronger to the weak (the protagonist).

Gain versus Loss

Binary opposition showing gain versus loss can be shown by various examples, in this novel. In fact, the loss of anything for someone can be the gain for the other one, it means when someone loses something it might be gained by the other one. In this way, Hamid shows the downfall of the protagonist from prosperity to adversity after losing his job, as he indulges in drug activities and became a thief also. In the end, after involving in such type of activities he was arrested and sent to jail in case of murder.

Subordinate versus Independent

Aurangzeb, his father, Mumtaz and Malik are the representation of the rich corrupt and independent class in the society. They depend on their money as Hamid depicts that they can do everything they want to do, on the bases of their money and power. Similarly, the protagonist on the other hand has become a subordinate person depending on his uncle and his best friend Ozzi. The servant of Daru also represents the subordinate character in *Moth Smoke*. So, we can conclude that the binary opposition in the novel *Moth Smoke* between presence and absence is basically relative. They are interdependent and can be changed into each other when required.

Conclusion

The present study examines *Moth Smoke* from the lens of deconstruction theory. It

tends to show that text does not contain complete and certain meaning, instead, it is a structure of symbols and signs which are proposed to establish meanings but none of them set precise meaning. Derrida's concept of *différance* focuses on the uncertainty of the text in order to liberate it from traditional binary opposition and western logocentrism. Thus, the meaning of the text has different interpretations in different contexts, situations and circumstances. By deconstructing the binary oppositions, the privileged term is reversed and it is revealed that these binaries are dependent on each other. The wealth of the novel makes it enables to keep on producing innovative meanings and interpretations. Any new reading of the novel will come up with new suggestions and meanings. The preceding analysis insisted on the cultural and intellectual area of the novel.

The Deconstructive critical approach; nevertheless, proves that such rich novels, as our content, will come up with new innovative meanings with each and every reading. Hence, this study is but a new

interpretation of the novel which reflects one side of its wealth and richness. This reading may continue applicable until and unless it is replaced by another one which will deconstruct it and catch its position. In such case, Derrida's ideas and thoughts will verify that they are convincing, despite the fact that he himself argued that he could not recommend a rigid critical approach to literature. That is the point where the idea of the "author is dead" arises. It means that the interpretation of a text depends upon its reader. The author's intentions are not important; the author's intentions are secondary to the meaning of interpreters. One can interpret the text according to his own perception.

The novel *Moth Smoke*, its title mentioned, the moth is a representation of unsafe, risky, or deadly attraction. Manucci states that as the moth is in love with the flame; the moth will not deliberately place itself on flames attempting to acquire a nearer and closer position to the flame, and in this attempt, he put himself in trouble and the result is his dreadful death.

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