

STRIVING FOR WHOLENESS AND IDENTITY: AN EXISTENTIALIST READING OF HAMID'S *MOTH SMOKE*

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ABSTRACT

*This research aims to explore self-consciousness and the search for meaning in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* through the lens of Sartre's existentialism. The researchers have conducted a close textual analysis of the novel using Catherine Belsey's deconstructionist concept. The plot revolves around Darashikoh Shehzad (Daru), a middle-class individual from Lahore who, after losing his job, faces psychological complexities and social challenges. The story of Daru's downfall portrays the struggles of individuals as they attempt to find purpose and self-identity in a society marked by social crises and moral ambiguity. This study examines how Daru's actions shape his experiences and contribute to his eventual downfall, reinforcing the concept that individuals should be responsible for their decisions and actions. Other characters also illustrate diverse aspects of existential challenges. The goal of this study is to bridge an existing gap by exploring the novel through an existential perspective, which will aid the readers in uncovering the complex psychological and philosophical elements woven in Hamid's narrative.*

Keywords: Sartre's existentialism, Free choice, Existence precedes essence, Nothingness, Self-actualization, *Moth Smoke*, Angst, Meaninglessness, Commitment.

Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that promotes the freedom of an individual to define their life purpose. First coined in the twentieth century, specifically in France and Germany, the term existentialism entered the common vocabulary in the mid-twentieth century, with the introduction of the term by Gabriel Marcel and later, in association with the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Initially, Sartre was hesitant to identify with the term, but he embraced it during a lecture in Paris in 1945. Several philosophers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Soren Kierkegaard, are recognized as pioneers of existentialism. Sartre is considered to be one of the influential figures in Existentialism theory, and Sartre's contribution affected the theory of criticality, sociology, the study of post-colonialism, and other literary works. Sartre frequently argues that "Existence precedes essence," which means that an individual's real life is shaped by their existence, rather than the other way around. Existence is essential for having essence. Self-actualization, free will, nothingness, absurdity, meaninglessness, nihilism, and angst are some of the main themes of existentialism.

Mohsin Hamid is a renowned Pakistani-British writer. Hamid is one of the South Asian writers who has significantly represented the political, economic, religious, and social fabrics of South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan. Hamid's works include *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist, Moth Smoke, The Last White Man, Exit West, and How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia. *Moth Smoke* is the debut novel of Mohsin Hamid, published in 2000 and translated into 14 languages, which became a cult favorite within Pakistan. The works of Mohsin Hamid are highly regarded for their acute sensitivity to contemporary global issues. The repetition of themes (some of which include identity, globalization, migration, and broader processes of social and political change) has established Hamid as a figure in these scholarly and critical circles.

Moth Smoke offers us a critical insight with which to investigate the social and political life of Lahore, Pakistan. Taking place in Lahore and telling the story of the main character, Darashikoh Shehzad (hereafter Daru), his wealthy best friend Aurangzeb (nicknamed Ozi), who is also married to Mumtaz, and a drug dealer all through various points of view, the novel explores the nature of the attraction to the forbidden and risky situations and can be viewed as making comparisons with a moth flying towards the deadly flame. Malik (2017) states that the novel examines two different sides of society. The characters are from diverse social backgrounds, and such differences create tension in the story. The word *Smoke* points to the fragility and translucency of the goods, whereas *Moth* foreshadows the moral greyness at the foundation of their pursuit. In the novel *Moth Smoke*, Mohsin Hamid goes further to critique not only the issue of Daru's supposed guilt but also the entire societal and political environment in Pakistan systematically.

The main themes of existentialism in this novel include the search for meaning, self-identity, sense of responsibility, absurdity, the quest for purpose, alienation, and the concepts of free will and freedom.. At the beginning of the novel, Daru has everything, like a good job and a prosperous life, but he is not happy with his prevailing economic condition. He is from the middle class, and he strives to achieve the same financial status as his friend, Ozi. Also, when he falls in love with his best friend's wife, Mumtaz, he makes efforts to pursue her, committing both ethical and unethical acts that lead to the loss of his employment and drag him into drugs and crime, ultimately resulting in his downfall and destruction.

A gap exists in the study of *Moth Smoke* from an existentialist perspective, specifically concerning Sartre's concept of existentialism. This research reveals an unexplored territory, the realm of self-consciousness. By integrating this framework, this research aims to fill this niche by examining how characters struggle for their identities in Hamid's work, emphasizing an understanding of different existential crises and terms portrayed through this novel. We know that, in today's complex world, which is full of complicated issues, most people face different psychological challenges, and they often find it difficult to realize their actual selves. Similarly, in such a rapidly transforming world, it is crystal clear that a minimal number of humans truly identify and are aware of their life's objective or aim. Sartre (1984) states that human nature is not fixed, and individuals constantly struggle for meaning. Human identity is the result of their free choice, accompanied by a sense of commitment and responsibility. The majority of people live their lives without clear goals and underlying motives, and are unaware of their true identity. This meaninglessness signifies a serious problem: the failure to understand that man is the architect of his fate. The central hypothesis of this research is that the protagonist and other characters in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* face major existential crises. It explores how the protagonist's destruction results from exercising his free choice to achieve meaning in his life.

Literature Review

The literature review discusses the views of other researchers in the realm of literature regarding *Moth Smoke*. The novel *Moth Smoke* is a significant work of South Asian literature that prominently focuses on the individual's search for meaning, identity, and purpose. Tanzer

(2008) states, "Existentialism represents a unique investigation into existence, existing at the intersection of philosophy and literature" (p. 1). Existentialism explores the meaning and purpose of life, as well as the value of human existence. Existence is primary, and subsequently, individuals shape their essence through their choices, as they are free and conscious beings. Kierkegaard (1992) suggests that people discover conventional truth through objective means and authentic truth through subjective experiences. The theistic perspective asserts the existence of God and posits that he shapes human lives, whereas atheistic existentialism denies God's existence. Unlike Sartre, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Kierkegaard offers a perspective of theistic existentialism that contrasts with the atheistic strands, where man's free will and independent role shape the course of existence.

Frederick Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God has led to the emergence of atheistic existentialism and a focus on individual freedom. He argues that individuals must strive to become Superman and create their existence without the constraints of external influences, such as culture, tradition, and religion. In his book *Will to Power* (1967), Nietzsche remarks, "The stronger becomes master of the weaker, in so far as the latter cannot assert its degree of independence" (p. 336). Contrary to Søren Kierkegaard's Existentialism, Nietzsche posits that one's social status and position can only be defined through free choice and personal struggle. Martone (2014) asserts, "Nietzsche unleashes atheistic thought upon the philosophical world" (p. 01). Nietzsche champions total freedom for individuals, and his existentialist ideas liberate humanity from the constraints of traditional societal norms. Albert Camus elaborated on the notion of absurdity, suggesting that every individual possesses inherent value. However, he noted that this individual, despite their worth, exists in a world that negates this value (Camus, 1999). He clearly stated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that "the only severe problem of philosophy is suicide because suicide is the confession that life is not worth living" (Camus, 1999). The avenues to address absurdity are inherently tied to the problem itself. Consequently, Camus identifies three responses to the meaninglessness of life: suicide, a leap of faith, and revolt.

Sartre emphasizes the idea that "Existence precedes essence," suggesting that a person's actual life is defined by their existence rather than a pre-determined purpose or meaning. Sartre (1948) further asserts, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (p.22). This claim of Sartre serves as a cornerstone of existentialism. Existentialists argue that there are two forms of existence: Authentic being and Inauthentic being. The essence of a person is intrinsically linked to their freedom; thus, "man is free, man is freedom" (Sartre, 1948, p. 34). Sartre means that man is condemned to be free, bearing the burden of the world on his shoulders; he is accountable for the world and for himself as a mode of existence. Existentialists argue that a significant portion of our lives is spent trying to deny or avoid the anguish brought on by freedom.

Moth Smoke (2000) has been extensively studied across various literary, philosophical, and theoretical frameworks, each offering valuable interpretations of the novel from its respective perspective. *Moth Smoke* illustrates a society characterised by social and political instability. Hamid reflects various forms of social injustice, including power abuse, conflict, oppression, and inequality (Lahiri, 2000). It illustrates how characters in *Moth Smoke* achieve or fail in their pursuits, providing us with valuable lessons on what it means to be human. Khan et al. (2018) highlight that due to overpopulation, Pakistani society faces challenges such as unemployment, inequality, corruption, and inadequate management in the health, education, and sanitation sectors. It further highlights that disparities in social status and power exacerbate the country's economic challenges. Malik (2017) categorizes the society depicted in the novel into two classes: air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned. He notes that while the members of

the first class possess numerous privileges and power, those in the second class lack influence and struggle for their rights. Butt (2008) contends that individuals from the second group strive to achieve the same status as those in the first group, and that this pursuit contributes to social conflict between the two classes.

Ahmed et.al., (2022) state, "The moth depicts people who lust after things that are beyond of reach, but who continue to 'circle' about those desires, eventually burning themselves in the 'candle's' scorching flame, leaving only some smoke, which does not affect the candle, which continues to burn" (P. 03). Hamid depicts the character of Daru by using a zoomorphic narrative style. Characters like Mumtaz and Daru exhibit recklessness in their relationships, while others silently endure the consequences of their adopted societal roles, aware that dissident individuals lack support from their communities. Hamza et al. (2023) explore Hemingway's characteristics of a code hero represented in *The Moth Smoke*. The scholars argue that the protagonist, Darashikoh, exemplifies the qualities of a code hero as he encounters various obstacles and hardships yet consistently exhibits strong determination and bravery. "In the storyline of *Moth Smoke*, there is a portrayal of attraction that is not only risky and unsafe but also potentially lethal" (Faiz et al., 2022, p. 43). In the story, the Moth represents danger, while cars signify societal elitism. Overall, the novel critiques a lifestyle marked by arrogance (Fatima et al., 2021). Gender encompasses the socio-cultural attributes and norms associated with masculinity and femininity, along with the psycho-sexual distinctions between men and women within a society. As a result, this position paper examines and highlights the challenges of gender discrimination in the upper-middle class of Pakistani society.

Research Methodology

This research is rooted in the philosophical theoretical framework of Existentialism, primarily drawing upon Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of self-consciousness. The data has been analyzed using the qualitative research method. The research paradigm adopted for the research study is interpretive and qualitative. A close textual analysis and interpretation of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* is conducted within the framework of existentialist theory. Belsey (2013) states that textual analysis is based on the comprehension of a text. Within textual analysis, the text is deconstructed using a primary focus on the post-structuralist view of Catherine Belsey. The study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. For the current study, the source of primary data is the original text of Mohsin Hamid's novel. Secondary sources encompass a range of books, research papers, journals, articles, and credible online resources that provide scholarly discussions on existentialism and literary analysis. Thematic analysis is conducted on the textual data to identify repeating themes related to self-realization and existential crises. In contrast, theoretical data from secondary sources guide the interpretation of these themes within the context of the existentialist framework.

Analysis/Discussion

1. Existential Dilemma

Moth Smoke is a novel by Mohsin Hamid that explores the themes of existential crisis and the construction of modern identities. The narrative takes place in Lahore, Pakistan, and its story follows Darashikoh Shehzad, who works (until he is fired) as a banker and in his post-work life comes to use drugs and engage in criminal activities, as well as in a forbidden affair. In the degradation of Daru, Hamid reveals the feeling of disintegration, which marks the overlap of values that have existed across time and the goals of a contemporary world. Daru is tormented by the reality of success, friendship, and love, becoming so alienated that he slowly loses touch with the rest of society, growing increasingly distant. Such choices of the characters can be viewed as an illustration of an existential premise, which states that people themselves have to impose meaning on a meaningless world.

In existentialist philosophy, the thesis of the primacy of existence over essence serves as one of the constitutive statements. It is stated that human beings do exist and, subsequently, find meaning in their choices, actions, and decisions. In contrast, existentialism, advocated by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, fundamentally challenges this notion. It begins with the indisputable fact of human existence: we arrive in the world without choice. Kiramat and Ashfaq (2023) state, "Sartre's existentialist characters define their fates and identities" (p.155). Initially, we are "beings" without any inherent purpose or identity. As the architects of our essence, we are fully responsible for our actions and the person we become. In the novel, Mumtaz relates, "A wife and son do keep life interesting" (Hamid, 2000, p.17). Here, Mumtaz derives significance from personal relationships and daily events. This study aligns with the existentialist notion that existence precedes essence. Ozi does not seek meaning in fame, success, or athletic victories; instead, he finds fulfilment in his roles as a husband and father. This signifies that his identity and the meaning of his life are formed through his decisions and experiences rather than something he was born into.

Humans possess absolute freedom to shape our identities based on our decisions and behaviors, and we are fully accountable for the individuals we become. As Nietzsche argues, man is the architect of his fate. He has to exercise his free will to give meaning to his life, ideally. This freedom extends beyond merely having choices; it involves the ongoing process of generating our significance in a universe that lacks inherent meaning. As Sartre famously noted, we are "condemned to be free." In *Moth Smoke*, Daru states, "Some men drink the blood of other men, all I drink is wine" (Hamid, 2000, p. 39). Here, Daru exemplifies the theme of free choice. The protagonist contrasts two types of individuals: those who inflict harm on others for their benefit and those who opt for a less damaging alternative. The statement emphasizes that individuals possess the freedom to determine how they choose to live. His preference for wine over "blood" signifies his core values and his intention to avoid emulating those he disapproves of. There is a conflict between Mr. Jiwan and Daru, where Mr. Jiwan is exerting control, assuming the high-status client role, which gives him power over the staff. Still, Daru is asserting his independence and refusing to submit to Mr. Jiwan's threats by saying, "Don't threaten me Mr jiwan, I don't work for you. You are a client of this bank, and if you don't like the service you receive here, you're free to go elsewhere" (Hamid, 2000, p.21). Daru reveals his free and rebellious nature in his remarks, and his independent nature makes him a significant character in the novel.

Characters feel disconnected and alienated from society, themselves, and each other. Factors like social class disparity, urban development, and individual challenges intensify their sense of isolation—this sense of alienation results in an identity crisis, emotional chaos, and strained relationships. There is an example when Mumtaz invites Daru in the late hours of the night, and he agrees to go with her. Mumtaz, a journalist under her hidden name 'Zulfiqr Manto,' was going to interview a brothel in 'Heera Mandi.' Meanwhile, during their discussion, Daru says, "I know I'm standing still, but I feel like I've stumbled, and I'm starting to fall" (Hamid, 2000, p.47). Darashikoh Shehzad feels disoriented and detached even though nothing externally has changed. While he remains physically still, he senses an internal downward spiral. As Daru (2000) narrates, "I only have a concussion, a dent in my skull, a broken nose, a broken rib, a compound fracture of my left forearm" (Hamid, 2000, p. 151-152). Here, a clear picture of Daru's suffering is portrayed, not just physically but also emotionally. This statement goes beyond mere physical harm; it also reflects a life in confusion. While Daru is evidently in pain, he does not reference anyone who is providing him with care or support, emphasizing his isolation. He is devoid of family, friends, and assistance, which makes his surroundings seem indifferent and harsh. His manner of speaking suggests a loss of hope.

Existential freedom goes hand in hand with responsibility. We are not given a pre-determined purpose at birth; instead, our meaning develops from the commitments we make. Yet, this process of self-realization comes with a significant burden and complete responsibility. We are not only responsible for our own choices, but also, in a broader sense, for all of humanity, as our actions shape our understanding of what it means to be human. Firstly, Daru is irresponsible because he is committed to Mumtaz despite knowing her fate of being married to one of his close friends, Ozi. This close intimation reflects his irresponsibility in the affair, as he doesn't care about anyone, nor does he think about the consequences. According to existentialists, to live a meaningful life, we must accept this freedom and pursue genuine commitments, whether to relationships, values, or projects. The powerful affirmation of the theme of responsibility is also evident in the conversation between Daru and Ozi when Daru reminds Ozi of his old times by saying, "Ozi, I knew you were doing many things in such situations. Then, Ozi's response indicated his sense of responsibility. Ozi describes, "I'm a father now. I have to be responsible" (Hamid, 2000, p.16). This indicates a significant inner transformation that fundamentally changes one's life. The phrase "have to" highlights a transition from a personal freedom to a dedicated duty, arising not from societal expectations but from an inherent recognition of the father-child relationship. This is not about making a choice; it's an essential element of parenthood for Ozi. It emphasizes the importance of care, support, and instruction associated with being a father. In the realm of existentialism, the concepts of commitment and responsibility are vital to living authentically. Thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre contend that individuals are "condemned to be free," signifying that there is no pre-determined essence for us, and we must carve out our identity through the choices we make.

Existential angst is a profound sense of anxiety that emerges when individuals come to realize that life lacks a pre-determined meaning. Societal structures and routines often fail to address this emptiness, leaving individuals with a lasting sense of emptiness. For instance, the protagonist Daru says, "I Feel Abandoned" (Hamid, 2000, p.16). Experiencing feelings of abandonment emphasizes the essential lack of inherent meaning in human existence. Daru suffers a deep sense of neglect that drives much of his tragic journey. As Aurangzeb grows and the social hierarchy evolves, Daru finds himself feeling deeply isolated and discarded. This emotional distress is further compounded by his deep, yet ultimately unrequited, love for Mumtaz, who is Aurangzeb's wife. Bound by societal expectations, Mumtaz cannot fully reciprocate Daru's feelings, which only deepens his sense of emotional abandonment and instability. In the same manner, when Daru is in the cell for his so-called crime before his trial, he unveils the dark and fearful situations that effectively signify feelings of existential distress and frustration. As Daru dejects, "My cell is full of shadows" (Hamid, 2000, p.10). Through its use of dark and close imagery, here, Daru dejects a sense of being trapped and alone, mirroring the protagonist's physical and mental imprisonment. It conveys a life that is limited and disconnected from freedom. Philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre suggest that such anxiety is a natural response to the realization of one's freedom and the responsibility to create personal meaning. While existential angst can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, it also presents an opportunity for personal growth and authentic living. "I felt so guilty. I knew there was something wrong with me. I was a monster" (Hamid, 2000, p.127). This reference shows a mind loaded with self-criticism and emotional despair, feeling fundamentally different or flawed. Referring to oneself as a "monster" highlights extreme self-hatred and a sense of alienation from humanity. This internal struggle reflects existential dissatisfaction as the person faces an unbearable awareness of their flaws and a profound sense of isolation.

2. Nothingness and Anguish

In existentialism, the concept of absurdity underscores the profound disparity between the human being's quest for meaning and the universe's apparent indifference. Absurdity, primarily proposed by Albert Camus, refers to the quality or state of being ridiculous. Absurdity refers to a state of being irrational, illogical, or lacking meaning. Daru is the character who is greatly affected by all the existential crises. His absurdity can be shown after his wrong choice during his exercise of free will, which dragged him into drug activities and criminal acts. As he states, "And I run through a world that is rotating, of our planet twirling as it careens through nothingness, of the uncertainty of everything, even ground, even sky" (Hamid, 2000, p.75). This explains Daru's feelings of being lost and perplexed in his surroundings. He becomes aware that the Earth is merely rotating through vast space, which lacks any firm or dependable anchors; neither the ground beneath him nor the sky above him is stable. In the same vein, Daru reveals his absurd condition in the novel: "I commit her to memory. When I'm alone, I feel a strange yearning, the hunger of a man fasting not because he believes but because he's ashamed" (Hamid, 2000, p. 167). The main character talks about someone and experiences a hollow, agonizing hunger in solitude. He likens this sensation to fasting, not for religious reasons, but due to a sense of shame and guilt. This highlights a clash between his actions and his beliefs. His hunger is not spiritual, but instead is burdened by guilt and confusion.

Existentialism perceives pain and suffering as integral components of human existence. *Moth Smoke* illustrates the various ways in which individuals in Pakistan experience suffering and pain. Daru, once leading a comfortable life, loses everything and feels despair. Mumtaz is dissatisfied with her marriage and faces difficulties due to her unfulfilled desires. The less fortunate characters in the narrative face significant hardships in their quest for survival. Even those who are wealthy, like Ozi, experience struggles such as feelings of jealousy. The metaphor of a moth attracted to a flame symbolizes the pain that can arise from excessive desire. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955), Albert Camus depicts life as fundamentally absurd, urging us to accept this absurdity by discovering personal significance within our challenges. While asserting meaning to our lives, we face different challenges. An individual may sometimes smile or laugh, even when facing difficulties. As portrayed through the conversation. "Why are you smiling?" I ask him. "I don't know. It's terrifying." (Hamid, 2000, p.75). In these two lines from *Moth Smoke* by Mohsin Hamid, beneath a smile, there lies pain and suffering. The protagonist wears a smile, but these are not expressions of genuine joy; instead, they indicate nervousness or a forced demeanor. These lines capture the emotional turmoil and mental distress faced by the characters. The protagonist of the novel is so immersed in thoughts regarding issues, guilt, or failures that it becomes very challenging. In *Moth Smoke* by Mohsin Hamid, Daru states, "It's hard to stop thinking once you've started." (Hamid, 2000, p.35). Here, Daru effectively conveys a profound sense of internal conflict. The protagonist's words illustrate the anguish of a restless mind immersed in an unending loop of thoughts that offer no serenity.

Existentialists believe that humans are born free to give meaning to their lives according to their choices and decisions. Nietzsche argues that humans are the architects of their destiny. They must exercise their inner strength, or their inner Superman, to shape their essence. However, this struggle to give meaning to life or self-realization doesn't necessarily mean that one must always find the purpose of one's life; sometimes, an individual's choices can lead them towards destruction or downfall. This is evident in the character of Daru, whose choices ultimately lead to his destruction, despite his exercise of free will in seeking the essence of his existence. "I spend most of my time smoking and thinking of Mumtaz" (Hamid, 2000, p.120).

This signifies the emotional and psychological decline of the main character, Darashikoh, in *Moth Smoke*. Rather than seeking to better his circumstances, he wastes time smoking and escaping from reality. This statement stresses his deepening despair, isolation, and lack of direction. It reveals how love, guilt, and addiction have entrapped him and led him towards destruction. Daru reveals "Love's dangerous thing" (Hamid, 2000, p.115). This emphasizes the emotional decline of the main character, Daru. It shows how his relationship with Mumtaz leads him into a state of moral ambiguity and emotional turmoil. Developing feelings for his best friend's wife brings guilt and creates friction. This infatuation turns into an obsession, causing him to close his eyes to the consequences of his actions. The novel ends with the pessimistic and disappointed notion of Daru by saying, "Some moths will do anything out of love for a flame" (Hamid, 2000, p.115). Here, Daru uses the analogy of a moth drawn to a flame to illustrate how people can become overwhelmed by their desires. Just like the Moth that meets its demise in its quest for the light, a person might sacrifice their true self in the pursuit of love or passion without caution. This highlights the existential idea that individuals sometimes pursue meanings that ultimately lead to their destruction. The flame symbolizes what they deeply desire, like acceptance, fame, wealth, love, or purpose, but it often results in pain. In this quest, they may lose sight of their genuine selves. This saying illustrates how love or obsession can leave a person feeling adrift, isolated, or lacking a true sense of belonging. Existentialism posits that we define ourselves through our decisions and belongings. When Daru loses everything, it feels as if his identity has vanished. He feels lost and seeks to forge a new identity, even resorting to negative means. The novel illustrates the fear that comes when the aspects that define you are stripped away. It implies that even in the face of total loss, we still possess the ability to shape our future selves, though the process can be challenging.

Conclusion

This research concludes the crises of self-consciousness and the search for meaning and purpose in Hamid's *Moth Smoke*, utilizing the core principles of Sartre's existentialism. Through the characters, the novel tells a deep story that shows important ideas from existential philosophy. This research has examined how Hamid utilizes these ideas to illustrate the consequences of making choices, the weight of freedom, and the sense of isolation that can result from personal mistakes and societal problems. This metaphor of a moth approaching a flame represents how people can suffer due to their intense desires and passions. Characters frequently exercise their free will, emphasizing the concept of existential freedom and its accompanying burdens. Their choices are not dictated by society or fate but stem from their desires. However, these choices often come with significant consequences, indicating that freedom entails full responsibility. This study sheds light on *Moth Smoke* as a profound example of existential literature within a South Asian context. The findings highlight how Hamid's work links Western existential philosophy and South Asian narratives. Daru's decline emphasizes the existential truth that developing one's essence can be fraught with risk when done carelessly, potentially leading to self-destruction.

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