

MOTH SMOKE: A STUDY OF ASHES

Dr. Mamta Srivastava

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shri Tika Ram Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Aligarh, India

ABSTRACT

In Global Transformation, David Held and his co-writers state

"Globalization can refer to those spatial- temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents."

If Globalization has brought economic growth, scientific advancement, medical progress and human-right awareness on one hand, it has also brought anger, anxiety and depression. It has brought money, materialism it has also brought terrorism, drug-trafficking and human-trafficking. Mohsin Hamid is a renowned novelist of Pakistan based at England. His first novel 'Moth Smoke ' is a saga of a man Darashikoh Shehzad or Dara, a banker at Lahore, Pakistan who afterwards loses his job, cuckolds his best friend and makes relation with his wife Mumtaz and plunges into the life drugs and crime. Thus 'Moth Smoke ' draws the divide between air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned society and infers that economic, social, cultural and humanitarian balance is essential for individual and national growth.

KEY WORDS: *Crime, Corruption, Drugs, Sex, Air-Conditioning, Conspiracy*

Article History

Received: 02 Mar 2022 / Revised: 05 Mar 2022 / Accepted: 08 Mar 2022

INTRODUCTION

"The moth takes off again..... He circles lower and lower, spinning around the candle in tighter revolutions, like a soap sud over an open drain. A few times he seems to touch the flame, but dances off unhurt. Then he ignites like a ball of hair, curl it into an oily puff of fumes with a hiss. The candle flame flickers and dims for a moment, then burns as bright as before."

Moth Smoke begins with a prologue which reveals omnipotence of Aurangzeb's money and power and Dara Shikoh, the prey of the omnipotence. The whole saga of the novel runs between two chapters Judgment(before the intermission)&Judgment (after intermission) and criminal, crime and conspiracy. It is the aftermath of air-conditioned class and non-air- conditioned class. Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh are chum friends but there is a huge rift between their social and economic status. Dara Shikoh Shehzad becomes the victim of his circumstances and falls a prey of Mumtaz's lust and sinks down in abyss of drugs and crime. He is falsely trapped by Aurangzeb and left behind the bars to be crushed under the yoke of destiny. The outbreak of information technology and multinational companies have brought the countries together and transformed the world into a village but this globalization is leaving its positive as well as negative effects. In this digital age, man has become a digit only, where neither emotions nor values exist. Money and power have become two strong poles between them he drags himself, when he tumbles down, he takes refuge in drinks and drugs. Sometimes he uses others and sometimes he is used and abused.

Non-Air-Conditioned Class

Darashikohis fired from his banking firm because he misbehaves with Mr.Jiwan, his customer, his Branch Manager yells out

"You have a serious psychological problem Mr. Shehzad... Go home." p25

The word 'psychological problem' is the keyword of the novel which illustrates the air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned class, their problems, their psyche, their emotions, their values Aurangzeb or Ozi belongs to airconditioned class and Dara Shikoh or Dara belongs to non-air-conditioned class. Ozi's father Khurram and Dara's father captain Shehzad were best friends at military academy and got married in the same December and blessed with sons. Destiny broke its hammer, Captain Shehzad died of gangrene in a prisoner - of - war camp near Chittagong in East Pakistan. Ozi relates his relation with Dara through an anecdote of two friends 'Ro and Lain.' After his father's death Dara was admitted in the most prestigious school of the city but his life was on the mercy of Ozi's father. He used to bring him clothes which were small to Ozi. Dara had seen Khurram Uncle touching the elbow of his mother while obliging him with gifts.He saw his mother in a restaurant with Khurram uncle. She told her that he would get the job in a bank with his help. Dara has been a good boxer since his childhood. Boxing was his family tradition. His uncle trained him in jump rope, speed bag and heavy bag nod he boxed till the college. Julius Superb, a professor of Economics at Punjab University recalls Dara as a brilliant student. The subjects of his dissertation were development and micro credit regarding small loans for lower income groups but he discontinued his PhD due to lack of money and joined the bank. His girlfriend also left him and got married with a textile Baron's son yet the last blow was left to strike. It was a summer night; electricity was obstructed due to heavy load of air conditioner. His mother went to sleep on the roof but a bullet fired by Kalashnikov pierced her throat and she died of heavy bleeding and due to injury in her throat. He recalls his mother

".....beautiful wasp-faced, with high cheekbones and hollow cheeks, her strict expression softened by sad eyes and a small, round smile. Never any jewelry, holes in her ears shriveled shut, still-black hair pulled into a bun. How young she always seemed, young enough to be mistaken for my sister the year she died. But not the day she was buried: bloodless, all colour drained from her face, wrinkles visible in her pale skin like creases on a ball of paper".

Non-air-conditioning plays an important role in Dara's life. His mother dies because on that tragic night, air-conditioner was not working. So she went on the roof to sleep. After being fired from the job the electricity connection of Dara's house was cutoff.

The Grip of Air-Conditioned Class Tightened

Ozi went to America for higher studies, Ozi returns back from New York to join his father's business. The story takes a quick turn after Dara's termination from the jobwhen Dara is turned out from the job. His friend Ozi was a big business man. He went with him and his Wife Mumtaz to a party to get a solace. He rolls a joint and smoke. Mumtaz was much interested in him, she talks about Murad Badhshah who was his classmate at Punjab University his professor Julius Superb, JulfikarManto and boxing. Mumtaz is attracted towards Dara because she does not like over air conditioning. In New York, Ozi and Mumtaz were always disagreed on the issue of air-conditioning. One more reason of Mumtaz's hate for AC was her fear psychosis of pneumonia, at the young age when she came home from the school after playing football match, she took off her clothes in front of the AC, and she was admitted in a hospital with a tube draining her lungs because of pneumonia.

Hamid writes-

".....but it must be said that if air-conditioning doomed her relationship with her husband, it doomed her relationship with best friend as well. You see, Mumtaz was over-air-conditioned and longed to be uncooled, while Darashikoh was under-air-conditioned and longed to be cooled." p131

Mumtaz comes to his house and discuss about boxing and wants to box with him. In the last, she punches on Dara's face. He was shocked; the blood was oozing out from his mouth. Next time she took Dara to Alima Mooltani for palm reading. She was coming closer to him. He didn't want to deceive his friend. From the party also Dara runs away because he knew that he has taken ex and Mumtaz was coming very near to him.

"I want to touch her ' to kiss her, to feel her skin.....I know what I'm thinking is wrong, that the woman behind me isn't Kashmiri but Mumtaz, Ozi's wife, and I can't betray him, betray her, betray them by touching her." p10

Dara's morals shattered down when she herself surrenders. Ozi goes out of town, Mumtaz Visits Dara and kisses him, makes relation with him. She does not want to be a mother but after Ozi's insistence she delivers Mauzzm. But he was living with his new nanny happily. In the chapter 'the wife and mother' she recalls herself 'I had my mind blown open by the combination of a liberal arts education and a drug-popping international crowd.' After coming to Lahore she wanted to restart her married life honestly but over interference of Ozi's mother and father compelled her to lose her love and respect for him. She decided to start working as an investigative journalist called Zulfikar Manto. She hid this fact from her husband and from here the lies began to pour. Though she wanted to be a good mother, a good wife, she became disloyal with her husband. She says-

"It all began with writing under a pseudonym. A double life has to begin somewhere. There has to be a first lie, a first deception. And mine began when I decided to start working as an investigative journalist called Zulfikar Manto." p195

Her physical relation with Dara was a protest against air-conditioning of Ozi as well as a shrewd tactic because she knew Dara will not open his mouth being Ozi's friend. Dara was used and abused, he was an emotional man, on his 29th birthday, he wishes for health, money and Mumtaz but she retorts-

"Ozi's a good father. He's sweet. He's generous. He's smart..... I don't think I should be married to Ozi. But not because of him. Because of me." p252

In her last meeting, she tells him clearly that she does not love him, he loves her because his life is motiveless and worthless. She gives one thousand rupees and goes away. He feels highly humiliated. He was 'ashamed 'and 'furious'

".....furious because people give money after sex to prostitutes and ashamed because I 'm hungry that I have to take it."

The Abyss of Crime

Murad Badshah was Dara's class fellow at Panjab University; he did MA in English and didn't get a job. Though his father was a gold Jeweler but he owns a fleet of rickshaw. He becomes a supplier of drugs. In lack of money Dara buys drugs and supplies to young ones. Shuja a young boy of sixteen is the addict of hash, Dara delivers drug to him and is beaten till death. But Mumtaz cares him and he recovers. Murad also abuses him because he knew that he has no job, he is a drug addict and in debt. He is bright, ruthless and delved in fake pride and self-delusion. Dara goes to him to buy hairy but he

suggests him to be involved in boutique robbery. They make a plan that Dara will go and capture the guard and Murad will gather jewelry and money from the customer. All of a sudden child runs towards me door crying under the cast of heroin that child appears to be Mauzzam, he shoots levelling at Muazzam's head. He doesn't want to lose Mumtaz once again, though the child was saved but the glass door of the boutique was shattered. Hamid writes-

"My hand. Hand's rising. Hand with the gun in it. Leveling off at Muazzam's head. He's not going to make it to Mumtaz. He is not going to ruin this." p294

Air-Conditioned Judgment

In the last Aurangzeb traps him in the crime which was not committed by Dara. On the jail road at Smugarh Chowk a Pajero collided with a boy. The boy's body rolls near the traffic signal. It became green, the Pajero fled away. The boy was partly crushed and flattened on one side. With the help of a man Dara drove him to Services Hospital. The boy was dead. Dara knows that it was Ozi's red Pajero, but he did not disclose it because of friendship. When he asks Ozi very easily he says that he will take care of his family and they will be compensated. Ozi knew very well about his relation with Mumtaz and he also knew that Zulfikar Manto is none else but Mumtaz. Now it was his turn to trap him. The police come and arrest Dara for killing the boy in accident. Mumtaz asks, 'You killed the boy, didn't you?' He didn't answer, no answer was his acceptance. The case was under trial. The prosecutor claims

"The accused has been described as untrustworthy by a former employee, as a peddler of drugs by a father whose son he corrupted. He has seen consorting with known outlaws. Illegal narcotics and unlicensed fire arm were found in his home. The words of such a man must be given little weight, My Lord, if indeed they are to be given weight at all." p297

In this way Dara's case was left on the judgment of audience whether he was guilty or not. It raises many questions on the system, on the society, where an emotional, truthful, educated man suffers because he belongs to non-air-conditioned class. Dara's friend Mujahid Alam says

"Our political systems at fault. Man like us has no control over our own destinies. We're at the mercy of powerful. A man requires a system where a man can rely on the law for justice, where he should be treated as a human being; he should be given respect and the opportunity to do work regardless of his status at birth." p283

Thus, the life is like a purple box which is full of many situations like crime, conspiracy, corruption and sex and the young men like Dara are quickly attracted and become crazy and consume themselves like a MOTH.

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