



**The Social Relevance of Literature: A Critique of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Sara Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003)**

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**Abstract**

This article explores 'social relevance' of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Sara Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003). For quite some time now, literature is looked upon as a tool used to examine social issues in accordance with indigenous aspirations. The authors referred to above, render a deeper insight revealing the complex nature of Pakistani society. Additionally, the article with a critical analysis approach focuses on Social Conflict Theory as to how the three literary works investigate the authors' perspectives pertaining to class, cultural identity and gender. The findings reveal the works explore class divisions, the gap between traditional and modern values and gender demands of Pakistani society. They also show ways of how literature addresses social issues. More research work needs be conducted to gain a solid understanding about the social relevance of Pakistani Anglophone literature.

**Keywords:** *Moth Smoke*, *Salt and Saffron*, *Boys will be boys*, Social Relevance

**1. Introduction**

Literature serves as a mirror of society's accomplishments, struggles, and aspirations. It encapsulates the significance of human experiences to reveal profound understandings of the social texture of a certain time. Social relevance of literature lies in its ability to engage with and critique social issues, values, and dynamics. Through narratives, themes, and characters, it illuminates pressing social challenges, prompts readers to reflect on their roles, and foster empathy. Literature also serves as a platform for marginalized voices, challenging prevailing narratives and amplifying underrepresented perspectives. Addressing themes like inequality, discrimination, political corruption, and cultural clashes, literature sparks critical thinking, promotes dialogue, and encourages change, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and just society (Jay, 2011).

This article examines Pakistani anglophone literature, focusing on *Moth Smoke* (2000), *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and *Boys will be boys* (2003). It attempts to show the relevance of literature by analyzing how these authors confront and engage with the complexities of Pakistani society. The chosen works provide a rich tapestry of themes, including social inequality, gender roles, cultural conflicts, and the struggle for personal identity. It also focuses on how literature captures the essence of societal transformations, challenges prevailing norms, and provokes readers to critique their society.

**2. Literature Review**

Literature criticizes culture and reflects society. This review is an analysis of the social implications of the literature revealed through Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Sara Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003). *Moth Smoke* (2000) explores socio-economic disparities, class divisions and moral corruption in the society obtained in Pakistan (Makhijani, 2023) while *Salt and Saffron* (2000) considers cultural identity and the clash of tradition and modernity (Shirazi, 2018). Aliya, the chief character, challenges traditional gender roles emphasizing individual agency aiming to shape identity. *Boys will be boys* (2003) delves into gender dynamics, family relationships and the interplay of tradition and shifts in Pakistani society (Chaudary, 2013). The work examines expectations of women from the standpoint of family and culture. The book highlights the social implications of literature to understand the intricacies of cultural identity and patriarchal structures. It also investigates the ways where women handle their identities under such perimeters with emphasis on the need for social transformation. Apart from different social themes and issues the novel deals with, there also runs a common thread unity in its critiquing societal norms and power structures. This fiction challenges the status quo, presenting detailed perspectives on gender roles, class segregation, cultural identity and social values and beliefs. Hamid portrays the outcomes of corruption and social disparities whereas Shamsie focuses on the clash of cultures and individual agency. Suleri probes the complexities of gender dynamics. Collectively, these novels provide an interesting understanding of the social value of literature.

A review of Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003) reveals that they have significantly contributed to the discourse of social relevance of literature. Their fiction serves as a genuine tool for criticism and reflection. It also exposes societal issues and challenges reader to rethink prevailing norms. A close examination of this fiction will improve the reader's understanding of how literature engages with and influences society with emphasis on its role as a catalyst for social transformation.

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### 3. Methodology

This article is descriptive and qualitative analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Sara Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003). It uses critical analysis approach, focusing on Social Conflict Theory as a framework to review the selected works. The *social conflict theory* is a macro-oriented worldview looking at society as a ground of discrimination that leads to conflict and social transformation. This view is grounded in the sociological discipline. According to this, society is built to protect the interests of selected groups at the cost of the majority. Social inequality is traced to demographic distinctions as race, class, gender, and age. Relationships between dominant and minority groups are globally at the center of social conflict theory (Coser. 2011).

### 4. Discussion

Social and cultural consciousness is a continuum between national identities and global transformation. It is a shift of historical self-perception and a change in the feelings of the native community. Shift on the global level is perceived through the English literary canon, as English is widely spoken and used as a tool for new ideas. Diaspora uses English as a link between the local and the global (Moretti, 2011). They are aware of changes in society, but look at changes as detached spectators and consider writing as a simple task. English literature in Pakistan, like novels, biography, and memoirs, continuously question re-evaluations, legitimacy, and current national ideals. Questions like how new and old trends influence individual life and how social and political conditions change over time? The researcher, through the current study, carries out a critical review of major themes of *Moth Smoke* (2000), *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and *Boys will be boys* (2003). *Moth Smoke* (2000) is out to eradicate ills from the society that have unjustly been split into haves and have nots. The haves form a smaller group enjoying all the privileges who are referred to as the "elite class." The second group, "the masses," forms the large and sweaty class. They do not have special rights and privileges, but keep fighting to regain their usurped absolute power exercised through proxy by the so-called elite class. The elites trample law by keeping the masses oppressed through the tools of poverty, discrimination, and injustice (Perner, 2010). This disparity is a recurring theme in the contemporary Pakistani literature discussed in the works of Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Sara Suleri. This Marxist Eco critical interpretation of *Moth Smoke* (2000) is rooted in the notion that "individuals and systemic maladies can be concurrent" (Buell, 2000, p.289). The work reveals a profound concern for the environment, a reaction to contamination, and the "mystical insufficiencies of urban space" (Rozelle, 2002, p.101). Buell's claim that the physical environment affects how individuals think and imagine is supported by the novel stating that humans cannot survive without the environment. He believes that human civilization and nature are interdependent and "intrinsically interwoven" (1986, p.283). He further explores how the environment influences personality. The author portrays the social, emotional, and psychological difficulties of those in a tainted environment where the ins and outs present a dismal view.

Lahore, the novel's setting, is a metaphor to end the world amid spiritual, emotional and social decay without splendour and spiritual elevation. Man stifles whether alone or in groups, whether in air-conditioned rooms or airless chambers. Peace fills their hearts even when they are busy making friends, expressing affection, or conducting business. Even love and friends are emotionally icy. Alone and quiet: similar to internal decomposition. They smell horrible, like decomposed corpses. "Even when I shower," Daru says, "the scent remains," despite the fact that I launder my clothes in soapy water. "I'll never forget that" (Hamid, 2000, p.216). They try drugs, sex, and other trivialities to reduce emotional and spiritual demise, but nothing works. This narrative focuses on humans. Like the listless characters in Eliot's "The Black Earth," they try hard to be happy and complete inside their families but succumb to sex, which leaves them exhausted, ill, and miserable.

The story describes a civilization where individuals are estranged from their surroundings. Wolanski (1999) considers the equilibrium between society and nature, though vital for physical and mental fitness, is out of sync in our civilization. As a result, folks feel physically, mentally, and spiritually miserable. Due to sick culture, people have lost interest in society and politics but only seek sound financial resources to sustain themselves.

The narrative persuades readers about the significance of a healthy ecosystem by focusing on underlying reasons for the fatal split between humans and the environment. The author opines that capitalism is unduly severe. According to Morris, "whatever a guy achieves, he gets that at the expense of another man's loss (2000, p.32)" in this system. The book questions the notion that capital, money, and goods are the sole drivers that matters in life. He conforms to Eierman's understanding of what Lenin wrote about how the capitalist system causes people to have a "short-sighted and pragmatic worldview" that motivates them to work to get more money. In the story, Lahore is depicted as a capitalist society in Pakistan. The author further explains how absurdly people are categorized depending on their financial status. Other people like the affluent with surplus income who live in luxuries. Their pride and snobberies motivate them to commit heinous crimes, and the system accommodates this conduct (Perner, 2010). They launder money, commit murders, use drugs and drinks, cheat on partners, and heap up advantages. Those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy are treated bestially and consequently become envious of the wealthy. Their envy is for wealth, vengeance, murder, drug addiction, and adultery but the law punishes the masses rather than the affluent. The tragic end of Darashikoh allows us to look at the ills of civilization.

In the novel, man is shown as both a generator and a sufferer - a polluter and a polluted individual. Rich and poor alike are “like a shadow” and “like a stain fading into a gray” because they have nothing to give spiritually or sensually (Hamid, 2000, p. 5). They are incapable of clear thinking and have a damaged mentality. They are persons whom the operation of capitalist ideology has shaped (Althusser, 1971). According to Hawkes (2003), conditioning manipulates spirit, which is as essential for the operation of the modern economy as a physical discipline is for industrial capitalism” (Mayers, 2003, p. 164).

The influence of wealth and the luxury established a social system that produced an arrogant, and hypocritical consumer culture having nothing to do with nature or the environment. This structure, which separates man from nature, is one of the primary causes of environmental abuse. Smoky wind, a dark sky, and rot food and fruit illustrate the conflict between humans and nature. The author sees gardening as “treating nature with care” (Kehler, 2007, p. 617). To display the weird human-nature relationship, he used Daru’s barren lawn with its dusty, wilted grass. In the book, pollution affects the human mind, body, and psyche. The novel shows that man in conflict with nature is detrimental not only to the environment but to the health and happiness of individuals as well.

According to the author, the people of Lahore live in filth and are “slowly killing themselves” (Luke, 1997, p. 9). Negative atmosphere is depicted through filthy places, terrible food, and smelly individuals. Hamid’s protagonist Daru perspires profusely; his residence is dirty, reeking, foggy, and dim. His garden is dry and overgrown. It is gloomy and without air in his chamber. His bread is “torn by fungi that spread like cancer,” and decaying fruit oozes from “cracks in destroyed skin.” (Hamid, 2000, p. 211). The author compares Daru’s physical, emotional, and addiction with his sickly physique and unhygienic living conditions. According to the novel, the relationship between the environment and its inhabitants is close (Bates, 2000, p.257). In the narrative, humans are both the cause and effect of a dysfunctional economic and ecological system. The novel explains how nature helps us comprehend civilization and vice versa. It is a morality story that teaches that “a happy and healthy society stems from man’s relationship with the natural environment and that man-made alterations in space are harmful.

*Moth Smoke* (2000) peeled back the curtain on the social component and brought it to the readers’ notice. *Moth Smoke* (2000) depicts how crime and the legal system work in developing countries. It also looks at how laws are made, how they are broken, and how people react when laws are broken. *Moth Smoke* (2000) brings to light the wrongdoings of the elites and the populace, which are a huge deterrent in developing countries (Honari, 1999). Anxiety, unequal riches, immorality, and unfairness: moth smoke is a vibrant approach to getting rid of all these problems.

Similarly, Aliya, a junior family member in *Salt and Saffron* (2000), muses on family customs and memories. The plot centers on the conflict between the traditional concerns and values of the older generation and the growing uncertainty of the younger generation. The narrator, Aliya, narrates stories and anecdotes about her family. Its principal materials comprise bedtime stories given by grandparents and unheard parental admissions. Alia, a member of the new generation skeptical of claims of royal ancestry and aristocratic grace, was raised out of Karachi (Riaz & Babaee, 2015). The plot centers on the Dard-e Dils royal dynasty. In Urdu, the word “Dard-e Dil” means “heartache.” The writer chose the title on purpose as it gives the notion of the past in the local language and culture using Urdu words to complement the English debate. In Urdu literature, “Dard” often connotes agony or pain resulting from a protracted, fruitless struggle for love. Losing exemplary family values, which occurred about the time the British took control of the colonies, is linked to the pain of love. As a result, the family felt socially hurt. The older members of the family attempt to remember the lost tradition by sharing their memories and experiences. The author’s use of vernacular terms in the English novel emphasizes the importance of the vanishing culture (Jamal & Singh, 2014). Even if you do not speak Urdu, you can easily recognize the significance and complexity of local customs and traditions in an Urdu story, since these terms are selected based on how the story hits you.

The novel depicts tradition and changes confusedly, which tells how new convictions substitute old ones. Grandparents such as mothers, fathers, and great-grandparents are separated from grandchildren and friends. They are always proud of their family since they discuss it through family trees, generational maps, artifacts, photographs, and oral recollections. However, the subsequent generation challenges the veracity of the past and reaches fresh inferences by reinterpreting past events and their aftereffects. The work focuses on tales of past failures and victories that serve as sources of inspiration and ceaseless skepticism.

Aliya analyses the relationships between Dard-e Dil’s royal and court ties to the Mughals on one side and its connections to imperial forces that opposed the Mughal government on the other. The author establishes a relationship between the Mughal monarch (1526-1707) and Dard-e-Dils in the tale. Alia claims that the Dard-e-Dil kingdom was a myth and the Dard-e-Dil tribal chief had a very limited domain, yet the upper family insists that the Dard-e-Dils were close associates of the Mughal monarchy. It differs from a kingdom or a nation. The Dard-e Dils, like the Mughals were related to Timurids, but they lacked the wisdom to construct monarchies like Timor and Babur. Only family stories and privileges claims are based on the stories that survive today. After his demise, Nurul Jahan was titled Sultan. Sultan Nurul Jahan was his whole given name (Shamsie, 2000, p. 141). In another story, the author describes a conflict between Zahir ud-Din Babur, the progenitor of the Mughal empire in India, and Zain, a Dard-e-Dil chief. This example shows that claims of familial superiority are false. Nawab Asadullah’s favoured son was Zain. His ascent to prominence was because of his ambition. Zain convinces Babur that if he

misses his home, he should select Zain as his lieutenant and return to Bukhara to reap the bounties of his homeland. This deception resulted in Zain's demise, and his younger sibling, Ibrahim, took command of Dard-e Dil. The narrative is recounted humorously with sarcasm and satire laced throughout.

The author guarantees that certain family-related details, and viewpoints are compatible with the new language. For instance, the novel's depiction of Maryam is a scathing indictment of how the family's collective mentality is motivated by a sense of duty and rank. Maryam marries the family chef, and their union is looked at as a symbol of shame and disgrace. People consider it a revolt against royal norms motivated by an impure birth and a stain on blue blood. Maryam was brought to Dard-e-Dils after the death of her parents. When she returns to her family is unknown. Through Maryam's story, the author examines what happens after people move and form new identities. Maryam's female persona remains distinct throughout the work since the narrator looks at Maryam as a source of inspiration. However, Maryam leaves an impression on the family's feeling of dignity and past virtues. By denouncing Maryam, the author highlights the contradiction between feminism and patriarchal power. These two principles have always been at odds producing conflict and drama throughout family life (Yaqoob & Hussain, 2012). The novel critiques these assertions as the author continually generates and deconstructs claims of class distinction and superiority. In the end, Alia weds Khalil, who is not a royal but a commoner. This eliminates class differences and disproves the idea that families are superior.

In our culture, men and women have different duties. Men are viewed as more significant than women in many respects, while women are less important. These obligations are often referred to as customs and traditions. Occasionally, society assigns specific roles. It implies that men fix these roles. These social systems are the most powerful principles. The father of Sara Suleri is a man of his word with a firm voice. The *Boys will be boys* (2003) explores various themes, including gender and sibling dynamics, political strife, religion, and patriarchy. Because of his position and demeanour, her father is superior to everyone else in the family. Females act like frightened lambs in *Boys will be boys* (2003). According to Sara Suleri, women in Pakistan will not be recognized universally since "there are no women in the third world" (Suleri, 1991, p. 63). Many feminists concur that social, cultural, and economic factors, not biological ones, handle gender disparity. When these forces become part of the natural order, they are undesirable. All of this is described in *Boys will be boys* (2003) by Suleri Suleri. Pakistani society expects women to be shy and subservient, which is because their role is stereotypical in our traditions and conventions (Murtaza et al., 2020).

*Boys will be boys* (2003) is a novel about the influential father of Suleri Suleri. This patriarchic structure is like the idea of *Gaze*. *Gaze* is a complex concept involving the balance of power between the observer and the object of observation. The origin of the gaze is a notion of French post-structuralism, coming from Michel Foucault (1980) and Jacques Lacan (1990). It investigates the complex relationship between staring and gazing, direct and indirect character views, and the audience (Nawaz, 2019). Psychoanalyst Lacan (1990), who uses the term, defines the mirror stage as the gaze between the object and its reflection in the mirror. The term describes the object's relationship to the need to study it and shows that it can be investigated. Vision is typically related to imagination and desire, especially when the perceiver desires to manipulate the object. Lacan (1990) elaborates on what causes humans to desire things and what causes objects to desire humans. This holds true not only for psychoanalysis but also for literary history. In feminism, cinema studies, and sociology in the 1970s, this term was used to differentiate "point of view." It can be perceived in two ways. First, it is the broadest language for just perceiving, whereas the second is believed to be a specific point of view dependent on the gender and position of the common reader. Gazing is often seen as a symbol of masculinity, suggesting that man is in charge, and woman must surrender and become an object (Murtaza et al., 2020). This affects the story shaped by the patriarchy's desires and anxieties.

Mulvey's primary aim in 1920 was to analyze and criticize on how the characters of females portrayed in the novel contributed to establishing patriarchal societies, especially in South Asian nations where men are considered more powerful than women are. The father of Suleri is a true patriarch. He respects the women in his family as if they were men. Women are compared to animals. When held by a man, they feel like tools. Men must be in charge of their own life. We must determine why women are looked at as being weak (Mohi Ud Din, 2022). Why do males have power over women despite their intelligence, riches, and good health? Sara Suleri provides much information about her mother. She was nice and performed an excellent job. She also discusses the former strong-willed woman Dadi. Sara Suleri has remarked multiple times that people write history. She also mentions her family members. Losing her sister is a horrible historical event. This part of Pakistani politics is terrifying. People believed she had perished when her sister passed away under strange circumstances. People believed Ifat's father had caused her death. At that time, his father was quite engaged in politics (Nawaz, 2019). People hypothesized that Ifat's death was connected to his father's political views. He believes that other accounts of the Third World are classified as "histories." Their numbers and statistics are absurd. The stories cannot be separated from the facts they contain.

In *Boys will be boys* (2003), she abandons the historical context and examines the masculine gaze, a social restriction. It is asserted that the male class marginalizes women. Sara Suleri's mother is Welsh. Her life in Pakistan makes her feel out of place. She cannot even communicate in his native tongue. She appears to be a woman from a third-world country who has never heard of liberty or benevolence. Suleri asserts that there are no women in the third world because they are like dumb

livestock and buffaloes. He states that there is no place for women in the active lexicon. It is irrelevant whether they are male or female. It covers the financial exploitation of women.

Muscatori is Suleri's companion. He uses it to show a point. Like Suleri, he uses parallels and metaphors to illustrate that all women struggle with their sense of self. They lack souls but possess physical bodies. It displays women at work but in positions where their presence is essential. They are servants who perform labour. They cook weekly meals for the men and clean their homes. Their aim is to show to men how valuable they are to them.

Her father measures history by the number of government leaders he can recall. Suleri recalls his physical transformation over the years. It documents both the past and the present. It illustrates the disparity between how males actively take part in history and how women are invented to fill in the gaps. Women reconstruct the past by recalling what they ate, drank, and put into their bodies. She adopts a different tone when writing about her brother Shahid and asserts that he is unlike any other man in Pakistan. This was not the situation. He was reliable and flexible.

Pakistan is one of the worst places for women because of its patriarchal system. Even when women are being mistreated in Pakistan, the word "brutality" is worse. Pakistan is in a worse state than just Congo and war-torn Afghanistan. Eighty percent of women are assaulted at home. If she doesn't have a family member to aid her, every third woman has to deal with the embarrassment of being raped. On the gender index, percent country is placed eighty-second out of ninety-two. On the metric of empowering women, the country ranks 152 out of 156 (Noor, 2004). Through *Boys will be boys* (2003), Sara Suleri has shown us how men see the patriarchal society of Pakistan from their point of view. Suleri argues that patriarchal social systems are the primary cause of women's oppression, and she seeks to remove male control, especially in the cultural domain (Murtaza & Hashmi, 2020).

To sum up, Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003) critiques Pakistani society, challenging cultural norms and expectations that perpetuate toxic masculinity and gender inequality. She calls for a collective re-evaluation of societal values and a commitment to fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian society. Suleri's critique serves as a catalyst for change, inspiring transformative dialogue and encouraging individuals to challenge and reshape the status quo.

## 5. Conclusion

This research article has explored the social relevance of literature by analyzing three significant works: Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), and Suleri's *Boys will be boys* (2003). These novels showcase the power of literature in addressing and critiquing social structures, norms, and inequalities prevalent in Pakistani society. Through nuanced storytelling, vivid characterizations, and thought-provoking narratives, these novels transcend mere entertainment and serve as powerful tools for social commentary. They challenge readers to question prevailing beliefs, interrogate societal structures, and critique their roles within these systems. By exploring complex themes such as class, culture, gender, and power, these authors prompt readers to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in meaningful conversations about social issues. These literary works act as mirrors to society, reflecting the realities and complexities of the world we inhabit. These novels give a platform to the voices that are usually unheard, and provide a human face to those who are often seen as outsiders. It helps to create understanding and empathy. By engaging with these works, readers are encouraged to grapple with important social issues and contribute to the ongoing process of shaping a more fair and just society. By embracing diverse voices, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging the creation and dissemination of socially relevant narratives, we can harness the power of literature to inspire positive social transformation and create a more compassionate world.

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