

# Socio- Economic Condition in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

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## Abstract

*Mohsin Hamid traces the Socio- Economic condition in How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia through the journey of an unnamed boy rising from poverty to a wealthy businessman. Hamid has uses the second person narration to help the reader to understand the story. It shows big issues like urbanization, city life, and economic inequality affect ordinary people. The Protagonist's story reflects the harsh realities of urban poverty, where individuals are compelled into moral compromises to survive. The protagonist supports his family through small jobs like delivering pirated DVDs and repackaging expired goods, eventually starting a bottled water business that grows by turning urban problems into business opportunities despite corruption and competition. This study explores the socio-economic inequality portrayed in the novel showing poverty, survival strategies, and moral compromises shape the protagonist's journey to wealth.*

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Conditions, Inequality, Urban Poverty, Survival Strategies, Moral Compromises, Entrepreneurship

## Introduction

Mohsin Hamid, born in 1971 in Lahore, Pakistan, is a novelist, essayist, and brand consultant . He gets a degree from Princeton University in the United States. His works explore themes such as globalization, identity, migration, and socio-economic inequality. His multicultural experiences deeply influence his writing, allowing him to present a global yet distinctly South Asian perspective. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is his third novel, published in 2013 and shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize in 2014, the novel is referred to as HTGFRRA.

According to the World Bank, urbanization in South Asian countries presents a critical opportunity to transform their economies and improve both prosperity and livability. In its report *Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and Livability*, the World Bank notes that, despite notable progress, the region continues to face challenges such as informal

settlements, uncontrolled urban sprawl, and peripheral areas often excluded from official statistics, indicating ongoing pressures on infrastructure, basic services, housing, and the environment.

### Objectives

1. To examine the factors that influence the migration of the protagonist's from his village to city.
2. To study the strategies adopted by the protagonist for survival in the urban environment.
3. To analyze the socio-economic challenges faced by the protagonist in his journey to become wealthy.

### Review of Literature

Muhammad Saleem (2023) in his article titled "Globalization and Socioeconomic Realities: An Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*", explores globalization shapes the protagonist's transformation from rural poverty to urban success.

Saleem argues that the novel reflects the harsh socio-economic conditions in South Asia, where neoliberal policies and urban migration both opportunities and exploitation. He emphasizes that Hamid portrays the protagonist's rise not as a celebration of capitalism but as a critique of the morally ambiguous paths individuals must take to survive and succeed. Saleem further notes that the narrative style second-person address universalizes the experience of the "Rising Asian" subject, making the socio-economic struggle deeply personal yet widely relatable. This analysis provides a critical framework for understanding of economic ambition intersects with personal loss, ethical compromise, and identity transformation under globalization.

Jae Eun Yoo, in her article titled "You inside me inside you: Reading the Other in Self in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*," explores the intricate relationship between self and other in Mohsin Hamid's novel through a postcolonial and psychological lens. Yoo argues that the novel's second-person narrative blurs the boundaries between self and other, suggesting a mutual interdependence of identities in a globalized, postcolonial world. The protagonist's journey is not merely a pursuit of personal success but an exploration of fractured identity, shaped by economic struggle, urban migration, and emotional detachment. Yoo emphasizes how the text critiques neoliberal individualism by portraying characters that are constantly negotiating between personal ambition and collective memory. This interpretation supports the idea that Hamid uses the second-person voice not only as a stylistic device but as a philosophical lens through which globalization's impact on identity can be critically examined.

### Statement of the Article

Urban life offers opportunities for wealth, but in an unequal society, survival often forces individuals into illegal activities, as seen in the protagonist's actions like selling expired goods and bottled water to escape poverty and become wealthy.

### Methodology

This study uses Marxist theory to show class struggle and economic inequality. Marxist theory explains the gap between the rich and poor, forcing people into moral compromise to survive. The novel reflects these ideas by portraying the protagonist's rise from the poverty, wealthy power control society.

### Socio-Economic Crisis

In the article, Kalliopi Sapountzaki in her study "The Interplay Between Socio-economic Crises and Disaster Risks", explains that people become more vulnerable during times of economic and

social crisis in both developed and developing countries. She points out that in rapidly growing cities; those who lack access to basic resources often suffer the most from issues like poor health, environmental risks, and financial instability. This idea helps the readers better to understand on Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, where the protagonist life is shaped not only by personal ambition but also by poverty, illness, and weak infrastructure all common problems in unstable urban environments.

Pakistan's unemployment crisis reveals the harsh socio-economic conditions that Mohsin Hamid fictionalizes in his novels. Recent studies show that unemployment rose to 6.9% in 2021–22, leaving over 4 million people jobless, with women and youth most affected ("Unemployment in Pakistan" 10). This reflects the struggles of Hamid's unnamed protagonist in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, who faces poverty, lack of opportunity, and the constant search for survival in a system that offers little economic security

### **Migration to the city**

*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is a story about an unnamed boy from a rural village. The poor jaundiced boy suffering from hepatitis E due to lack of sanitation in the rural village. The protagonist's mother, strong and determined, expresses the desire to escape village life and join her husband in the city, hoping for a better life. The protagonist's father is working as a cook in the city and stayed with the driver in a shared room where no families were in the quarters. At first he refuses to take them along with him citing financial constraints and the unsuitable living conditions in his quarters and later he agrees. The father, although emotionally distant and constrained by urban economic realities, is still drawn to his wife physically and emotionally. A conversation between the protagonist's parents exposes the financial struggles of city life. The mother believes that her husband earns ten thousand rupees to support the family and argues that they should all shift to the City. The protagonist's mother says: "You earn ten thousand now. You are not a poor man" (HTGFERRA 8). However, the father disagrees, explaining that although his salary seems sufficient in the village, it amounts to very little in the city, where everything is more expensive. The Protagonist's father says: "In the city ten thousands makes you a poor man" (HTGFERRA 8). Poor families often have to make tough choices when they think about moving to a city to improve their living conditions. According to Manzoor, Fraz, and Karam "Hamid's portrayal of systemic inequality, wealth disparity, and the socio-political challenges faced by the lower classes in contemporary Pakistan" highlights the social realities depicted in his novels.

The next month, the family travels atop an overloaded bus to the city, enduring a dangerous and chaotic ride. The protagonist, now recovering from his illness, experiences a visual transformation of the world: mud roads give way to highways, electricity appears, and buildings rise in stature, marking the technological and infrastructural shift from rural to urban. This journey is both physical and symbolic. It marks a break from the extended family system toward a nuclear one a shift reflective of broader societal changes in rising Asia. The move brings promise, insecurity, and the first step on the path to becoming "filthy rich." Hamid says: "Moving to the city is the first step to getting filthy rich in rising Asia" (HTGFERRA 12).

### **Survival Strategies**

A story follows a young boy who shifts from the rural to urban, hoping for better future. Like many people in developing countries, his family believes the city will offer more chances to grow and succeed. But life in the city gives him challenges. The city is with poverty, disease and danger. He joins a school because he dreams of escaping poverty through education. Even though he is sick and doesn't have enough money, the school is with poor infrastructure and located near

Cigarette Company but he keeps going. He studies hard and later gets into college, which opens more opportunities for him. Hamid says: "Getting an education is a running leap towards becoming filthy rich in rising Asia" (HTGFERRA 18). As a schoolboy, he walks through city streets where rich and poor people live close to each other, Hamid says: "the poor live near the rich" (HTGFERRA 15) but their lives are very different. His school is small and crowded, squeezed between a tire shop and a cigarette stand. The teacher there teaches by memorization and hits the students often. This shows that education plays a big role in helping the poor survive and move ahead in city life.

At home, things are also hard. His father cannot afford to send all the children to school. So, he arranges his sister's marriage. His elder brother drops out of school and works as a painter's assistant. To support his family, the boy delivers pirated DVDs in the evenings after school by bicycle. Hamid says: "And it is Partly the consequence of your night job as a DVD delivery boy" (HTGFERRA 24). This small job becomes his first step into the business world. He learns how to deal with people, how to make money, and how to survive in a busy, unfair city. These experiences help him grow stronger and smarter. While selling DVDs, the boy starts to understand how business works. Hamid's narrative "reflects the contradictions inherent in the protagonist's journey" and satirizes societal norms in a rapidly changing Asia (Zaib). This turning point shows that survival in the city is not just about hard work, but also about being smart, noticing problems, and turning them into success. Through this journey, Mohsin Hamid shows urban life, full of struggles, can also offer chances to grow, if one is strong, wise, and willing to take risks. Their house regularly loses electricity. A single candle lights the room while they prepare for sleep. His mother puts it out by pressing the flame with her fingers. The room stays dim from the soft glow of the city outside. The sounds of trains passing and his brother's coughing fill the air, but the boy sleeps deeply. These small scenes reflect the tough conditions many poor families face in growing cities.

The protagonist gets a job where he helps a man who sells expired goods by changing their expiry dates. His Master buys expiring products at very cheap rates. He removes the old dates carefully, and prints new ones so they can be sold again. The protagonist knows this is Illegal activities, but he convinces himself that these goods are still safe it to helps the reduce waste.

He believes that no one has been harmed by it. Hamid Says, "Your costs are low because your master sources recently expired goods at scrap prices, erases the expiry date from the packaging, and reprints a later date instead" (HTGFERRA 26). Poor people in the city are often forced to make moral compromises to survive. Unlike his father, who worked honestly as a cook, the protagonist has to take risky and dishonest jobs to earn to lead a life.

### **Socio Economic Challenges**

His early jobs help him build valuable contacts with shopkeepers and retailers, which later helps him to starts his own business. Observing the city's crumbling water infrastructure where drinking water is mixed with sewage he identifies a business opportunity in supplying clean bottled water. Using the small income and contacts he has gathered, he sets up a bottledwater operation in his modest two-room house. The protagonist sets up a small but effective bottled-water business using basic methods. "Entrepreneurial venture of re-packaging and selling the polluted bottled Water under the guise of purity. It also makes explicit the act of desacralization of a sacred natural space and how this sacred natural space is turned into a capitalist neoliberal location in the post development imaginary" (Rabbani and Chaudhary).

As his business grows, the protagonist faces many difficulties. Shortages of gas disrupt their water purification process, and financial pressures constantly loom over him. However, he refuses to compromise on quality, even when it hurts his profits. His quiet leadership keeps his small team motivated, and his dedication to hard work allows the business to slowly expand. By reinvesting

his earnings, he increases production capacity and reaches more customers. His success is not overnight; it is a result of patience, wise decisions, and the ability to survive in the tough, competitive urban environment.

The journey to wealth becomes more dangerous when he faces violent threats from a powerful rival businessman who runs a competing water company. His delivery truck is burned, and he is attacked by hired gunmen. These events show that rising in business often involves dealing with power struggles and personal risks. Rather than giving up, the protagonist seeks protection from a local militia, understanding that in a corrupt system, survival requires not just business skills but also strategic alliances. Despite the fear and humiliation, he remains determined to protect his business and continues to push forward.

Eventually, the protagonist becomes a wealthy and successful businessman. “The protagonist who only cares for profit gradually becomes a part and parcel of the burgeoning middle and upper classe” (Bose 149) His bottled water company grows stronger, bringing him financial stability and social respect. However, emotional struggles continue in his personal life. His marriage becomes distant, and he feels the loneliness of his journey. Despite achieving his financial goals, he realizes that wealth comes with emotional costs and moral compromises. Yet, his hard work enables him to support his family, provide for his aging relatives, and secure his place in the rising economy. His story shows that in a developing society, wealth can be achieved through persistence and resilience, though the personal sacrifices are often heavy.

## **Conclusion**

Mohsin Hamid’s *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* tells a powerful story about a boy who dreams of escaping poverty but finds that the path to success is never easy. As he moves from his village to the city, he faces many struggles—sickness, money problems, and tough choices that force him to bend the rules. He works hard, learns how to survive, and builds a business out of the city’s water crisis. But even when he becomes rich, he feels lonely and realizes that success comes with emotional pain and moral compromises. Hamid’s story shows people in poor and unequal societies often have no choice but to take risks and make difficult decisions just to survive. It reminds us that while wealth can change a person’s life, it also has a hidden cost, making us think about what true success really means.

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