Research Journal of Language and Literary Studies
Volume3, Issue 1, 2023, p 1-22

An Existential Exploration of Sohel's Character in Daniyal Muaeenuddin's Muscle

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Abstract

This research paper embarks on an intellectual quest into the domain of existential exploration. It is guided by a meticulous analysis of the central character, Mian Sohel, within Daniyal Muaeenuddin's latest literary masterpiece, 'Muscle.' By drawing from the profound existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and the associated literary criticism, this scholarly investigation aims to unfold the intricate layers that compose Mian Sohel's existence. The study thoroughly analyzes the character's experience of inauthenticity, the torment of bad faith, the burden of indecisiveness, and the echoing pangs of loneliness that reverberate within his being. Through a rigorous examination of Mian Sohel's innermost thoughts, the choices he makes, and his intricate interactions with the narrative's setting and its other characters, this research endeavors to illuminate Mian Sohel's profound existential journey. By foregrounding Sohel's existential struggles, the paper aims to shed light on the dilemma faced by returning Pakistani students, who spent their formative years in West, in assimilating back into local socio-political ambience. It also examines the broader existential implications

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that echo within the human condition, going beyond the confines of this literary work and offering insight into the universal human experience.
Keywords: **[Existentialism, Inauthenticity, Loneliness]**

Introduction

Daniyal Mueenuddin is a Pakistani-American author known for his short stories. His stories provide a glimpse into the lives of characters in contemporary Pakistan. In his works, he explores themes of power, class, and relationships in a changing society. Daniyal Muaeenuddin's latest novella 'Muscle' was published in 'The New Yorker' magazine in August 2021. It is a story that revolves around a young man named Sohel who arrives back from America to manage his family estate in Duniyapur, Pakistan and the circumstances that he faces over there. Daniyal Muaeenuddin's story was well received by the readers as well as by the critics. In late 2021, a well-known literary website 'longreads.com' included Daniyal Muaeenuddin's story in the list of ten outstanding stories to be read in 2022.

Existentialism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasizing the individual's subjective experience, freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in an otherwise seemingly meaningless and indifferent universe. It is defined as "a system of ideas made famous by Jean Paul Sartre in the 1940s in which the world has no meaning and each person is alone and completely responsible for their actions by which they make their own character". (Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, 2023). Its importance in understanding human experiences lies in its ability to shed light on fundamental aspects of the human condition and offer valuable insights into how individuals grapple with existence, choice, and the quest for authenticity and purpose. One of the central concerns of existentialism is the quest for meaning and authenticity in life. It explores how individuals grapple with questions about their purpose, values, and identity in a world that lacks inherent meaning. By examining this search for meaning, existentialism helps us understand

the motivations and struggles that shape human behavior and aspirations. Existentialism confronts individuals with existential dilemmas, such as impotence, listlessness, isolation, and the absurdity of existence. These dilemmas are universal human experiences and exploring them deepens our comprehension of the complexities and vulnerabilities of human nature.

The novella 'Muscle' is set in the Pakistan of 1980s. Sohel returns from America to manage his family's declining estate in Dunyapur after the death of his influential grandfather. His father's reckless actions led to financial ruin, leaving Sohel, a 22-year-old with no siblings or close relatives, to navigate corrupt servants, violent neighbors, and societal lawlessness. Trained in a liberal society, he strives for peaceful solutions but is forced into uneasy alliances, including with gangsters, to protect the estate. Lonely and torn between loyalty to his girlfriend in America and societal expectations in Pakistan, Sohel faces increasing challenges. As tensions rise, he grapples with a complex dilemma as we ponder on whether Sohel can overcome his existential crisis.

As the story unfolds, Sohel comes across as a person suffering from inauthenticity who is torn between the dilemmas of choices and internal conflicts. He is never able to assert himself and can be seen hurried and harried by the circumstances and people around him. His sense of sheer loneliness shadows his view of socio-political context of his. These factors offer a rich and compelling avenue for storytelling and philosophical introspection through the lens of existentialism. Existential themes, such as inauthenticity, dilemmas, and loneliness, are fundamental aspects of the human condition. By exploring these facets through Sohel's journey, readers can connect with his struggles on a personal level, making the story emotionally more resonant for them.

Research Questions

1. How does Mian Sohel's character in 'Muscle' exemplify themes of existentialism, such as inauthenticity, bad faith, indecisiveness, and loneliness, and how do these aspects contribute to his existential journey?

2. In what ways does Mian Sohel's character provide insights into the dilemma faced by returning Pakistani students who have spent their formative years in the West, trying to assimilate back into the local socio-political ambience of Pakistan, and how do his experiences resonate with broader existential implications beyond the novel 'Muscle'?

Literature Review

Jean-Paul Sartre, a key figure in the development of existentialism, gave most of the concepts related to existentialism. One of the very basic tenet of existentialism is the concept of 'existence precedes essence' which means that a "man is nothing else than what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 1948, p. 28). Hence a person has a complete freedom and ability to make a choice in his life to rise above the absurd condition of humanity and to conceive himself and thrust into existence. Following excerpt explains this concept further:

"What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards […] He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself […] Man is nothing else than that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (Sartre, 1948, p. 28). His influential works include 'Being and Nothingness' and 'Existentialism is Humanism'. Present research employs Sartre's concept of 'authenticity', 'bad faith' and 'existential angst' to analyze protagonist of the story.

Authenticity is another important concept of existentialism. The scholarly authors define authenticity as "the unobstructed operation of one's true or core-self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p. 294) or "authenticity as consistency between an entity's internal values and its external expressions" (Lehman et al., 2019, p. 3). A person is authentic if her actions are true to her values. Existentialists often emphasize the importance of living authentically, which means being true to oneself, making choices based on personal values, and taking responsibility for one's actions. In his book 'Being and Nothingness',

Sartre explores the concept of authenticity. In his views, authenticity is an interrupted process that asks individuals to keep reflecting on their choices and values. Authenticity is also a kind of radical self-examination in which an individual must face her own limitations, fears, and anxieties. This process makes people develop a deep sense of self-awareness and understanding of their own values and priorities.

Existential angst is also known as existential anxiety or existential dread, is a central theme in Sartre's philosophical works, particularly in his major work 'Being and Nothingness'. Existential angst refers to the deep sense of anxiety and unease that arises from human awareness of their own existence and the realization of their freedom and responsibility in shaping their lives. It is the feeling of being confronted with the fundamental questions of existence, meaning, and choice without any pre-established answers or external guidance. According to Gurung (2009), 'angst' takes on a distinct meaning in existential philosophy, referring to the anxiety or fear that arises due to the paradoxical nature of human freedom. This emotion is a result of the perceived meaninglessness of human existence and the apparent emptiness of the universe. Angst is considered a universal aspect of human existence and underlies various aspects of our lives.

Sartre discussed the concept of 'bad faith' which refers to individuals evading their freedom and responsibility by conforming to social roles, norms, and expectations. By denying their freedom and choosing to follow a pre-established path, individuals may experience a sense of inner conflict and anxiety. "Bad faith is a form of self-deception which in making use of freedom denies it" (Bhandari, 1998, p. 32). In his 1943 book, 'Being and Nothingness', Jean-Paul Sartre characterizes it as a form of self-deception, distinct from general lying, where individuals aim to possess the hidden truth entirely. Sartre suggests that a true liar is a cynical consciousness that acknowledges the truth within but denies it in their words. In essence, bad faith reflects an inauthenticity within oneself, as humans attempt to evade their responsibility to discover and

define their true selves, ultimately relinquishing their freedom in the process.

DR Bhandari's article titled 'Existentialist Perception Of The Human Condition: With Special Reference To Sartre' delves into existentialism, focusing on Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy. It emphasizes the idea that 'existence precedes essence' challenges the traditional notions of predefined purpose. Sartre's perspective suggests that human existence results from chance, placing the responsibility for meaning and purpose on individuals through their freedom. The article explores how existence is revealed through choices, anxiety, and freedom, and how greater responsibility leads to increased anxiety. It also discusses the pursuit of being, nothingness, and the concept of bad faith. Contrary to the belief that existentialism is pessimistic, the article concludes with Sartre's view that it prepares individuals for an authentic life by guiding them through anguish, abandonment, and despair to discover the genuine meaning of life, highlighting the relevance of existentialism to the human condition.

In their article 'Vulnerability of Mankind: An Existentialist (Philosophical) Interpretation of Charles Mungoshi's Selected Literary Works' authors Mapako and Mareva explore how the choices and actions we make in life give it meaning. They explain that we can assert our existence through our free will, choices, and personal responsibility. They also discuss how existentialism, a philosophical idea, originated during the Great Depression when people lost their optimism in society. The main point of their study is that there is no perfect life. Instead, life is filled with worries and suffering because we lack perfection, power, and control over our lives. According to this theory, our existence doesn't have inherent meaning; we have to create meaning through our actions. This is what they mean by 'existence precedes essence'. They emphasize that we need to take responsibility for our actions and the results they bring. Overall, their study can help us understand Sohel's anxiety and loneliness, and how he can find a better solution to his problems by creating a meaningful world for himself through his actions.

Monisha Roy's research, titled 'Finding Meaning in a Meaningless World: Existential Crisis of Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers' delves into the profound existential crisis experienced by the character Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence's novel 'Sons and Lovers'. Roy's analysis draws parallels between Paul Morel's struggles and the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, particularly the concept of 'bad faith.' This philosophical lens helps Roy to uncover the depths of Paul's crisis, as he grapples with the absence of meaning in a world that appears devoid of purpose. Throughout the novel, Paul's experiences are examined through the existentialist perspective, shedding light on the idea that an individual's existential crisis can often lead them down a path where life seems futile and devoid of significance. By intertwining Paul Morel's narrative with Sartrean notions of authenticity, self-deception, and the search for meaning, Monisha Roy's research offers readers a deeper understanding of the character's internal turmoil and the broader themes of existentialism in D.H. Lawrence's work. This exploration serves as a poignant reminder of how literature can illuminate the human condition and the quest for meaning in an otherwise perplexing and often indifferent world.

The personal views of a writer are of considerable importance in any analysis. Daniyal Mueennuddin in an interview with Cressida, for 'The New Yorker', discusses at length about his latest novella 'Muscle' and the character of Sohel. Regarding Sohel, he talks about two types of power: perceived and real. In his views, Sohel has only perceived power, because of his family background, his estate and somewhat because of his foreign education. But Sohel discovers that perceived power is largely ineffective in the corridors of real power. The police officer does not show any deference to Sohel, because he knows that Sohel' s perceived power is illusionary. The author also asserts that politics, attitudes and manners that Sohel has learned abroad make him incapable of managing his collapsing family estate. In his frustration and weakness, he surrenders to the temptation of violence. He makes a choice of

seeking resolution to a problem through violence and ends up facing ramifications of his choice.

Based on an extensive review of the available literature on the concerned topic, several research gaps have been identified and will be addressed in this paper. Firstly, Daniyal Mueenuddin's latest novel, "Muscle," published in 2021, has received little to no critical appraisal, leaving a significant void in the analysis of this literary work. Secondly, there exists a notable research gap concerning the study of returning Pakistani students who have spent their formative years in Western countries and the challenges they face when attempting to assimilate back into the local socio-political ambience. These gaps in the literature underscore the need for a comprehensive examination of both the novel "Muscle" and the experiences of returning Pakistani students, which this paper aims to address, contributing to a better understanding of these overlooked aspects in the academic discourse.

Research Methodology

The research article employs a qualitative research design, as it seeks to explore and analyze the character of Sohel in Daniyal Muaeenuddin's novella 'Muscle' through the lens of existentialism. During the course of narrative, the protagonist seems to lack the power to assert his own self on the circumstances and people around him. This creates a feeling of helplessness which is further aggravated by his loneliness. All things join together to make the protagonist a perfect subject for the exploration of existential themes. Moreover, the qualitative method allows for an in-depth examination and interpretation of Sohel's character, his actions, and interactions, as well as the broader themes of existential crisis, authenticity and existential angst in the narrative.

The primary data source for the purpose of this research is the novella 'Muscle' by Daniyal Muaeenuddin. A close textual analysis of the text is conducted to closely examine and analyze the character of Sohel, the protagonist of the story, to bring out his existential crisis, his existential angst and his search for authenticity. Key passages and dialogues are analyzed to gain insights into the character's portrayal. Other characters

of the story are also brought in discussion to seek their significance in the thought process and actions of Sohel.

Relevant secondary sources are gathered from scholarly articles, books, academic journals and interviews that explore existentialism and its relevance to our lives. These sources provide theoretical frameworks and critical perspectives to enrich the analysis of Sohel's character.

Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to Sohel's character and his struggle. The relevant passages from the story are coded to categorize them into themes. Themes are analyzed in light of Sartre's existential theories and concepts to draw connections and insights.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The story is set in Pakistan of 1980s. Most of the action of the story takes place in Lahore and Duniyapur. The protagonist of the story, Sohel, comes back from America to manage his family's estate in Dunyapur. Sohel's family, once a prominent and well connected one to the power corridors of Pakistan, is now on a decline and verge of disaster. It is because of Sohel's father who was an irresponsible drunkard and gambler. He sold much of the family's land and consumed a lot of wealth in his drinking and gambling spree.

Sohel has to come back from America after the death of his grandfather, Mian Abdullah Abdalah, who was the main influential figure behind their family's rise to power and reputation. He was a well resourceful person who knew how to get things done. Sohel's father and mother had already died a couple of years before his grandfather's demise. Their car hit an accident in Lahore when Sohel's father was driving drunk.

This puts the responsibility of estate's affairs on young and inexperienced shoulders of Mian Sohel, who is just 22. Being the only son of an only son, he finds himself quite singular in the cause. There isn't any siblings, uncles, or cousins to help him out in difficult times or in improving the declining state of the estate. At the same time, Sohel faces the issue of being unfamiliar with the complex surrounding society around him. His mother, fearing that he would follow his father's

reckless style of living, dispatched him to America for his education at the time when he was just 13. His grandfather initially resisted the idea, but she eventually convinced him too. Now, after almost a decade, he comes back to manage the estate in Dunyapur.

Right from the let go, he is confronted with different sorts of conflicts and problems. Corrupt servants and farm managers, emboldened and violent neighboring clan, general lawlessness in society and his lack of powerful connections to solve any problem are the few pressing issues that he has to tackle with. But there is also much going on inside his head. He got his education in a liberal and progressive society. He has a vision of his own to run the affairs of the estate. He wants to bring peace and prosperity to the people around him. He doesn't believe in violence and wants to help people there. But circumstances always push him to do things averse to his own vision.

Another predicament that Sohel faces is his loneliness. He has a girlfriend, Clara, back in America whom he misses a lot. He cannot bring her to his estate as she will never be able to adjust to the circumstances with which he himself is in trouble to adjust. The agony of recent death of his mother and her memories often transport him to a melancholic disposition. Throughout the course of the story, Sohel's sense of loneliness prevails over him. He has no friends or close relatives to give some solace to him in moments of trouble.

Despite his internal conflicts, Sohel is determined to run the affairs of estate in a peaceful and amiable way. He does not believe in violence as a way to control people's behavior towards him. He wants to uphold the principles on which he was brought up. He loathes roaming around with armed gangsters to protect him and secure his estate but consistently happening unpleasant events and people around him push him to respond strictly to ever increasing liberties taken by the neighboring Chandios. He lacks political and influential connections to press the Police to take some solid action against Chandios as they were hand in glove with the criminals. Reluctantly, he called upon gangsters for help who were loyal to his grandfather over the years.

One problem leads to another. The gangsters become a constant source of trouble for Sohel for their raunchy antics on the estate. Moreover, they make use of excessive force and severally injure one of the Chandios. This again compels Sohel to reach out to one of his distant relatives, reluctantly asking him to sort out the Chandios' matter with his influential connections in power corridors. His relatives try to set him up for a practical marriage with an influential woman, Nisa. They think that Nisa can prove to be key that can unlock and solve Sohel's all sorts of issues.

Entourage of Sohel's distant relatives including Nisa makes a visit to Duniyapur. Initially, Sohel feels attraction for Nisa but soon delves into melancholic brooding and anxiety. He doesn't want to be unfaithful to Clara. But neither he can leave Pakistan and go to America, nor she can come to live with him. This dilemma leaves him hanging in between both the choices and he is unable to decide. An argument also erupts between Sohel's relatives and the leader of armed gangsters, Malk Sharif. Malik Sharif feels insulted and leaves Duniyapur. This further worsens the situation for Sohel as now he has to cope with an angry gangster also.

Later, at the end of the story, Malk Sharif alongside a police officer makes a visit to Sohel's residence in Lahore. Both try to intimidate Sohel in some subtle ways as they know that Sohel lacks actual power to protect himself and his interests. After their departure, we see Sohel looking into night sky, still torn between choices, on the horns of a dilemma, and unable to take any decisive step. At the same time, we leave the story wondering whether Sohel will never be able to liberate himself from the dilemmas and crisis he faces or whether he has what it takes to get rid of his existential crisis.

Character Analysis:

The character of Mian Sohel is a complex one. The extraordinary turn of events has put the 22 years old heir of one of the powerful families of the Southern Punjab in a precarious position. The first thing we observe is his search for power to control the situation and people around him. His

inability to do so causes him severe frustration. His discomfiture at police station is the result of his similar inability. He brings in the 'goondas' to take control of things but then, he has no real control on the 'goondas'. This lack of power to control circumstances and people around results in Sohel's feeling of helplessness, frustration, and loss of agency in his life.

An important dimension of Sohel's character is his desire to assert himself and, at the same time, his inability to do so. This lack of assertiveness makes Sohail suffer from inauthenticity. There are many instances where Sohel's innate desire to assert his point of view remains unsuccessful. Deep down inside, Mian Sohel knows that Munshi Zawar Hussain has accumulated most of his personal wealth through guile and fraudulent management of estate's accounts over the years. There are few occasions where he feels like saying it to Munshi Zawar Hussain but every time he backs off and keeps it to himself. Another instance where he is unable to assert himself happens when Malik Sharif, 'the goonda', decides to invade the Chndio's fields. Mian Sohel shows his reluctance to go ahead with violence and says:

> "Let's go , have a cup of tea, anyway, and make a plan. We can talk it over with Zawar Hussain." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

To this, Malik Sharif answers with a false laugh and abuses the Munshi. He reminds Mian Sohel about the intrusions and meddling of the Chandios and proceeds with his violent plans despite Mian Sohel's reluctance. This failure of Sohel to assert his own vision results in severe repercussions and further aggravates the crisis for him.

Mian Sohel wants to run his form in a liberal and humane way. He does not want to behave like traditional landowners who often beat their tenants and use violent measures to control the affairs of their land. On the other hand, Sohel's vision is based on his upbringing in American society. However, he fails to run the farm according to his liberal vision. One problem after the other takes him further and further away from his vision. As he tells Munshi Zawar Hussain:

> "I'm not afraid. I'm frustrated. I came here to help, and all you people do is push at me and pull at me." **(**Mueenuddin, 2021**)**

To this Zawar Hussain replies to him, "These villagers are like cats. You can smash their heads in and they crawl into some hole and live for days." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Eventually he calls for 'goondas' from Lahore, who were once loyal to his grandfather, to show his power and muscle to the people around. This step of Mian Sohel proves to be catastrophic not only to the situation on the farm but also to his own personal well-being.

Sohel, the protagonist of the story, is an example of a person who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His childhood was spent in a luxurious household. Yet there had been something missing. Throughout the narrative, there are many instances when Sohel delves into the past memories of his childhood. However, rarely these memories are cheerful. His attitude is never nostalgic about his childhood. Being the only son of an only son, he never had the playful company of siblings and cousins. Most of his memories revolve around the drinking and gambling parties of his parents especially the recklessness of his father. This loss of his childhood constantly keeps on hovering around him. The only shining light in the dim memories of his childhood is his mother albeit who herself was a case of personal loss and waste of individual talent. In this way, the childhood of Sohel became the bedrock of his existential angst and crisis in years to come.

Sohel also comes across as a case of square peg in round hole. He was never meant for the circumstances which he had to go through. His upbringing and education were not meant to face criminal police and well organized gangsters. All these factors make him incapable of running an already declining estate. This misfit led his life into complete disarray. The crisis he faces is not only social and cultural but also has emotional and psychological implications.

Another important aspect of Sohel's journey towards existential crisis is his loneliness. He lives alone on his estate, and has no siblings, cousins or even distant relatives there. Being alone is one thing but having an

acute sense of loneliness is completely different. In Sohel' s case, it is this acute sense of intense loneliness that troubles him the most. Troubles around him **redouble** his sense of loneliness. The narrator of the story describes his feeling of loneliness in the following words:

> "He would be alone, with Malik Sharif's men prowling outside, and all the concentric rings around him, all the people looking in toward him, the villagers, the Chandios, and the rest." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

After spending a few days with him in Duniyapur, Nisa also perceives his aloneness. As she looks in his eyes and says:

> "You're lonely here, aren't you? Poor Sohel and you are all alone." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

At one point of time, being all alone, Sohel literally starts weeping like "the quiet tears one sheds when perfectly alone." This absence of meaningful relationships amplifies Sohel's feelings of emptiness, insignificance and uncertainty.

Sohel's complicated relationship with Clara, the American girl whom he loves is a crucial facet of his personality. They fell in love with each other when he was studying there in America, but things become complicated when he starts living in Pakistan. He wants her to come here and live with him at his farm. But at the same time, he is afraid about how she would react to the situation at the farm. The dilemma keeps him hanging and confused. On the other hand, with passing time, he feels that Clara is losing interest in him. As narrator tells us:

> "He wrote too often, too many pages while she increasingly sent little more than a note, written in haste." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Her drifting away from him worsens the already troubling state of Sohel's mind. His disturbance is quite evident in the following words:

> "He knew that he thought of her much more often than she thought of him, and that made him angry at the farm, made his troubles here more galling." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Sohel's association with the memories of his deceased mother is an important feature of his life. Very often, he is found lost in the memories of his mother. She left a lasting impression on Sohel's soul. She was the

one who decided to send Sohel to America for education. She did not want her son to follow suit of his father. While arguing with Sohel's grandfather she says:

> "They'll make him clean and hardworking and then he'll come back and do what you wish. It costs me a lot to say this. I don't want him spending his life like his father." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

She is one shining figure in otherwise dim memories of Mian Sohel. Her memories haunt him wherever he goes. The narrative describes this in following words:

> "He remembered her at the desk, typing, writing her novel, which had never seen the light of day, cigarettes overflowing the ashtray, her long hands, long face, sadness." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Exploration of Existential Themes:

A close analysis of Sohel's character reveals that he is torn and stuck between different choices and dilemmas. Firstly, he wants to manage the affairs of his farm according to his own vision of humane and liberal principles. His intention and commitment to do so, is visible in the following words which he said to Munshi Zawar Hussain:

> "And I keep telling you, I came here to make things better. Otherwise, what's the use of all my education?" (Mueenuddin, 2021)

However, ground realities demand a different course of action from him. He is advised and insisted to run the affairs in a more traditional and brutal way. So, this disparity and discrepancy between his own vision and ideology and the ground realities propel him into internal conflicts which further lead to existential anxiety.

Another critical impasse where Mian Sohel finds himself is his association and relationship with Clara, his first love in America. He wants her to be with him at his farm. But at the same time, he knows deep down inside him that she with her liberal mindset and feminist principles would never be able to adjust here. He sometimes also feels perturbed about how Clara would react and judge him for his actions on the estate. This keeps him consistently preoccupied in an internal

conflict. This internal struggle is one dominant element of the complexities of Sohel's existence.

Moreover, the arrival of Nisa in Sohel's life adds another dimension to this crisis. He is subtly suggested by his cousins to marry Nisa, as she brings a whole lot of political and administrative connections with her that would make things easy for him in the future. Sohel also feels attracted to her for her charming personality, but he thinks of Clara and her love. He cannot be disloyal and unfaithful to her. Confused and perplexed, Sohel is unable to reach any decision and hangs between the choices. His life continues to move ahead without any direction or purpose. At the end of the narrative, we see him staring in the night sky and reflecting upon the choices and alternatives he had, and wondering how things could have been different for him.

Sohel's struggle for authenticity:

Mian Sohel's inability to assert himself and act upon his inner values and beliefs while accepting societal expectations can be analyzed through Sartre's concept of authenticity. Sartre's concept of authenticity is a central theme in his philosophy of existentialism. It is the idea that individuals must be true to themselves and their own values if they are to live a meaningful life. He defines authenticity as the process of becoming oneself. This means that individuals must create their own identity and value through their actions and choices. The examination of Sohel's character from the perspective of Sartre's concept of authenticity clearly reveals that Sohel is suffering from inauthenticity. He succumbs to societal pressures and expectations. His opting for violence as a way to resolve the issues is entirely against his values and beliefs. So, Sohel's going against his authentic self results in a sense of alienation, inner conflict and a lack of fulfillment as he denies his true self and conform to societal expectations and external pressures.

Mian Sohel's inability to be decisive and assert his own values and beliefs reflects a deep existential struggle with the concept of personal freedom and responsibility. In the following lines, the narrator of the story reveals the thought process of Sohel at a similar occasion when he

could not assert himself and was unable to stop Mailk Sharif from invading the fields of neighboring clan.:

> "Sohel strolled the circuit, birds in the trees clamoring, while he thought of the tractor plowing up the Chandios' fodder. He shouldn't have let that happen. What happened to college days and marching for justice in South Africa and in solidarity with ship workers in Poland?"
>
> (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Here, his struggle to assert himself on the situation and people around him is quite evident. Moving on, he experiences a constant conflict between societal expectations and his authentic self. This pattern of Sohel's lack of assertiveness and authenticity continues throughout the narrative till the end. At the end, we still find Mian Sohel struggling to reconcile his inner self to the outer world.

Bad faith of Sohel:

Sartre's notion of bad faith is closely related to his idea of authenticity. In Sartre's views, a person lacking authenticity suffers from bad faith. The character of Mian Sohel shares striking similarities with Sartre's concept of 'bad faith'. He deceives himself by denying himself freedom and responsibility, leading to a lack of authenticity. Sohel's struggle to decide reflects his attempt to avoid making choices and taking responsibility for his actions. His feelings of powerlessness and loneliness stem from this inauthenticity, as he fails to confront his true self and the freedom that comes with it. This internal conflict traps him in a state of self-deception, mirroring Sartre's notion of bad faith.

Sohel's Existential Angst of Indecisiveness:

Mian Sohel's character also shares similarities with Sartre's concept of Existential angst. Like Sartre's notion, he experiences inner turmoil due to his inability to make decisions, leading to a sense of being torn between choices. He also suffers from inauthenticity, feeling disconnected from his true self, and struggles with feelings of powerlessness and loneliness. These experiences align with the existential anxiety that arises from the realization of one's freedom and

responsibility to define his own existence yet feeling paralyzed by the weight of that responsibility.

Exploring the Roots of Sohel's Existential Crisis:

If we delve into the causes and reasons behind Sohel's existential crisis, we can trace a few pivotal moments from his life that set him on the course of this crisis. The main influential factor behind the existential crisis of Mian Sohel is his incomplete and shattered childhood. Most of his childhood memories are about his father's drinking and gambling parties with his friends. For being the only son of an only son, his childhood memories were devoid of any jolly moments. He had no childhood friends to remember. So, the role of his parents, predominantly his father's irresponsible predilection towards drinking and partying, is a crucial factor behind his existential crisis in later years.

Another important cause behind Sohel's predicament was his mother's decision to send him to America for education when he was only thirteen, albeit the basic issue behind her decision was again Sohel's father. She didn't want to let her son follow the ways of her husband. However, his parents' decision to relinquish themselves of the responsibility left a lasting impact on Sohel's future. His formative years were spent abroad, with no likelihood of establishing local connections and friendships, and learning attitudes and values that later proved to be a stumbling block in his adaptation to circumstances back home. The narrator describes the situation in the following words:

> "Sent abroad at thirteen, he had lost touch with the boys of his age who had gone through grade school with him." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

He became a boy 'too soft, too mannered, too Westernized' to become aware of vultures around.

> "The only child of an only child, sure to inherit the property, Sohel should never have been sent abroad, certainly not for boarding school as well as college. Even as a teen-ager he had been aware of the vultures circling around—the boy too soft, too mannered, too Westernized." (Mueenuddin, 2021)

Few other factors that influenced Sohel's journey towards existential struggles were the untimely death of his parents, declining state of the farm, and his problematic and entangled relationship with Clara.

Implications and Interpretations:

Sohel's inauthenticity and mental conflicts have broader significance and implications for the readers. By examining Mian Sohel's struggles, readers may develop a deep sense of empathy and understanding for individuals who experience similar existential challenges in real life.

During the whole course of the narrative, we find Mian Sohel as a helpless and powerless character. He is unable to take control of things. This helplessness and powerlessness are not only towards external circumstances but also towards his internal conflicts. He finds himself utterly helpless in his relationship with Clara. There are occasions when Sohel feels an urge to leave each and everything and flee to America to make a home with Clara there. But this momentary urge is suppressed by his familial responsibilities and societal expectations. Sohel's feelings of helplessness and powerlessness indicate a lack of agency in his life and it stems from the perception of the indifferent and hostile circumstances.

Mian Sohel's perception of his sheer loneliness prevails throughout the narrative. This experience of loneliness suggests a disconnection from others and results in a feeling of existential isolation. He struggles to find meaningful connections and a sense of belonging in the world. The only time he felt a personal connection was when he was with Nisa but that too ended briefly. The critical assessment of Sohel's feeling of loneliness and alienation can stimulate readers' awareness towards human condition, societal norms and the need and search for meaningful connections.

The critical analysis of the root causes behind Sohel's struggles offers a substantial avenue to the readers to reach better awareness towards development and growth of early adults. By engaging with the Sohel's existential journey, readers may be inspired to embark on their own paths of personal growth and self-discovery. The novella serves as a catalyst

for introspection and self-reflection, encouraging readers to confront their own existential dilemmas and seek authenticity in their lives.

Moreover, the exploration of existential themes in the 'Muscle' opens the door to philosophical contemplation and critical thinking. It encourages readers to engage with existentialist philosophy and other related philosophical concepts, fostering a deeper understanding of human experience and the broader implications of our choices. Overall, the interpretations and implications drawn from the novella's exploration of existential themes offer a rich and thought-provoking experience for readers. They invite us to contemplate our existence, confront our inner struggles, and seek deeper meaning in the complexities of life. The novella also serves as a powerful tool for philosophical exploration and a source of inspiration for embracing the freedom and responsibility that comes with being human.

Relatively newer work, Daniyal Muaeenuddin's 'Muscle' offers a substantial scope for further inquiry for recurrent motifs and themes. The story incorporates a considerable number of autobiographical touches. The character of Mian Sohel manifests a reflection of its creator. Daniyal Muaeenuddin's work can further be analyzed through psychological and socio-cultural perspectives to explore its themes, characters, and the author's personal experiences and influences.

Conclusion

In 'Muscle', the existential exploration of Mian Sohel's experiences of inauthenticity, bad faith, indecisiveness, and loneliness provides a profound and thought-provoking journey into the complexities of the human condition. Through our analysis, we have witnessed how Sohel embodies the core themes of existentialism, including inauthenticity, bad faith, indecisiveness, and the haunting pangs of loneliness. His innermost thoughts, choices, and interactions with the narrative's setting and other characters have served as a rich tapestry for understanding his profound existential journey.

Furthermore, we have explored the peculiar circumstances that placed Mian Sohel on the path of existential struggles. His experiences as a

returning Pakistani student, who spent his formative years in the West, have illuminated the challenges of assimilating back into the local socio-political ambience. We have delved into the complexities of his identity and the tensions he faces in reconciling the two worlds he inhabits. These circumstances have underscored the universality of the human condition, where individuals grapple with questions of authenticity, freedom, and responsibility.

The novella acts as a powerful mirror to our own lives, prompting us to contemplate the masks we wear, the choices we make, and the impact of our connections with others. Through Sohel's existential struggles, we are reminded of the fundamental human need for connection and belonging, as well as the weight of responsibility in shaping our existence.

In conclusion, the portrayal of inauthenticity, bad faith, indecisiveness, and loneliness in Daniyal Muaeenuddin's story speaks to the timeless and universal aspects of human existence. It challenges us to examine our own lives, question the choices we make, and embrace the call for authenticity and self-reflection. Through the character's struggles, we gain empathy and compassion for those facing similar existential crises, fostering a more compassionate outlook towards others' journeys.

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