

CONSTRUCTING HISTORY, POWER, AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN  
MOHAMMED HANIF'S A CASE OF EXPLODING MANGOES: A NEO-  
HISTORICIST CLOSE READING

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines how A Case of Exploding Mangoes constructs history, political power and authority as well as how language, ideology and institutional practices interact to form historical narratives. The novel is set in the history of the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan, and incorporates satire, irony, and historical events to criticize dictatorship and the manipulation of collective memory. Though a lot has been written on the work of Hanif, the research that has been carried out up to now has been mainly focused on the postcolonial or literary stylistic interpretation, and it has provided a gap in the analysis of how the novel is an active discursive production of authority and historical knowledge. In this paper, I will seek to fill this gap by looking at the representation, resistance, and negotiation of power and political legitimacy within the text. The study uses a Neo-Historicist approach intertwined with the Close Reading and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). To discuss the discursive strategies applied to build a divine authority, influence the masses, and coerce institutionalized obedience, three major passages are analyzed. The analysis of findings indicates that the narrative of Hanif has constructed power not by mere character actions but mainly by the language, ritual, and ideological performance, and demonstrates how power is a social construction and historical mediation. This paper shows that literature may serve as a counter-historical discourse, challenging official discourses and revealing the processes of ideological domination. This study is also a contribution to the knowledge of how modern fiction challenges political power and offers a broader perspective of how history and power are told and negotiated.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The relationship of literature and history is a subject of critical debate in numerous fields, particularly in postcolonial studies, because literary writings are likely to be opposed to the formally accredited understanding of the past. Instead of being transparent recreations of the historical reality, literary narratives are actively

engaged in the construction, negotiations, and contestation of history. The Neo-historicist theory also focuses on this dynamic engagement and sees history as a discursive practice that is influenced by power relations but not as an objective record of historical events. Fiction in this case is a significant area where the

mainstream ideologies are exposed, criticized, and re-evaluated (Greenblatt, 1980).

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) directly addresses this intersection of history, power, and political authority by returning to the last days of the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan. The novel recreates a politically sensitive historical event, the enigmatic death of Zia, not by definite fact but by satire, supposition, and the acceptance of various viewpoints of the narrative. By so doing, Hanif disrupts the authority of official historiography and brings into focus the dependence of political power on narrative control, ideological discourse, and institutional language.

Neo-historicism facilitates a useful approach to studying this text since it does not accept that literature stands apart from history. According to the argument presented by Montrose (1992), literary writings are created by the existing social and political discourses and are influenced by them. In his novel, Hanif demonstrates this reciprocity as the military authority, religious symbolism, and the Cold War geopolitics come together as a legitimate way of authoritarian rule. The story reveals the processes of the functioning of power not only in the form of coercion but in the form of discourse, spectacle, and myth-making.

The concept of power as diffuse and productive as explained by Foucault also sheds more light on the subject of political authority in the novel. Foucault (1978) believes in the circulation of power in the form of institutions, language, and everyday practices to formulate subjects who internalize the dominant ideologies. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is representative of this process since the characters are placed within systems of hierarchy that determine their identity and conduct. Irony and narrative fragmentation in the novel challenge these systems and demonstrate to the reader the need to question the historical narratives that are upheld to legitimize political power.

This paper uses a neo-historicist close reading, backed by Critical Discourse Analysis, to understand how *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* builds up and disrupts historical discourse and

political power. The novel shows history as the ideological, discursive, and powerful product instead of an unquestionable truth. By means of satire, fragmentation of the narration, and uncertainty, Hanif disrupts the official discourses of the past and reveals the weak premises of authoritarian legitimacy. The text is a counter-historical text because the author refuses to acknowledge a certain historical closure that makes national memory decide and renders other voices ineffective.

### **Overview of the Novel**

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a political satire set in the later days of the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan. It is the story of an officer of the Pakistani Air Force, Ali Shigri, who feels that Zia had killed his father, and he has a plan to avenge him. In conjunction with the personal revenge of Shigri, the novel shows a tangled mess of conspiracies between high-ranking military officials, intelligence, religious leaders, and foreigners, especially the United States. The novel incorporates both real and fictitious characters in such a way that it builds a narrative that end up between realism and absurdity. Hanif uses dark humor, irony, and fragmented narration to show the uncertainty of the death of Zia and the political truth in general. The notorious airplane accident that resulted in the death of Zia is the climax of the novel, but the text is intentionally silent on giving a conclusive answer, instead focusing on ambiguity rather than closure. Through rejection of a single historical narrative, the novel indicates that history is defined by multiple narratives and power politics. The text is therefore a counter-historical account that undermines the authority of the official accounts and reveals the ideological underpinning of dictatorship.

### **Research Problem Statement**

Despite the extensive critical interest in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* as a satirical work and a political commentary, recent scholarship tends to focus on the novel as a comic commentary on military dictatorship. These readings, though useful, are more prone to neglecting the more

internal processes by which the novel is a reconstruction of history and a challenge to the political authority on the discursive plane. Consequently, the contribution of language, narrative strategy, and ideological discourse to the meaning of history has not been well explored. Moreover, a lot of studies treat the novel either as a purely political or as a postcolonial one without applying a theoretical framework to explain the mutual shaping of literature and history. Neo-historicism provides such an approach, focusing on the point that historical discourse is created in the name of power relations, and literary texts are involved in such creation (Montrose, 1992). However, a lack of studies that apply neo-historicist theory with the discourse-oriented analysis to Hanif is evident. This is especially important when considering the politically charged historiography of Pakistan, and where military regimes have traditionally influenced national discourse by censoring and framing national histories ideologically. The critical intervention of the novel in the historical discourse is not clearly seen without a methodical study of the manner in which *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is deconstructing these discourses. Thus, the research problem of this paper is the lack of an analytical methodology that explores the construction of history, power, and political authority by the novel using narrative and discourse. To solve this issue, a combined methodological approach that can expose not only textual techniques but also a wider socio-political context is needed.

### **Rationale of the Study**

This study was justified by the increasing necessity to explore modern Pakistani fiction as a locus of historical and ideological criticism, instead of political commentary. According to the neo-historicist theory, literature does not simply reflect historical reality but instead contributes to its reconstruction through interaction with dominant discourses and sources of power (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2001). Using this strategy in relation to *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* enables one to better appreciate the ways in which fiction questions authoritarian

historiography in the postcolonial world. Also, the research is inspired by the applicability of discourse in perpetuating political power. According to Fairclough (1995), power can be exerted through language, as it legitimizes some opinions and silences others. The novel by Hanif provides a lot of content on such analysis as it unveils the discursive actions of the military, religious, and political institutions that define the national history. The combination of close reading and Critical Discourse Analysis allows this study to go beyond the superficial level of thematic interpretation to explore the resistant potential of narrative form and language. Such integration of methodology is especially significant in the analysis of politically sensitive texts in which the meaning is frequently coded by means of satire and irony. Finally, the paper will also seek to provide a contribution to the neo-historicist and postcolonial literature by showing how the Pakistani political fiction is involved in the historical revision and ideological critique. It also aims at prompting more studies of the South Asian literature as a crucial area of reapplying history and power.

### **Significance of the Study**

The project is important on theoretical, methodological, and contextual levels. Theoretically, it brings neo-historicist studies to a modern South Asian novel, which in turn broadens the applicability of the theory to a contemporary text as opposed to its traditional focus on early modern works. It also adds value to the postcolonial studies through the perspective of negotiating both history and power in fictional stories. Methodologically, the study proves that a combination of close reading and Critical Discourse Analysis is effective in the study of literature. This combined method allows us to look at the text in a subtle way, both in its details and in the socio-political discourse, which can serve as a prototype to analyze other politically active literary works. The study is particularly relevant to Pakistani literary studies in its context. Through examining the ways in which *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a subversion of state-sponsored historiography, the study

explicates the power of literature in doubting military power and ideological supremacy. It highlights the importance of fiction as a cultural resistance and intervention in history. Besides, the results of the given study can be beneficial to researchers in interdisciplinary areas, including history, political science, and cultural studies, as they reveal how literary texts can aid the development of the wider discussion concerning power, remembrance, and national identity.

### Method of Data Analysis

The methodology used in this research is a qualitative research approach based on close reading and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a neo-historicist point of view.

Close reading is a theoretical approach in literature that is based on the critical analysis of language, plot, description, and figures of speech. Abrams (1999) holds that close reading helps scholars to find out the multiple layers of meaning within a text. This paper employs close reading to examine the satire, irony, characterization, and narrative fragmentation in an effort to identify how the historical and political interpretation is created in the novel.

In its turn, the Critical Discourse Analysis also considers language as a social practice that forms and shapes the power relations. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is central to the sustenance of ideological dominance through the normalization of some forms of reality. CDA can specifically be applied to this study as the novel pays significant attention to the issue of institutional language, such as military orders, religious oratory, and political propaganda.

Close reading together with CDA is methodologically important as it is a way of bridging the gap between textual analysis and socio-political understanding. Although close reading helps us to see how meaning is created within the literary text, CDA puts these meanings into a perspective of historical and ideological backgrounds. This combined methodology is compatible with neo-historicist values, the focus of which lies in the relationship of reciprocity between text and history.

Through both approaches, the paper shows how *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* not only recounts historical events but also participates in a critique of the discourses that justify political power. In this way, a thorough examination of the novel in its relation to history, power, and ideology is guaranteed.

### Literature Review

Since the publication of the novel in 2008, scholarship on *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* has been growing steadily, with various critical issues raised, including political satire and postcolonial critique, narrative structure, and ideological construction. Early criticism was mostly in journalistic and literary circles, describing the satiric nature of the novel on the military establishment in Pakistan, and the imaginative reconstruction of the scandalous demise of General Muhammad Zia ul Haq. As an example, global critics characterise the story of Hanif as irreverent satire that pierces the whims of authority and exposes corruption and military nonsense and mixes fictional artistic creation with speculative history (complete review.com, 2025; The Guardian; see also Wikipedia to provide context). These early responses precondition the scholarly work of the critical analysis since the novel political boldness and the multifaceted combination of historical facts and imaginative re-creation were recognised.

One of the earliest ongoing scholarly interactions with the text is Tanvir (2014) writing about praetorianism, in which the novel is interpreted as an allegory of military supremacy in Pakistani politics. According to Tanvir, black humour and irony are the techniques that allow Hanif to present a picture of the overwhelming presence of the military in the civil realm, and, therefore, the novel reveals the inner mechanism of the authoritarian power that runs the national politics (Tanvir, 2014) 5. The work is noteworthy in that it places Hanif's satire in the context of the larger socio-political processes of military rule, but it is more of a description than an analysis; it outlines what the novel is critical of as opposed to how power is constructed and maintained through narrative discourse. Tanvir has therefore

prefigured the political content, but has not, as it is critical to a neo-historicist analysis, connected textual strategies to ideological production mechanisms.

Altaf (2019) continued with Tanvir, Barthesian critique proceeds to discuss the critical discourse of the novel, which deconstructs cultural myths about General Zia and the historical narrative of Pakistan. Turning to the concept of myth by Roland Barthes, which is ideology as something that is supposed to be a natural reality. Altaf shows that Hanif disputes the widely accepted opinions about Zia as a saviour character and exposes them as socially constructed social myths, not as truths (Altaf, 2019). Altaf, in his work, therefore redirects the focus of satire on politics to the ideological apparatus of myth-making and representation, and how narrative can deconstruct how historical figures are romanticised or demonised. Nevertheless, this structuralist treatment does not entirely work with power as a historically specific discourse, but it is rather confined to the plane of narrative signification without relating to the greater socio-institutional forces that generate and authorise such myths.

In 2020, a postcolonial analysis by Arafat added a deeper theoretical twist to the understanding of the novel by Hanif using the idea of totalitarianism and the legacy of colonialism. Arafat places the story in the context of Zia's rule and states that Hanif criticises not only the military intervention, but also the colonial traces according to which Pakistani rule was organised, especially through the process of Islamization and national discourse (Arafat, 2020). This methodology emphasises the way in which historical context and ideological discourses are intertwined in the novel and the way in which the text interacts with old political forces. Nevertheless, even though Arafat adds to the knowledge of ideological and structural conditions, thematic content is mostly interpreted but not examined in the way literary language and discourse are involved in the process of building political authority and historical consciousness. In this way, despite being substantive in the contextualization of

power, it is still restricted in the way that there is a lack of evidence that textual and discursive strategies are historical and political interventions.

Along with thematic and ideological approaches to reading, structuralist ones have also made an input to the academic discussion. The narrative structures and aesthetic pleasures enclosed in the text are analysed by Ali, Khan, and Qureshi (2021) with the help of Barthesian codes: hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural (Ali et al., 2021). As mentioned in their work, the text by Hanif employs different narrative codes in a bid to capture the attention of the reader and create meaning beyond the events that occur on the surface, such as the cultural codes that bring out the underlying political and religious conventions. Although this method expands on the formal analysis of the narrative construction, it fails to fully comprehend how these codes are activated to serve historical authority or power discourses; instead, it implies analysis of aesthetics and structure without making any direct connection to the socio-political situation.

Scholars started using historicist frameworks more explicitly in 2023, such as Mengal and Khanda's *Critical Study of Text Interpretation in the Novel in the Light of Historicism* (2023). This study highlights, with the aid of New Historicism, that the text by Hanif is a mirror of the real socio-cultural and political environment of Pakistan, by stating that the context and the text intersect in order to produce historical meaning (Mengal & Khanda, 2023). This view follows the neo historicist principles as it considers the novel as the product and producer of the historical narratives. Nevertheless, Mengal and Khanda are more interested in narrative historicity and contextual interpretation rather than viewing a discourse-centred approach that would examine the issue of how the language itself constitutes and negotiates power relations in the text.

On the ideological level, the Marxist analysis presented by Rahim, Fatima, and Nazir (2023) also adds to comprehending the functioning of power through institutions in society. Their

work, based on the work of Althusser, Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (ISAs and RSAs), is a study of how institutions of social and religious institutions under the Zia regime operated to oppress people and make them conform to the state power (Rahim et al., 2023). Such a study is significant in focusing on the material power of ideology and the way of how subjects are constructed by institutional structures, and the novel by Hanif reveals these processes via fiction. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on general socio-political commentary as opposed to a description of how the involvement of discursive strategies in the novel generates and challenges these ideologies on a linguistic, rhetorical, and narrative practice level.

Other viewpoints have come up that look at other aspects of the text. The article The (mis)use of religious ideology by Komal Naeem and Syeda Fatima discusses the issue of the politicisation of religion and its use as a source of power, and believes that the narrative of Hanif shows that the discourse of religion is intertwined with authoritarian power and ideological brainwash (Naeem & Syeda). This methodology provides a good understanding of the way ideological discourses, such as religion, are being utilised in political forms of power; it is once again theme-oriented as opposed to the linguistic and discursive processes which formulate the themes within the text. In the same way, eco critical analysis by Zeeshan, Khan, and Khan (2024) understands environmental and symbolic images as manifestations of political corruption and authoritarian influence (Zeeshan et al., 2024). Although quite original, this view may distract the attention of the political discourse construction towards symbolic environmental criticism. Postmodern readings, including the use of irony and nostalgia in the paper by Zubair butt and Khadam, are even more innovative in the way they interpret the political pasts, focusing on perceptions and ways of reinterpreting those (Zubair et al., 2024) through the application of postmodern narrative devices. Such works demonstrate the destabilisation of fixed meanings through these texts, but these works tend to theorise irony and nostalgia as more of an

emotional or stylistic impact and not as a tool of historical authority construction. Other literature, including the discussion of magical realism in a wider range of fiction by Hanif, has indicated the possibility of challenging positivist historiography and prevailing discourses of history and power by non-linear, speculative elements (Sancheti, 2023), but these are considered secondary to the main issue of the role of textual discourse in the creation of political authority. Within this developing scholarship, there are some very interesting thematic and methodological trends. Much of the early political criticism of the novel points to the critique of authoritarianism, but makes this without being explicitly involved in discourse as an active agent. Barthesian and structuralist approaches are richer analyses of form, but they tend to have no connection to the larger socio-political discourse. The contextual richness of postcolonial and historicist studies is at the cost of being descriptive and prioritising the content of narratives and analysing the way language itself functions within power networks. Meanwhile, the ideological and institutional critique approach is working on the level of power, but it fails to fully explain narrative discourse as a place of ideological production and contestation. The general limitation of current research is that although various experts speak about what Hanif critiques - corruption, military authoritarianism, religious manipulation, and historical myth - nothing is done to analyse how the linguistic structures, narrative techniques and patterns of discourse in this novel play out, challenge and negotiate the concepts of history, power and political authority. None of the studies has yet entirely combined a neo historicist focus on the mutual interaction between text and context with a discourse-centred focus that prefigures the role of language itself in the construction of ideological structures. This illustrates a burning and unmet research gap: the necessity of a universal approach that would synthesize neo historicist close reading with Critical Discourse Analysis to unravel the interwoven processes of how the novel demonstrates historical accounts

and political power as a discursive phenomenon, not thematic content.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this work is Neo-Historicism, which is a school of literary criticism that focuses on the living interaction between literature and history. Neo-Historicism emerged in the 1980s, with the writings of Stephen Greenblatt, and it is opposed to the idea of literature being a self-sufficient and closed entity, which is merely a reflection of history; rather, it is perceived as literature being an agent in the creation and negotiation of historical and cultural meaning (Greenblatt, 1980; Veese, 2013). Neo-Historicism, in contrast to traditional historicism, views both history and literature as discourses and both subject to power, ideology, and social practice. Texts are not objective reflections of historical occurrences; they are subject to the rhetoric building of social reality and exert an influence on the preservation of power relations, power, and cultural norms or challenge and provoke them (Behdad, 2008; Morris, 2015).

In *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammed Hanif, the Neo-Historicism is applicable in the sense that it offers a platform to identify how the novel recapitulates the political history of Pakistani especially under General Zia-ul-Haq, and at the same time questions the narratives of power and authority. This will allow me to examine the historical context shaping the text and strategies of the text (Hanif, who criticizes military dictatorship, religious philosophy, and governmentally approved historical accounts). Locating the literary events that occur within the framework of their socio-political and ideological contexts, Neo-Historicism enables us to understand the operation of the literature as the place of the dialogue with power and memory, with the historical consciousness (Veese, 2013; Greenblatt, 1980).

The adoption of the framework is important since it helps in a critical examination of the relationship between text, history, and power, which directly relates to the aims of this research. It endorses a more comprehensive approach to

the fusion of close reading and Critical Discourse Analysis that, when used in the investigation, guarantees the involvement of the narrative structure and the ideological processes that underlie the depiction of political power.

### Discussion and Analysis

This section analyzes *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by embracing a neo-historicist approach to discover the engagement of history, power, and political power. Through close attention to key scenes and narrative techniques, it illustrates how Mohammed Hanif challenges the official historical account and unveils the process of discursivity in the framework of totalitarian power. The analysis traces that the novel opens up the space to challenge mainstream narratives of the past and reclaim lost voices by emphasizing the use of satire and ambiguity in narrative.

*"I am the only person in this country who can look into the eyes of God and tell Him what to do. No one else is capable of understanding the will of Allah as I do, and it is my duty to guide the nation according to His command"* (Hanif, 2008, p. 85)

The passage is an impressive statement on authority, power, and ideological self-validation. A more thorough analysis demonstrates numerous layers of meaning, both in terms of language, positioning of the narrative, and ideological functionality.

On the one hand, the statement is a demonstration of complete individual power. The use of superlatives such as *"the only person"* emphasizes exclusivity, establishing Zia as the sole interpreter of divine will. It is a language that creates a form of stratification between the ruler and the one who is being ruled, and it places the speaker in a superior position, both politically and spiritually. The sentence, *"look in the eyes of God and tell him what to do"*, is hyperbolic, with blasphemy and bold hubris built in. The ironic tone of the commentary is clearly felt here: it is absurd to say one can do anything to God at the same time, and it mocks authoritarian pride and shows how far military dictators go to impose their will in licensing their actions as morally and Godly.

Under the lens of CDA, this text is a good example of discourse at work, which helps to build and normalize political authority. In accordance with the model provided by Fairclough (1995), power is not only reflected in language: it is created through it. Through its presentation of the mandate of the authority of Zia as divinely appointed, it can be seen that the ideology of the regime makes use of religion as an ideological technology (Althusser, 1971) to justify the authority of the regime. The story places the audience, both in the novel and the readers, in the real world in a place to realize the Zia words as being coercive ideological performance, which shows how language, power, and historical narrative play off. It is used as a classic example of how leaders can leverage symbolic power to generate consent or, at least, compliance, which defines shared ideas about who can exercise legitimate power within society.

Moreover, this passage is significant to the research goal: to investigate the ways history, power, and political authority are created. In this case, Hanif re-creates a historical figure, not as a political leader, but as a representative of discursive power, demonstrating how regimes mediate history with the help of rhetoric and ideology. The hyperbolic, complete analysis also encourages the reader to question the constructed nature of historical parts of the story, a primary issue of neo-historicism. By posing Zia's claim as a text becoming authoritative or as a hyperbolic rhetoric, the novel reveals the conflict between official history and other forms of interpretation, as the research question, which is the way Hanif's narrative represents, critiques, and destabilizes official beliefs on authority.

In addition, the text illustrates a combination of religion and militarism to influence political power within the historical framework of Pakistan. The repetitive referral of Allah as an act of authority demonstrates how religious speech is transformed into a means of rule, and this strengthens the main thesis that power is not just created by the use of institutions' force but by the use of discourse. The text also preconditions the interpretation of other textual strategies in the

novel, including satire, irony, hyperbole, and so on, that collectively question historical authority. With close reading, we observe rhetorical strategies that Hanif uses to form a figure of absolute authority, i.e., exclusivity, hyperbole, and moral positioning. CDA indicates that such a discourse produces power, legitimizes ideological hierarchies, and also constructs historical memory. The passage summarizes the idea of the novel as a counter-historical work that challenges the authoritarian power and shows the way political and religious power is being constituted, reproduced, and criticized.

***"In this country, you can get away with anything as long as you use the right words. It doesn't matter what you do, what matters is how you explain it, how you dress it up for the public – that is the only measure of survival here."*** (Hanif, 2008, p. 47)

This passage serves as a meta-observation of the dynamics of power and political authority in Pakistan during the rule of General Zia. On the surface, the statement made by Major Kiyani emphasizes that the role of rhetoric is more important than the role of action, meaning that perception, framing of a narrative, and managing the use of language are more determinant than the actual actions. The term *"the right words"* is especially important: it shows that authority and legitimacy are discursively produced, and it depends on the way in which actions and events are framed instead of what is objectively happening. The narrative lens used by Hanif helps expose how people internalize the norms of manipulating the political system, and language is one of the weapons of survival and conformity.

By closely reading, we see the structure of the sentence is focused on the contrast: *"It doesn't matter what you do, what matters is how you explain it"*. The monotony of the word *"matter"* supports the prevalence of discourse over reality. This stylistic decision pre-empts the performativity of language in the formation of power relations by demonstrating that the political power in the novel is shaped by the politics of representation and not brute force alone. *"Dressing it up to the public"* is another term that suggests even the spread of historical or political truth is mediated,

acted, and consciously molded to control society. The text is indicative of the performative control over the writing of the past, which is a primary issue of neo-historicism: the past itself is a subject of discursive construction.

In the Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this text serves to show how language contains ideology. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is a place where the relations of power are created and maintained. In this case, the statement reveals how the elites have been able to deal with the perception of people to maintain power. It is also echoing the idea of Foucault of power being diffuse and relational, being operated through institutionalized practices and accepted truth, but not through explicit coercion. It is emphasized in the passage that political power in Hanif Pakistan is not merely represented in the military chain of command but also preserved through the close management of words and stories, which predetermine the sense of collectivity and historical awareness.

Significantly, this text coincides with the research purpose, which aims to analyze the way Hanif develops the political authority and history. It is noted that the text emphasizes power as performative, mediated, and symbolic, but not material. Hanif challenges the discursive construction of legitimacy by foregrounding the role of language, demonstrating that even history itself is narrativised in order to advance the interests of dominant politics. With reference to the research question, the extract illustrates the processes by which the novel reflects on how power is exercised and sustained by textual and rhetorical practices, which provide an insight into the ideological mechanism of the military regime. This passage illustrates the general thematic issue that Hanif explores: that language, narrative framing, and ideological discourse are fundamental to the formation of power, survival, and historical meaning. With the close reading, the text discloses stylistic and rhetorical devices that help to underline the primacy of discourse, whereas CDA contextualizes the devices in the general socio-political and historical context, which shows the production, naturalization, and reproduction of power.

*“My smile vanishes. I know I am saluting a dead man, but that doesn’t change anything. If you are in uniform, you salute; that is all there is to it. The system is more important than any individual, and discipline means following the rules without question.”* (Hanif, 2008, p. 192)

This passage underscores the institutionalised imposition of power and institutional control in the novel. On one hand, the fact that the main character sees himself as “saluting a dead man” highlights how mechanical and unquestioned the obedience of the military structure can be. The repeated use of the same phrase, “which does not change anything”, by the close reading, also highlights how institutional authority is superior to individual morality or judgment. The way Hanif uses the wording to describe the situation, “the system is more important than any particular person,” makes bureaucratic and ritualised power even more dominant than the lives of people, displaying how military institutions continue to reproduce power that is not based on the leaders themselves.

In a neo-historicist sense, this text can be interpreted as the process of systematising and ritualising historical power, and it demonstrates that in Pakistan, military regimes exercise power not only physically but also establish it in routine practices and symbolism. This seemingly trivial act of saluting turns out to be a discursive and performative process which imposes loyalty and reinforces hierarchies. The internal recognition of the futility of the ritual that the protagonist experiences “my smile vanishes” displays the conflict between personal consciousness and institutional pressures, and how ideology is used to unify the mind and body, a fact that Foucault refers to as being relational, omnipresent and constituted by routine practices (Foucault, 1980). Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the text reveals that power exists in the institutional language and practices as opposed to being a mere command. The ideological control that is conveyed in the statement, “discipline means you follow the rules without question”, means that the military power is normalised by repetition, symbolism, and expectation, and influences the way people perceive it and internalise hierarchical

power. In this case, Hanif does not criticise only a past regime, but the processes to maintain authoritarian power in the long-run, and emphasises the structural reproduction of power.

This section is very pertinent to the research objective, given that it indicates that political power in the novel by Hanif is not solely on individual leaders but systems that are institutionalised and bring about control, and the creation of historical accounts. It also answers the research question by demonstrating how the story of Hanif reveals how rituals and routines bring obedience and normalise power. The literary presentation of the ritual of saluting serves a counter-historical purpose as it demonstrates that institutional power is performative, symbolic, and preserved by the daily activities, not necessarily by charismatic leadership or official history.

Close reading enables us to see the textual strategies used by Hanif: repetition, contrast, and narrative focalization, to emphasise the conflict between individuality and institutional power. CDA puts these textual practices within the socio-political and historical background, showing how authority is discursively produced, ritualized and normalised, to the general theme of the novel: the manufacture and critique of historical and political authority in Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

This paper sets out by analysing the ways in which *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammed Hanif rewrites history, political power and authority through the prism of narrative and discourse. The central issue that was analysed consisted of the problem of how the novel visualises and criticises the processes through which authority is established, supported, and contested. Close reading and Critical Discourse Analysis revealed that Hanif does not merely retell past events, but he participates in a discursive debate of inducting history through deliberate and carefully constructed historical reconstruction, in which authority is a product of language, ideology, institutionalised practices, but not a reflection of reality. The discussion of the focal passages, the assertion of divine authority by General Zia, the comment made by Major Kiyani

regarding the power of words, and the ritual involving paying tribute to a deceased leader revealed that there are various strategies that are undertaken to enact the legitimisation and social control of politics.

The importance of these results lies in what it tells us concerning the sovereignty of narrative in the constitution of the historical consciousness. The novel also predicts the manner in which authoritarian regimes use not just coercion as a means of asserting power, but symbolic performance, religious rhetoric, and bureaucratic ritual. Language is introduced as an instrument and a place of conflict: it creates conformity, defines the past and at the same time, reveals inconsistencies in the history of official accounts. The performativity of power, as discussed by Hanif, is highlighted through his satire and ironic tone, which calls the reader to challenge the official version of history and understand that historical power is constructed. Considering the neo-historicist approach, the text shows that literature may act as a counter-discourse; literature may provide alternative interpretations, which disrupt the ideological hegemony.

In the future, this paper provides avenues of exploration. Further studies might be done on how other Pakistani contemporary novels interact with military or religious authority, or how transnational histories of power come to play with national histories. Methodologically, close reading and discourse analysis would be beneficial in questioning the interaction between textual strategies and socio-political structures, implying that the same methodology may be used in other settings in which power and ideology are interwoven. On the larger scale, this provokes the readers to be aware that authority can never be absolute and is subject to negotiation, narration and contest, within fiction and in history. The novel, therefore, entertains and educates, showing that in order to critically engage with both literature and historical narratives, it is essential to understand how power is constructed.

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