

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF COMPRADOR CLASS: A NEO-COLONIAL
STUDY OF A CASE OF EXPLODING MANGOES BY HANIF**

M. Aamir Iqbal

MPhil Candidate

Institute of English and Modern Languages
Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

Dr. M. Shahbaz Arif

Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

Anila Jamil

Lecturer in English Literature

University of Sargodha, Women Campus, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT: *This paper is an endeavor to explore the damaging role played by comprador/bourgeois class in the fate of newly independent states by applying postcolonial theorist Fanon's (2004) inferences about colonial legacy and its practitioners, the comprador elites. Hanif's A Case of Exploding Mangoes (2008) is a critique of General Zia's dictatorial regime when he abused the institutions of army and religion in the name of Islamization and played havoc with the political and constitutional set up of the state. Hanif dismantles Zia's sham religiosity and exposes how he kept his people oppressed, deprived and in confusion sustaining an aura of serving the ideology of the people and the state.*

KEYWORDS: bourgeois, comprador, colonialism, colonial legacy, neo-colonial, postcolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Comprador class is a term for the natives of a colonized land that are "bought" by the colonizers. The term 'comprador class' has been defined; "[A] relatively privileged, wealthy and educated elite... introduced by colonial domination, and who may therefore be less inclined to struggle for local cultural and political independence" (Ashcroft et al, 2007, p. 55). It is a deplorable dilemma of postcolonial condition of the states, liberated from colonial clutches that there are still pervading political, cultural and economic crises as colonial legacy. This condition of partial independence has been termed as 'neo-colonialism' by Nkrumah in his *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). Neo-colonialism in fact is the (indirect) survival of colonial system, a stage managed and designed by the colonial powers, to give the colonized the illusion of freedom. It is in fact; "killing of two birds with one stone by establishing a colony of exploitation and settlement" and "divide and rule here by artificially creating a bourgeoisie of the colonized" (Sartre, 2001, p. 139).

Colonialism was by no means entirely abolished, rather here by guaranteeing (false) independence, the colonizers entrusted the governments in the hands of specific local bourgeoisie, called the comprador elites. According to Kwame; “Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia” (Kwame, 1996, pp. 62-63).

This paper aims to explore the role of comprador class in Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008). The work deals with military life in postcolonial Pakistan, decade-long conspiracies and the politics of Third World and First World interactions. The story of a nation in the horrible clutches of comprador class, after being freed from the direct metropolitan control. The role played by these indigenous elites was just to extend the colonial rule and ideology. The concepts of nation, religion and state served only as tools in the hands of the new masters. It brings to light how Zia utilized all available ideologies to blind the people to their own condition of frustrating present and. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) exposes how a neo-colonial phase like Zia regime postpones the facing of social and national issues by using exploitative tendencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It being a very recent novel enjoys very little critical work. There are only a few sketchy observations and comments, no detailed work. The study of the novel from the point of view of the role of the comprador class is almost mandatory in order to understand the text. Countries of Africa, North America and Asia are filled with the histories of the rulers who tried to safeguard the interests of the metropolis centre at the expense of their own countries. Pakistan is no exception, unfortunately many Pakistani leaders, willingly or unwillingly, worked for the interests of the imperial rule after its independence. Hanif’s *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) is a story of such a ruler who unconstitutionally occupied the throne of the state and derailed the democratic path of the country.

Karman in his *Democracy and Governance in Pakistan* (2008) describes how Zia’s power hungry nature and his policies to strengthen his control done the biggest damage to the country. He points out; “[M]ost significantly, the Revival of Constitution of 1973 Order granted Zia the power to dissolve the National Assembly virtually at will”. Further he exposes; “Gen. Zia thought of providing a constitutional cover to such acts like military sharing decision making power with the political elite in the matters of national interests” (Kamran, 2008, pp. 105-108).

Talbot in his *Pakistan: A modern History* (1998), discusses the disaster done by Zia and his policies quite in a similar way like that of Hanif. According to Talbot Zia emphasized the “regulative, punitive and extractive” aspect of Islam, rather than its “social aspect” (Talbot, 1998, p. 271). It was Zia who presented Islam as a conservative religion and shattered the image of Islam and Pakistan. He sums up the ill authoritative administration of Zia; “Zia left behind not only a political process distorted by the Eighth Amendment” but in this way he also opened ways for his successors to sustain their control by using unfair means even. According to him Zia created in Pakistan; “[The] atmosphere of bigotry, fanaticism and distorted values” (Talbot, 1998, p. 286).

Chadda, in her *Building Democracy in South Asia: India, Nepal, Pakistan* (2000), also exposes Zia’s lusty policies; “he had benefited immensely from the Afghan war and the U.S, Saudi and

other foreign aid that Pakistan's "front line" states had brought. She also like Hanif exposes the reality behinds Zia's Islamization process by saying, "Zia skillfully used Islam to create the ideological basis for his regime and divide his opposition. The bottom line was force, but Zia was also a master manipulator of collective psychology" (Chadda, 2000, p. 74). Jalal in her *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (1995) also shares with Hanif the threats and dangers imposed by military regimes in the history of Pakistan. She brings to light the role of comprador class in Pakistan; "Pakistan drew heavily on the colonial state's method of bureaucratic control and centralization" (p. 17). Further she exposes the Islamization policy adopted by Zia as an attempt to gain material pursuits rather than the real Islamization of the society. She tells that use of religion by Zia did not give proper results and; "Zia's Islamic democracy elicited more contempt than it did respect" (Jalal, 1995, p.106).

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodologically, this is a qualitative research based on the textual analysis of Hanif's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) in postcolonial perspective. Exploitative role of the comprador class as well as the exploited people has also be explored in the selected text. It interprets various forms of colonial legacy demonstrated by the text. Only those parts of the text and those characters, events and situations have been chosen for analyses that afford neocolonial analysis.

Theoretically this paper has been constructed on assumptions given by Fanon(2004) about colonial legacy and comprador elites in postcolonial states by applying his ideas on *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) by Hanif. Fanon exposes the role played by the comprador elites who are semi-Western in their thinking and enactments. Sartre points out in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004) that, "Fanon reveals to his comrades—above all to some of them who are rather too Westernized" (Fanon, 2004, p. 14). Fanon quite ironically remarks; "The native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture. Like adopted children...the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own" (Fanon, 2004, p. 218).

These natives are not independent wholly rather; they work just as agents of the former imperialistic rulers. Fanon says; "[The] intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination...he is bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native" (Fanon, 2004, p. 38). They once again are a source of bringing violence and threat to the native people.

The hypocritical religious scholars of the native land are there to help them in this matter. They help to justify the unjust rule, domination and use of force by native government with their religious sermons. Fanon says; "[The] colonialist bourgeoisie is helped in its work of calming down the natives by the inevitable religion" (Fanon, 2004, p. 67). All the religiousness emphasized by the government is only an attempt to keep people at cool and all the excuses provided by the local government are nothing but lame excuses as their rule over the country is based upon the principle of Might is Right. They promise change and revolution in the country but all their claims of change and prosperity are only the tools to befool their people who

struggled and sacrificed each and every thing they possessed to get rid of the foreign domination. Fanon brings to light their real intentions; “[The] so called revolutionary doctrine in fact rests on the retrograde, emotional and spontaneous nature of country districts” (Fanon, 2004, p. 120).

The native bourgeoisie use force against their own people as the former imperialistic governments used to do when they were in power. According to Fanon the comprador class has no mercy at all for their native people who helped them and accepted their governance. Both the old and the new masters of the country proved to be senseless enough to relieve their people. Fanon says, “[P]aradoxically, the national government in its dealings with the country people as a whole is reminiscent of certain features of the former colonial power” (Fanon, 2004, p. 118).

ANALYSIS

A Case of Exploding Mangoes (2008) is an explicit critique of the comprador class ruling in Pakistan. Their decisions are dictated by their own politico-economic gains with absolute indifference to the people and their gains. The assassination of general Zia in the airplane crash is followed by a case filed against the conspiracy by the sons of the deceased general who use this political crisis as an underhanded bargain to acquire ‘lucrative cabinet posts’ (Hanif, 2008, p. 4).

After dethroning the elected Prime Minister, General Zia held the first conference of the core commanders so that new government set can be upheld. Instead of making right choices to run the country, he had the multiple choices in the form of generals who could serve him well rather the country, and who cannot be ignored as they are the foundation stone providing the cover to his illegal coup. The coup which was taken place in the name of ‘surviving the country’ finally resolved in the distribution of ‘lucrative cabinet posts’ (Hanif, 2008, p. 4) to different generals so that they may remain loyal to the general instead of the country. As they have taken the oath of being loyal to the general rather than to the nation, as the general’s security is prior to the nation’s security. They all cheer up and remain stuck to the message when: General Zia hinted at the nice things to come: “I need governors for the provinces; I need ministers to run the ministries. Whom can I count on except the professionals gathered around this table? (p. 42).

General Zia has become the sole concern of all the defense authorities and intelligence agencies, because for comprador class country rests on secondary but the president the top most priority. All the energies of the intelligence agencies which could be utilized to ensure the country’s safety are being put in to ensure the general’s security against the unseen threats. “If general Zia wanted to become an elected president” (p.196), the then ISI chief, general Akhtar, supposed to be working to eliminate the threats facing the nation, is busy “to ensure that ballot boxes were stuffed in time (p. 196). “If general Zia announced a National Cleanliness Week” (p. 197), the responsibilities of intelligence agencies increase because they had to make sure that the “gutters were disinfected and security checked before the president could show up to get his picture taken” (Hanif, 2008, p. 197). Such are the duties of the so-called custodians of the nation who for the welfare and wellbeing of the country are putting themselves in danger, but the actual picture is quite the opposite of what they are doing. They are all hungry for power because every person wants the upper rank and for that person there is no limit of the evils they have done to the

country because if general wants to be president, the other general is enjoying the title of “second most powerful man in the land” (p. 197).

Zia has shown the same interest in his State Visit to the U.S.A. It seems as if he has gone there not to hold important bilateral dialogue between his American counterpart but to have a meeting with “His host, his comrade in struggle, Joanne, would be here shortly, and just thinking about what she might be wearing and what she would smell like made him nervous” (Hanif, 2008, p. 107).

Comprador bourgeoisie is never ready to understand and care about what people think, and what they want. All they do is what will be helpful in order to carry on their profits and their own well wishing. Comprador class is never ready to cater about the public needs, like the colonial masters they are always indifferent to the public ideology and their social needs, because they are answerable to none. Hanif quiet admirably brings out the situation in a single sentence that the comprador class is trained in such a way that it becomes impossible for them to understand the native demand because “[They] are part of the reactionary bourgeois establishment, which has never understood the dialectics of our history” (p. 147).

People carry no place in any neo-colonial set up and so has been the case in Pakistan. They are marginalized and rendered voiceless by the suppressive Army discipline. In part twelve of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) some poor women had been gathered and brought to the President house to receive cheques from general Zia who wanted to give an air of his democratic temperament while he was only ‘Playing the President’ (Hanif, 2008, p. 144). The First Lady is also there to observe the moral dichotomy of Zia’s character: he was “nothing but a tit ogler” (p. 145) but he posed to be ‘the Man of Faith’ and ‘the Man of Truth’ and ‘the Friend of Widows’ (p. 145). General Zia decides to distribute one Hundred Rupee Notes among three hundred widows in Ramadan instead of June which was usual scheduled month for this kind of charity shows. The staff could hardly arrange 243 widows but the President’s order were to be obeyed. So the remaining 57 widows were produced out of the staff to make up the deficiency. The banner in the background announced the purpose of this generosity: ‘President’s Rehabilitation Programme for Widows’ (p. 149). And the irony is that the general wants to rehabilitate the widows in life with one hundred rupee note.

General Zia feels easy when he is with VIPs’ in the public gathering sessions but he is at ease among the people whom he feels a ‘hired crowd’ (p. 276). Their slogans and flag-waving are mechanical performances without emotional involvement in national identity and purposefulness. This disregard for public aspirations is proportional to the highest overestimated regard for themselves. General Zia cycles to the people with the air of Caliph Umar, the Second. He idealized Fidel Castro, Kim-II Son, and King Abdul Aziz because they had ruled longer than Zia himself. He had nothing to do with the people on his bicycle on the lonesome roads of Islamabad, he thinks: ‘what if everybody had migrated somewhere else and he was ruling a country where nobody lived except his army men, his bureaucrats and his body guards’ (Hanif, 2008, p. 280)? The cycling to mingle with the people was to observe whether the people loved him or feared him or indifferent to him because Ceausescu had advised him: ‘the key (to power) is they should either love you or fear you; your decline starts the day they become indifferent to you’ (p. 275).

Zia tried his best during the eleven years of his rule to cover himself under the umbrella of Islam. But this was only the one side of the coin as the other side was quite repulsive and ugly with his personal interests behind it. Islam served only as *raison d'être* of the continuation of Marital law. That is why socio-economic egalitarianism of Islam and accountability of the political authorities and other aspects of Islamization that could lead to the solution of public issues were not touched upon. Flogging and whipping were introduced to sow and instill fear in the minds of the people in the name of Islamic penal code with the actual purpose of making his supremacy unquestionably acceptable. Hence Islamization was only a punitive measure. Kamran exposes Zia's real intentions by saying; "Islamization was sometimes used as a political process. Zia's interpretation of Islam had contributed quite considerably to the rise of fundamentalism, obscurantism and retrogression" (Kamran, 2008, p.125).

During Zia regime no stone was left unturned to suppress and oppress the mediums that were spreading awareness among the country people. Especially the print media of Pakistan was suppressed tyrannically with an iron hand. Zia's rule was exceptionally bad for its treatment of the institutions, especially the media, and for the first time in country's history "journalists were whipped under sentences passed by the military courts" (Siddiq, 2007, p. 85). Media was crushed so that the so-called image of Islamic democratic state may not be destroyed by the print media.

After usurping power with the promise to hold elections within 90 days, Zia continuously postponed the elections as he was aware of the fact that his throne will be snatched away by the political parties. After a long period of eight years elections were held in the country and those elections even proved to be eyewash. Army whose duty is to save the boundaries of the country, under Zia was busy in securing power and authority for the dictator and "the army under Zia skillfully used the intelligence agencies to manipulate the political parties" (p. 87).

The neo-colonizers are always busy and ready to please their western masters. This is the guiding principle of their decisions. The comprador class with their westernized education and mentality are unable to think in nationalistic terms. They are unable to bring any real change in the conditions of the people. But the real dilemma faced by the state is the presence of the native bourgeoisie who are no more different from their old masters. They don't make decisions independently because they lack self-reliance. Zia's issue of the choice of language for the speech to be delivered at the expected Nobel Prize ceremony is one such example. The first possibility is Arabic that will please Allah Almighty, the Arab masters and the stupid people. But then he has to go for English to please his American masters because the power factor is after all the decisive element in the choices of the comprador class.

The impression has always been sustained by electric and print media that Army men are the greatest benefactors of the people and that they have always saved and served the country. Hanif shatters this false impression with one stroke in the beginning of the novel. Hanif exposes the torch bearers of Islam, the defenders of Islamic State and host of born heroes. It is a joke against the pseudo religious character of the Army and religious sentiment of the public. But then this is the true story of how comprador class treats the nation and the national issues.

CONCLUSION

Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) is a daring and insightful exposition of General Zia's dictatorial rule through Pakistan army, the most powerful and most disciplined institution of the state. But as it happens in the postcolonial situation of a state, the institutions are hijacked and manipulated by the comprador class which in case of Pakistan happens to be General Zia and the company. Hanif has dexterously pulled Zia down from his sham sublime status and presented him as a buffoon maneuvering policies for self-promotion and to befool his people in the name of religion while actually distorting the national and constitutional scenario. The greatness of Hanif's novel lies in making his readers see the darkest neo-colonial decade of Pakistani history in the true colors without sentimentalizing the pseudo hero.

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