



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 4, Number 1, 2026, Pages 1027 – 1033

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Language and Manipulation: A Bhabhaian Reading of Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*

Zubair Saleem¹, Adnan Riaz² & Dur Jan³

¹MPhil Scholar at Department of English University of Turbat, Email: zubairsaleem638@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Turbat, Email: Adnan.riaz@uot.edu.pk

³Lecturer, Department of Education (Home Department University of Gwadar, (Currently Serving at University of Turbat), Email: durainmalik@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: January 17, 2026
Revised: February 14, 2026
Accepted: March 03, 2026
Available Online: March 09, 2026

Keywords:

Hybridity, Political Language,
Postcolonialism, Third Space,
Manipulation, Satire

Corresponding Author:

Adnan Riaz

Email:

Adnan.riaz@uot.edu.pk



ABSTRACT

This study examines language in A Case of Exploding Mangoes by Mohammed Hanif through the postcolonial concepts of hybridity and the Third Space proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. The paper argues that language in the novel functions not only as a satirical device by the author but Hanif also employs it as a tool of ideological control and political manipulation. By analysing the linguistic strategies employed by political figures such as Zia, particularly the blending of religious, military, and diplomatic discourse, the study demonstrates how hybrid language becomes a tool for power, legitimacy, and negotiation for power. Drawing on Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity, the research highlights how political actors operate within a hybrid linguistic space that reflects both colonial legacies and local sociopolitical realities. The analysis reveals that the manipulation of language in the novel reflects the broader postcolonial dynamics in which authority is sustained through rhetorical performance, moral posturing, and cultural negotiation. Ultimately, the study contributes to postcolonial literature by showing how satire effectively portrays the nexus of language, power, and identity in contemporary South Asian and postcolonial political fiction.

Introduction

Muhammad Hanif's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a critically acclaimed satire that was first published in 2008. It is a political satire on the regime of the military dictator of Pakistan, General Zia Ul Haq and a fictionalised depiction of the mystery of the 1988 plane crash that killed Pakistan's military dictator, combining real-world political events with fiction. Hanif employs sarcastic language and tone throughout the work, using black humour, irony, and sarcasm to

criticise the political system, armed forces, bureaucracy, and corruption, making the story both amusing and thought-provoking. The artistic and comic amalgamation of language results in deeper in the context and meaning when becomes a tool for exploitation in the hands of the ruling class. Along with other ways of control and authority, it is used as a powerful tool. The study will provide a new approach to understanding the use of language in post-colonial literature and its powerful way of both working as a satire and an ideological manipulation tool.

More often than not, in politics, language is used to manipulate. Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif begins his speech in Arabic during his official visit to Saudi Arabia in April 2024 to attend the World Economic Forum meeting in order, apparently, to gain favours from the Saudi government or the nation. Similarly, during one of his previous official visits to Iran in 2024, when he met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to inaugurate the Electricity Supply Project from Iran to Gwadar, he welcomed Iranian officials in Persian. Similarly, Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* illustrates postcolonial Pakistani identity using hybridised characters, language, and symbols to express the political and cultural ambiguities and complexities. Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity theory, as expressed in *The Location of Culture* (1994), offers a lens through which to investigate how cultural mixing generates a "third space" where new identities form, challenging colonial power and monolithic ideologies. According to Bhabha, "Third Space" represents an in-between space where different cultures can meet, mix, and create something new. Bhabha thinks that cultural identity is neither fixed nor pure, but rather a mixture that is constantly generated and altered by encounters with other cultures. Hanif's work illustrates this hybridity as characters oscillate between tradition and modernity, authority and insurrection, exemplifying Bhabha's concept of "cultural ambivalence" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112), which challenges conventional definitions of identity and power.

Similarly, manipulative language is used by politicians to gain and sustain power. Alan Ware rightly calls the concept of manipulation "of central importance in democratic theory," but it remains one of the least studied of the concepts that are usually recognized as members of the power or control 'family'" (Alan, 1981, p. 163). This technique is used through the language by the politicians to gain power and justify their decisions in country politics, which can be seen in Muhammad Hanif's novel. According to Norman Fairclough, language is a tool that is used to gain power and control over others; politicians use the tool of language to manipulate others. In his work, he says linguistic manipulation is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control others. (Norman, 1989, p. 6). According to him, politicians use the language in order to find a way to control the countrymen. Moreover, to Atkinson, linguistic manipulation is a distinctive feature of political rhetoric, and it is based on the idea of persuading people, i.e., it persuades people to take political actions or persuades them to support a party or an individual. (Atkinson, 1984). In the same manner, Van Dijk categorized manipulative speech strategies in his article *Discourse and Manipulation*. For example, they include positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others, stressing positive things about us and negative things about others. Linguists may not consider these tactics manipulative in and of themselves, but in the context of political debate, where "OTHERS" means our political opponent, damaging their image in the eyes of our voters is certainly manipulative. (Van, 2006). To Hoffman, "the political language manipulates and mobilizes fear to shape people's behaviour and further its agendas" (Hoffman, 2021). A similar kind of political language can be seen in Hanif's novel, one of his major character General Zia, uses religious language to control the politicians and his countrymen, as he knew no one would speak against religion, as it is blasphemous.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Hybridity was introduced by the post-colonial theorist Homi. K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha, in the book, discusses the different perspectives and relationships between colonizer and colonized through which he introduces many ideas about culture, language, relationship. Among these ideas, Hybridity is one of his most famous and discussed ideas in a postcolonial perspective. Also, Hybridity is one of the most controversial terms used in a postcolonial perspective, as the term often refers to the creation of interculturality through the connection of colonizer and colonized. However, the term is basically used for horticulture when pollination of two species is used to form a “hybrid,” the third form. Bhabha has taken the same concept, applying it to the connection of colonizer and colonized to form a new hybrid culture. Bhabha’s hybridization is not bound to culture, but it also includes language, politics, and race. According to Bhabha, the colonized are unable to adopt the culture of the colonizer as it is; they reproduce it in a way that looks different from the colonized culture. The colonized subject mimicry is never the perfect copy of the “original” of the colonizer, but it looks different and makes the colonizer’s culture strange, as Bhabha writes in his essay “*Of Mimicry and Man*” Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the other as it visualizes power. But it also means that the object of mimicry is never quite the same as the model, the colonized subject becomes almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122) Bhabha here shows that the mimicry that colonized apply is not the exact imitation of colonizer’s culture, to him this imitation of “almost the same, but not quite” is not the exact culture of colonizer neither it is of colonized but something in between which according to Bhabha is hybrid, the new one.

In the same manner, Bhabha uses the concept of the “third space” to describe the location where cultural differences, contradictions, and tensions meet. According to Bhabha it is this third space where new hybrid identities are formed, according to him this space is not a simply fusion of two cultures, but it is a zone or an area where new meanings, possibilities, and forms of identity are mixed, as Bhabha says, “The ‘third space’ is the place of the in-between, the space in which the hybridization of cultural forms and identities takes place” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). According to Bhabha, it is not a point where two cultures meet, but it is a point where something new is formed, and this new ‘third space’ shows that the cultural identity is not fixed.

Moreover, Bhabha’s theory of hybridity is particularly useful in analysing the postcolonial perspectives, as in such regions’ colonial aspects, such as cultural practices, national identity, and political structures, are still dominant in a quite strong manner. Such regions do not return from the colonized perspective completely but they are shaped according by the hybridization of the colonial culture, as Bhabha argues that; “It is in the [hybrid] moment that the national, the cultural, the political, and the psychological are imbricated in the new forms of belonging, which postcolonial discourse creates” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 154). To Bhabha, such communities, especially colonized nations, do not return to their original culture nor do they move to the colonizer’s culture completely; they are stuck in between, which is created by the hybridization.

In the same manner, Bhabha suggests that hybridity can act as a means of cultural resistance. By forming hybrid identities, individuals from colonized backgrounds challenge colonial power and overturn conventional stereotypes. For example, the colonized may adopt aspects of the colonizer’s language, behavior, or customs, yet they reinterpret these elements in ways that confront colonial authority. Bhabha states that this change “renders the colonial presence ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as

repetition and difference” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 111). Hence, hybridity weakens the cultural superiority of the colonizer and disrupts the structures of colonial power.

According to Bhabha, a nation that is colonized just does not try to follow the culture of the colonizer, which creates a hybrid culture, but they also try to follow the language and try to apply that language in their daily lives, politics, and other sectors, which creates a hybrid language, as Bhabha says:

I am equally convinced that, in the language of international diplomacy, there is a sharp growth in a new Anglo-American nationalism which increasingly articulates its economic and military power in political acts that express a neo-imperialist disregard for the independence and autonomy of peoples and places in the Third World (Bhabha, 1994, p. 20)

To him, the third world nations, underdeveloped or those that were once colonized, have a strong effect of colonizer because of which they carry their language and mix it in their political region, which creates a hybrid language.

Discussion

Muhammad Haneef's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a political satire based on true Pakistani political happenings; yet, the novel criticises the dictatorial administration of General Zia Ul Haq. The novel depicts how political leaders use political language to manipulate the nation and other countries. Hanif's main character, General Zia Ul Haq, can be seen from the beginning of the novel as a political leader who attempts to manipulate his own fellow army officials and countrymen. After the coup, Zia realises that some of his officers are unhappy with his decision to stage the coup, and to calm them down, he reads verses from the holy Quran and says, "In Arabic it says In the name of Allah, it does not say in the name of God, it does not say in the name of gods, it does not say in the name of some nameless deity." It reads "In the name of Allah" (Haneef, 2008, p. 40).

As he explains ordinary life in such political terms, he impresses his listeners, the eight generals in the hall, and perplexes the others, such as the Naval Chief, with his remark opposing or denying the coup. Zia uses political rhetoric to manipulate his opponents, which has always been a tactic for politicians. The naval chief, who was unhappy with the coup and was complaining about it, suddenly misses the mark; he is caught between religion and politics as a result of Zia's political language, as Haneef writes, "The Naval Chief, still reeling from the lecture about God's nomenclature, suddenly felt very small" (Haneef, 2008, p. 41). After Zia's religious address, the Naval Chief was unable to highlight the specific issue that he desired; this is how a politician uses words to deceive or confuse someone.

In the same manner, when he has an official visit to Saudi where he had to meet the king and the prince, Zia was planning about his speech to be delivered in Urdu that will be translated by the translator as he has experience in politics or whether he should speak in Arabic to impress the Saudi government, as Haneef informs his readers through the narrator in the novel when he says "General Zia thought maybe he should deliver his speech in Urdu or polish up his Arabic and (Haneef, 2008, page 31). Zia utilises the language to obtain certain benefits, a language that is not his own nor the exact accent of the Arabs; it is most likely a language that is somewhere between Urdu and Arabic accents, which is the "hybrid", the new one, as Bhabha says in his concept.

Zia is a character who knows the psyche of his people, he knows how to implement his rules and laws in the country, therefore, like any other politician, he takes the help of language, the language

of religion to put his charm on the layman, and he knew once the population stands by his side, no one else can remove him from the position, which Haneef shows in the novel that a man of the army who comes from the background of army language that is abusive as he says "There is something about these squadron leaders that makes them think that if they lock you up in a cell, put their stinking mouth to your ear and shout something about your mother..." (Haneef, 2008, p, 17), Zai a man from such background is suddenly interested in religion and divine knowledge as Haneef writes "Between making a decision and implementing it, General Zia sometimes liked to seek divine opinion." (Haneef, 2008, p, 33). Haneef in the novel introduces the background of an army officer in a military camp who is always abusive, and Zia is undoubtedly a product of one similar camp, which means he speaks a similar language, but since taking charge of country politics, he has developed an interest in divine knowledge.

Zia's language was also deceptive when dealing with international powers, particularly the United States, during the Soviet-Afghan War. He portrays Pakistan as an important ally, exploiting the worldwide war against communism to acquire funding and support while concealing his domestic tyranny. Zia presents himself as a reasonable leader in discussions with American officials, tailoring his words to their expectations. Hanif's Zia wears a façade of civility and participation, concealing his genuine political goals, as Hanif says: "He smiled at the American ambassador and said, 'We are fighting your war for you. I hope you'll fight our poverty for us.'" (Hanif, 2008, p 183).

Hanif demonstrates Zia's manipulative diplomacy, using Pakistan's geopolitical prominence for personal and military advantage. Because political leaders have used language for various purposes in different parts of the world, Zia is a figure similar to Muhammad Hanif. In addition, Zia's personal behaviour is hypocritical when compared to his religious speech. While presenting himself as the embodiment of devotion, Hanif discloses his deceptive use of religion to enhance his public image. Zia rigorously manages his public image, emphasising his religious behaviour during speeches, prayers, and meetings. However, the story highlights his fears and contradictions, demonstrating how his religious vocabulary is more about performance than actual belief, as stated by Hanif's narrator: "He prayed in public, he prayed in private." He prayed when he was joyful and when he was terrified, and he was always scared. (Hanif, 2008, page 69). The satire here exposes Zia's deceptive self-projection as a "man of God," which he employs to silence critics and obtain public support.

Zia is a character who is aware that he has enemies and is confident that no one, except his own military men, can harm him. As a result, he uses manipulative language to try to persuade his generals to gain their sympathy and prove himself the true loyal man for the country, saying to them, "If you cannot trust a man in uniform, who can you trust? "A man wearing a turban?" (Hanif, 2008, page 98). He uses both religion and the military as symbols of patriotism and continuously tries to convince his army officers to be loyal to him.

Zia understands that he must not only persuade army officials, but also the common man of Pakistan. He creates a scenario in the minds of the common man to demonstrate that he is the one working for their benefit, and as a result, he has made enemies for himself, as he states in his national address, "We are building a nation on the principles of faith and discipline... but some elements are intent on derailing our progress" (Hanif, 2008, page 125). He reassures the average man by his statements that whatever he does, any decision, or any law that he enacts is for the welfare of the country and its people, for whom he is confronting issues and threats. However, the spoken words appear comical; a ruler who is simply using religion to influence his people and

justify his authority is speaking about faith and discipline, although he himself was the result of a coup.

Zia's involvement in Bhutto's death was characterised by a combination of manipulation, propaganda, and military strength. In the narrative, Zia employs rhetoric to explain his choice to assassinate Bhutto. He portrays Bhutto as a threat to national security, saying that his actions as prime minister jeopardised Pakistan's stability, stating in the novel, "Bhutto was a dangerous man." He was willing to sell the country for his own selfish reasons. I had no choice but to remove him from the political arena. The judgment was in the national interest. It had to be done, and it had to be done quickly." (Hanif, 2008). To justify his decision and statement, he had to manipulate the common man and the other political leaders as well as the army officials, for which he chose the holy book Quran, as he says with reference to the Quran:

I am doing this for the sake of Pakistan, for the good of the people. The Quran tells us that sometimes sacrifices must be made for the greater good, that we must act to preserve the nation. This is what I am doing, and it is my duty, as a servant of Allah, to carry it out. (Hanif, 2008)

Zia utilises the Quran to justify his acts, presenting his choices as being consistent with religious imperatives. By presenting the execution as a heavenly duty, he transfers moral responsibility away from political motivations and toward spiritual duty. This deception is a defining feature of his dictatorship, which frequently used religious and moral posturing to legitimise political activities.

Furthermore, Zainab's rape case plays a vital role in the narrative, revealing several perspectives. Zia trivialises and deflects responsibility for a rape case involving a subordinate by using religious discourse to manipulate the situation's moral context. Instead of addressing the crime, he highlights modesty and women's attitudes, transferring blame to the victim. Meanwhile, he continues using the religious context: "If women cover themselves properly, such incidents will not happen... Allah has made them delicate. They must stay within their limits" (Hanif, 2008, p, 99). Instead of addressing the perpetrator's conduct, Zia's statement manipulates the narrative by blaming the victim's apparel and behaviour for the rape. This displays a patriarchal attitude in which women's modesty is linked to male behaviour, which is not a good sign of a great leader and instead demonstrates how manipulative he has been. Zia uses religion to justify his position, deflecting criticism and securing cooperation from his audience, who may be hesitant to question religious discourse, by invoking Allah and divine wisdom. Zia announces: "Allah has made them delicate"(Hanif, 2008, p. 99).

The above-mentioned incident demonstrates Zia's deceptive use of religious and moral discourse to promote victim-blaming and avoid accountability. It demonstrates his capacity to manipulate narratives to suit his authoritarian and patriarchal goals, all while portraying himself as a defender of faith and morals. Mohammed Hanif's comedy reveals the folly and unfairness inherent in Zia's rhetoric, offering a harsh condemnation of his leadership. Hanif attempts to paint a truthful image of Zia and his government through such and similar events in the novel. Hanif used political rhetoric to reveal the true face of the leader, who used religion to deceive the average man and justify his control.

Conclusion

This study highlights that political language in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* functions as a central instrument of power, manipulation, and ideological negotiation within a postcolonial context.

Through a Bhabhaian reading, the novel reveals how language operates in a hybrid space where religion, politics, and diplomacy intersect to construct legitimacy and authority. General Zia's discourse illustrates how rhetorical strategies rooted in religious vocabulary, military symbolism, and international diplomacy are employed to influence both domestic audiences and global powers, thereby reinforcing authoritarian control. The analysis further shows that hybridity extends beyond cultural identity into linguistic practice, where the blending of languages and rhetorical registers creates a "third space" that enables both persuasion and ambiguity. By shifting between religious devotion, nationalist rhetoric, and diplomatic performance, political language becomes a flexible tool capable of masking contradictions and justifying controversial actions. In this sense, Hanif's satire exposes the gap between public performance and political reality, revealing how language can simultaneously entertain, deceive, and discipline. Ultimately, the study highlights the relevance of Bhabha's theory for understanding contemporary political discourse in postcolonial societies. The novel demonstrates that hybrid language is not merely a reflection of cultural mixing but a strategic practice through which power relations are negotiated and maintained. By studying the politics of language, this research contributes to postcolonial literary studies and offers insight into how a satire can critically expose the linguistic mechanisms through which authority is constructed, sustained, and imposed.

References

1. Atkinson, M. (1984). *Our masters' voices: The language and body language of politics*. Routledge.
2. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
3. Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
4. Hanif, M. (2008). *A case of exploding mangoes*. Jonathan Cape.
5. Hoffman, A. (2021). Political language and the mobilization of fear. *Journal of Political Discourse Studies*, 15(2), 45–60.
6. Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
7. Ware, A. (1981). Manipulation and democratic theory. *Political Studies*, 29(2), 163–181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1981.tb00506.x>