



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

## **Histographic Metafiction and Political Pastiche in Muhammad Hanif's "A Case of Exploding Mangoes": Rewriting National History through Satires**

**Swaira Urooj**

M.Phil Scholar, NCBA&E Alhamra University Bahawalpur

Email: [swairaurooj@gmail.com](mailto:swairaurooj@gmail.com)

**Arooj Irfan Ansari**

M.Phil Scholar, NCBA&E Alhamra University Bahawalpur

Email: [aroojansari526@gmail.com](mailto:aroojansari526@gmail.com)

**Kainat khan**

M.Phil Scholar, NCBA&E Alhamra University Bahawalpur

Email: [kainatkhanmd307@gmail.com](mailto:kainatkhanmd307@gmail.com)

**Dr. Muhammad Arfan Lodhi\***

Higher Education Department, Punjab

Email: [samaritan\\_as@hotmail.com](mailto:samaritan_as@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the relationship of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche in Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), examining how the novel reconstructs historical memory, interrogates authoritarian power, and destabilizes official narratives of Pakistani history. Situated within postmodern literary discourse, the research employs a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in textual analysis, thematic coding, and content analysis. Drawing primarily on Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction and Fredric Jameson's theorization of pastiche, the study analyzes selected narrative episodes, stylistic patterns, and discursive structures to explore the relationship between fiction, history, and political representation. The findings reveal that Hanif systematically blurs the boundaries between historical fact and imaginative reconstruction through self-reflexive narration, narrative fragmentation, competing versions of truth, and the strategic use of irony. Metafictional techniques expose the constructed nature of both literary narratives and official historical records, encouraging readers to question the authority of state-sponsored histories. Simultaneously, political pastiche operates through the hybridization of military discourse, bureaucratic documentation, intelligence reports, political rhetoric, religious language, detective fiction, satire, and popular culture, producing a multilayered critique of dictatorship, ideological manipulation, and geopolitical power structures. The novel transforms the historical event of General Zia-ul-Haq's death into a contested narrative space where truth remains unstable and subject to competing interpretations. The study further demonstrates that the convergence of metafiction and pastiche functions as a postcolonial strategy of resistance, enabling the recovery of marginalized voices and alternative historical memories suppressed by authoritarian regimes. Rather than merely parodying historical events, Hanif reconstructs cultural memory through narrative disruption, exposing the mechanisms through which power manufactures legitimacy,



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

controls public discourse, and shapes collective consciousness. The research contributes to contemporary scholarship by integrating historiographic metafiction and political pastiche within a single analytical framework, revealing how postmodern narrative techniques can serve as powerful instruments for historical revision, political critique, and cultural resistance. Ultimately, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* emerges as a significant postcolonial text that re-imagines history not as a fixed record of the past but as a dynamic site of ideological contestation and narrative negotiation.

**Keywords:** Historiographic Metafiction; Political Pastiche; Postmodernism; Mohammed Hanif; *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*; Historical Reconstruction; Political Satire; Narrative Fragmentation; Postcolonial Literature; Cultural Memory.

### Introduction

The scholarship is going to highlight the elements of pastiche in the novel 'A Case of Exploding Mangoes' (2008) written by a Pakistani writer Muhammad Hanif. It mainly looks for the oppressive, barbaric, totalitarian, tyrannical, and colonial techniques used by the president of Pakistan (1977-1988) General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, a military dictator who overthrew the government of one of the most charismatic leaders in the history of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by imposing martial law and began the longest and most despotic period in the history of Pakistan. Zia took over the government and promised the people to arrange free and fair elections in 90 days, but unfortunately, his regime lasted for 11 long years. In the novel, Hanif has portrayed very skillfully with a satirical tone the real historical events in Pakistan, which finally led to the demise of Zia in a plane crash. Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) is a notable example of political pastiche. The novel is set during the final years of General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime and revolves around the mysterious plane crash that resulted in the deaths of Zia-ul-Haq and several senior officials in 1988. Drawing upon actual historical events, Hanif combines satire, conspiracy theories, political commentary, and fictional elements to construct an alternative version of national history. The novel refuses to offer definitive explanations regarding the plane crash; instead, it presents multiple possibilities that highlight the uncertainty and complexity surrounding historical truth.

General Zia-ul-Haq's rule remains one of the most debated periods in Pakistan's political history. His regime was characterized by martial law, the Islamization of state policies, restrictions on political freedom, and the expansion



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

of military influence in governance. While official historical accounts often focus on political developments and institutional narratives, literary representations have sought to uncover the social and psychological consequences of authoritarian rule. Through satire and irony, Hanif exposes the absurdities, contradictions, and anxieties that shaped everyday life during this period. The use of satire in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* extends beyond entertainment. Satire functions as a powerful instrument of resistance, enabling the author to criticize political authority without directly reproducing conventional historical discourse. By portraying historical figures in exaggerated yet recognizable ways, Hanif encourages readers to reconsider the accepted versions of national history. The novel simultaneously entertains and provokes critical reflection on issues related to power, ideology, religion, and state control.

Furthermore, the novel's reliance on conspiracy narratives contributes to its postmodern nature. Conspiracy theories often emerge in contexts where official explanations fail to satisfy public curiosity or where political secrecy creates uncertainty. In Hanif's novel, competing narratives surrounding the plane crash destabilize the distinction between fact and fiction. The absence of a single authoritative explanation compels readers to acknowledge that historical understanding is often shaped by interpretation, perspective, and ideological interests. Despite the growing body of scholarship on Mohammed Hanif's work, many studies have primarily focused on satire, political criticism, or representations of dictatorship. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the combined operation of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche in shaping the novel's engagement with history. An integrated analysis of these concepts can provide deeper insights into the strategies through which the text reconstructs the Zia era and challenges dominant narratives of the Pakistani state.

The present study, therefore, seeks to examine how *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* employs historiographic metafiction and political pastiche to rewrite national history through satire. By applying Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction and Fredric Jameson's understanding of pastiche, this research investigates the ways in which Hanif blurs the boundaries between historical fact and fictional invention. The study also explores how satire



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

operates as a means of political critique and historical revision. Hanif utilizes the structural framework of a whodunit thriller, filtered through an intensely satirical lens, to reconstruct the claustrophobic, paranoid atmosphere of the Zia-ul-Haq era—a period marked by aggressive Islamization, media censorship, judicial overreaches, and deep complicity in the Soviet-Afghan Cold War proxy conflict. The novel's importance lies in its refusal to offer a singular, definitive historical truth regarding the assassination. By weaving these disparate narratives together, Hanif does not merely write a historical novel; he constructs a counter-history. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* uses the tools of postmodern fiction to dismantle the rigid, state-manufactured hagiography surrounding the Zia regime, asserting that in an authoritarian state, farce and conspiracy are often more accurate representations of reality than official history.

This research contributes to the broader field of postmodern literary studies and Pakistani English literature. It demonstrates that literary texts are not merely reflections of historical events but active participants in the construction, negotiation, and contestation of historical meaning. Through its innovative narrative techniques, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* invites readers to approach history with skepticism, recognizing that historical narratives are often shaped by those who possess the authority to tell them. Consequently, the novel offers a compelling example of how fiction can challenge official histories and create space for alternative voices and interpretations within the national imagination.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The relationship between history and fiction remains a central concern in contemporary literary scholarship, particularly within postmodern and postcolonial studies where historical narratives are increasingly viewed as discursive constructions rather than objective representations of the past. Historiographic metafiction challenges the authority of official historical accounts by exposing the textual and ideological processes through which history is produced, narrated, and legitimized (Hutcheon, 1988). Similarly, political pastiche functions as a postmodern aesthetic strategy that appropriates, recycles, and recontextualizes existing cultural, political, and historical discourses to expose the contradictions embedded within dominant systems of power



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

(Jameson, 1991). Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) revisits the politically contentious period of General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime and the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death. Through satire, irony, narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, and competing conspiracy narratives, the novel reconstructs historical memory while simultaneously questioning the possibility of historical certainty. Although previous studies have explored the novel from postcolonial, political, deconstructive, and satirical perspectives, relatively little attention has been paid to the combined operation of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche as interconnected strategies of historical revision and political resistance.

Furthermore, existing scholarship largely emphasizes authoritarianism, Islamization, military dominance, and ideological control while overlooking how the novel's narrative architecture destabilizes historical authority and reconstructs alternative forms of cultural memory. Consequently, a significant scholarly gap remains regarding the ways in which Hanif employs postmodern narrative techniques to interrogate the production of historical knowledge, challenge state-sponsored historiography, and recover marginalized voices excluded from official archives.

This study addresses this gap by examining how *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* utilizes historiographic metafiction and political pastiche to reconstruct the Zia-ul-Haq era, destabilize dominant historical narratives, and generate alternative interpretations of Pakistan's political past. Drawing upon postmodern theories of narrative, historiography, and representation, the study contributes to broader debates concerning memory, power, truth, and historical discourse in postcolonial literature.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective**

- To investigate how Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* reconstructs and critiques the Zia-ul-Haq era through the postmodern narrative strategies of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche.



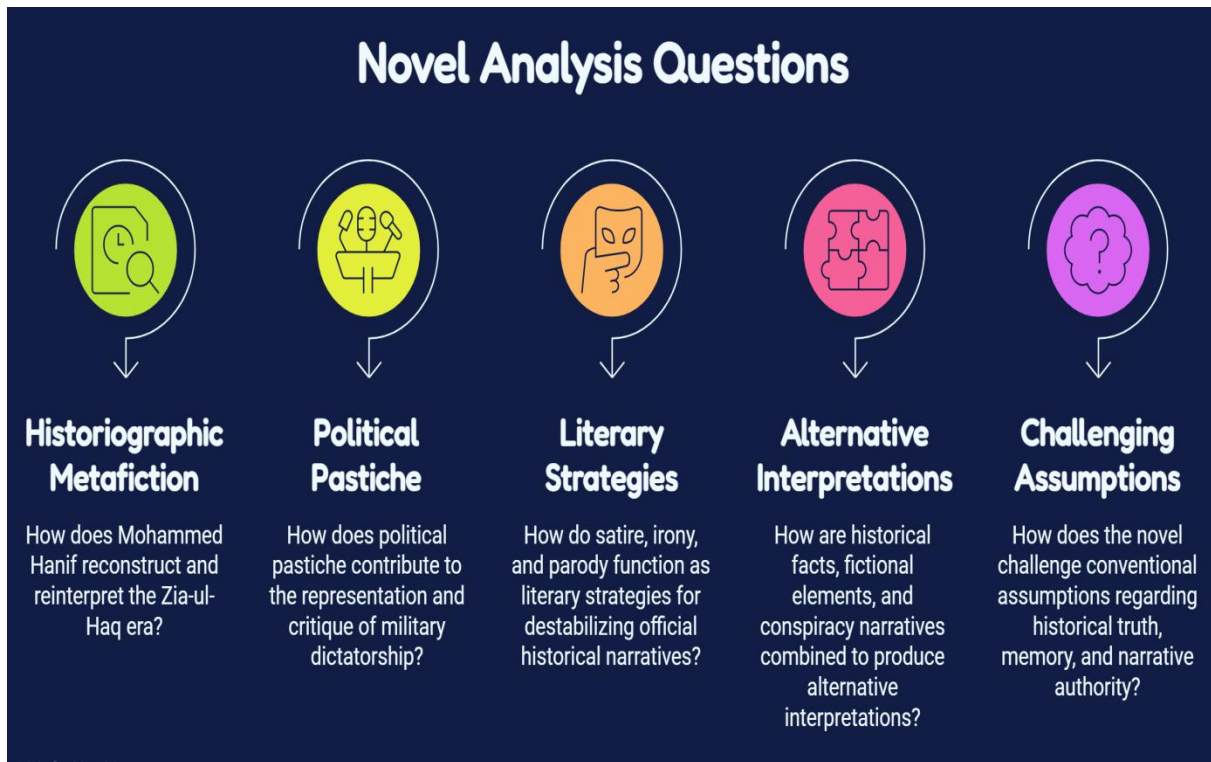
## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To identify and analyze the major elements of historiographic metafiction in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*.
2. To examine the function of political pastiche in representing military authoritarianism, ideology, and state power.
3. To analyze the role of satire, irony, and parody in challenging official historical narratives.
4. To investigate how historical facts, fictional narratives, and conspiracy discourses are blended to reconstruct alternative versions of national history.
5. To explore how the novel problematizes historical truth, narrative authority, and collective memory within a postcolonial context.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Mohammed Hanif employ historiographic metafiction in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* to reconstruct and reinterpret the Zia-ul-Haq era?
2. In what ways does political pastiche contribute to the representation and critique of military dictatorship and ideological power structures in the novel?
3. How do satire, irony, and parody function as literary strategies for destabilizing official historical narratives?
4. How are historical facts, fictional elements, and conspiracy narratives combined to produce alternative interpretations of Pakistan's national history?
5. How does the novel challenge conventional assumptions regarding historical truth, memory, and narrative authority?



**Figure 1. Research Questions**

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant at theoretical, methodological, literary, and socio-historical levels. Theoretically, the research contributes to contemporary postmodern literary scholarship by integrating historiographic metafiction and political pastiche within a unified analytical framework. While both concepts have received substantial scholarly attention independently, their combined application to Pakistani English fiction remains underexplored. By synthesizing Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction and Jameson's conceptualization of pastiche, this study expands current discussions concerning narrative representation, historical discourse, and cultural memory. Methodologically, the study demonstrates how qualitative textual analysis, thematic coding, and content analysis can be employed to examine the complex interaction between literary form and historical representation. The research offers a systematic framework that may be applied to similar postcolonial texts engaged in historical revision and political critique. Literarily, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Mohammed Hanif's fiction by providing a comprehensive analysis of the narrative mechanisms through which



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* rewrites history. It highlights the significance of satire, metafiction, intertextuality, and genre hybridity as instruments of political resistance and cultural critique. In addition, historically and culturally, the study underscores literature's role as an alternative archive capable of preserving suppressed memories and marginalized perspectives excluded from official historical records. In societies shaped by authoritarian governance and ideological control, literary narratives function as counter-histories that challenge dominant discourses and facilitate critical engagement with the past. Finally, the research contributes to broader debates in postcolonial studies, memory studies, historiography, and narrative theory by demonstrating how fiction actively participates in the production, contestation, and reinterpretation of historical knowledge. The findings will be valuable for scholars, researchers, and students working in Pakistani literature, postmodern fiction, cultural studies, historiography, and political discourse analysis.

### **2. Literature Review**

Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) has attracted significant scholarly attention due to its unique blending of satire, historiography, and postmodern narrative techniques. Researchers have examined the novel from multiple perspectives including postcolonial critique, political satire, deconstruction, dictatorship discourse, and narrative representation of history. However, despite growing scholarship, there remains a gap in integrating historiographic metafiction and political pastiche as combined analytical tools. This section reviews existing empirical studies to establish the academic positioning of the current research. This novel can be easily applied to the socio-political history of Pakistan and articulating a universal phenomenon of undemocratic authority and colonialism. Muhammad Yar Tanvir in his article *Praetorianism in A Case of Exploding Mangoes: A Critical Analysis*(2014)has criticized the socio-political scenario of Pakistan in the 1980s, when General Zia take over the government by imposing martial and ruled for 11 years until his death in a plane crash. He described the role of army and the reality of Pakistani politics using the same text. Iqbal (2015) in his article has investigated the neo-colonial aspects of the novel. He criticized Zia's regime for using religious ideologies and Islamization for exploiting and manipulating the people. Sunder



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Huma et al. authored an article *A Case of Exploding of Mangoes: Postmodernist Analysis* (2018) analyzed the novel from a postmodern perspective and claimed it as a 'Black Comedy'; a prominent feature of the postmodern text. She has gravely satirized the influence of the military in politics. Altaf (2019) deconstructs the myths and heroic beliefs of the people about General Zia. He further investigated that it was a social trick used by Zia and that's why he was famous among the masses with the name of 'Man of Truth' and 'Man of Faith. He reported in a very crystal clear manner that these historical beliefs of people about General Zia are only myths and myths do not occur naturally.

Hafsa, (2020) in her research *The geometry of God and A Case of Exploding Mangoes* used the comparative method for analyzing both postmodern novels. This study investigates the social and political situations of Pakistan during General Zia's administration. Both the novels have deeply criticized the interference of military in politics of Pakistan. A major body of research focuses on postcolonial readings of Hanif's novel, particularly its representation of dictatorship, ideology, and state power. Yasir Arafat (2020) analyzes *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* through a postcolonial lens, emphasizing how the novel critiques totalitarian governance and colonial legacies in Pakistan. The study argues that General Zia-ul-Haq's regime is portrayed as a continuation of colonial structures where power is centralized and dissent is suppressed. Using Frantz Fanon's and Hannah Arendt's theoretical frameworks, Arafat highlights how Hanif exposes ideological manipulation through Islamization and nationalism. However, the study primarily focuses on political oppression and does not explore narrative techniques such as metafiction or pastiche in detail.

Similarly, Ahmad (2025) examines colonial mentality and resistance in Hanif's novel using Edward Said's Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory. The study concludes that the novel represents postcolonial identity struggles and ideological resistance against authoritarian discourse. It shows how characters navigate cultural hybridity under oppressive political systems. However, the study remains limited to identity politics and does not analyze historiographic reconstruction or narrative fragmentation.

Another study by Bilal (2024) focuses on necropolitics in the novel, particularly the socio-political marginalization of blind Zainab. It argues that



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

authoritarian systems produce “social death” through legal and institutional violence. While this study provides insight into power structures, it remains focused on biopolitical theory and does not engage with postmodern narrative strategies. Another significant group of studies focuses on postmodern stylistic elements such as satire, irony, and narrative hybridity. Sundar Huma, Ijaz Asghar, and Hira Ali (2018) conduct a postmodern analysis of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, emphasizing black comedy and satire as key narrative devices. The study argues that Hanif destabilizes historical certainty by blending humor with political critique. It highlights how satire transforms serious political events into absurd representations, thereby challenging official narratives of truth.

Majeed et al. (2021) explore irony and nostalgia in the novel from a postmodern perspective. They argue that Hanif uses ironic representation of Pakistani politics to expose contradictions within authoritarian rule. The study emphasizes that nostalgia and irony work together to question historical authenticity and collective memory. However, it does not fully engage with historiographic metafiction as a structured theoretical framework. Saleem et al. (2026) examine language and manipulation in the novel through Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and “Third Space.” The study shows that language functions as both a tool of resistance and ideological control. It highlights how political discourse is manipulated through hybrid linguistic forms. However, it focuses more on language politics than on narrative form and historical reconstruction.

A third category of empirical research focuses on narrative structure, historical representation, and comparative literary analysis. Rubab Khalid et al. (2023) examine how Hanif blends history and fiction to reconstruct political events of Zia-ul-Haq’s regime. The study argues that the novel destabilizes linear historical narratives and creates multiple interpretations of truth. It highlights narrative fragmentation and historiographic engagement but does not explicitly apply the theoretical framework of metafiction. Sadia Ali et al. (2023) conduct a comparative study between Pakistani and Latin American dictator fiction, specifically comparing *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* with *The Feast of the Goat*. The study finds that both novels challenge authoritarian regimes through satire and power discourse. However, it does not deeply analyze stylistic mechanisms



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

like pastiche or metafictional narration. Afzal et al. (2020) use deconstruction theory to analyze meaning-making in Hanif's novel. They argue that fixed meanings collapse under textual ambiguity, and binaries between truth and fiction are destabilized. While this aligns with postmodern thought, the study does not focus on historiography or political narrative strategies. Hassan (2016) explored that "A Case of Exploding Mangoes by Hanif (2008)" is a present exemplar of English language narration. Moreover, he examined important facets of Pakistan's history, where the individual and collective awareness of people is hidden and obscured, and the English language serves as a tool that encompasses civic, literary, governmental, and global dimensions. In addition, he stated that Hanif's writing style in English imbued his text with a distinct Pakistani emotional impetus, and he adeptly employs the English language in his own unique manner, given his mastery of it. Furthermore, he successfully incorporates wit, humor, and satire into his writing.

Awais (2014) supports this perspective by arguing that "A Case of Exploding Mangoes" by Hanif portrays General Zia's peculiar death from a postmodernist perspective, incorporating elements of dark humor, satire, authorship, novelistic techniques, and mystic naturalism. The book "A Case of Exploding Mangoes" criticizes Zia's avarice and the middle class that rules Pakistan. Zia was not oriented to exercise restraint or to stretch the consciousness of the people in his nation, and the period of time he governed was not good for the media. According to Bhat (2014), literary theory and criticism are as old as literature itself. Literary criticism is the cerebral process of approximating, classifying, assessing, comprehending, and appraising literary works. Additionally, critique is creative in that it can comprehend the work of a literary artist and then highlight pertinent points. In actuality, that was "meta-literature." The well-known literary figures are the world's most prominent critics and theorists. According to Kar (1995), new interpreters in the United States have brought about a number of significant changes to the technique of interpreting fictional texts. These interpreters use anthropology, significant events, and important matters to explain fictional texts and provide historical and literary suggestions.



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Historians and interpreters alike use the literary interpretation method to examine culture. Moreover, it has made significant contributions to emerging or post-colonial countries. Anticipating the failure of new critical analysis to break down and battle with the intricate base of the literary text, new historicism emerged. The new analysts believed that historical or well-planned opposition to literature existed. Consequently, place a high value on employment's self-sufficiency in order to guard against changes and progress in the external world. The New Historicism theory was established by Stephen Greenblatt and was published in 1980. Greenblatt's theory places a strong emphasis on how historical events should be interpreted from historical documents. Additionally, the crucial approach of text interpretation represented by the new Historicism is strongly linked to Greenblatt's essay "Resonance and Wonder," in which he skillfully describes both the new Historicism and text interpretation. Understanding the text's context and the situations it depicts is another goal of text interpretation. The fundamental procedure for classifying, quantifying, and sequentially analyzing every literary work in literature is known as "new historicism." The history is brought back to relevance for the modern era. The primary goal is to show critical literature that has been published in the text and to disrupt the literary work in its historical context or at the center of attention on a socio-cultural event. It concentrates on significant historical and biographical events while viewing the work as a whole within sociocultural traditions.

**Table 1. Studies on Historiographic Metafiction**

Author	Year	Findings	Gap
Rubab Khalild,Tasneem Kosar and Ansha Yameen	2023	The study investigates the relationship between history and fiction in the novel. It argues that Hanif reconstructs political history through satire and narrative experimentation.	The study discusses historicism but lacks a detailed historiographic metafiction framework.



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Hassan Bin Zubair, Samina Khaliq and Iqra Khadam	2024	The study explores postmodern irony and political satire that Hanif uses to reveal hidden realities of Pakistani politics.	It does not analyze historiographic metafiction and political pastiche together.
Sadia Ali and Muhammad Ali	2023	The study examines representations of authoritarian power and political discourse.	The comparative approach overlooks metafictional reconstruction of history

**Table 2: Studies on Pastiche and Postmodern Satire**

Author	Year	Findings	Gap
Khalid Rahim and Saima Nazeer	2023	The study examines how general Zia's regime uses ideological and repressive state apparatuses to control society. Hanif exposes state power, Islamization and political manipulation through satire.	The study focuses on Marxist ideology but does not analyze political pastiche.
Muhammad Yar Tnaveer	2014	The study discusses military intervention in politics and highlights Hanif's use of irony, satire and black humor to criticize authoritarian rule.	The study acknowledges satire but does not examine political pastiche.

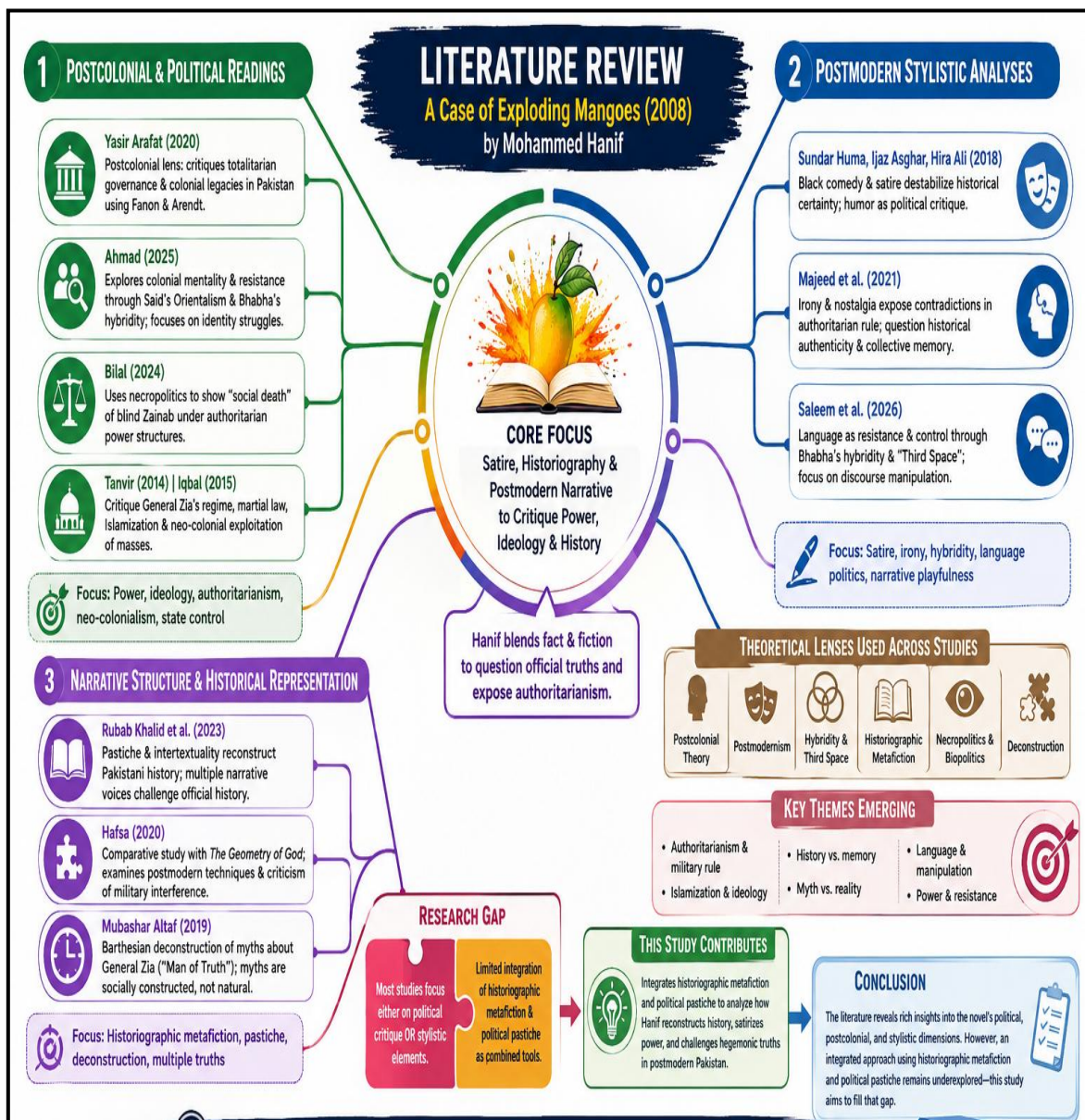


Figure 2. Methodological Framework

Table 3. Studies on *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*

Author	Year	Findings	Gap
Yasir Arafat	2020	The research highlights military dictatorship, Islamization and colonial legacies in Zia's regime.	The study uses postcolonial theory and does not explore metafictional narrative strategies.
Malik Haroon	2020	The study shows how the	Pastiche not examined.



Afzal and Muhammad Rashidi Mohd Pakri		novel destabilizes fixed meanings and challenges dominant political narratives.	
Bilal Ahmad and Muhammad Ali Khan	2024	The study explores the oppression of marginalized individuals under authoritarian rule.	The focus remains on oppression rather than historical reconstruction through metafiction.
Fatima Hassan and Zarmeena Khan	2021	The study analyzes the women's oppression during Zia's regime. It argues that Hanif exposes legal injustice.	It does not address postmodern historiography.

### 3. Research Methodology

Qualitative research methods are utilized in this study. Astalin (2013) states that one common method for performing qualitative research is the qualitative mode of inquiry. When it comes to structuring the research, qualitative research designs are quite versatile and flexible. Furthermore, Ospina (2004) contended that full counsel cannot be adequately provided by qualitative research designs due to the extensive review of frameworks that are required. Symbolic components, dynamic characters, and augmented elements centered on qualitative techniques are all part of it. It covers multiple layers of phenomena. When we do in-house qualitative research to probe the enduring complexity of leadership, we are engaging in the qualitative mode of inquiry. In this study, we look at the cultural context of Mohammad Hanif's 2008 book "A Case of Exploding Mangoes" and how Historicism relates to the text. The investigator gave her stamp of approval to both the inductive notion of the present investigation and the job's qualitative style of inquiry.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research aims to understand and interpret social and cultural phenomena through detailed analysis of textual and contextual data. Since this study investigates literary techniques and historical representations in a novel, a qualitative design provides the most appropriate framework for examining the complexities of narrative construction and political



discourse. The study adopts a descriptive and interpretive research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on identifying instances of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche in the novel, while the interpretive aspect analyzes their significance in shaping historical understanding and political critique. This research follows an inductive approach. The inductive approach begins with close reading and textual observation and then develops interpretations based on recurring themes, patterns, and narrative strategies. The researcher examines selected passages from *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* and interprets them through the lens of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche. Rather than testing a predetermined hypothesis, the study generates insights through detailed textual analysis. This approach allows flexibility in understanding how fictional narratives interact with historical realities and political ideologies.

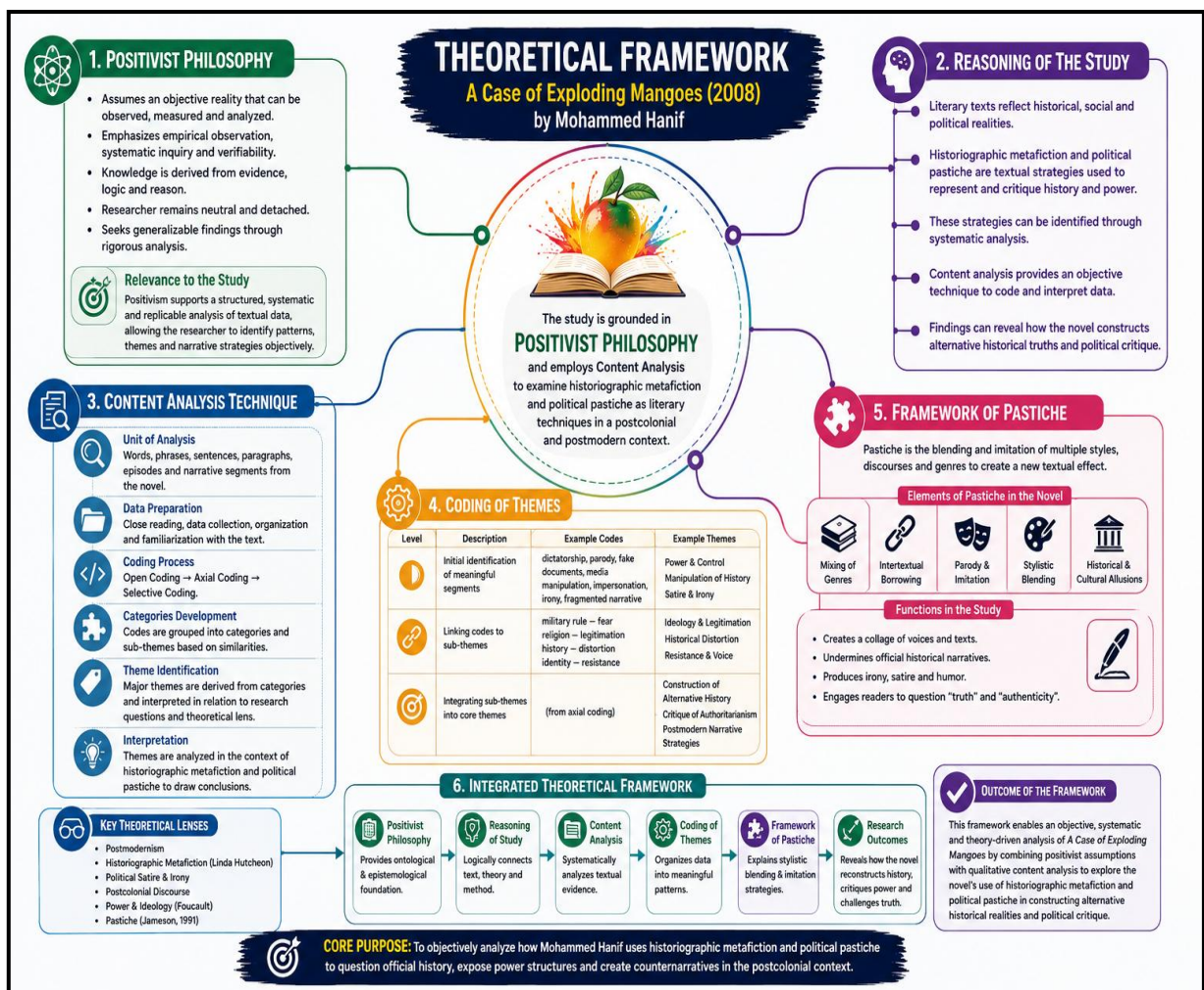


Figure 3. Theoretical Framework



## 4. Data and Analysis

### 4.1 Thematic Analysis

The plot structure of Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) is intentionally non-linear, highly fragmented, structurally multi-layered, and deeply complex, serving as a direct formal reflection of the chaotic, paranoid, and highly volatile political landscape of Pakistan under General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime. The narrative completely rejects a traditional, cause-and-effect chronological trajectory in favor of a dual-narrative mechanism that juxtaposes a micro-perspective with a macro-perspective of global and national historical events. On one hand, the reader follows the intensive, highly personal first-person perspective of Under Officer Ali Shigri, a silent rebel within the Pakistan Air Force academy at Nishtarabad, whose personal quest to avenge his father's highly suspicious and staged military suicide serves as the emotional, structural, and psychological core of the novel. On the other hand, Hanif employs an omniscient, detached, and deeply ironic third-person narrator to depict the absurd, claustrophobic world of General Zia-ul-Haq, his intelligence chiefs, and global political actors who manipulated the South Asian region during the final years of the Cold War.

By fragmenting the story into these alternating viewpoints and continuously disrupting temporal continuity through flashbacks, drug-induced dream sequences, historical digressions, and top-secret intelligence briefings, Hanif ensures that the reader experiences the exact same state of disorientation, epistemic uncertainty, and hyper-vigilance that characterized the historical era of the late 1980s. Chronology is radically disrupted from the very first sentence of the book, which establishes a retrospective look at a known historical countdown—the impending, inevitable death of General Zia in a plane crash on August 17, 1988—but the literary path leading to that crash is anything but straightforward. Hanif continuously leaps backward and forward in time, jumping from the immediate, tense countdown of the final days in August to the historical background of Colonel Shigri's operational life, the structural and



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

strategic shifts within the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the sweeping historical intersections of the Soviet-Afghan War.

***“Subsequently, forensic specialists employed by Lockheed will reconstruct the fragments of the wrecked aircraft and conduct simulations in an effort to unravel the enigma surrounding the sudden descent of a highly capable C130 aircraft, which occurred a mere four minutes after it had taken off.” (p.02).***

The analysis of the incident involving the C130 aircraft, which crashed shortly after take-off, aims to determine the cause of the crash. The plane was carrying several high-profile individuals, including General Zia, the President of Pakistan, the US ambassador, and others. The investigation will determine whether the crash was accidental or an act of assassination.

This radical temporal instability mirrors the psychological climate of a totalitarian state, where history is constantly being rewritten, records are actively censored, and archives are classified, leaving the ordinary citizens and the readers entirely unable to rely on a stable, linear progression of time or truth. Furthermore, the narrative systematically dismantles conventional historical realism through the strategic application of magical realist tropes and absurdist political satire. While the setting is deeply grounded in precise, material historical realities—such as the sweltering air force bases of Multan, the cold diplomatic parties in Islamabad and real political figures like the American Ambassador Arnold Raphel and General Akhtar Abdul Rahman—the events that unfold within these historical spaces consistently defy rational realism. The introduction of Zainab, a blind woman sentenced to public stoning under the discriminatory Hudood Ordinances who delivers a powerful curse against the dictator, a sacred, resilient crowd that witnesses and inadvertently triggers the final moments of the C-130 aircraft, and General Zia’s crippling, absolute paranoia regarding a hidden hex placed upon him by a silent Quran reader, all serve to push the text into the realm of the surreal and the grotesque. Hanif suggests that the political reality of Pakistan under military rule was so inherently bizarre, contradictory, and unnatural that standard literary realism is fundamentally inadequate to capture its absolute truth.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

***"Life is Like That" has a brief narrative consisting of five lines about an individual."***

***(p.51)***

Characterization within the novel is defined by perpetual fluidity, political performance, and profound psychological instability. No character is allowed to possess a static, unified, or coherent identity; instead, their personas are fragmented by the violent demands of survival within a pervasive surveillance state. Ali Shigri is simultaneously a loyal, highly disciplined air force cadet executing morning drills, an active, cold-blooded conspirator plotting the assassination of the head of state, and a deeply grieving, traumatized son consumed by psychological wounds and memories of his father's death. His close companion and intimate lover, Cadet Obaid, continuously oscillates between a romantic, sensitive poet obsessed with the verses of Rainer Maria Rilke and a reckless, cross-dressing pilot who executes a rogue flight that triggers a national security alert. The historical figures are similarly split by Hanif's satirical pen: General Zia presents himself to the public and the media as a deeply pious, humble, and chosen servant of Islam, yet behind closed doors, he is a deeply insecure, power-hungry autocrat suffering from severe physical ailments, obsessed with his own mortality, and terrified of his own shadow, his generals, and his wife. His intelligence chief, General Akhtar, operates under complex layers of bureaucratic deception, managing global jihad and American funding while constantly worrying about shifting political alliances and his own survival within the military hierarchy.

This deep multiplicity highlights the performative nature of identity under a dictatorship, where everyone must wear a calculated mask to survive, and the boundary between the public mask and the private self eventually erodes entirely, leaving behind a fragmented shell. While the characters do not explicitly break the fourth wall to acknowledge they are inside a book, they possess a profound, tragic awareness of their status as mere pawns within a larger, pre-written historical script. Ali Shigri is hyper-aware that his every move is being monitored, audited, and directed by invisible, faceless forces like the ISI, the ghost of his father, and the rigid military hierarchy. General Zia constantly looks for signs, omens, and divine scripts—consulting the holy Quran randomly for signs—



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

revealing an underlying psychological awareness that his destiny is being controlled by an external authorial force, whether divine, political through the machinations of the CIA, or narrative.

The novel's narrative architecture relies heavily on a split point of view to expose the wide gap between individual human experience and institutional history. Ali Shigri serves as an unreliable first-person narrator for the chapters focusing on the military academy, his time in the detention cells of the Lahore Fort, and his personal plot. His unreliability stems not from a malicious desire to deceive the reader, but from his profound psychological trauma, his intense grief over his father's death, his frequent consumption of hashish, and the inherent limits of his perspective as a low-ranking officer trapped within a secretive, highly classified institution. He frequently suppresses vital information, experiences vivid hallucinations or memory distortions, and views his surroundings through a cynical, completely detached lens. Conversely, the third-person omniscient sections shift the focus to the broader geopolitical apparatus. This narrator is biting, deeply ironic, and privy to the innermost thoughts, physical discomforts, and private humiliations of General Zia and his inner circle. By combining these two narrative modes, Hanif denies the reader a single, authoritative version of history, implying that in a state governed by systematic disinformation, truth can only be approached from multiple, conflicting angles. The frequent shifts between Shigri's intimate, dryly humorous first-person voice and the grand, satirical sweep of the omniscient narrator create a rhythmic tension throughout the book. This formal choice forces the reader to constantly recalibrate their understanding of the plot, transitioning rapidly from a tender, homoerotic moment between two cadets in a barracks to a high-level geopolitical meeting involving CIA directors, Saudi princes, and global strategy.

The setting of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a meticulous historical reconstruction of late-1980s Pakistan, captured at the absolute height of the Cold War and the zenith of the state-enforced Islamization process. Hanif vividly recreates the sweltering, oppressive, and unyielding heat of Multan, the sterile, calculated, and terrifying geometry of military bases, and the decadent, superficial luxury of diplomatic enclaves. Every detail—from the specific brands of military uniforms to the political slogans of the era—is rendered with



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

historical precision. However, this historical setting is presented as a simulated reality or a hyper real construction. The Pakistan depicted by Hanif is a grand stage play where the scenery is constantly being painted over by state propaganda. The military parades, the televised prayers, and the public executions are all choreographed spectacles designed to simulate order, control, and religious purity. Behind this facade lies a vast network of torture chambers such as the historic Lahore Fort, secret interrogation centers, and black-market arms bazaars, revealing that the official reality presented by the state is entirely simulated. The novel abounds with hyper real spaces where the boundaries between the real and the imagined dissolve completely.

The most prominent of these is the C-130 aircraft, *Pak One*, which becomes a claustrophobic, floating micro-universe where the entire destiny of a nation is compressed into a pressurized cabin. Other hyper real spaces include the American Ambassador's air-conditioned July 4th party as a surreal oasis of western consumerism and geopolitical maneuvering dropped into the middle of a conservative, impoverished landscape, and the prison cells of the ISI, where reality is reduced to the physical experience of pain, interrogation, and complete isolation. Ultimately, the novel explores a profound crisis of national and individual identity. Pakistan is depicted as a country torn away from its historical and cultural roots and forcibly remolded into a frontline state for global proxy wars and a laboratory for religious fundamentalism. The characters embody this crisis: they are caught between Western modernity, symbolized by Top Gun movies, aviator sunglasses, and American pop culture, and state-enforced religious orthodoxy. Hanif sets up a structural conflict between official state history and private human memory. Official history is shown to be a weapon wielded by the powerful to erase dissent, justify military coups, and canonize dictators as martyrs. Private memory, represented by Ali Shigri's refusal to forget the truth about his father's murder, acts as a counter-narrative, a site of resistance against the state-sponsored amnesia imposed upon the public. Finally, the novel questions the very nature of truth in historical discourse. By mixing historical facts like the actual plane crash, real political figures, and genuine legislative acts with absurd fiction such as the poison-tipped sword, the silent Quran reader, and the political machinations of a mango-eating crow, Hanif



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

argues that fiction is often more capable of exposing the grotesque truths of power than official historical accounts, which are themselves highly fabricated narratives designed to serve the ruling class and maintain their hegemony over the nation's memory.

If Zia truly intends to donate to the poor, it is unnecessary for them to be well dressed, as the purpose of the donation is not to benefit those who are fashionably attired. The following sentences align with the opinion that the historical text is renowned for its depiction of the natural political circumstances, which Hanif also employs in his writing to portray Zia as a disloyal individual who prioritizes maintaining his political status rather than being considerate and compassionate towards his impoverished citizens.

***“Eleven years ago, shortly before leading his men in Operation Fairplay, which removed Prime Minister Bhutto and installed him as the country's leader, he happened to come across the verse "He it is who hath made you regents in the earth" while reading the Quran. After two years, while facing pleas from world leaders to spare Bhutto from being executed and signing the order for his murder, Zia sought guidance from the sacred scripture and came upon the verse: "And the guilty behold the fire and know that they are about to fall therein, and they find no way of escape." (p.34)***

Hanif (2008) successfully re-contextualizes the historical events of Zia and Bhutto, showcasing his ingenuity in depicting the past. In the past, during Zia's regime, Bhutto was ordered to be hanged. Hanif, in his description of the past, presents it in a realistic manner but also creatively reimagines it. He first represents the actual reality and then presents a new reality by recontextualizing it. According to Hanif, before the decision to hang Bhutto, Zia read the Holy Quran and found the verse that supported his decision. Zia believed that Bhutto posed a threat to his leadership, and therefore it was preferable to hang him. Two years prior, Zia had found a clue in the holy book indicating that Bhutto had granted him authority, and two years later, he found another clue suggesting that the same person who had caused his rise to power was now the cause of his downfall. The author employs this statement to contextualize the past in accordance with the theory.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

## 4.2 Metafictional Analysis

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is highly self-reflexive, frequently drawing attention to its own status as a constructed narrative and commenting on the mechanisms of storytelling, censorship, and historical fabrication. The text comments on itself by repeatedly demonstrating how narratives are manufactured, manipulated, and consumed within a totalitarian regime. Throughout the novel, characters are constantly engaged in reading, writing, or censoring texts. General Zia is obsessed with reading his daily intelligence dossiers, looking for hidden patterns and narratives regarding his potential assassination. The ISI spends its time compiling files, rewriting confessions, and creating fictional accounts of political dissent to justify state violence. By highlighting these internal acts of composition, Hanif signals to the reader that the novel they are holding is also a constructed narrative—an alternative file compiled to challenge the official state narrative.

The book exposes the machinery of fiction-making not just as an artistic choice, but as a primary tool of political survival and control. Mohammed Hanif does not literally step onto the stage as a character named Hanif, but his authorial presence is powerfully felt through the highly stylized, deeply ironic, and intrusive voice of the third-person omniscient narrator. This narrator does not simply report events objectively; instead, they constantly intrude with biting political commentary, philosophical digressions on the nature of dictatorship, and satirical insights into the psychological pathologies of the ruling elite. For instance, when describing General Zia's religious devotion, the narrator intrudes to expose the underlying hypocrisy, detailing the exact physical and bureaucratic absurdities of implementing holy laws for personal political gain. This continuous authorial commentary breaks the illusion of a neutral narrative, forcing the reader to remain intellectually detached and critical of the historical reality being depicted.

***The fort in the historic city of Lahore holds great historical significance." The construction was undertaken by the Mughal King Shahjahan, who also built the Taj Mahal. His own son, acting with***



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

***cruelty, put him in prison, resulting in an early retirement. I have not personally visited the fort, but I have observed it in a shampoo advertisement." (p.95)***

Narrative instability is the engine that drives the entire novel, systematically undermining the concept of an objective, knowable historical truth. Hanif achieves this by presenting multiple, mutually exclusive explanations for the central historical event, which is the crash of *Pak One*. The text forces the reader to constantly ask whether the plane was brought down by Ali Shigri's poison-tipped swagger stick, or if it was Obaid's rogue, poetic flight into the desert. Alternatively, the text suggests it could have been the nerve gas hidden in the crates of mangoes by the ISI or the CIA, a sudden mechanical failure, or even the divine intervention of a curse delivered by a blind woman and executed by a kamikaze crow. By refusing to privilege any single explanation over the others, Hanif leaves the narrative unresolved and highly unstable. This instability is a deliberate epistemological statement implying that in a postcolonial state governed by secrecy, martial law, and disinformation, objective truth does not exist; there are only competing narratives, and history itself is a fiction written by the survivors. Consequently, the reader of *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is not a passive consumer of a story, but an active participant, an investigator tasked with piecing together a fragmented historical puzzle. Because the novel operates as a satirical whodunit, the reader is constantly forced to evaluate evidence, cross-reference the claims of the unreliable first-person narrator with the observations of the cynical third-person narrator, and navigate the ocean of rumors, conspiracies, and classified memos. Hanif relies heavily on the reader's historical hindsight. Since the contemporary reader knows from the outset that General Zia's plane will inevitably crash, they are positioned as an ironic witness to the frantic, absurd efforts of the characters to prevent or cause an event that is already historically determined. This creates a highly collaborative reading experience where meaning is generated in the space between historical reality and fictional interpretation.

The text's metafictional landscape is further complicated by the way it treats official documentation and bureaucracy as forms of dark creative writing. The state apparatus does not merely collect data; it invents reality. For example,



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

when Ali Shigri is tortured and interrogated at the Lahore Fort, his torturers are not particularly interested in what he actually did; they are interested in getting him to sign a confession that fits into a pre-established political narrative that benefits the intelligence community. The confession is treated as a literary text that needs proper pacing, believable villains, and a dramatic arc. This satirical exposure of the state's methods highlights the postmodern assertion that those who control the narrative control the definition of reality itself. By showing how easily the state manufactures "facts," Hanif forces the reader to look at all official history with a profound sense of skepticism. The novel suggests that the only way to counter a weaponized state fiction is to create a subversive literary fiction that exposes the mechanics of the lie. Thus, the text operates as a counter-history, using metafictional disruption to puncture the balloon of absolute state authority and to allow marginalized voices to be heard above the din of national propaganda.

To deeply evaluate this narrative disruption, consider the character of Major Mahmood, whose bureaucratic survival relies entirely on creating seamless, albeit completely fictional, case files. When Major Mahmood interrogates prisoners, he is essentially acting as a structural editor of historical testimonies. He shapes raw human agony into neatly typed reports that confirm what the high command already believes. This shows that in Hanif's universe, the state operates like a paranoid publishing house, where dissent is edited out and conformity is mass-produced. The metafictional commentary here is clear: history is not what happened, but what survived the censor's red pen. Hanif's novel acts as a systematic re-insertion of the deleted scenes of Pakistani history. By treating the dictator's private life and fears as a narrative to be picked apart, the novel breaks down the grand national narrative of stability and divine mandate, replacing it with a localized story of institutional incompetence and unbridled greed.

***“The arrival was sufficiently covert that even the air traffic controller, accustomed to the entrance of American military aircraft at unconventional times, was unaware that he was communicating with a flight of high importance. As the pilot received respectful orders, he cynically anticipated the arrival of another aircraft***



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

***carrying alcoholic beverages and pork products for the American spies stationed at the US Embassy.” (p.88)***

General Zia said that he rules Pakistan in the name of Islam and pretended himself a religious person, who followed the doctrines of Islam, then why did he show so much inclination towards the US ambassador and Bill Casey? Why the Bill is so important to Zia even though he pretends himself a religious person, then why does he shower so much importance on the non-Muslims? This is probably due to his position as a political leader and if he did not give them a response, things would become difficult for him to sustain his position. This unveils Zia's hypocrisy he was wearing a mask of religion for his own benefit. Some detractors describe General Zia as a hypocrite, portraying him as a religious person in public but behaving differently in private. These statements unequivocally

The novel utilizes a complex structural network of embedded narratives to mirror the multi-layered secrecy of the state apparatus. Within the main plot of Shigri's revenge and Zia's downfall, Hanif embeds numerous micro-stories that function as distinct structural layers. The tragic narrative of Zainab, the blind woman sentenced to stoning under the Hudood Ordinances, serves as a radical legal and moral critique embedded within the broader political text. Similarly, the meticulous narrative tracking the execution, poisoning, and loading of the mangoes transforms a regional fruit and diplomatic token into a weapon of mass destruction. Furthermore, the case files and personal journals of Colonel Shigri introduce a psychological mystery regarding the past, forcing Ali to unspool layers of military documentation to find the truth about his father. These embedded narratives function like a set of Russian nesting dolls; each story opened reveals another layer of political corruption or psychological trauma underneath. This structural design emphasizes that under a dictatorship, there is no single straightforward story. Every event is buried beneath layers of secondary narratives, cover-ups, and bureaucratic mythologies, suggesting that the ultimate truth of an authoritarian regime can only be uncovered by unpacking its institutional fictions, analyzing its structural contradictions, and reading its gaps and silences against the grain.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

### 4.3 Pastiche Analysis

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is an exceptional exercise in pastiche, characterized by the stylistic borrowing and imitation of a wide variety of literary, bureaucratic, and popular genres. Hanif seamlessly blends the conventions of the military procedural, mimicking the sterile, acronym-heavy, and disciplined jargon of air force manuals, morning drills, and security protocols, with the tense, paranoid world of the political thriller. The text incorporates the clandestine meetings, poison vials, and intelligence briefings typical of espionage fiction, but views them through the lens of absurdist satire. In doing so, Hanif draws heavily on Western postmodern classics like Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, imitating their use of grotesque exaggeration, dark humor, and surrealism to depict the madness of institutional power and autocracy. By combining these disparate styles, Hanif creates a distinct linguistic texture that is simultaneously authoritative and ridiculous, capturing the dual nature of military dictatorship as something terrifyingly powerful yet fundamentally absurd. The text acts as a site of radical genre mixing, refusing to stay within the boundaries of any single literary category. While it adopts the structural framework of detective fiction, as Ali Shigri investigates the mysterious circumstances surrounding his father's death, tracking down clues and interrogating figures from his father's past, it simultaneously operates as historical fiction, recreating the political realities of 1988 Pakistan and featuring real geopolitical crises like the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Additionally, the novel flirts with speculative elements, particularly through its depiction of chemical weapons like the invisible nerve gas VX, and the surreal description of the inner workings of *Pak One*. Woven into this hyper-militaristic setting is a subversive element of tragic romance—the unspoken, deeply felt homoerotic relationship between Ali Shigri and Cadet Obaid—which challenges the heteronormative, conservative Islamic identity mandated by the military state.

This aesthetic of pastiche allows Hanif to engage in a form of linguistic and cultural mimicry that destabilizes the authoritative discourses of the time. By imitating the hyper-masculine, nationalist rhetoric of the Pakistani military and juxtaposing it with the soft, introspective poetry of Rilke, the text creates a jarring stylistic friction. This friction exposes the internal contradictions of a



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

regime that attempts to build a pure, monolithic Islamic identity while remaining deeply dependent on American capital, Western military technology, and global networks of consumerism. The pastiche of the military manual, for instance, highlights how language can be drained of human meaning and transformed into an instrument of bureaucratic violence. When the academy guidelines describe the mechanics of discipline or the protocols of silent execution, the clinical nature of the language serves to mask the underlying horror of state terror. Hanif's genius lies in his ability to mimic this clinical language so perfectly that its inherent absurdity and cruelty become completely transparent to the academic reader.

Furthermore, Hanif includes a sharp pastiche of diplomatic communication and international relations. The scenes involving the American Ambassador, Arnold Raphel, and the broad diplomatic corps are written in a style that mimics the superficial politeness and calculated coldness of Cold War statecraft. At the July 4th party, conversations about human rights violations are casually mixed with discussions about arms deals and regional containment strategies. This stylistic choice highlights the structural hypocrisy of global powers who claim to champion democratic freedom while actively financing and legitimizing a brutal military dictatorship. By pastiching both the localized military rhetoric and the international diplomatic discourse, Hanif maps the complex network of global alliances that allowed General Zia to maintain his grip on power for over a decade. The text demonstrates that the language of global politics is a highly stylized game of mirrors, where words like alliance and security are simply placeholders for imperial expansion and resource exploitation.

***"General Zia perceives the aircraft descending, unfastens his seatbelt, and rises to a standing position. He suddenly realizes that the time has come to assert his authority and show the buggers who are in control. He believes it has been eleven years. Is it possible to govern Allah's followers for duration of eleven years without the support of Allah?" (p.358)***

Hanif engages in historical pastiche by recycling and recontextualizing the tragic, dark history of Pakistan's third martial law period into a canvas for dark comedy



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

and political satire. History is not treated as a sacred, unchangeable monument; instead, it is treated as raw material to be disassembled and reassembled. The traumatic realities of public floggings, the suppression of democratic movements, and the systemic destruction of civil society are juxtaposed with farcical depictions of General Zia's vanity, his panic over a single case of worms, and the bureaucratic incompetence of his generals. This recycling of history serves a dual purpose: it strips the dictatorial regime of its terrifying mystique by making it an object of ridicule, while simultaneously ensuring that the real horrors and victims of that regime are not forgotten by history. The novel is also woven with a dense web of intertextual references that contextualize its themes within global literature and politics. Rainer Maria Rilke is explicitly referenced through Cadet Obaid's obsession with his poetry, using those romantic, transcendent verses to escape the harsh, mechanical, and violent reality of the air force academy, setting up a stark contrast between artistic beauty and military discipline. **"Life is under the control of Allah." (p.69)** The Quran is referenced frequently and explicitly, primarily through General Zia's selective, paranoid readings. Hanif illustrates how the dictator weaponizes the sacred text, using it as an oracle to predict political betrayals or as a legislative tool to legitimize his authoritarian rule. Meanwhile, references to the *Top Gun* phenomenon and Western popular culture highlight the ideological contradictions of the era, where anti-Western, Islamist rhetoric was funded by billions of American dollars, and Pakistani cadets styled themselves after Hollywood military archetypes.

***"Life is Like That" has a brief narrative consisting of five lines about an individual." (p.51)***

The interpretation of the tale in Hanif's text is both powerful and captivating, presenting a combination of comic and tragic elements. The narrative is deeply symbolic and engages the reader, depicting life as a five-line tale within a historical context. The text effectively represents the past, with its strong dramatic elements.

The novel is a product of deep cultural pastiche, borrowing from Western postmodern literary techniques while remaining rooted in South Asian traditions of storytelling. Hanif fuses the magic realism of Latin American literature with the rich tradition of Urdu satire, political irony, and the oral storytelling styles of



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

the subcontinent. The novel incorporates localized cultural tropes—such as the profound belief in the evil eye, the cultural significance of the mango as a symbol of regional pride and diplomatic gift-giving, and the social hierarchies of the Pakistani military—and views them through a sophisticated, cynical postmodern lens. This synthesis allows Hanif to write a novel that speaks simultaneously to a global literary audience and to a local population intimately familiar with the cultural nuances and political traumas of Pakistan, transforming the regional postcolonial experience into a universally comprehensible critique of unchecked absolute power, institutional corruption, and global political hypocrisy.

The architectural integration of postmodern literary devices within Mohammed Hanif's novel allows for an original, highly sophisticated critique of power, narrative, and historical production. The systemic interaction of metafictional instability and historiographic pastiche within *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* produces a complex, highly layered postmodern representation of reality. This literary framework argues that under totalitarian rule, reality becomes a hyperreal spectacle—a simulation where the state manufactures crises, religious mandates, and historical records to maintain an illusion of absolute authority. By exposing the cracks in this simulation through dark humor, unreliable perspectives, and competing conspiracy theories, Hanif's narrative challenges both historical certainty and narrative authenticity. The novel suggests that when official history becomes a tool of systemic oppression, the radical instability of fiction becomes the ultimate space for reclaiming human memory, exposing the absurdities of absolute power, and archiving the fragmented truths of a traumatized nation. By synthesizing these elements, the text moves beyond simple parody and becomes a sophisticated interrogation of how history is written, who is allowed to write it, and how literature can act as a site of political recovery.

The first major synthesis of this study demonstrates that metafiction deliberately destabilizes narrative authority. The constant deployment of self-reflexivity, narrative instability, and unreliable narration throughout the text serves a direct political purpose. This is most vividly demonstrated in Ali Shigri's final moments aboard *Pak One*, where he realizes that his meticulous, deeply personal plot to kill the dictator using a localized, poison-tipped swagger stick is



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

completely swallowed up, rendered redundant, and obscured by multiple other, larger conspiracies unfolding in the exact same airspace, such as the gas in the mangoes, the mechanical sabotage, and the unexpected intervention of the divine crow. This structural choice reveals that individual agency is entirely compromised within a totalized military state. The narrative refuses to grant Shigri the satisfaction of a clean, heroic revenge arc, thereby mirroring the chaotic, multi-layered reality of real-world political assassinations where the truth is forever buried under state security apparatuses. This directly matches the foundational postmodern theories of Patricia Waugh, who argues that metafiction deliberately exposes the constructed nature of all texts. Hanif applies this theory politically: by exposing the novel as a construction, he exposes state history itself as a highly manufactured, weaponized fiction designed to sustain the hegemony of the ruling elite, thereby empowering the reader to question all official documentation and to recognize the structural gaps in the narratives handed down by those in power.

The second major finding illustrates how pastiche reconstructs fragmented cultural memory against state-enforced amnesia. The radical borrowing of genres and the recycling of traumatic historical events allow Hanif to bypass official censorship and to re-engage with a historical period that has been systematically sanitized by the state. This is evident in the juxtaposed depiction of the implementation of the Hudood Ordinances—specifically the absolute tragedy of the blind woman Zainab sentenced to death by stoning—with the farcical, deeply comedic domestic anxieties of General Zia-ul-Haq regarding his physical health and his interactions with the American Ambassador. By processing historical trauma through the lens of political pastiche and dark satire, Hanif does not minimize the suffering of the victims; rather, he strips the perpetrators of their dignity, authority, and historical grandeur. The terrifying apparatus of martial law is revealed to be run by deeply flawed, deeply absurd men driven by petty greeds, structural systematic incompetence, and irrational phobias. This critical move directly engages with Fredric Jameson's seminal critique of pastiche in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. While Jameson famously criticized pastiche as a "blank parody" devoid of political teeth or historical depth, Hanif subverts Jameson's definition entirely.



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

In *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, pastiche is weaponized as a profoundly political, postcolonial strategy of resistance. It uses stylistic borrowing not out of historical amnesia, but as the only viable method to reconstruct a fragmented cultural memory that has been actively erased by state censorship, proving that postmodern forms can be successfully adapted to achieve urgent postcolonial political ends and to challenge the cultural monopoly of absolute military rule.

The systemic synthesis of these literary strategies reveals that Hanif's novel does not simply look at history from a distance; it actively deconstructs the psychological infrastructure of absolute power. By making the unreliable memories of an air force officer collide with the structured, clinical paranoia of a state security state, the novel uncovers the foundational instability of the dictatorship itself. The absolute chaos that breaks out inside the cabin of *Pak One* serves as an ideal metaphor for a nation governed by competing lies and covert networks. When the pilot Obaid vanishes, when the snake poisons the system, and when the mango crates are loaded with invisible death, the entire machinery of the state collapses under the weight of its own structural secrets. This suggests that a government built on deception will eventually destroy itself from within, as the various factions of its intelligence and military apparatus turn on each other in a desperate bid for survival. When Hanif inserts figures like Osama bin Laden—referred to satirically as OBL at a high-society barbecue—or details the strategic paranoia of the CIA director, he is not merely creating historical set-pieces; he is unpacking the global network of complicity that sustained regional authoritarianism. The pastiche of corporate, diplomatic, and intelligence jargon serves to map out how global empires mask their violent, resource-driven operations behind the language of democracy, security, and holy mandate. Within this synthesis, the text demonstrates that the grand narratives of global politics are just as fabricated as the personal myths constructed by General Zia. The absolute breakdown of order inside the pressurized cabin of *Pak One* becomes a powerful, overarching metaphor for the structural collapse of a completely simulated national apparatus. By allowing the perspective of a low-ranking, traumatized air force cadet to match and dismantle the supreme state narrative of a heavily protected military dictator, Hanif's synthesis



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

ultimately redefines the postmodern novel as an active, highly disruptive archive of postcolonial survival, memory, and intellectual liberation.

Furthermore, this architectural synthesis offers an essential lesson on the relationship between postcolonial trauma and the aesthetics of the absurd. By refusing to give the reader a clean, comforting resolution or a singular villain to blame, Hanif reflects the enduring trauma of a generation that survived the Zia years. The fragmentation of the plot and the instability of the characters are not merely stylistic games; they are formal expressions of a fractured national psyche. The novel demonstrates that when a state wages war on the memory of its own citizens, the artist must use the radical instability of fiction to keep the truth alive. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* thus stands as a monument to the power of satirical resistance, showing that while dictators can control the historical record, they cannot control the subversive imagination of literature, which remains the ultimate space for reclaiming human dignity, challenging absolute authority, and exposing the internal decay of totalized power structures.

To finalize this synthesis, we can trace how the overlapping layers of pastiche and metafiction culminate in a radical democratization of the historical text. By reducing the absolute dictator to a sweating, anxious character trapped in a web of his own making, and elevating the marginalized, imprisoned cadet to the status of primary historian, Hanif completely flips the traditional hierarchies of postcolonial historiography. The academic value of this text lies in its structural demonstration that the official archive is not an absolute space of truth, but a contested zone of narrative warfare. Literature, by embracing its own status as a fiction, paradoxically becomes the only space where the absolute mechanisms of state-enforced illusions can be safely dissected, analyzed, and permanently dismantled for the contemporary reader. Extrajudicial murders, and treason without facing any legal consequences. By exposing this deep structural inequality through a cynical, satirical lens, Hanif demonstrates that the state's insistence on public piety was a calculated strategy to divert public attention away from the massive corruption and lawlessness that defined the highest levels of the military administration. Ultimately, the text positions the postmodern novel as a vital form of intellectual warfare against historical amnesia. By refusing to conform to the clean, linear requirements of traditional historical



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

fiction, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* creates an analytical space where the official myths of national identity can be safely deconstructed. The radical instability of the text, its generic flexibility, and its unrelenting use of dark humor all serve to protect the historical memory of a highly traumatized society. Hanif's narrative architectural design proves that when history becomes a lie manufactured by the powerful, the only way to recover the truth is to create a magnificent, self-conscious fiction that exposes the absolute madness of totalized power.

### 4.3 Textual Analysis

The aim of the current study is to investigate the representation of culture, history, and politics in the "Case of Exploding Mangoes. The narrative is delivered through the fictional character Ali Shigri, who tells the story of the untrustworthy leader General Zia-ul-Haq. Zia-ul-Haq manipulated his people in the name of Islam, using it as a means to maintain his political power. However, he was more concerned with his own image and personal interests rather than being genuinely religious. He would read the Holy book for the purpose of preaching, rather than seeking a true understanding of the Quran and its teachings. Hanif analyzes the previous incident involving the Army Chief General and the President of Pakistan. The analyst conducts content analysis on the data and interprets the structure of Hanif's (2008) novel.

Specific lines of the novel are selected that are closely related to the theme of history, society, and culture, demonstrating the impact of cultural context on the literary works. ***"Does he genuinely believe that using profanity towards one's mother, even when expressed with great intensity, retains any significance when you are several weeks away from the President's yearly evaluation and attaining the rank of commissioned officer?" (p.18)*** the subsequent excerpt pertains to Shigri's statement.

He employed colloquial language. The non-literary text conveys the underlying meaning of the text, even though it does not prioritize formal language. Hanif (2008) introduced these words to provide context, and readers have since been utilizing them to interpret the text more efficiently. ***"The recitation of the Quran and the performance of the national song had concluded."***



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

**(p.09)** Cultural and historical contexts are relevant to the lines that have been mentioned. At the start of each day, our culture and society put our sociocultural practices on display through the recitation of the national anthem and the Holy Book. Hanif (2008) depicts Asian culture and historical events in his co-text, and we still follow historical customs like reciting the Quran and the national anthem.

***"The room was minimally furnished with a standard wooden army-issue double bed. On one side of the bed, there was a stack of morning newspapers, and on the other side, there was a glass of milk covered with an embroidered napkin."* (p.35).**

This comment pertains to the decor of General Zia-ul-Haq's personal quarters, which serves as a manifestation of his untrustworthy leadership. The writer depicts Zia's opulent lifestyle during his time as a leader, highlighting his religious persona as a deliberate act of self-presentation.

The writer also portrays the General of the Army's private bedroom decor, revealing the hypocrisy of a leader who lives luxuriously while his people endure poverty.

***"Are you familiar with Sun Tzu's famous quote?" By exercising patience and waiting for your enemy, you have already achieved victory in half of the battle."* (p.53)**

The following lines contain code words that represent the previous world. These code words indicate that something significant has occurred, suggesting that you have already achieved a significant portion of your objective. Bannon's statement to Shigri implies that he possesses knowledge that can resolve half of Shigri's problem. Words that reflect the past can have an impact on the present and can bring about changes in the world. It implies that there are still remnants of the past that have an impact on the present. During a short interval, the image of General Zia's face is seen in the video clip, serving as the final recollection of a much photographed individual. The central split in his hair shimmers in the sunlight, his remarkably white teeth gleam, and his mustache perform its usual subtle movements for the camera, however as the camera zooms out, it becomes

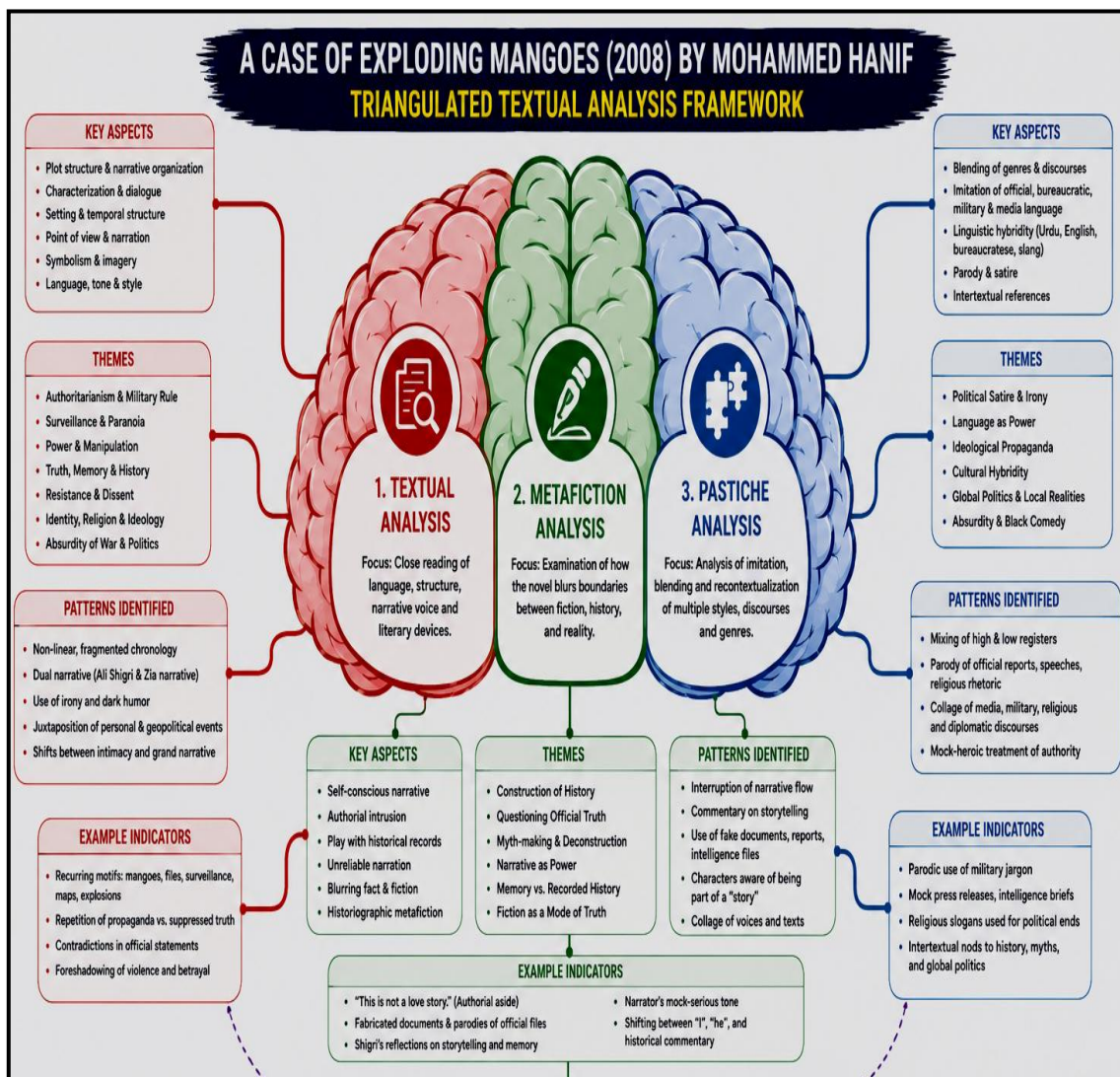


## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

evident that he is not displaying a smile. He is walking in a manner that resembles that of a constipated man. The user's text is a single page document.

Hanif (2008) portrays the past by reimagining significant moments, such as General Zia's last moments of distress and agitation. Although these moments actually occurred in the past, the writer creatively reimagines them, depicting Zia's mustache performing a small dance for the camera while he is in a state of upset. Additionally, the writer describes Zia walking with a troubled mind, comparing his movements to those of a constipated man. This obviously demonstrates that the writer is skillfully recreating historical events in the current time period through the use of innovative settings and creative techniques. These sentences embody the philosophy by recontextualizing and introducing new perspectives to the historical narrative.

***"Ensure that the hundred-rupee bills are in pristine condition." The elderly women have a strong affinity for the aroma of newly printed money. The Ministry of Social Welfare was instructed to prepare three hundred widows who were appropriately attired for the event." (p.146)***



**Figure 4. Analytical Framework**

General Zia's donations to poor widows were motivated by political considerations rather than a genuine religious perspective. Throughout history, leaders like Zia have often provided assistance to widows and orphans as a means to maintain their leadership and political conditions, rather than out of modesty and kindness. This indicates that Zia's actions were not driven by a sincere commitment to his people, but rather by a desire to secure his political position. Firstly, he stated that a donation of one hundred rupees was to be made to assist widows. Second, he brought up the fact that the gift amount was brand new as if to say that low-income widows would find the hundred rupee note neat and original. His betrayal and disloyalty are plainly shown here. The third point is that he wanted the widows to look nice, even though most widows are poor and can't afford nice clothes.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

## 5. Conclusion

The present study explored the use of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche in Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* to examine how the novel reconstructs Pakistan's political history through postmodern narrative strategies. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction and theories of pastiche within postmodern literary discourse, this research investigated the ways in which Hanif challenges official historical narratives, destabilizes notions of historical truth, and employs satire as a means of political critique. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study sought to identify the traces of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche in the selected text and to determine how these elements contribute to alternative understandings of history and power.

The findings of this research indicate that *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a significant example of contemporary Pakistani English fiction that effectively combines historical events with fictional reconstruction. Hanif revisits the controversial death of General Zia-ul-Haq and the socio-political atmosphere of his regime by intertwining factual details with imaginative speculation. Rather than presenting history as a fixed and objective reality, the novel demonstrates that historical narratives are selective, subjective, and shaped by ideological interests. By introducing multiple perspectives, conflicting accounts, and unresolved explanations regarding historical events, Hanif questions the authority of official state discourse and encourages readers to reconsider accepted versions of the past. The analysis further revealed that historiographic metafiction functions as a central narrative strategy in the novel. The text consistently blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, thereby challenging traditional distinctions between history and literature. Historical figures, documented incidents, and recognizable political contexts coexist with fictional characters and imagined scenarios. This fusion creates a narrative space where the reliability of historical representation is interrogated. The novel neither claims to reveal an absolute truth nor attempts to replace one historical narrative with another. Instead, it exposes the processes through which histories are constructed, interpreted, and legitimized. In doing so, Hanif aligns with



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Hutcheon's assertion that postmodern fiction simultaneously installs and subverts historical discourse.

Another important finding concerns the role of political pastiche in shaping the novel's critique of authoritarian power. Hanif employs parody, irony, dark humor, and the imitation of political rhetoric to depict the absurdities and contradictions embedded within dictatorial regimes. The portrayal of military institutions, intelligence agencies, religious authorities, and political elites reflects a deliberate stylistic blending that highlights the performative nature of power. Through political pastiche, the novel recreates the atmosphere of fear, manipulation, and uncertainty that characterized the period under General Zia-ul-Haq while simultaneously undermining the legitimacy of the structures being represented. The study found that pastiche in the novel is not merely decorative or playful; rather, it serves a critical function by exposing the constructed nature of political authority. Furthermore, the findings suggest that satire operates as a powerful instrument of resistance within the text. Hanif's use of humor allows him to address sensitive political issues without reducing their seriousness. Instead, satire becomes a means of confronting repression, censorship, and historical amnesia. By presenting authoritarian practices in exaggerated and often absurd forms, the novel encourages readers to recognize the inconsistencies and injustices associated with such systems. The coexistence of tragedy and comedy within the narrative reflects the complexities of postmodern representation and reinforces the idea that literature can provide alternative avenues for engaging with traumatic historical experiences.

The study also contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Pakistani English literature by demonstrating how local historical experiences can be examined through global theoretical frameworks. While previous studies on *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* have primarily focused on postcolonial resistance, dictatorship, satire, or deconstruction, this research integrated historiographic metafiction and political pastiche to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's narrative strategies. In this regard, the study addresses an important gap in existing literature and highlights the value of interdisciplinary approaches in literary analysis. Despite these contributions, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

one novel by Mohammed Hanif and relied solely on qualitative textual analysis. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all works of Pakistani fiction dealing with history and politics. Additionally, the research concentrated specifically on historiographic metafiction and political pastiche, leaving other significant dimensions of the text, such as gender representation, trauma studies, reader-response perspectives, and linguistic hybridity, beyond its scope. Future researchers may extend this line of inquiry by conducting comparative studies involving other South Asian novels that fictionalize political history. Examining the works of different Pakistani writers through the lens of historiographic metafiction could provide deeper insights into the relationship between literature and national memory. Researchers may also explore audience reception to understand how readers interpret alternative historical narratives presented in fiction. Moreover, combining postmodern approaches with postcolonial, feminist, or cultural memory theories may generate richer interpretations of texts that engage with contested histories. In conclusion, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* emerges as a compelling literary intervention that challenges dominant narratives of Pakistan's political past. Through the use of historiographic metafiction and political pastiche, Mohammed Hanif reveals the instability of historical truth and exposes the ideological mechanisms through which power seeks to define collective memory. The novel invites readers not only to question what they know about history but also to consider who has the authority to narrate it. By foregrounding ambiguity, multiplicity, and critical reflection, Hanif transforms fiction into a space for historical inquiry and political resistance. Consequently, this study affirms that postmodern narrative techniques possess significant potential for illuminating the intersections of history, literature, and power within contemporary Pakistani fiction.

### References

- Assmann, A. (2011). *Cultural memory and Western civilization: Functions, media, archives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Barry, P. (2017). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (4th ed.). Manchester University Press.



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. Fontana Press.
- Bertens, H. (1995). *The idea of the postmodern: A history*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Childs, P. (2005). *Modernism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Currie, M. (1995). *Metafiction*. Longman.
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary theory: An introduction* (25th Anniversary ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Hanif, M. (2008). *A case of exploding mangoes*. Jonathan Cape.
- Hassan, I. (1987). *The postmodern turn: Essays in postmodern theory and culture*. Ohio State University Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.
- Hutcheon, L. (1989). *The politics of postmodernism*. Routledge.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Duke University Press.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction*. Routledge.
- Nicol, B. (2009). *The Cambridge introduction to postmodern fiction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nünning, A. (2004). Where historiographic metafiction and narratology meet. *Style*, 38(3), 352–375.
- Onega, S., & Landa, J. A. G. (Eds.). (1996). *Narratology: An introduction*. Longman.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1). University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan, M.-L. (2004). *Narrative across media: The languages of storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Sim, S. (Ed.). (2001). *The Routledge companion to postmodernism*. Routledge.
- Stam, R., Burgoyne, R., & Flitterman-Lewis, S. (1992). *New vocabularies in film semiotics: Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond*. Routledge.



## Vol. 4 No. 3 (March) (2026)

Waugh, P. (1984). *Metafiction: The theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*.

Routledge.

White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

White, H. (1987). *The content of the form: Narrative discourse and historical representation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.