



The Ideological Ranting in the Debut Novels of the Contemporary Pakistani Writers

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ABSTRACT

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People believe that ideologies work for their betterment by showing them a path of prosperity. However, they fail to understand the consequences of blindly following a specific ideology. In their debut novels, the contemporary writers of Pakistan depict the working of one of these ideologies: religion. The present study aims to analyze the projection and exploitation of power in the name of religion: how people suffer for the sake of faith, and the manipulation that follows it in these selected novels: *The Prisoner*, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *How it Happened*, and *Agency Rules*. The study also highlights the link between religious ideology and the conditioning of the minds of people. The analysis takes place in the light of Marxist theory. The study discovers the role of religious ideology in overpowering helpless people with the belief that following a certain path will reward them in life after death.

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1. Introduction

Having faced several obstacles, Pakistani Literature today is not confined to the country only, but is immensely read all around the world. This way it spreads a diverse image of Pakistan, which was previously overshadowed by a sort of radical fundamentalism. To raise their voices for those who are silenced, the Pakistani writers try to convey an underlying message. The study explores the work of four Pakistani contemporary writers and their first work that mostly revolves around the same theme of exploitation of undesirable ideology. The writers and novels chosen are Khalid Muhammad's *Agency Rules*, Shazaf Fatima Haider's *How it Happened*, Omar Shahid Hamid's *The Prisoner*, and Muhammad Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*.

Ideologies that are considered favorable for the people are undesirable in reality. They cause harm to the proletariat and are beneficial for the bourgeois. Ideologies have existed for centuries only to be used by the rich and powerful people so they can rule the poor. These selected writers highlight the suppression of the weak, middle and lower classes that are easily manipulated emotionally and physically in the name of some ideology. They later suffer the ills of these manipulations economically, socially, culturally, and politically. This way, the poor class is left with nothing while the influential class is still hungry for more power. The ideologies are a part of people's life through constant conditioning. The conditioning happens at different levels of their life, starting from the beginning years till their very last breath. The conditioning takes place socially and culturally. Through social conditioning, people care more about how society perceives certain situations and not what is good for them. Cultural conditioning plays a vital role since childhood which explains specific views and living conditions of some people.

Countless people blindly follow the religious ideology without questioning the authenticity of what it preaches. People follow any religious scholar or any religious saying without questioning its validity. That is how they are easily used by those who know how to

use faith for the sake of their own advantage. A practical way for people who share the same set of beliefs is to follow a common religion. Grouping together as one helps achieve all the positive outcomes that a religion requires. Although the use of religion is mostly for a good cause, some extremists end up working in defective ways resulting in harmful outcomes (Burrowes, 2020). Exploitation through religion has been part of the world for many years. People fight wars and one another because they believe they will get rewarded for it. In reality, they are only fighting people like themselves who are the target of constant exploitation and will gain nothing. Religion often claims to spread messages of peace and harmony while paradoxically it is being used as an ideology causing the major divides.

2. Literature Review

Different critics have observed the said works of the selected writers from various points of view and positions. Momina Hafeez reads *The Prisoner* from an anarchist perspective highlighting the role state plays against the political violence faced by those trying to disrupt the peace. Hafeez mainly reads the novel from the perspective of anti-state violence and state repression, stressing the episodes of state employee's rebellion, the challenges faced by those in uniform, and how proletariats are the biggest victim of the anti-state activities (Hafeez, 2019). Raj Walli Khan reads the novel *Agency Rules* from the linguistic viewpoint. He emphasizes the mixture of two languages and the author presents a unique picture of Pakistani culture (Khan et al.). Nayyab (2018) analyzes *how it happened?* in the light of patriarchal theory, breaking down how women face oppression not only by men but also by women of their own house and the society. In Asian countries, women sometimes overshadow and silence other women because that is how they are brought up in a male dominant society. Nayyab (2018) also discusses the abuse of platonic love by older women of the house in order to get what they want. Zainab Akbar explores the text with the theory of intertextuality. She finds how readers are able to sketch a vivid picture in their mind because of it. With this, the writer is successfully able to deliver the intended message (Akbar). Iqbal (2015) studies *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* from a new-colonial perspective highlighting how the author of the novel brings the glorious status of the ex-President down by presenting him as a scared fool who fears his life and only wants to hold power. He explores the novel, keeping in view the comprador class in the postcolonial Pakistan. He further clarifies the use of ideologies by Zia and the national issues he ignored while his only focus was to present himself as a saint.

Most of the critics focus on the religious ideology and its exploitation by both the state, and anti-state highlighting how it is used to cover up sins and to impose power upon people in the places it is least needed. The critics listed above have approached these texts from varied perspectives ranging from political, feminist approaches to neo-colonial discursive practices. The researchers have brought forth a unifying approach based on Marxist concept of Ideology and the role it plays in these stories. In this way, these novels can also be read from a singular perspective which adds another dimension to the understanding of these texts that is absent in the above mentioned examples. It is noteworthy that although Pakistani fiction, along with the fiction from the other South Asian countries, has been on the rise in academia as part of the postcolonial studies project, its critical reception is somewhat limited because of this categorization at the same time. In order to highlight different literary achievements of Pakistani writers, it is necessary to introduce more literary approaches to their texts.

3. Research Methodology

The current study is based upon the detailed analysis of *Agency Rules*, *The Prisoner*, *How it happened?* And *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* in the light of Marxist theory. Marxism is a vast theory. The current study focuses on an underlying ideology of religion, highlighted in the Marxist theory that makes the poor believe they will be rewarded in life after death for sacrificing their lives for a religious cause. The primary source of research is the chosen novels, and the secondary sources consist of articles, websites, and critical responses. The paper uses APA formatting of referencing. The content of all four texts is deeply analyzed and is read in the light of the working of religious ideology.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Karl Marx emphasized on the importance of religion in an ordinary person's life. Religion gives people a purpose for living and enduring the miserable conditions they live in. Religion helps practice patience and tolerance, something everyone needs to survive in a world full of power-hungry people. It has been used by the powerful people to manipulate the poor and weak class by showing them dreams of a good after-life. In return, they ask them to sacrifice everything they own, sometimes their lives and sometimes their homes. It is a belief system that consists of faith in God, the system of norms, method of worship, and devotion. That is pretty much similar to what ideology is like. Just like any other ideology, religion has a set of views that people following it respect and there are certain rules imposed on the followers that no matter what happens they are not allowed to break. The discrimination and prejudice caused by religion promote the role of ideology. Religion, when mixed with patriotism, can make people sacrifice their lives without having a second thought.

Religion is a vital aspect of the political world. The effects it has on social, political, cultural, and economic growth are huge. It often helps strengthen certain ideologies and positions of those already in power ("Political Factor"). The dominating powers sometimes use religion to bring a social, cultural, economic, or even political change, hence further exploiting the emotions of those devoted to their religion.

Muhammad's first novel is a spy thriller with some elements of realism where the writer depicts the influence of upper-class people and misuse of their power against those who just want to follow a simple life. The use of religious ideology highlighted by the author shows the real image of the world that is hidden behind the mask of goodwill and hope for prosperity. Religious ideology is more about manipulation than good faith. Poor people fight in the name of God against their own men because they have been conditioned to believe that those whom they fight are standing against their religion. What poor people fail to realize is that the rich are using them for their personal gain. The killing of fellow Muslims will not get them to heaven at the end of the day. The dominating figures tend to brew hate in the minds of their followers that make them go against their own kind while they sit back and enjoy the downfall of the poor who are fighting one another instead of the power that exploits them. These people fail to realize that a fight against innocents can never be in the name of faith. Religion is used by powerful people to project hate in the minds of the poor and weak. This way the poor will help them gain more power by fighting wars. While the poor lose their life, the powerful get more control. The religion of Islam preaches peace, love, and harmony, whereas today, it is used by leading people to infuse hate against others.

Kamal Khan, the protagonist of the novel, goes on an undercover mission to carry out an investigation in the training camps of the militants. He observes the blind faith people had on those leading them. So much hate has been permeated in their minds that they were ready to sacrifice their lives on one call. The Imam of the people, Shahid, develops a liking towards Khan and asks him to join them on one of his sermons. There he preaches nothing but hate towards what he calls the 'unfaithful' because according to him people working for the state have forgotten the real teachings of Islam. Shahid addresses the crowd saying his sole purpose in life is to bring "Pakistan back to the fold of Islam and away from the Western *dajjals* that are trying to destroy it" (Muhammad, 2014, p. 94). The response of people that follow his wordings shows how his purpose of spreading the ideology of hate and violence has successfully reached their minds. Most of the Muslims do not read the Holy Quran themselves. This makes them rely on all the information and sometimes misinformation provided by the self-proclaimed religious scholars, Imams, and Maulanas (Lasson, 2005, p. 14). Instead of preaching the true message of Islam, the religious scholars, with huge followings, use their position to create hype for the individuals for their ulterior motives such as terrorist activities.

The real value and holding of the religion keep vanishing with each passing day. What takes over is the false stands the so-called religious scholars make their followers take in the name of religion. Muhammad further elaborates on the incorrect concept of jihad that has ruined many lives of those who do it without any questions. He also sheds light on those lives that are lost because 'some' people blame others for being 'unfaithful' to their religion. Khan, during his undercover mission, finds a lot of young men training in 'jihadi camps' where they are taught how to fight, and use weapons. Such places have good food, transport, and medical facilities as well, which makes the funding evident. The funds come from those who want to destroy the peace of the world and use the religious followers for their purpose, "The valley

filled with jihadi chants” (Muhammad, 2014, p. 119). These young men, with the help of religious ideology, live with the belief that jihad will get them to Jannah’ one day. The hate speech infused in their minds leads them to a path of cruelty and hatred. It comes with a purpose to create a place for detestation through misleading information provided to make people act on forbidden grounds (Edge, p. 282). Pakistan’s history shows how the religious masses have done more damage to the country than good. These religious masses are one of the reasons why Pakistan is misunderstood as a terrorist state. The involvement of the religious extremists leaves a bad image of Pakistan internationally.

The jihadists believe Muslim countries have lost their true spirits because of the Western influence. These people assume that the Muslims are constantly repressed by the West and have no strength to fight for themselves or their religion. Jihadists, thus, conclude ‘jihad’ remains the only way to bring back the Muslims who have lost their way. Mufti Fazal, in a sermon, addresses his followers, “You are the ones that will bring Islam back from the infields in Muslim countries that have sold our lands to kafirs” (Muhammad, 2014, p. 120). His speech increases the spirits and chants of the crowd in front of him. The Mufti successfully infuses the ideology of hatred in these young men by using religion to get them to a path that will only lead to catastrophe for all but will be beneficial for him. Normal people, having typical lives are converted into religious fanatics but the problem does not lie in them following a religion. The problem arises when people with no coherent knowledge of religion are used solely for personal gains. The idea of the battlefield in the Sanctuary is all young men fighting one another and then the best of them getting chosen for the job. These young men are exploited in the name of religion. They are encouraged to fight each other which not only raises competition but also jealousy. They are willing to stand against their own men to secure their place in the eyes of the people observing them from the top.

Hamid in his novel *The Prisoner* brings to light the religious ideology that disrupts peace in people’s lives. As the story unfolds, the narrator describes the events revolving around a policeman and his life in one of the biggest cities of Pakistan. The protagonist, Constantine, is a Christian. The writer shows the hardships someone belonging to a minority has to go through in a country with one major religion. The novel shows how religion is used to make people believe that their current living condition is a test from God, this way, these people never try to change their lives for the better as they live with the certainty that it is what they deserve. Religious people and places are used, mostly, for the sake of illegal activities instead of spreading the message of peace. After taking over the control of Karachi, the United Force’s ward bosses look for a place to open their camps where all the unethical activities will be planned and carried on. One of the ward bosses opens his office at a deserted school and “they called it the Haji Camp” (Hamid, 2013, p. 43). UF uses it for the sake of their politics to promote the message that whoever leaves the camp alive will be compensated by God. It shows how religion is used only to get people on a specific side; it is never for a good cause.

The sufferings of minorities in a single majority country are not hidden from anyone. While most people respect diverse religions, there are those who make it the goal of their lives to not let anyone with a different set of beliefs live in peace. Not only in Pakistan, but religious minorities live in fear all around the world, facing several hazards. The increased attacks on their places of worship indicate the barbarity faced for following a different belief system which ends in driving them away from their homes (Jain, 2019). Constantine is a Christian living in a Muslim majority country. Although he is well respected at his workplace and does not encounter many problems, there are times when he fears extremists. Soon after getting involved in the missing American journalist’s case, Constantine starts fearing for his and his family’s life. The people responsible for the kidnapping of the American do it solely because they are unable to accept a white person on their land, believing they have suffered enough because of them. The jihadists, when on a mission, do not care about anything and crush anyone who tries to come in their way, “A man with no hope is a man with no fear” (Hamid, 2013, p. 62). These kinds of people do not understand anything if they set their minds to destroy someone. Anyone who is not from their religion is a kafir for them and they take upon themselves to remove all the kafirs from their pure land. These people have no real awareness of the religion, they normally present a choice for their supporters, and either they die a glorious death as a hero or die knowing they are incompetent. That is how their training leads

them to the path of violence. Constantine, too, would be a non-believer in their eyes plus, he is a police officer, so his involvement in the case puts his life in jeopardy.

In order to get on the right path of religion, people need to find the right people, but on this quest for righteousness, people encounter more evil than good. Wajahat, a now spy working for Constantine, tells him how he decided to change and take the peaceful path of religion. The last time he went to jail, the Mullahs he met there had nothing to do with peace and everything to do with filling their own pockets. They manipulate the emotional value religion holds in people's life as a key to their success because "these mullahs are hardly God's chosen ones" (Hamid, 2013, p. 113) These Mullahs are usually the ones who make people stand against their own government. They make them think the government wants to stop them from advancing in their mission, so it is the duty of the people to not let the government win, even if they have to initiate violence. Their followers then seize rich masjids from rival sects because it is never about religion, but it has always been about money and power. It is only business for these people at the end of the day.

Ideologies tend to make a certain group of people feel superior than others. The superiority complex comes from conditioning individuals over the years both intentionally and unintentionally, that leads to emotional and sometimes physical harm. Islam, a single religion, is further divided into different sects by the people themselves. A person who belongs to a specific sect has different takes and views on the religion, which also results in them disliking one another that further cause disputes within the religion. Pakistan is a Sunni majority country which makes the Shia feel left out of everything, giving them the idea that their lives are in constant danger. Pakistan has been facing this problem of the Sunni-Shia dispute for years. Their principles often last only on the surface: people practice festivals or memorial rites in a certain way or marry into the same sect for reasons of solidity. Haider perfectly writes her novel from the Shia perspective, how the constant Shia-Sunni fight has damaged the young generations, how families have broken for this reason, and how the hate is not getting them anywhere. Many Shia, around the country, complain of rising anti-Shia militant groups that target not only their place of worship but also pull the leg of those making a living by discriminating against them (Abbas, 2010, p. 9). One of Dadi's sons, Fareed, ends up falling in love with a Sunni girl who is not acceptable to Dadi. She wants him to leave the girl who she thinks wants to take her precious son away from her and exists for ulterior motives. Saleha narrates how "they wanted my uncle to 'convert' before he could marry their daughter" (Haider, 2012, p. 14). The statement shows how the feeling of hate is mutual on both sides. The Sunnis cannot accept a Shia son-in-law as well, so he needs to change his beliefs in order for them to accept him. These inherent beliefs do not help as a foundation for relations when one of them is more dominant over the other. These beliefs generally retreat against modernist ideas letting for more social mixing. Hatred for one another is so deeply rooted in people belonging to both the sects that even if they are on good terms, they will avoid getting intermingled at all costs, but there are always exceptions.

Similarly, Zeba attracts a lot of proposals when the Bandian family starts looking for a suitor. One of her first proposals is by a Sunni woman who wants Zeba to meet her son at a wedding. She develops an instant liking towards her and wants to talk to Zeba's family. To this Zeba's aunt says, "You simply must produce one Shia relative so that I can convince Zeba's father to approve the match" (Haider, 2012, p. 131). Upon finding that Zeba is a Shia, she gets angry for her not mentioning it before because there is no way she will get her son married in a Shia family. This shows the inborn hate both sects hold for one another and, how they are willing to sacrifice good things to keep their heads up high. Religion preaches equality while it is used to infuse hate in people's minds. There is no restriction for women to follow the same sect as her husband in Islam. She is allowed to convert or not according to her wish ("Inter-Religious Marriage"). All the complications and restrictions which arise today are fabrications. Zeba then ends up falling for a Sunni man, Omer, just like her uncle. Dadi again stands against the relation and disapproves of it saying, there is no match between a Shia and a Sunni. She also blames Zeba's best friend saying, "Typical Sunni thing to do, to help your friend to indulge in indecency during Moharram" (Haider, 2012, p. 202). Dadi puts the whole blame on her friend because she is a Sunni and, later shifts her anger towards Omer for deceiving her innocent granddaughter. The belief that Sunni wants to damage their heritage and take their new generation on the immoral path is what makes them hate each other even

more. People keep losing patience, acceptance, and tolerance, which is why they consider inter-sect marriages to be nothing but a grave sin.

In his work Hanif, too, shows the working of religious ideology and its impact. The novel shows how religion is used for the sake of exploitation. People are emotionally blackmailed into doing things that can never be justified, for the sake of religion. Zia, in his eleven years rule, uses religion for the exploitation of power and instead of letting people decide for themselves what they want; he inflicts religious beliefs on them. He forces them to change their lifestyle according to it, in order to show who has the power. The Zia-brand of religion faces blackish from several areas, but he represses all the voices that are raised against him.

Zia conditions people through different forms of media to indicate that religion is for their own good. The obligation later results in many people spilling hate against those belonging to minorities, and leaving them with no rights. Over the years, the government pressed certain religious beliefs over people and restricted freedom of religion by favoring certain religious ideology ("Religious Restrictions"). This certainly leads to bigger problems for the minorities. Shigri recalls how one of the drill commanders before him was 'drummed out' because he was a non-Muslim. Tony Sign, a passionate person, part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's Air force, is asked to leave because it is unacceptable for some people to have a non-Muslim among them. This episode was a result of the hatred enforced into people's minds against the non-Muslims. Shigri, before his encounter with Tony Singh, remembers hearing the name Tony that was his neighbor's dog and muses, "I thought the Partition took care of all the Tonys and Singhs, but apparently some didn't get the message" (Hanif, 2008, p. 20). The ignorance of the characters is shown here and how the minorities are depicted in a certain way and are judged on the basis of their religion and not on the hard work and passion they hold for their country.

The novel, then, uncovers Zia's double face. Everyone sees Zia imposing religious values and making people follow Islam forcefully while he has different ways of handling everything for himself. The man who preaches Islam and its values everywhere is impressed by almost every other woman. During an interview by an American journalist published in Pakistani newspapers one day, Zia can be seen staring at the reporter inappropriately and he is same man who "fired judges and television newscasters who refused to wear a *dupatta* on their heads" (Hanif, 2008, p. 117). Because of the 'Hudood Ordinance' women were socially numb, which would prevent them from tracking their rights as equal members of a society under a stricter version of Islam while Zia went around the world happily willing to be interviewed by a woman who did the exact the opposite of what he preaches ("Pakistan Woman's Crusade"). Zia not only religiously suppresses people but also suppresses women through patriarchal beliefs.

5. Findings

The preoccupation with the religious ideology, of these different writers from different social standing, in their debut novels, reflect that these writers not only recognize the dominating influence of the religious ideology in the life of common man but also are a severe critic of the damages it has done to the social fabric of the country. Another, consensus that these writers have unconsciously build up in their respective narratives is that none of them attacked religious belief system rather they exposed the exploitative tactics of the power brokers and the dangers of maintaining religious ideology in public life. It also shows that, these writers while working on the subject matter for their first stories find it impossible to ignore the presence of religious ideology in Pakistani society. Therefore, it points out that the chief interest of these writers was to depict social and political reality and to present a true picture of Pakistani society to the readers at home and abroad.

6. Conclusion

These writers highlight the damage religious ideology has done to people and society. Muhammad, in his novel, shows how religious extremists have been raising a whole army of theirs who are conditioned to believe that the state is anti-religious, and in order to get it back on track, people need to die. Hamid, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the difficulties faced by minorities in a single religious majority country. Even people with good intentions are

labeled as traitors and will get punished both physically and emotionally. Haider, in her work, elaborates the inter-religion disputes caused by the emergence of several sects. Under the roof of a single religion, the differences still reside. People from different sects, with slightly different beliefs, find it hard to accept the other. These differences only create problems for the new generations who fail to understand the depth of the problem and want to let go of the conditioning based on sects. Hanif's novel explains that when religion is mixed with politics and power, it loses its real purpose. These Pakistani writers, in their debut novels, manifest the nexus of religious ideology and power.

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