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## EXPLORING NOSTALGIC RITUALS AND IRONIC DIMENSIONS IN HANIF QURESHI'S *A CASE OF EXPLODING MANGOES*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the concepts of irony and nostalgia from a postmodern perspective. Hanif's novel A Case of Exploding Mangoes, presents irony and nostalgia in a fresh and postmodern way. The novel exposes the ironic nature of Pakistani politics and the nostalgic aspects of societal relationships. The research aims to delve deeper into the influence of General Zia's imperialistic mindset on politics and the impact of postmodernism on human emotions and relationships, which involve various perceptions of reality, interpretations, and reinterpretations. This research is descriptive in nature and the data is analyzed using theoretical frameworks based on Linda Hutcheon's article, "Irony, Nostalgia, and Postmodernism: A Dialogue," which explores irony and nostalgia from a new and unique perspective. The research investigates how our perceptions and perspectives on different aspects of life change over time, using postmodern irony and nostalgia as examples. The article concludes that while people may consciously reject the past, nostalgia is deeply felt and people unconsciously idealize the perfection of the past. In the current scenario, people are more prone to irony due to increased competition and a desire for ostentatious displays. The research also uncovers hidden realities of Pakistani politics.*

**KEY WORDS:** Irony, Nostalgia, Society, Politics, Pakistan.

### Introduction

Irony has been used in literature for a long time, with different meanings and styles. It's when what's said or shown is different from what's meant or happening. The origin of irony goes back to ancient Greek times, where it meant hypocrisy or pretended ignorance. It's a literary technique where what appears on the surface is different from the reality. Irony can be divided into different categories, like verbal irony (when someone says something but means something else), dramatic irony (when the audience knows something the characters don't), and situational irony (when the situation turns out differently than expected). Shakespeare's plays are great examples of all three types of irony, with characters saying one thing but meaning another, unexpected twists in the plot, and characters playing diplomatic roles. Irony adds depth and complexity to literature.

### Literature Review

In the postmodern context, irony is often referred to as post-irony. It involves bitterly mocking something and not taking it seriously, while also taking something that isn't serious very seriously. Post-irony combines elements of absurdity and treating serious issues lightly. For example, in Virginia Woolf's novel "To the Lighthouse," the death of a character is described in just one line. Postmodern irony incorporates humor and absurdity. Some people mistakenly believe that irony has ended in postmodernism, but according to Hutcheon, there is more irony now. It's not the end of irony, but rather an excess of it, which is referred to as the doubling of irony. Postmodernism sees irony as the connection between what is said and what is unsaid. Irony is often used in politics because it deals with diplomacy. Hanif uses irony to convey social and political behavior in society. In Hanif's novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, the character of General Zia is portrayed as ironic. He uses Islam to gain publicity and present himself as a

devout and perfect Muslim. However, behind his religious façade, he dreams of ruling the Islamic world. Hanif skillfully combines humor and satire in depicting this irony at its highest level.

When it comes to nostalgia, it's the longing for the past, the attachment to past moments and memories. Throughout different periods, nostalgia has had various definitions. In ancient Greece, it referred to the longing for homecoming, as soldiers were often away from their families during war. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was seen as a painful emotion and even considered a psychological problem. Some modern studies criticize nostalgia, suggesting that modernism encourages people to focus on the present and future rather than dwell on the past. However, many still find comfort and value in reflecting on the past. Postmodern nostalgia can be seen as a type of ironic nostalgia. People may claim not to be nostalgic, but deep down, they idealize the past and long for its perfection. In the postmodern era, people experience disruptions and uncertainties in their lifestyles, leading them to long for the past nostalgically, even if they appear to neglect it. Hutcheon categorized nostalgia into positive, negative, and imperial nostalgia. Positive nostalgia involves viewing the past in a glorious light and cherishing sweet memories. Negative nostalgia, on the other hand, involves seeing the past as bad, filled with painful memories. Imperial nostalgia combines both positive and negative aspects, particularly in postcolonial contexts, where colonizers may idealize the power of the colonized while also rejecting their cruel actions. General Zia's character in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* exemplifies ironic nostalgia in its truest form.

## Research Objectives

- To highlight the socio-political issues in the selected text
- To present the irony and state of nostalgia in the novel
- To inquire about the Western approach towards Pakistani culture and politics

## Research Questions

1. How has Hanif Qureshi presented the collective dimensions of nostalgic rituals and irony in his novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*?
2. How has Hanif Qureshi projected the social and political behavior in Pakistani society?

## Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. Hutcheon's concept of irony and nostalgia forms the basis of this research. The research aims to analyze and evaluate selected novels using the elements of irony and nostalgia at a formal level. It explores how these features are used in Hanif's work to highlight themes such as the sociological understanding of nostalgic expressions in late-modern Western culture. The research fills two gaps in existing studies on nostalgia by examining its experiential and collective dimensions and proposing a sociological framework to analyze nostalgic rituals in Pakistani culture and politics. The first part of the research discusses various approaches to nostalgia, while the second part delves into the complex emotional aspects and identifies three types of nostalgia in a postmodern setting. In summary, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of nostalgia and challenge the predominantly negative assessment of it in a postmodern context. In this research, the main focus is on exploring Hutcheon's concept of ironic nostalgia. The study examines how irony has evolved and gained popularity in pop culture, reaching a point where some even declared it to be the "end of Irony." This declaration came about particularly after the

tragic events of 9/11, where some critics felt that irony had no place in such a serious and devastating situation. However, it is important to note that irony is a powerful literary device that may ebb and flow in popularity but always finds its way back. The research aims to delve into the concept of ironic nostalgia and its relevance in contemporary culture.

## Textual Analysis

Hanif's novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, is well-known for its use of irony and the portrayal of General Zia as a nostalgic figure. The novel incorporates elements such as comic language, black humor, and socio-political issues to enhance the narrative. Hanif, as a Pakistani novelist and experienced analyst, aims to bring this fusion of nostalgia and irony to a global audience by using the Pakistani backdrop. The story revolves around General Zia, the real-life president of Pakistan, depicted as a paranoid character. The narrator, an officer in the Pakistani Air Force, seeks revenge for his father's death, which was believed to be a suicide but was a murder orchestrated by Zia. The novel's pivotal event is General Zia's tragic death in a plane crash, surrounded by various stories and rumors. Hanif deliberately selects one of these stories, which appears incredibly realistic. In the novel, Hanif skillfully exposes the political aspects and bitter reality of dictatorship, showcasing how dictators can devastate a country. He peels back the beautiful façade surrounding General Zia's death to reveal the harsh truth beneath, much like Saadat Hassan Manto, who unveiled the true face of society by exposing hidden facts. Hanif Qureshi exposes the ironies of Zia's personality and presents the real face of Zia to the world. "Characterization is the key aspect of the mass appeal to enlighten and empower the women in their society that constructs the meaning, and norms and exercises them" (Zubair, 2020)

Postmodern irony in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* creates a unique blend of what is said and unsaid, blurring the lines between seriousness and humor. The novel delves into various political issues, as it is often said that politics and irony go hand in hand. General Zia ul Haq, the dictator of Pakistan, is a prime example of an ironic character. He presents himself as sincere and patriotic, but his actions and words are driven by personal gain rather than the country's welfare. While he claims to love Islam and desires a pure Islamic country, he manipulates religion for his benefit, distorting its true essence. After the plane crash that took General Zia's life, Shigri recounts that the general's body was wrapped in a flag and given a military burial with strict instructions not to open the coffin. However, the irony lies in the fact that there were rumors that the shroud contained only fragments and remains, casting doubt on whether the buried bones belonged to Zia or someone else. While the government declared ten days of mourning for Zia's death, there was no mention of the other generals, pilots, and crew members who also perished in the crash. It's ironic how the high-ranking officers were overlooked in favor of Zia. Another irony is that Zia, who loved being photographed for his televised speeches, was so damaged and disfigured that he couldn't even be shown on TV. He was hastily wrapped in a coffin and buried without his face being seen by his loved ones. Zia's behavior regarding the prayer mat gifted by the Saudi prince was quite ironic. The mat was a luxurious piece, adorned with gold thread and a gold compass pointing towards the Kaaba in Mecca. It's funny how Zia, who claimed to be a devout Muslim, would use such an extravagant prayer mat. Islam emphasizes simplicity and modesty, so, ironically, Zia couldn't offer his prayers on a simple mat. When General Zia died in the plane crash, it's ironic how he was pointing towards Mecca in the air. Despite using a prayer mat adorned with gold, when he passed away, nothing of his body could be found.

It's interesting how Zia mentioned the gold compass on his prayer mat, joking that he could fly to Mecca like Aladdin. The irony lies in the fact that he was literally in the air when he died. Additionally, Zia portrayed himself as a dedicated Muslim, but his actions, like going to the mosque without changing his uniform, seemed more about showcasing his power and authority. Religion held a significant role in Zia's rule. In those lines, Hanif is highlighting the irony in General Zia's actions. Zia portrayed himself as a devout Muslim by kissing the Quran keeping it on the shelf, and even enforcing strict rules on dress and behavior.

However, behind closed doors, Zia was not as virtuous as he appeared. Hanif describes a scene where Zia enters his room and sees his wife lying with her backside towards him, implying a lustful nature. This contrast between Zia's public image and his private behavior adds to the irony surrounding his religious authority and power. It's ironic how Zia presented himself as a religious man, but in reality, he had lustful tendencies. He took pride in his religious practices, like performing ablution in the morning and praying throughout the day with the same ablution. However, his thoughts were often impure, even when he was receiving medical treatment for worms. Zia's inappropriate behavior extended to his interactions with others, such as his interest in the foreign minister's wife and attempting to make advances towards her without the minister's knowledge. It's quite ironic that Zia, who claimed to be religious, would have such lustful desires. Zia's so-called "President's Rehabilitation Program for Widows" was a deceptive move. Instead of helping widows, Zia organized this program as a mere show-off. He wanted to regain attention and be seen as charitable, even though the amount distributed was a mere hundred rupees. It's ironic how Zia tried to use this charity as a way to gain publicity and portray himself as a caring leader, but it was ultimately just a shallow gesture. The women who attended the program, despite their poverty, made an effort to dress up for the occasion. Zia's officers were supposed to collect three hundred widows, but they only managed to gather two hundred and forty-three. Some women even came from the parliament just to meet the required number.

The backdrop banner mocked the rehabilitation program, which involved distributing one hundred rupee notes to the widows. Zia was more concerned with the newness and appearance of the notes rather than the significance of the money. He interacted with each woman, asking about their health, not out of genuine courtesy but to showcase himself to the world. Everything was being recorded for television broadcast because Zia loved being in photos and appearing on TV. Meanwhile, the First Lady arrived at the camp and joined the queue, covering her face with a dupatta. The other women whispered about her, noticing that she was wearing gold and standing among the widows. It's ironic how Zia, who portrayed himself as a man of faith and truth, was playing a loose character by pretending to be a caring president. While all of this was happening, the First Lady entered the camp where her husband was pretending to be the president. It's ironic how he portrayed himself as a man of faith and truth, but he was playing a loose character. The First Lady covered her face with a dupatta and stood in the queue with the widows. People started whispering about her, noticing that she was wearing gold and standing among the widows. She then revealed that she wasn't a widow, but separated from her husband. She removed her earrings and gave one to a lady and a necklace to another.

There was a commotion as people realized that a woman was distributing gold. This situation prevented Zia from asking the cameramen to stop broadcasting. When Zia saw his wife standing there, he noticed that she was striking her glass-bungled wrists

together, a gesture that women usually do when they hear news of their husband's death. This statement proves the irony of Zia's actions. He only cared about building a good reputation and had no concern for the people's feelings. Hanif does a great job of highlighting the democratic issues in the country through the sub plot of the novel. It's really sad to see innocent people like Ali Shigri being investigated by Zia's Army without any wrongdoing. That quote you mentioned, "You want freedom and they give you chicken Korma," is so powerful. It's ironic how when you're in prison, all you crave is freedom, but instead, they give you something as trivial as chicken Korma. It's a metaphor for how the government tries to distract people from their desire for true freedom. Zia may be free, but the rest of the nation is trapped in psychological prisons. It's a thought-provoking portrayal of the struggles faced by the people.

## Findings

It's like when you don't believe in certain traditions from the past and you don't really like them, but somehow they still influence our lives today, both consciously and unconsciously. Back in the day, people were more superstitious, but even in modern times, we still have our own superstitions, even if we hide them from others. Hanif explores this element of superstition in the case of Blind Zainab. Superstition used to be a strong tradition in the past, but nowadays, people don't believe in it. Instead, they label it as absurdity or magical realism. It's interesting how Hanif uses this fictional parody where Zainab's curses actually come true, just like in those old Greek tragedies like Oedipus Rex. In the opening of the play, there were famines, fires, and plagues as the effects of a curse. It's like history repeating itself, right? Curses coming true was a common thing in the past. It's like Hanif is bringing back that old tradition of curses, maybe because he's nostalgic about Greek tragedies and that time period. In King Lear, Shakespeare also starts the play with curses from the king towards his daughter. It's like Hanif is keeping that tradition alive in his way. Zainab's curses in the story also come true, just like in those old tragedies. It's kind of ironic how fate can be so cruel to those who deserve it. Hanif's storytelling really shows us how postmodern people can be ironically nostalgic.

Linda Hutcheon's perspective on nostalgia is fascinating. In the past, nostalgia was seen as homesickness, a longing for home when you're away. Then it was considered a severe mental disease and later a psychological disorder. But in the postmodern era, nostalgia takes on a different meaning. It's about "returning toward time," wanting to go back to the old days, even though postmodern obligations make it difficult. "Nostalgia is „memorialized" as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting" (Hutcheon 1998, p.20). Nostalgia is like a memorial of the past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting. It's interesting how postmodern nostalgia can be about both the good and the bad times. You can be nostalgic about the things that brought you happiness, but also about the things that made you sad. Looking back, you can either reject the past or linger and long for it. It's a complex and multi-faceted concept. Nostalgia is like a memorial of the past, where we remember the precious moments but also forget certain things. In modernism, there was a focus on rejecting the past, but in postmodernism, there is a tendency to recall the past as a way to escape the complexities of the modern world and return to a simpler time of community.

"The process of changing patterns in his life brings physical difficulty and psychological torture" (Zubair, 2021). Nostalgia is typically associated with remembering the good days and good

times, but postmodern nostalgia can also encompass remembering the bad times. It's interesting how looking back can involve both rejecting the past or longing for it. The past can be disturbing, mocking, or pleasant. In Hanif's case, the past is depicted as disturbing and mocking, lamenting the loss of the traditional qualities of being a democratic leader through the character of Zia. Hanif uses various forms of nostalgia in his work "A Case of Exploding Mangoes." One of these is ironic nostalgia, which is when our culture is nostalgic but postmodernism is aware of the risks involved. Nostalgia can exile us from the present and bring the imagined past near, just like how Ali Shigri in the novel experiences the imagined past coming closer to him. "Nostalgia exiles us from the present and brings the imagined past near" (Hutcheon, 1998, p.27). Another form of nostalgia Hanif explores is imperial nostalgia, which refers to the intentional and forceful destruction of society by imperial powers like the British in the subcontinent. For the British, nostalgia was a perfect feeling because they were the rulers and had a vast empire on which the sun never set. This is what Rosaldo calls "imperial nostalgia," where racial domination appears innocent through elegant manners. However, for the colonized people, the past doesn't hold attractive feelings at all. "Imperial nostalgia, the kind of that makes racial dominations appear innocent through elegance of manners" (Hutcheon, 1998, p.52).

Zia seems to be fixated on the past in many moments throughout the novel. One particular instance is when he remembers his wedding and experiences a form of regressive nostalgia. "Twenty three years later, the morning after his midnight coup, he knew the meaning Of proverb .He intended to kill the cat, bury it and hoist his flag over its grave"(Hanif,2009,p.38). It's like he's stuck in that moment from twenty-three years ago, and it continues to affect his life. You see, when Zia was a captain in the army, he got married. His uncle gave him advice on how to establish authority over his wife, saying he needed to "kill the cat" on their first night together. But when Zia entered the room, his wife behaved rudely, and he didn't do anything to address it. This made him lose confidence, and he couldn't move forward or establish that authority. As a result, his wife ended up insulting him multiple times throughout the novel. Zia regrets not being able to "kill the cat" that night because he believes that if he had, he could have acted more confidently now. He's afraid of his wife, just like a rat is afraid of a cat. Zia constantly remembers that past moment and carries the regret with him. At the beginning of the novel, Shigri feels a sense of nostalgia when he remembers his dorm mate, Obaid. He notices that the poem on the inside of Obaid's cupboard door is missing, and even though Shigri isn't really into poetry, he knows that Obaid used to post a new poem there every month. This makes Shigri reminisce about the time he spent with Obaid and his habits. Obaid was a romantic person who loved reading novels and poetry, and it was a daily ritual for him to paste a piece of poetry into his cupboard. It's like Shigri gets a tender feeling of nostalgia when he thinks about Obaid and those moments they shared. Shigri and Obaid had a close bond. They would often wear each other's T-shirts, share everything about their daily lives, and participate in the After Dinner Literary Activities (ADLA) together. They even made plans to enjoy ice cream and watch a movie. However, Shigri couldn't believe that Obaid would leave him and be absent. It seems like Shigri was caught off guard by Obaid's sudden absence and felt a sense of disbelief.

## Conclusion

This research, based on Hutcheon's concepts, demonstrates that even in the postmodern era, irony and nostalgia continue to exist,

despite claims that they have ended. Postmodernism offers a new perspective on the world, which also changes the definition of irony and nostalgia. It has been observed that Pakistani novelists couldn't resist the allure of irony and nostalgia. While postmodernism rejects the idea of nostalgia, ironically, it cannot escape its influence. In the case of Hanif's novel, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, it was impossible for him to write about the real history of Pakistani politics without a sense of nostalgia. Hanif's work compels readers to reflect humorously on the authoritarian regime of General Zia, who himself occasionally experiences nostalgia during religious and political events. His character is extremely ironic. Hanif constructs a subplot through Ali Shigri's recollections of the past, which showcases an attempt at postmodern ironic nostalgia.

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