

## **Power, Privilege and Class Struggles: Unravelling Pakistani Society by Decoding Socio-Hierarchies**

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### **Abstract**

This destabilized hierarchy of power, privilege and class struggles in Pakistani society is the subject of this paper, which investigates how literatures, cultures and structures are produced to reiterate or resist those hierarchies. Taking its inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital, Michel Foucault's ideas about power and surveillance, and postcolonial critiques developed by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha the analysis explores the ways in which elites establish dominance as at once historically evolved while maintaining a silencing or falsifying of more marginal voices. Using close readings of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* in conjunction with sociological analysis, the article illustrates how Pakistani Anglophone literature mirrors and critiques inequities that have been embedded in society. In the context of history, politics, and culture that frames texts, it brings attention to literature's double function: unmasking privilege while imagining counter-narratives of justice. In the end, this study maintains that literature is not a simple reflection but a challenge, and it can provide imaginative resources for more democratic futures.

**Key Words:** Power, Colonial Cultures, Top of Form Power; Privilege & Class Struggle Bottom of Form.

### **1. Introduction**

Power and privilege have historically been on the hearts and minds of social scientists as well as writers – how people move through their real, live world. The postcolonial legacies combine with deeply embedded feudal, bureaucratic and military formations to create these intensities in Pakistan. Hierarchies are not only visible in materialities (land, wealth or institutions), but also cultural and symbolic practices– language, education and writing. To understand the reproduction, contestation, and negotiation of privilege in Pakistani society one needs both a sociological as well as literary perspective. The beginnings of privilege in Pakistan are steeped in colonial past. British colonial rule entrenched class distinctions by creating Landed Gentry, Landlords and Middlemen as power brokers of the state. The zamindars/jagirdars program institutionalized feudal domination by the colonial state even as it got an emerging salariat class that was rewarded with positions entailing administrative and beautiful benefits to becoming stools of the colonial state. After India gained its independence in 1947, these structures were not dismantled or fundamentally reformed. Instead, late top-down trajectories persisted under new identities, with landed elites, military rulers and bureaucrats remaining the gatekeepers of state institutions and resources. The military in particular has frequently cast itself as

the protector of the state, accruing power through coups and dictatorships. The hegemony in Pakistan is also maintained through cultural signifiers. In colonization, English was the language of power and in postcolonial India English has remained a keeper of gates of opportunities; it determines ease or difficulty with which one can access education, job and mobility. Elitist private schools and foreign universities help entrench cultural capital as something that cement class divides. Fluency in English is very often witnessed as an index not only of education, but also of modernity, cosmopolitanism and legitimacy. On the other hand, Urdu- and regional-language-speaking people including Punjabis, Sindhis and Pashtuns are reported to be relatively of lower income level but in majority. This layering of privilege builds a cycle which reproduces itself through the generations. Elite offspring don't just inherit material wealth—they also receive an inheritance in the form of the symbolic capital that comes with elite schooling, global networks and connections to structures of power.

The poor, meanwhile, are commonly locked into systemic exclusion that offers little upward mobility. Education, rather than serving as an equalizer, often perpetuates inequality since the system is divided between exclusive English-medium schools, cheap private schools and government-supported schooling. The complex dynamics of these relationships can be queried in and through literature. Pakistani Anglophone fiction has become increasingly visible internationally, especially since the 1990s, and a significant part of its narrative work is on themes of unequalness, identity and power. Authors such as Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie and Mohammed Hanif take on themes of corruption, authoritarianism, social inequity to reveal the fabric through which elites of all kinds entrench their supremacy. Their writings have global appeal and at the same time they mirror the life as it is actually lived by Pakistanis. Literature therefore acts as more than a mirror of inequality, but also as a critique that can reconceptualize social relations and give progression to the silenced.

This is where the present project sits in between sociology and literary criticism.

### 1.1 Research Questions

- What is the politics of power and privilege within Pakistani society, in terms of class and social hierarchies?
- How do Pakistani English novels reflect, critique and even reproduce these hierarchies?
- How might Bourdieu's and Foucault's theoretical frameworks, along with Frame from a postcolonial paradigm, help students to understand the equation of social structures and literary representation? By answering these questions, the paper enters into conversations that are still active today about inequality, representation and resistance. It contends that while privilege in Pakistan is firmly rooted, literature continues to be an important space for both exposing domination and envisioning alternative futures.

## 2. Background of Study

The politics of Pakistan is inextricably intertwined with the history and culture. Colonial inheritances have engrained elite behaviors in modern institutions, notably education and governance. This process was further intensified through the partition of 1947, which single-handedly chased millions out and perpetuated stark lines between the haves and have nots when it came to wealth and land. Postcolonial processes, such as military invasions, unequal economic development and neoliberal reforms, have intensified these inequalities and marginalized large sections of the population. Anglophone Pakistani literature has evolved into a strong medium to grapple with such realities. Other authors – Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Mohammed Hanif and Nadeem Aslam among them – have shown how system inequalities affect people's daily lives. Their texts do not only denounce power structures but apprehend how subjects negotiate them as they resist or comply. The premises of this study, thus, emerge upon the articulation of Pakistani literature not only as an aesthetic production but a sociological text which registers the lived experience of many different communities.

### 3. Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- Discuss how Pakistani Anglophone fiction deals with power, privilege and class warfare.
- Examine the crosscurrents of class, gender, ethnicity, and religion in literary representations.
- Consider the ways in which literature interrogates social strata and imaginatively floats alternatives to resistance or transformation.
- Contribute an interdisciplinary analysis of sociology and literary criticism.

### 4. Literature Review

For many years, scholars of Pakistani society have stressed the perennial nature of inequality. Hamza Alavi's analyzed the 'salaried class's (1972) in how colonial bureaucratic forms helped to produce a certain kind of middle class that acted as 'state vampires'. Ayesha Jalal (1995) documents how elite families capture politics and bureaucracy, building patron-client relationships that exclude ordinary citizens. Akbar Zaidi (2005) points out the strength of traditional landed elites and industrialists to this day in determining economic policy with state resources being siphoned into a few hands. This fellowship highlights the resilience of elite formations and their translation across historical times. Whether through feudal society or military dictatorship or neoliberal globalization, elites have found mechanisms to concentrate and entrench power. But such work tends to emphasize material inequalities while overlooking symbolic forms of distinction including language, education and cultural capital. Pakistani Anglophone fiction has recently been perceived as a contested terrain on which social pecking orders are being actively reshaped. Amina Yaqin and Peter Morey (2011) have maintained that authors such as Hamid and Shamsie pull the veil off contradictory manifestations of globalization where elites flourish within cosmopolitan geographies but the poor encounter exclusionism and modes of surveillance. Claire Chambers (2010) discusses hybridity in contemporary Pakistani fiction and the related challenges that the texts negotiate between local situations and global audiences. Other critics contest the world literary circulation of Anglophone fiction. Drawing on the work of Elleke Boehmer (2005), Duffy presents a query as to whether postcolonial writers write for the West and in doing so repeat "cultural privilege" even while criticizing inequality. Even Pakistani fiction, which is critical, has the potential of studding to become a commodity of local reality for consumption in the global market. This tension poses important questions: can Anglophone literature really be authentic representation of the marginalized when it also necessarily reproduces privilege? The one big hole in the state of current scholarship is that there has been relatively little interdisciplinary research. Sociologists track inequality, while literary critics analyze representation; these studies are rarely combined. Furthermore, vernacular literatures –Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi– continue to suffer neglect in global scholarship even as writers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Saadat Hasan Manto have offered some of the most radical critiques of inequality. Although this paper was a study of English, it is aware of these limitations and suggests more dynamic interaction with local literatures.

### 5. Research Gap

Though Pakistani society has received considerable academic attention with regard to its (widely acknowledged) inequalities, such latter work tends to be constrained within particular disciplines. Sociologists including Hamza Alavi and Ayesha Jalal have analyzed forms of elite rule historically and from political-economy perspectives, while scholars such as Claire Chambers and Amina Yaqin have focused on questions of identity in anglophone fiction. Yet, there are few system-wide studies in which these different approaches are discussed. Additionally, existing literary criticism tends to engage those texts in the context of identity politics, hybridity and globalization, rather than as addressing how class and privilege operate in everyday Pakistani life. Also, sociological narratives tend to focus on structural inequalities at the expense of their symbolic and cultural dimensions that are brought to light by literature. Another such lacuna is in the privileging of texts in English in global academia, and how that can potentially sideline vernacular literatures, Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi here, which also embody compelling critiques of inequality.

This article will attempt to fill these theoretical and disciplinary gaps by taking an interdisciplinary perspective, combining sociological analysis, postcolonial theory and literary studies. It foregrounds power, privilege and class struggle through its analysis of a number of Anglophone novels but also seeks to locate these narratives within the wider sociohistorical canvas of Pakistan. In so doing, the study adds to our understanding of how literature both mirrors and opposes hierarchies.

## **6. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The analysis combines insight into three converging theoretical traditions:

Bourdieu's Capital and Habitus Auguste Comte are the fathers of structural functionalism, while Marx is considered a conflict theorist. Pierre Bourdieu – exploration took him to study Raphael Garbage Collectors Attempted to solve issue of how elites maintain their status. Dominant theme would be how prominent (rich) remain rich Somewhat in between Marx communist and social causes Had many different forms CAPITAL: economic capital form urgency / admission into upper class Cultural Capital-material cultural assets/symbolic/psychological acceptance from others is all about submission status based on past will thus determine future can Be acquired only through τ... In Pakistan, wealth and cultural capital — English education is a signifier of class status — often go hand in hand. The notion of habits, embodied cultural dispositions, describes how it is that the elites appear to rule without ruling and how subalterns internalize their domination.

### **6.1.Foucault's Power and Surveillance**

Michel Foucault understands of power as diffuse and relational, helps to explain how such institutions in Pakistan operate. Discipline is exercised through educational institutions, bureaucracy and the military as a disciplinary factor that naturalizes hierarchies and normalizes behavior of citizens. Government (literal surveillance) and society itself (symbolic surveillance) help maintain inequality by making obedience a habit.

### **6.2.Postcolonial Perspectives**

'Edward Said's Orientalism shows how representation is set by global hierarchies, Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak? illustrates the silencing of marginalized voices. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity may provide one way into thinking about Anglophone Pakistani literature, which challenges the binaries of local authenticity and global markets. These frameworks position Pakistani literature within national as well as transnational geopolitics of privilege.

## **7. Methodology**

The Method of the study intervenes through a qualitative textual analysis. As it closely reads *Moth Smoke*, *Home Fire* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* for their depictions of power, privilege and challenges related to class, it sets the novels within the framework of Pakistan's sociopolitical conditions. References also contain sociological writings and critical essays. The emphasis on English-language texts is not intended to ignore such global giants while also trying in the process to point to openings for future studies of vernacular literatures.

## **8. Analysis and Discussion**

9.

### **'Moth Smoke' as A Story of Class and Corruption**

In *Moth Smoke*, Mohsin Hamid depicts the fusion of class, corruption, and desire in Lahore. Caught between both worlds is the disillusioned banker Darashikoh Shezad, who falls into an elite circle that includes his childhood friend Aurangzeb, a man above consequence by dint of inherited privilege. In Bourdieu's terms, Aurangzeb represents the form of privilege that ensures power: with wealth, an education in English and family connections which grant him access to power. Dara is so well-educated yet does not have enough money to hold on to her upper-class status, illustrating a paradox that the privilege is not just readily available but inherited and secured. The novel is not simply a

critique of personal corruption, but of systemic inequality. Meanwhile, the poor are criminalized and the elite's game legal and financial systems are in their favor. Hamid, then, exposes the moral vacuum that is Pakistan's upper class: Privilege their breeds impunity.

### **Transnational Privilege in Home Fire**

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* takes up the question of privilege in transnational spaces. Eamonn, the son of a British Pakistani politician, has money and safety on both sides of a border. By contrast, Aneeka and Parvaiz's working-class origins make them vulnerable. That Parvaiz is radicalized shows how marginalization opens zones of exclusion, while Eamonn's privilege shelters him even when he's complicit in moral corruption. Shamsie attacks the haphazard nature of global privilege: the fact that elites can glide across borders, while marginalized communities are treated with suspicion and surveillance. Foucault's surveillance is reflected in the way Parvaiz is policed, criminalized and seduced/ Eamonn moves between categories with ease. Shamsie brilliantly explores the ways that privilege is not just local but global, indeterminate as it passes through all races, across all classes and flags.

### **The Satirized of Military Power in A Case of Exploding Mangoes**

*A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammed Hanif Funny as fuck.

It's a satire on General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship - and it doesn't just focus on Pakistani hypocrisy, if you know what I mean. The aura of military invincibility is shattered in the book which also portrays how state trains citizens through punitive measures and surveillance. The idea of discipline that emerges in Foucault, is carried out by the military through regulation over the Soldiers' lives and with silencing opposition power. Hanif also shows how the benefits of such closeness to the military flow upwards, how authoritarians tend in reality to clobber ordinary citizens. But satire, on its own, becomes a weapon of resistance in undermining the authority of power.

### **Gender, Religion, and Subaltern Voices**

Privilege in Pakistan is gendered and religious, too. Women, minorities and working classes face many layers of exclusion. Spivak's contention on the impossibility of speech of the subaltern is reflected in 'women being silenced as depicted by Bapsi Sidhwa and Saadat Hasan Manto. In Manto's short stories, for example, prostitutes and refugees and servants predominate, violence and inequality weigh heavily on the marginalized. Literature as Counter-Discourse despite systemic inequities, literature allows space for resistance. In the same pipeline, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry imagines egalitarian futures, and Hanif's satire roils authoritarian fiction. Shamsie and Hamid – who write in English – lay bare contradictions of elite privilege, as the lines between social orders crumble. Indeed, literature proves to be a place of counter-discourse with it re-imagining justice in a world where the actual is oppressive.

## **10. Conclusion**

This paper has shown the role and importance of power, privilege, and class struggle in Pakistani society and literature. Sociology and literature were combined to show how elites acquire legitimacy through economic, cultural and symbolic capital; how institutions (in general) provide legitimacy for inequality; and how literature reflects critical impulses or oppositional intransigence to these structures. Pakistani Anglophone fiction functions at once ambivalently: writing for a global market but offering important critiques which certainly resonate with local debt and possibly as well to global deficit. These readings reveal how privilege is perpetuated, how the marginalized are excluded and how power functions materially and symbolically. The study demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary research that is in both sociology and literary criticism. It also highlights the need for engagement with vernacular literature that provides critiques just as sophisticated yet are frequently sidelined in global academia. Subsequent research could add Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi literatures to Anglophone ones in order to obtain the full picture of inequality. And ultimately, in Pakistan, literature

is more than art: it is a political act that intervenes in social hierarchies and cries out for justice. By giving voice to those who are silent, and by questioning prevailing modes of thought, literature is responsible in aiding readers to imagine a world more just.

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