

**State and State Apparatuses:
The Formation of Productive Force in
The Black Coat and *The World in My Hands***



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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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DEDICATION

To all the brave people across the globe who are fighting their oppressors for their rights, their lands, their dignity, and not refusing to bow down before the tyranny of men, as Hemingway put it - “But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated”.

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation was to read Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* and K. Anis Ahmed's *The World in My Hands* from the theoretical lens of Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)". It was an attempt to understand how mass people in precarious situation of a country are used as mere tools by authoritative figures to advance their agenda and interests. The objective was to examine how state apparatuses are used to persuade people to provide their labour to produce and reproduce the dominance and legitimacy of the authority. This work illustrated that the fear of repression, promise of reward, and ideological sentiments such as nationalism and patriotism are effective tools convincing people to submit their consent and labour to the ruling class.

Keywords: Authority, State, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), Nationalism, Production and Reproduction

Introduction

The relationship between state and its subjects has always been a symbiotic one since its inception. Thomas Hobbes in his influential work of political philosophy *Leviathan* puts forward the theory of social contract - a pact between the authority of the state and its population where the people submit their absolute freedom to the authority and in exchange the authority takes the responsibility of its subjects' wellbeing, safety, and security of basic rights. Hobbes understood that humans are capable of being extremely selfish, of doing cruel and exploitative deeds to other human beings for their own gain. This understanding of human nature is still relevant today and this thesis aimed to investigate the issue when the authority of state leverages its subject's precarious state to use them as tool and labour force in order to produce and reproduce its political ideology and ideological dominance, thus perpetuating the legitimacy of its power and dominance. From this point of view, this work analysed two texts: *The Black Coat* Neamat Imam and *The World in My Hands* by K Anis Ahmed. The central investigative focus from the respective texts was on Sheikh Mujib and Emergency Government as the state authority; Khaleque and Nur, and Hissam and Kaiser as the labour force of the state. Louis Althusser's theory of the State and its Ideological and Repressive Apparatuses laid out in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" was used as the theoretical framework.

Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* is a response to the prevalent narrative of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a glorified hero. Instead, it reimagines Sheikh Mujib as an authoritative and failed state leader. In the text, Khaleque Biswas and Nur Hossain's labour power is exploited by the state and Sheikh Mujib to propagate their authority and legitimacy. Existing research and studies on *The Black Coat* explored the issues of trauma, death, and displaced identities of

minorities due to the political and economic crises. However, existing studies lacked the examination of Khaleque and Nur's role as a productive force for the state authority. On the other hand, K Anis Ahmed's *The World in My Hand* is a not-so-subtle allegory of Bangladesh, a turbulent political period under a military backed emergency government where the emergency government's shortsighted and hasty actions to uproot political corruption fails miserably and opens a path for a politically dark age in Bangladesh. Ahmed's portrayal of Hissam and Kaiser's role as the exploited subjects of the state authority is similar to that of the story of *The Black Coat*. There is any scholarship yet to be done on *The World in My Hands*.

Since none of the text have been examined from a Marxist theoretical point of view, this thesis started as an attempt to closely inspects Khaleque and Nur from *The Black Coat*, and Hissam and Kaiser to explore their formation and contribution as a productive labour force of the state authorities who are Sheikh Mujib and military backed Emergency government in the respective texts. This worked identified the largely exploitative relations between the workers of the production and the owner of production. Thus, the objective of this study was to investigate the issue that every subject in a nation state is susceptible to the ideological dominance of the authority due to their: precarious situation both in personal life and professional life; survival instinct in the face of existential crisis; and individual desire for power, influence, and recognition. Using Louis Althusser's theoretical framework, it aimed to explore the role of both the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) in the formation of a labour force in order to produce and reproduce the legitimacy of the state authorities by propagating their ideologies and supporting their agendas. Furthermore, it also sought to examine the exploitative relation between the workers and owner of the production. Thus, it posed some research question to follow along the whole work:

1. Does the state authority use its subjects as a productive force to produce and propagate its legitimacy and agenda?
2. How do the ISAs and RSAs operate to obtain the submission of the productive force?
3. Are precarious people more susceptible to the tyranny of the state apparatuses than who can afford to be defiant?

This thesis followed a qualitative method of research to analyze the primary texts *The Black Coat* and *The World in My Hands*. From the reading of Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", this study intended to use his theory of reproduction of the conditions of production, and the state and its ideological and repressive apparatus as a theoretical framework to analyze the issue of production and reproduction of power of the state authority in the primary texts. It should be noted that the concepts of social formation, condition of production, the states - are in the first place Marx's idea. In the context of this specific study, this work is using Althusser's contribution on these concepts.

Althusser states that "social formations" (1) need to be produced and reproduced in order to sustain their position and dominance. This thesis hypothesized social formation as the state authorities i.e., Sheikh Mujib and Awami League in *The Black Coat* and the Emergency Government in *The World in My Hands*". Althusser furthers his statement, "in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce:

1. the productive forces,
2. the existing relations of production." (2)

The productive forces, according to Althusser, are the labor force, the labor power, simply the workers of the production, who propagate the agendas of the state authority, thus securing its legitimacy and dominance. This thesis identified Khaleque, Nur, Moina Mia, and Hissam as the productive force of the state. Now, Althusser remarks that this productive force must be reproduced. In order for it to be reproducible, the workers must be competent and skilled “i.e. suitable to be set to work in the complex system of the process of production” (5) as well as submissive to the authority they are working for. He says, "the reproduction of labor power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression" (6).

How does the submission of the reproduction of productive force is secured? First of all, their competent and skilled labour must be compensated by “wages” (4). Wages in this regard embodies any form of material value for the worker, not just money. Secondly, the productive force must also be brought under the system of “the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology or of the ‘practice’ of that ideology” (6). There must be a unifying ideology that drives the submission of the workers. In both of the texts, it was a political ideology, namely Nationalism. However, in the case of *The Black Coat*, the very idea of Sheikh Mujib, his charisma, his black coat acted as the influential ideological force and symbol of power.

Now, about the second factor of reproduction: “the existing relations of production” - “it is secured by the exercise of State power in the State Apparatuses, on the one hand the (Repressive) State Apparatus, on the other the Ideological State Apparatuses.” (18). Here Althusser advances a major contribution to the concept of the State. In the traditional Marxist

understanding, the state is by default a repressive one, Althusser says, “the State is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus. The State is a ‘machine’ of repression...a force of repressive execution and intervention” (9-10). However, he thinks that this theory doesn’t express the complexity of the function and action of the state, thus he attempts to further it by proposing the theory of “Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)” (14). ISA may function through: media and the ideas of the ruling party and the state that are propagated and dispersed to the masses; symbols that stand for the absolute authority and legitimacy of the ruler. Althusser lays out the differentiating factors between RSA and ISA: the former one operates by violence, it’s a centralized public domain; and the latter operates by ideology and it belongs to a diverse field of private institutions. However, he recognizes the important underlying nuances beyond the supposed black and white distinction of RSA’s operation by violence and ISA’s operation by ideology. Thus, he acknowledges,

“the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology...the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic.” (16)

Therefore, the exploitative relationship between the owner and the workers of the production is sustained by the intervention of both the RSAs and the ISAs as Althusser states,

“the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses.” (21).

Repressive institutions like armed forces, personal cadres and the militia of the authoritarian ruler, and the display of their violence helps instill fear into the mind of the masses. This enables

them to be easily or reluctantly swayed by the ideological and emotional manipulation, thus giving consent as well as participating in the state activities and apparatus. It follows the Gramscian tactics of hegemony where the ruling class needs to indoctrinate the people so that their idea and rule seems naturally legitimate. Therefore, it becomes a self-sustaining cycle of the masses persuaded by the state apparatus only for them to become a part, a tool in the apparatus.

Literature Review

Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* explores the invasive force of ideology and propaganda in the reproduction of the power of authority in a nation state. Existing literature on this text examines several other issues and themes this text deals with, for example, trauma and displacement of minority; social, political, economic crises that leads to famine and death; corruption and failure of the state under Mujib, etc. There is no academic work on *The World in My Hands* found in online resources, thus this thesis included some reviews on this book. Furthermore, in order to support the analysis in this thesis, it also studied some works on political ideology; historical account of the military governance in Bangladesh including Zia's regime and 1/11 regime; portrayal of precarity in Bangladeshi literature, etc. Some notable works are reviewed in this section:

Zillur R. Khan's 1976 article is a historical account and analysis of the problem of leadership in the newly independent Bangladesh. After earning their independence, the people of Bangladesh instead of unifying themselves under the spirit of Bengali nationalism, engaged in power struggle due to different political parties' conflicting political and ideological views of restructuring the country. Thus, Mujib attempted to unite Bengalis utilizing his charisma and ideology because "during the liberation struggle, Mujib received unquestioned loyalty from most Bengali political parties and their guerrilla extensions who had previously united against the Pakistanis" (Khan 109). Thus, he established an ideology called "Mujibism" (111) that comprised "nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism, which were subsequently incorporated in the constitution of Bangladesh as fundamental principles of state polity" (111). His personal appeal helped Awami League (AL) win the 1973 election in spite of AL's inability to manage the rampant political violence, corruption, collapsing economy, and staggering

inflation. Hence this article asks the question, “how could a leader enjoy so much popularity when his own political party was facing so much mass criticism?”. Mujib’s charismatic appeal and popularity soon started to wane due to his repeated failure to get hold of his party men's rampant corruption for example, he used the Army “to curb widespread corruption, hoarding, smuggling and political violence. But every time the operation affected his partymen adversely, he ordered it stopped” (116). Burdened by the expectations to stabilize the socio-political-economic crises, and the repeated failures to do so, Mujib instituted a one-party government in January 1975 which consequently brought forth his tragic demise.

In the chapter “Ideology” in his book *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory* Christian Fuchs argues that one of the reasons why ideology is so pervasive is that it consists of a “fetishist structure” (Fuchs 219). Ideologies normalize domination and exploitation using justification and concealment. Laws, values, practices, social relations - are all made to appear as “timeless, eternal, and valid for all social formation” (219). In this hegemonic way, by repressing the autonomic intellect of the collective and reifying its consciousness, ideology thus justifies and establishes the power of the dominant class and its way of exploiting the dominated class. By doing so, ideology instrumentalizes human behaviour and consciousness to achieve the interest of the dominant class. Ideology uses propaganda to circulate its existence and control, for example, ideological propagandas are manifested in texts, thoughts, institutions, artifacts, concepts, belief systems, representations, etc. Fuchs examines the ideology as a communicative process that the ruling class needs to deploy its resources, e.g., money, mass media, political influence, reputation in order to increase the likelihood of acceptance of its ideologies. However, ideology is not abstract, which means “there are ideological workers who create and reproduce ideology” (221). According to Marx, these ideological workers are the “thinkers of the

ruling class” (221). Fuchs also explores how ideology defines and divides existing groups or classes in society using the example of xenophobic ideological system: (a) a superior and powerful group is defined; (b) an outsider, inferior, immigrant group is defined; (c) a relationship between them is stated; (d) measures (of dominating or exterminating the subordinate group) is advocated. Fuchs’s discussion of Ideology in this chapter establishes its mechanism and its motives which helps examine the ideological mechanism of the state in *The Black Coat*.

In another chapter "Nationalism, Communication, Ideology." Fuchs further argues that nationalism is an essentialist ideology that creates political and cultural outsiders in order to justify the position of the ruling class. It’s an ideology that “operates on the level of national identity and defines who should be considered as belonging to the nation and who should be excluded” (Fuchs 238), hence as an ideology, it manufactures a difference between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (243). When defining the concept of nationalism, Fuchs presents two theories of nationalism; the fetishist theory of nationalism that regards nationalism as a natural and inherent part of society; and the critical theory of nationalism that identifies nationalism as a social construct, fabricated through ideological dissemination (238). Thus, nationalism is built and maintained on its fetishist foundation, that sees the nation as “a homogenous social and political entity” (241) thereby excluding the social complexities and diversities. This indicates that nationalism is especially attractive to an authoritarian personality or system that can empower its existence by defining itself against ‘others’; minorities, immigrants, refugees; who don’t belong to or abide by the manufactured homogeneity (242). Fuchs further discusses the importance and modes of communication because for an ideology to be effective it needs to be communicated in public. It mainly communicated through different social forms, i.e., primary media (theatre,

concert, interpersonal communication); secondary media (books, newspaper); tertiary and quaternary media (CD, DVD, tv, radio); and quinary media (social media) (255).

Governing an underdeveloped country is a considerably more grueling task than fighting a war. “Bangladesh in 1974: Economic Crisis and Political Polarization” by Maniruzzaman Talukdar in 1975 is a detailed economic and political account of Bangladesh in 1974. During that time Bangladesh was not only underdeveloped but also war torn with devastated infrastructure. As a result, the Awami League (AL) government and PM Sheikh Mujibur Rahman find themselves in a dire situation to confront and manage the economic crisis as well as political polarization due to conflicting political ideologies. Several reasons have played crucial part to aggravate the economic crisis since 1972; (a) a global inflation in 1972 affected Bangladesh alongside the whole world economy; (b) faulty domestic policies that nationalized country’s economic industries such as banks, textile and jute mills, coastal shipping, airways, and foreign trade; (c) as a result of that, those industries were administered by AL politician and supporter with zero knowledge to run an economic system, only to make themselves rich by large-scale smuggling of machineries, raw materials like jutes, and relief goods to India. These factors led to a sharp decline in industrial production and export earnings as well as an inflation of 300-400% due increasing cash flow in 1973. Such a near economic collapse was even worsened by “the worst flood in our history” in July and August of 1974 (Maniruzzaman 119) due to which “the country's food shortage, originally estimated around 1,700,000 tons, was widened by an additional 1,300,000 tons” (119). By September, inflation rose to staggering 700-800% and consequently the country experienced a famine, diseases, starvation, and death. While unofficial sources estimated a death of over 100,000, PM only acknowledged the situation as a “near famine situation” (119). This economic calamity was intensified by the political turmoil due to

the “activities of radical revolutionary parties and by factionalism within the AL government and party” (120). The leftist revolutionary parties “have been trying to bring about a second revolution in Bangladesh through a mass movement as well as armed struggle” (121). According to their ideology, the 1971 revolution was unfinished and cut short “when the Indian landlord bourgeois government in collaboration with Soviet social imperialists intervened directly in the liberation war” (121). As a coercive measure to suppress the leftists, the government positioned a special security force with absolute power. Besides, the AL government and the party was crumbling within because of their inter-party arguments and division. Busy fighting their own agendas, there were no party leaders left to work for the government's program of national reconstruction by the end of 1974. That led the PM to eventually introduce “a presidential and one-party system on the model of some of the African countries” (126). This historical account of Bangladesh in 1974 presented in this article helps contextualize the economic, social, political, and personal turmoil and suffering portrayed in *The Black Coat*.

Literature is history, and *The Black Coat* plays a responsible role being an important text in historiography by revisioning the history and narrative of the 1974 famine, its deadly consequences, the failure of the state, exploring the “relation between politics and paranoia” (Basak 172) that turned a leader into a dictator. Avijit Basak in the chapter "Trauma, fetish, and binary politics in *The Black Coat* " analyzes the text to highlight the political mistreatment of the “minority” (163) that took the worst hit of the famine. He explores that democracy is always at risk of collapsing into totalitarianism when it is faced with “competition, struggle, and antagonism” (166) leading to a “pure divide” (166) between the government and citizens as well as between individuals. Both the government and Khaleque collapse into such a totalitarian state. Khaleque’s identification with his fellow citizens, the refugees, doesn’t make him sympathetic

rather reducing him to a “pathological state of numbness and self-justification” (167) thus becoming an exploitative person to make sure of his own survival. Basak examines the concepts of ideology and fetish; fetish comes from the word ‘fétiche’ that means charm (165); Khaleque is bound under the spell of both the ideology “Mujibism” (165) and the overwhelming charm of Sheikh Mujib, thus falling victim of the ideological interpellation. He illustrates how Khaleque, and his exploitative and violent treatment of Nur Hossain symbolizes Sheikh Mujib’s government’s exploitation of its citizens. When Nur refuses to further participate in Khaleque’s exploitation, he is violently killed which parallels how the ideological opponents of Mujibism are labelled as the “agents of anti-Bangladeshi activities” (167) and violently discarded. Basak concludes that by burying the body and memory of Nur, Khaleque also carries “the failure of Mujib as an incompetent administrator”. (172)

Asking the questions of what is home and displacement, Tahmina Mariyam’s “Forever Displaced? : Identity, Migration, and the Concept of Home in the Works of Manzu Islam, Neamat Imam, and Tahmima Anam” examines Khaleque Biswas’s journey to answer that home is a state of mind and Khaleque’s displacement is a psychological one. Searching for and dedicating himself to achieve the “utopian dream” (Mariyam 81) in a liberated country, Khaleque instead realizes “a Dickensonian wasteland of urban poverty, exploitation and violence” (81). This article assesses Khaleque from a moral and honest point of view terming his descent into becoming “a mimic man with a national agenda” (83). It illustrates that Khaleque exploits people’s “trance of Bengali Nationalism” to cash using Nur Hossain’s Sheikh Mujib impression. Khaleque is trying to create “a trance within the trance reach into their pockets” (82). It states that it is out of “greed that Khaleque Biswas sold his soul to the nationalistic agenda” (83) while ignoring the socio-political crises, e.g., famine, political

repression, ideological influences - that complicate a person's motive and freedom of choice. He is displaced from his home because of his gradual corruption of becoming a machine in the cog, however, it is not simply because of 'greed' as this article suggests.

According to Rukunuddin Sheikh's "Representation of Deaths due to Misrule during the Famine of 1974 in Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat*" *The Black Coat* is a reimagining of the state of the post liberation war Bangladesh. It portrays a haunting and grim picture of crisis, misrule, poverty, death that are simply glossed over in mainstream literature in the favour of glorifying the rule of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "Faulty economic policies, mismanagement, black market, corruption and power hunger of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" (Sheikh 103) wreaked havoc on the people during the 1974 famine who were neither economically nor politically privileged, and they were left to die of starvation. Hence, in the novel Imam holds Sheikh Mujib responsible for the dismal condition of the country. However, Sheikh Mujib didn't seem to hold that sense of accountability as he publicly stated that 27000 people died due to famine whereas the estimated death toll as a result of famine was well into six figures, according to Anthony Mascarenhas's *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood*,

"Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself publicly admitted later that 27,000 people died of starvation. In the circumstances this was a very conservative estimate...Since at least 3,000,000 people were living below the starvation line, by that reckoning the death toll as a result of the famine was well into six figures" (Mascarenhas 59).

Such distortion of reality by the government is one of the main reasons that motivated Imam to pen this text. Thus, this article tries to examine the issue of reality and the distortion of it by the ruling party. In the face of the famine, instead of acknowledging the crisis and taking bold steps to better the situation, Sheikh Mujib chose to "to maintain his public image by employing a

number of innate supporters who only propagate his gorgeous benevolent character and by enforcing the belief that Bangladeshi people are in a very comfortable position during the famine” (106). Skills and intellect of Khaleque and Nur Hossain were manipulated and instrumentally used as propaganda machines. Although this article broadly illustrates the suffering of the people and analyses the misrule of the state, it doesn’t examine the personal level impact this misrule and its ideology had on Khaleque or Nur. This article lacks the investigation of the nuances of ideological repression and manipulation which have a stronger grasp on individuals in desperate situations.

Farhad Mirza’s review of *The World in My Hands* begins with an astute observation of K Anis Ahmed’s competency as the author of the text. It admires the author’s insightful understanding of the characters, and criticizes his opinion on politics by saying, “commonsensical at best and naïve at worst”. The review advances its critique of the construction of the characters by positing that the characters, especially Hissam, shows a complicated character development. His justification of his actions to occupy a place with power and authority, his perception of success, his attempts to disguise his true self - all come from his state of precarity, “resentment and bitterness” due to his long-awaited promotion that hampers the recognition of him as a competent worker. Hence when the new regime proceeds to subjugate the media, Hissam feels important and powerful. The review criticizes author’s lack of scrutiny of the evil of corporations problematic because in real life they pose bigger threat to the mass than governments do by “maximizing their profits at the expense of what Ahmed portrays as an inarticulate mob in a scene when his beloved palaces are being bulldozed”. It finds the portrayal of the female characters, Natasha and Duniya, problematic. They fall victim to the stereotypical representation of South Asian women: Natash as “as the devoted wife, fundraiser and confidante

to the two male protagonists” and South Asian American women: Duniya as “the rebellious, westernised temptress”. Moreover, these two women seemingly nurture the male fantasy of angelic, flawless women whose sole purpose in the story is to be the north star of the complicated flawed male characters.

In her review, author Fayeka Siddiqua doesn’t talk much about the content of *The World in My Hands*, rather celebrates the text as a precious addition to Bangladeshi English literature. To her, K Anis Ahmed is one of the worthy successors of Syed Waliullah and Sayeed Ahmed as English language Bangladeshi prose writer. She sheds light on the publication history of the text and the warm reception it was garnered, as well as the publication history of the author. However, she most importantly discusses the author’s view of his book and the significance of literature as a whole. Literary texts like *The World in My Hands* should be treated as an “extensive social institution which incorporates history, anthropology, politics, and economics of a society”. She highlights the author's view on increasing practice of translating Bengali literature in different international languages because in this way Bengali literature can be spread across the globe. Furthermore, to broaden the horizons of Bangladeshi readers, more world literature should be translated into Bangla. Author marks this practice as a “cross-cultural exchange” and regrets that due to lack of incentives, this practice is lost in the recent past. Hence, he argues the urgency of a new generation of devoted readers.

Author Golam Sarwar Chowdhury in his review “K. Anis Ahmed's *The World in My Hands*: Pandua Indeed!” appreciates Ahmed’s skill of using imagination and speculation to craft a bunch of characters who feel real and alive with their own agencies, who feel like they are living in and dealing with a real, lived in place, and who are filled with real human emotions:

love, ambition, anger, hatred, jealousy. An author's sense of imagination comes handy especially when they are dealing with creating an allegory of a real setting which in the case of this novel is Bangladesh and Dhaka. The novel's another strength lies in its prodding portrayal of the character in the midst of a vulnerable political situation which reciprocates with the Bangladeshi readers who have gone through the similar situation under the military rule. Chowdhury acknowledges that Ahmed's use of satire has been a provoking device in critiquing the misrule and exploitation of the military regime in its misguided and rushed attempt to set the country in a correct course. The novel provides its readers with a sense of relief from the bleak world of scheme, corruption, political and personal ambition through portrayal of Duniya and her gleaming sense of optimism and hope, as well as her romance with love-deprived Hissam. Chowdhury ends his review pondering whether it was necessary to change the name of the setting since it is obvious for the Bangladeshi readers to understand which country and the institutes are criticized, and since the criticisms are fair there shouldn't have been any fear for anyone to take offense.

Author Kaiser Haq in his essay "Precarious Cultures: Bangladeshi Novels in English and in English Translation" contemplates on the precarious situation the world and Bangladesh face due to Covid-19 pandemic. Such contemplation leads him to embark on a chronicle of modern Bangladeshi literature, mainly novels in "the colonial, i.e. up to the Partition; post-Partition, i.e. from 1947 to 1971; and Post-independence" (Haq 282), that portrays precarious economic, socio-economic, political, ecological circumstances of Bangladeshi people. His aim is to establish precarity as tangible notion, a living breathing element of human existence, instead of thinking about it as an abstract concept. First of all, he attempts to define precarity from different sources; precarity is, according to Niels Springveld, a consequence of neoliberal capitalism that

has given rise to job insecurity, unpaid labour, “the dismantling of welfare state provisions”. Such precarious conditions birthed a new social class “Precariat” coined by British Economist Guy Standing. Additionally, the elements of precarity (i.e. uncertainty, fear) are two folds: cosmic or natural/supernatural and official or manmade. Author Haq further acknowledges that although Bangladesh was hit with neoliberalism in 1980s’, precariousness of people has been portrayed in Bangladeshi literature way before that since precarity is a notion that has been plaguing us since the dawn of our existence. On such a premise, Haq reads an array of literary pieces from the lens of precarity. Starting with Mir Mosharraf Hossain to Nazrul, Humayun Kabir, Syed Waliullah across the pre partition and pre independence era - Haq analyzes their works to illustrate precarity due to colonial oppression, humans struggle with nature and poverty-stricken socio-economic conditions of rural life. He then moves on to the post-independence literary works and the depiction of precarity in them. Harishankar Jaladas’s *Sons of The Sea* (2014) deals with the cosmic fear of precariat people due to fishermen’s’ relation with the sea and their official fear of being socio-economically exploited by moneylenders. Haq widens his analytical range with mention of Bangladeshi origin transnational writers and their works such as Zia Haider Rahman’s *The Light of What We Know* (2015) that depicts a picture of “universal precarity” (289). Theft of democracy at the cost of the citizen’s mental, physical, socio-economic wellbeing has been a constant trait of Bangladesh since its inception - such precarity is depicted in Neamat Imam’s *The Black Coat* (2013) and K Anis Ahmed’s *The World in My Hands* (2013) - which are mentioned by Haq by the end of this essay.

Syed Serajul Islam’s article title “The State in Bangladesh under Zia (1975-81)” is a self-explanatory one; it is a historical account of General Ziaur Rahman’s rule of Bangladesh. After a series of military coups from August to November 1975, Zia became “the de facto

military ruler” (556) of Bangladesh via the coup of 7th November. Zia assumed the presidency of Bangladesh on April 21, 1977 as well as holding on to his post as Chief Martial Law Administrator and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. After that, Zia’s effort to consolidate and legitimize his position as the president included: a presidential referendum in May 1977 where he won a massive vote of confidence; a presidential election against M. A. G. Osmani which secured his presidency with a landslide victory; formation of his political party BNP in 1978 before the parliamentary election in 1979 and BNP won the majority of the seats in that election; establishing village based institutions i.e. “Swanirvar Gram Sarkar (Self-sufficient Village Government) and Gram Pratirakkhi Bahini (Village Defense Force-VDF)” (566). The most noteworthy change that was brought about in Zia’s regime was the installation of civil-military bureaucracy by suppressing the political parties and the constitution, thus reshaping the state apparatus; by 1981 “there were 24 full ministers in the cabinet of whom six were military bureaucrats, five civil servants, six technocrats, four businessmen, one landlord, and two lawyers” (560) which was, according to the author, “a resurrection of the "administrative state" under Ayub Khan in Pakistan” (561). However, forming a political party and holding a parliamentary election were his attempts to put on a “constitutional facade” (566) over the de facto administrative state. Zia’s regime was being marked by growing crisis and instabilities: challenge from opposition political party which he dealt with “repression and manipulation”; insurgence of the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts; and most damagingly, the conflicts within with own state apparatuses: his party BNP and the civil-military bureaucracy. The internal dispute and antagonism in his state administration, especially the dissatisfaction in the military that led to the fall of his regime as well as his demise. The ghost of military rule would keep haunting Bangladesh again via Ershad’s military regime and 2007 military takeover.

Dhaka Tribune's January 2023 article “1/11 changeover: How it happened and why” is a review of the military takeover in January 2007 in a politically volatile and violent Bangladesh. Based on an WikiLeaks disclosure, then chief of Bangladesh Army's intelligence wing (DGFI) Brig Gen ATM Amin briefed then US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A. Butenis the reasons the military intervened to form a caretaker government. Because of the seated government BNP influenced appointment of the Chief Justice (who would hold the chief advisor position in the caretaker government), the opposition party AL boycotted the election alleging that the caretaker government and the election was designed to favour the ruling party, and there was extreme violence and deaths in the streets especially on October 28. The army feared that such an undemocratic situation in Bangladesh and a dubious election would stain their credibility and participation in US peacekeeping missions. Hence, they moved in to take control of the situation in a state of emergency and formed a new caretaker government. This military backed government had an agenda of purging the country of corruption and political malpractices hence restoring democracy by cracking down on the politicians and businessmen. Such hasty and nearsighted actions would push Bangladesh further into the abyss of autocracy and kleptocracy in its immediate future.

Saleem Samad's article “General Moeen Purge 1/11: Key Players In Power Struggle To Regain Supremacy” is an inspection of the military backed caretaker government. It discusses the internal power struggle between then the military chief Lieutenant General Moeen U Ahmed and the main architects of the 1/11, two of them were Principal Staff Officer (PSO) Major General Masud Uddin Chowdhury and Military Secretary to the President (MSP) Major General Mohammad Aminul Karim. According to Samad, “General Masud and General Karim are among the ‘Khalifas’ who engineered the 1/11 since 2000” and they designed and swayed and

used several officers to place their choice of personnels, such as placing Moeen the chief of army. After being propelled into the limelight as the military head in a military backed government, General Moeen was carried away by the ambition to grow his power and influence. In order to consolidate more power and authority for himself, Gen. Moeen got rid of many important generals including the two mentioned above, transferring them from important executive military positions to some decorated positions so that they wouldn't pose any threat to him in his quest for more authority. To politically legitimize his growing authority, a formation of new political party "Jago Bangladesh" was attempted, which failed spectacularly and eventually allowed political corruption to devour Bangladesh even more tragically in its coming years.

Textual Analysis

This chapter should be started by noting that this thesis aimed to mention and discuss the historical figures and setting as well as the characters and the setting of the text. It was pertinent to the discussion because the texts and their characters were in the first place inspired by the historical events, thus, for example, both the character Sheikh Mujib from *The Black Coat* and the historical Sheikh Mujib are compared back and forth. Similarly, both the emergency in *The World in My Hands* and that historical period are a focus of the discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter One: *The Black Coat*

The analysis has been broken down into three parts examining Sheikh Mujib as a charismatic authority; Khaleque Biswas as a microcosmic portrayal of Sheikh Mujib; and finally, Khaleque and Nur as a productive force of the authority.

Sheikh Mujib: Excels as a Charismatic Leader, Fails as a Statesman

“They all believed in the leadership of Sheikh Mujib. All of them believed that if the country were not free now, under his direction, it would never be free. Some said they did not go to war for the country; they went for him. They did not know what they were doing; he said they must go and they did.” (Imam 16)

The discrimination of the oppressive and authoritarian regime of West Pakistan acted as the catalyst in the birth of the leader Sheikh Mujib who united the population of East Pakistan to fight for its independent status as Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib’s resistance to bow before the unjust authority, relentless pushback, and the uncompromising spirit spread like wildfire across the country. According to Max Weber’s theory, these conditions earned Sheikh Mujib the crown of a charismatic leader. In his book *Economy and Society* and later in his lecture “Politics as a Vocation”, Weber posited three types of legitimate authority and one of them is charismatic authority: “domination by virtue of the devotion of those who obey the purely personal ‘charisma’ of the leader.” (3). His conception of charismatic authority of a leader was originally based on the context of religion: a messiah who is endowed by his followers with extraordinary and supernatural power and heroism because of his ability to rile up the masses. Later interpretations of Weber’s work, i.e. Robert Tucker, Samuel I. Cabbuag etc, suggested that this charismatic type of authority is also valid in political circumstances. In fact, this thesis

understood that religious faith encompasses every plane of social relations. What constitute a faith as religious faith is when a figure can manipulate the emotions, thoughts, actions of a group of people, as it was shown in the book - “but you may believe in God. At this moment I can only tell you that if you believe in God you must believe in Sheikh Mujib.” (18). Both in religious and political situations, the charismatic figure appears as the agent of emancipation. Such charismatic figures have always existed both in the realms of real life and fiction. Paul Atreides in Frank Herbert’s seminal book *Dune*, Muhammad, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler in real life – they were religious, political, social leaders, they all possessed magnetic personality, they understood the demand of the time, they tapped into the emotion of the masses, they were revolutionaries in their time. Some succeeded in spreading their ideas and legacy, some brought cruelty and devastation on humanity and were met with tragic end to their reign. Sheikh Mujib played the similar role of leadership who promised to fight for emancipation which was the most desired demand of the people of East Pakistan. He promised his people freedom from their tyrant oppressor. A revolution is afoot! And a charismatic leader thrives in times of revolution. So did Sheikh Mujib. As a revolutionary charismatic leader, he was able to light the emotional fuse of the masses and that gave them enough spirit to start a civil disobedience and later a full forced armed struggle for their liberation. There were several instances in the text where such commitment to Sheikh Mujib was in full display, “Sheikh Mujib was more popular with Bangladeshis than Mohammad the prophet; he was supported by people of all religions and creeds” (14), so much so that such devotions turn into religious delusion,

“He told me he had heard the voice of Sheikh Mujib in the fall of the waves and in the sound of the thunder; that helped him overcome his fear during the battle.” (17)

In his non-fictional book *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood*, Anthony Mascarenhas provided several accounts of Sheikh Mujib's quality as a charismatic leader,

“Mujib's great strength - and success lay in an elemental ability to fathom the full measure of his people's emotions and to arouse and articulate them with a resounding eloquence. He had a fantastic ability to relate to crowds. Because of this his opponents would deride him as a rabble rouser.” (22)

The time and condition of a population deprived, oppressed, facing identity crisis demand for a rabble-rousing character like Sheikh Mujib. However, that quality does not qualify as a competent statesman, and in the case of Mujib, it did not. Mascarenhas also indicated to a darker and problematic side of Sheikh Mujib that was incompatible with the requirement as a just and capable authority of a state, especially a newly born, war-torn state. He asserts that Sheikh Mujib's folly is his oversimplified assumption and solution of complicated state affairs, his “over-riding obsession for power (22), and his tendency to “eliminate the slightest threat to his supremacy” (22). This historical account has provided this study with a perspective that perhaps his intention as a revolutionary leader was not entirely a benevolent one, perhaps he entertained the idea of becoming a ruler of the country himself after it was liberated from West Pakistan rule. Perhaps the rush of power and authority got to his head later, when he was handed the country after the victory. Whichever the case might be, he did not end up being a fair and reasonable authority of the state.

Khaleque Biswas: The Little Sheikh Mujib

“Look at that little Sheikh Mujib,’ he said, whisperingly. ‘Victory to you little, rejuvenated Sheikh Mujib. Long live, little, rejuvenated, indomitable Sheikh Mujib. May you be happy, little, rejuvenated, indomitable, indefatigable Sheikh Mujib.’” (243)

In the text, this thesis didn’t get to observe Sheikh Mujib closely let alone his thoughts except one little instance where Khaleque and Nur meet him. Yet one of the intentions of this text was to critique Mujib as an antagonistic force. Hence, Neamat Imam deployed an intelligent and effective narrative technique to give valuable insights to the personality, thoughts, and emotions of the character Sheikh Mujib through the portrayal of Khaleque Biswas. And this portrayal felt even more visceral because of the first-person narrative of Khaleque Biswas. Seeing the world of *The Black Coat* through the eyes of Khaleque helped the reading to experience how Mujib might have seen and assessed his surroundings, how he reacted to various precarious situations and made wrong decisions due to his error of judgements. This narrative also helped the reader form a sympathetic understanding towards the downfall of both Khaleque and Mujib. Perhaps, neither Khaleque nor Mujib were manifestations of pure evil, rather they were victims of their time and situation. In this way, the reader was provided with a nuanced perspective to the complexities of these two intelligent, thoughtful, and often cruel characters.

Khaleque started his journey as a journalist; who was a man of honor and integrity, who strove for truth, who understood the basic human values and causes: “the cause of freedom” (20). As a journalist, he understood the importance of freedom of speech, especially in media that serve not an individual but the interests of the nation and its people, hence his remark, “I had no doubt he believed a paper must be free even in a free country—particularly in a free country” (15)

Sheikh Mujib was also a person, a leader who upheld the value of freedom, and served the interest of the nation working as a collective. He said in his speech after taking the position of the PM, “the enemy is gone. It is your country now. Forget your differences. Transform your hate into action. Build this nation.” (14). Both Khaleque and Mujib embodied moral values that transcended their individual selfish needs; they knew they were burdened by moral obligations to their fellow countrymen, they were aware that with great power came great responsibilities.

Khaleque was an intellectually sharp, perceptive, and self-aware person who possessed the capacity to peer behind the hypnotizing sense of nationalism and patriotism even during the struggle for liberation. As a wartime journalist, he experienced the media’s role to agitate the masses’ emotion by promoting petty insults and mockery, as he remarked,

“I attacked and insulted the Pakistani rulers—present and past. I ridiculed them, invented stories about them, misspelt their names and designations to make them seem eccentric and trivial... Iqbal died long before the British rule came to an end; nonetheless, I attacked him as if he were alive today, alive and well and advising Pakistan’s generals on homeland integration affairs, sitting in some fortified palace inside the Karachi cantonment.”

Such exceptional quality of shrewdness and self-awareness later enabled him to criticize his own countrymen, leaders, and authority in the post-war country. He observed that instead of development, the country was “falling into a deep pit of brutality” (32), people were hungry and dying, they were growing disgruntled whereas the looting of the people in power was rampant. It hurt him to watch a country started with a promise of freedom dissenting into degeneracy as he pondered, “What has happened to these people: has freedom made them heartless and selfish? How can they be so apathetic?”. His moral integrity couldn’t tolerate this picture, as a journalist

he wanted to speak up the truth even if it might anger the authority. He confronted his editor and expressed passionately,

“My country was suffering. Good-for-nothing politicians were playing games with people... Where is Sheikh Mujib? Where is the Awami League? Don't they see these people?” (33)

Unfortunately, his editor and paper had already sold themselves to the authority and their agency. Which led to his termination from his job, “Within a week, he made the decision to lay me off. ‘Financial constraints,’ he said.” (34). Young Mujib started his journey as a leader for the cause of a Muslim nation independent of the British Raj. His patriotism and fight paid off with the formation of Pakistan. However, like Khalque, he didn't tolerate the oppression and discrimination of the East Pakistan rulers. He also wondered whether freedom made the West Pakistani authorities heartless and selfish. He couldn't tolerate unfair treatment of his fellow Bengali people; he couldn't allow the rampant suppression of their right and autonomy; and the exploitation of their resources and economy. Thus, he spoke up and with him he aroused the whole nation. Because of that he was imprisoned where he was waiting to meet demise while his countrymen fought for freedom. And they won. And he came to the power of the newborn nation Bangladesh. That coronation had set him on the path of becoming an oppressive, authoritarian leader like his West Pakistani predecessor. That ascension to power retrospectively was a start of a downward spiral of just not him but the whole nation, as losing the job was the same for Khaleque.

The loss of his job had pushed Khaleque to a precarious position in a country that is ravaged by mismanagement of assets, corruption, flood, and famine. Both of his intellectual skill and material existence were facing the threat of extinction. On top of that, he was then endowed

with a responsibility to find Nur Ahmed a livelihood. He was both disappointed and angry at the system was failing him and the whole nation. When he saw Nur Hossain giving Sheikh Mujib's 7th March speech, he was mortified, he stopped him and told him,

“You want to embarrass yourself, go ahead, do it; nobody will stop you. But don't you ever do things that I am uncomfortable about.” (41)

However, he realized that people, the very poor people unable to feed themselves properly, were enchanted by the speech, by Nur's resemblance to Sheikh Mujib, who are throwing their precious money to Nur without thinking twice. That gave him an idea. He realized that “Nur was Sheikh Mujib's copy, a true, honest, reliable and enviable copy.” (43) and people were illusioned by the charisma and authority of Sheikh Mujib, their great emancipator. He was too smart to let this opportunity go to waste. His honor and integrity were thrown out of the window in the face of survival instinct. He had decided to use Nur and his Mujib speech to earn money. In chapter 8, 9, 10, 11, Imam showed how craftily Khaleque prepared Nur to wholly embody the persona of Sheikh Mujib. He lectured Nur about Mujib's expertise as an electrifying orator. He aimed to perfect the performance by making Nur attend to the look of Mujib with his haircut, the black coat, the specs, and the pipe. Their collective efforts came to fruition as Khaleque remarked,

“We made a good team, he and I. I made the plans, he delivered the speech. I selected the venues, he followed me without question—even when it was too hot and the humidity was high and the punjabi was wet with sweat and the coat was the most impractical piece of clothing to wear. I collected the coins, counted them three times”

With each passing day, as they were not only amassing money from their con performance but were also garnering the attention of the authority, Khaleque's desperation for mere survival waned. In its place, his desire for power and supremacy over Nur grew, which was illustrated in another self-aware evaluation of himself,

“Everyone has to do something for survival, but that something does not have to define the real character of a person. I am what my head tells me I am. I am what my feelings say I am. I do not depend on anyone’s approval.” (68)

The compassionate side of him was devoured by his malignant and cruel attitude toward Nur. He used his manipulative persuasive tactics to keep Nur submissive under his control because in the course of the story Nur started to grow conscience and autonomy of thinking, especially after meeting Shah Abdul Karim who was portrayed as the moral compass of this story. As Khaleque got devoured into the dark and deep pit of the government and its propaganda machine, he gradually lost himself to all the lies he told himself to justify his actions. On the other hand, Nur became more rebellious each day and eventually one day he demanded to leave, but Khaleque couldn’t allow him to because he realized without his tool (Nur) he was not worth a penny and not useful to Mujib. Thus, he chose violent repression to keep Nur down. But once docile Nur had grown into an enlightened and defiant person by the. He was what Khaleque has become, an imitation of the authoritarian Sheikh Mujib. He called him out, which finally snapped Khaleque and in an eruption of violence he killed Nur.

This transformation of Khaleque helped the thesis to evaluate the similar journey of moral corruption Sheikh Mujib went through. In a war-torn country, he found himself in a crossroad of building the nation with proper management and/or spending that effort to keep his power intact. Due to the political instability: violent political opposition and uprising against his rule; internal dispute and falling out in his own party - he chose the latter, to suppress any threat to the legitimacy of his authority. Once an altruistic leader who fought the liberation of his nation, who said he didn’t want to be the PM, gradually gave in to the corrosive infection of desire for power and control at the cost of the very freedom he once fought for.

Khaleque, Nur, and Moina: The Productive Force of the State

The importance of the previous two discussions can wholly be understood in this part examining the dominating power of the state authority in order to render Khaleque and Nur as mere tools of its propaganda machine. The hypnotizing hold on the mind of the masses was possible to be sustained because of the charisma of Sheikh Mujib as a leader who could do it all from inciting a mass uprising and civil non-cooperation to building a new nation after the struggle for liberation was completed. The exploration of Khaleque as a parallel of Sheikh Mujib had helped this work to lay down the development of Mujib from a people's leader to an authoritarian dictator because of precarious circumstances as well as a human nature of desire for power. In this final part, this work has drawn the conclusion by looking into the mechanism of using Khaleque and Nur as a productive force as proposed by Louis Althusser in the production of Sheikh Mujib's legitimacy as the authority of the state.

First of all, this chapter aimed to probe into ideologies like 'Nationalism' to explore the exploitation and abuses of it instead of any value judgment, like - it's a pure evil or a benevolent ideology. It is of utter importance to remember that ideas and ideologies are manmade, hence it's in our hands how we intend to use them in practice, it doesn't matter whether the ideas are flawless on paper. Every political, social, economic, and religious ideology has had a history of exploitation and manipulation: nationalism, capitalism, communism, various religions. In the recent history of human civilization, the collective spirit of nationalism has enabled oppressed people to stand against their oppressor and to take back their rights, and through that to form an independent nation state; our ancestors continue revolts against British Raj eventually earned the Indian subcontinent its azadai; which was followed by our own sacrifice and struggle against the West-Pakistani oppressive authority. We can also think of dozens of other African, Southeast,

Caribbean, South American countries earning their independence in the post-colonial era. After the independence, if the nation leaders and the population still share the unity of brotherhood, nationhood, the disciplined sense of development, and if their integrity stays firm, then nationalism further allows state machine to use its people as tools to build that nation and ushers it into economic, political, moral, environmental, aesthetic development. However, it hasn't been the case in Bangladesh due to our moral and political corruption, selfishness and greed, lack of unity as a nation - all of which can be argued are the consequences of our collective trauma under a long spell of colonialism, from which our nation hasn't been healed yet. Both collectively and individually, we are suffering from paranoia, trust issues, we are busy fighting among ourselves regarding religious belief, cultural practices, etc. This broken nationalism has in turn always created the chances for the rise of dictators and oppressors within ourselves. We as a nation have been stuck in a perpetual tragic loop of heroes becoming villains.

One of these heroes turning villains was Sheikh Mujib in this novel. After independence, he became the absolute head of not only his political party Awami League, but also the government and the country itself. Here, a question could be asked whether the population was responsible for the rise of such an autocracy because they were the one who positioned Mujib in a place of God with absolute power over the nation. The godly position got to his head and he corrupted and exploited the emotion of nationalism for his own gain. The very nationalism that united the whole country for its independence was turned into an ideology of one man to serve his own interest, which is Mujib as the absolute authority of the state, and which he appropriately named as "Mujibism" (Imam 213). The sycophants that surrounded him in establishing his own ideology also helped him disconnect from the reality of people suffering from poverty, flood, and famine in the post war broken economy. That disconnect only

aggravated his desperate attempts of retaining his power at the cost of democracy and the wellbeing of his citizens.

In order to produce and keep reproducing the dominance and legitimacy of his authority, Mujib needed productive forces who would work to propagate his authority. This thesis studied Khaleque and Nur as one of the major productive forces. According to Althusser, the productive force must be competent, and Khaleque and Nur both were skilled at using the public's emotion of nationalism for their economic gain. In chapter 12 Imam presented a vivid illustration of experts at work to exploit public sentiment,

“These people are in a trance—the indolent, seductive trance of Bengali nationalism. We are creating a trance within that trance so that they reach into their pockets. Whatever you speak or do not speak will not move them from it.” (63)

Nur's expertise was mimicking the voice, the emotions, the speech of Mujib, and Khaleque orchestrated the act with his intelligence of organizing, managing the whole performance, and manipulating Nur into doing this for money. Their performance naturally caught sight of Mujib and he sent one of his party leaders “Moina Mia” (72) to convince them to work for Mujib and Awami League,

“Moina Mia addressed Nur Hussain as ‘Sheikh Mujib’, and asked him directly if he would be interested in working with him. The job involved, he explained, speaking to various crowds within the local constituency, something we were already doing. Nur Hussain would appear at the meeting spot well ahead of time and deliver the speech again and again to prepare the crowd for the main attraction of the day” (74)

Moina Mia himself was one of the tools in the productive force, a devoted worker of Mujib as he expressed after meeting Khaleque and Nur that he was more than willing to sacrifice his own physical and mental comfort when tasked with a job by Mujib. Moina Mia was tasked with

finding and communicating with Khaleque and Nur because Mujib needed their performance to use for his propaganda because he had been failing as a statesman, thus the legitimacy of his authority is threatened. Khaleque had an insight regarding the possible failure of Mujib and its consequences in chapter 13,

“people trusted him, they believed in his ability to lead and provide. An unthinkable dangerous situation would arise if Sheikh Mujib failed to administer the country as a visionary leader, reflecting the desires of its people. We might even end up with civil war.” (70)

Hence, Khaleque had been predisposed to accepting this propaganda work because he already had a realization that Mujib might be the only binding force that could unite the collective. And he understood that in order for failing Mujib to sustain his authority, the repetition of his speech of 7th March 1971 was an effective ideological symbol of power and competence. That speech was potent because it was the speech that brought together the nation for their ultimate armed struggle for an independent nation, so people might be still be manipulated by the sentiment of the speech again and again. In addition to this observation, Khaleque’s another and might be the main incentive to work for Mujib was earning money in a precarious time that was crumbling under the cruel strike of poverty and famine; therefore, he asks,

“If we were to work for Moina Mia instead of what we were doing, we would have to know the monetary part of the proposal in detail” (75)

Moina Mia responded with not only an amount “so huge compared to what we were earning” (Imam 75), but also additional manipulative words in order to strengthen their ideological submission to Mujib as his workers,

“As long as Sheikh Mujib was leading the country, there would be no scarcity of money for any patriotic work. He had freed the country; he knew how to fight hardship. Bad times had arrived, but they would not stay long. The Awami League being in power meant all the people of the country were in power. They knew exactly how to take initiatives, proper and pragmatic initiatives, to build the country from its foundation up. Such initiatives would be taken in every constituency and Nur Hussain was an indispensable part of that effort.” (75)

All of this was aligned with what Althusser proposed that in order to secure the productive forces, the workers needed to be allured with material incentive as well the ideological manipulation.

The second component of reproducing the legitimacy of Mujib’s authority was a clear distinction between Mujib as the owner, and Nur and Khaleque as the worker. Not only that, that relationship of production must be maintained through both ISA and RSA working at the same time. Althusser realized that the state authority by default is repressive: Mujib has his personal militia force – the gestapo-like Rakkhi Bahini, his party cadres, and other repressive tools of a state like, police to use on his dissenters. Thus, this paper mainly intended to investigate the ideological forces at work. Among them, the most powerful was the black coat of Sheikh Mujib, or known eponymously as ‘Mujib Coat’. Khaleque understood that the black coat symbolized moral corruption, it stood for the absolute and forceful authority of Sheikh Mujib, hence he criticized whoever wears it to show their obedience to Mujib and he refuses to wear it at first,

“No way, no way am I going to wear that trouble, not even if I have to go to prison for three months. I cannot tarnish my character by embracing it. Not until I have gone mad and my heart has collapsed...” (111)

However, since it was an essential requirement for every worker under Mujib to wear his black coat, and that Khaleque was motivated to earn a handsome amount of material gain as a worker, he reluctantly decided to wear it, “I would wear a piece of cloth as a piece of cloth, not as an idea” (Imam 111). However, as soon as he donned that piece of cloth, the symbolic dominance and authority that it embodied started to devour him. He started to feel like Sheikh Mujib, the power of being a Mujib was surging through his veins so strongly that he started to utter the lines of the Mujib speech, hence justifying the coat,

“I thanked myself again for trying what I did not like. I felt that no Bengali would ever be a true Bengali unless he wore the Mujib coat at least once in his life.”
(113)

This scene resembled the scene from Akhteruzzaman Elias’s “Raincoat”, where the protagonist Nurul Huda, a cowardice person, wore his freedom fighter brother-in-law’s raincoat giving him a heroic and courageous aura to tolerate the physical abuse of the Pakistani military like the beating was nothing but a nuisance. Instead of that kind of heroism, the black coat throws Khaleque into an abyss of becoming an accomplice of Mujib’s reign of terror, who started submitting to the dominance and authority of Mujib,

“I wore the Mujib coat, I had many questions on my mind...I would ask him a set of well constructed questions...Now hours away from meeting him, I could not think of anything to ask him...A man wearing a Mujib coat could not charge Mujib with any wrongdoing; a man wearing a Mujib coat could not object to anything said or done by any other man wearing a Mujib coat, not even when he saw people dying.” (115-116)

Khaleques’ euphoria heightened even further after meeting the prime minister Mujib himself. The calm and charisma of the man, the myth, the legend consumed his mind, thus the beginning of a man who turned into a mouthpiece of Mujib’s legitimacy by sacrificing all the moral

grounds he once stood on. He had been devoured by the ideology of Mujibism which replaced or corrupted the original spirit of nationalism. He internalized Sheikh Mujib as the sole liberator and savior of the nation, he said,

“We want every individual in this country to enquire about Sheikh Mujib when they wake up in the morning; we won’t stop until children refuse to go to sleep unless they are told stories of Sheikh Mujib, and girls refuse to get married until their grooms promise to be loyal to Sheikh Mujib.” (135)

Yet he was being punished by his conscience because he was completely aware that he had brought his own moral downfall by selling himself for money and recognition, as well as to feel himself powerful over a weaker person - Nur. Hence, when he acknowledged in the chapter “Sold” that he sold Nur several times - to the street, to Sheikh Mujib - it symbolized him selling his own honor and righteousness. When he later realized that he was turning into a monster for exploiting Nur and taking his choices away, he intended to backtrack, and stopped working for Mujib. Because of that Moina Mia threatened him with possible use of repressive force, that if Khaleque didn’t oblige, he would be in despair. Khaleque was scared, “He has me...The Awami League has me. I am dead” (Imam 216). Thus, threatened by Moina Mia, Khaleque started to lose his mind and eventually when he was confronted by Nur Hossain with the fact that he has turned into a “little sheikh mujib”, he killed him. The death of Nur symbolized the death of Khaleque’s soul and humanity, and these two tragic deaths were due to Mujib’s exploitation of two human beings as a mere tool to propagate his authority.

Chapter Two: *The World in My Hands*

This text is analysed first through an examination of the privileges of belonging to an upper social class when faced with a precarious situation under an oppressive authority, and then the usual investigation of Hissam and Kaiser being used as a productive force regardless of their privileged class.

If You Have a Choice, Are You a Precariat?

This discussion was an attempt to examine what kind of precarious situation Hissam and Kaiser were in; whether Hissam was willing to be a productive force of the state because his mere survival is at stake; what enabled Kaiser to be defiant of that.

“Hissam Habeeb - Deputy Editor of The Daily Pandua, man of letters with a pungent wit, and deep-seated heresies; and also a possessor of ambitions as huge and hidden as his anxieties” (Ahmed 1)

Introduced as a man of ambition who held a reputable and important position of a daily yet suffering from existential anxiety, Hissam’s precarity thus arose not from a necessity of survival but from his insecurity of not being able to attain what he desires beyond basic survival. Guy Standing in his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* posits an explanation to define what is precarity and who are precariat: when one has no “occupational identity” due to their unstable and uncertain labour; one has to engage in works that are “neither recognized nor remunerated”; one is in constant debt and in danger of getting demoted to be a homeless. None of these situations applied to Hissam. His economic, social, occupational identity weren’t facing any threat of extinction.

Similarly, when examining Kaiser's social class and socioeconomic status, there were no elements that indicated any precarity in Standing's measure,

“Kaiser was Hissam's best friend, one of Pandua's biggest businessmen and known to be close to the top echelons of the SDP” (Ahmed 8)

In addition to that, Kaiser had “a sizable stake in the paper” (Ahmed 11) Hissam was working at. Thus, he had his political, economic, and social identity well-secured. In fact, according to Standing's hierarchy of social class, Kaiser belonged to the highest “Elite” class who exert influential political authority and a significant part of the plutocracy. In this hierarchy, Hissam's belonged to the second highest class, a salariat. Therefore, if their basic existence was not in a precarious position then what else? Here, the Butlerian definition of precarity helped further the exploration. According to Judith Butler, precariousness is an inherent state in human nature and human's social existence since as social beings both of our wellbeing and destruction simultaneously exist in relation to other people and other elements of the society. Therefore, Hissam's sense of precarity was a result of his desire to be recognized as a remarkable person, his desire to wield more power and authority, to have his worth fully acknowledged, and as he found himself in a world full of opportunity, he was anxious that he might fail to take this chance to fulfil what he most desired. Hissam's such longing could be understood in these lines,

“Hissam didn't want money...High time people of merit and integrity receive their due honours, even rewards.” (Ahmed 32)

On the other hand, Kaiser was a strong-willed and single-minded person, who had apparently achieved the things he wanted in life,

“self-made...Kaiser amassed wealth because he loved the luxuries it enabled, and also for the sheer pleasure of winning battle, and of course to attain a position above people who ignored him when first arrived in Palitpur.” (Ahmed 35)

Besides having earned the material possession and social status, Kaiser belonged to a happy family consisting of his wife and son. A man who possesses everything he had desired for, might also have everything to lose in a regime that was in a mission to hunt down and bend politically and economically influential people. Yet, he was not willing to sacrifice his integrity and pride which was reflected in his pondering when he was being interrogated at the BNI secret torture cell, “Take a stand now, and be destroyed by the regime’s brute assault. Or make a deal now, and be destroyed later” (Ahmad 239). Kaiser found himself in a world that was not in his control anymore, he was slipping through the fabric of time and space that once gave him security. Thus, Kaiser’s precarity was when his morality was at stake, when he had to compromise with his integrity and values, and be used as a tool for the unfair interest of the authority.

In the end, despite finding themselves in precarious situations, Hissam and Kaiser had a choice whether to join the state apparatus or reject. Hissam was willing to cooperate with the state because it promised him the things he had been craving for in life, whereas Kaiser chose to be defiant as his priority was to stand up by his honour no matter what. Two ambitious men, one who was on the precipice of losing either his honour or his material possession, and one who thought he hadn’t got the due appreciation of his worth.

The Productive Force of the State:

The previous discussion established Hissam and Kaiser susceptibility as valuable targets for the state due to their occupational, social, political identity and influence. This part began with laying out the players acting as the state and the authority. The military backed emergency government was the embodiment of the state, there the authoritative figures maintained a hierarchical pattern: BNI director Brigadier Bakhtiar was the most prominent authority in the novel, however it could be argued that he was also a productive force, a mere worker for the greater authority who sat atop, the mighty and elusive General Red Beard who was suggestively pulling the strings from behind. If Red Beard resembled Mujib from the previous novel, then Bakhtiar was Moina Mia - a dedicated employee who might truly believe in the cause of eradicating the corrosive political disease of Pandua. However, as the story progressed, it got clear that he might have been deceived by his boss as his boss had his own agenda to legitimise his military authority as an elected, people-backed political power, an authoritarian under guise of democratic statesman.

Now, about the state apparatuses that were at play: first of all, the military backed government itself was a repressive form of state in the first place because it was tackling the vulnerable situation of Palitpur using curfew, military check posts, guns, and tank - there was an air of fear - which enabled the soldiers to display a seemingly unlimited power they were imbued with. This was bluntly portrayed in an instance in chapter one when Hissam, at the curfew hour, was going to the BNI and halted by a tense confrontation with a soldier at a check post,

“The soldier sauntered over to their car with the universal gait of all men with a gun slung over their shoulders: deliberately slow and with just a hint of a swagger to signal their authority...the soldier - dull-eyed young men with a thin and austere face,

hardened from years of beatings, presumably first from his father and then in the army”
(14)

Aside from its armed forces, since the state was an administrative one ran by military officers, it used military institutions to devise and execute its laws i.e. Bureau of National Intelligence (BNI). BNI utilised every possible measure to make people comply with the state, be it coercion and/or coaxing. Which led this thesis to examine how Hissam was persuaded to work for the state. Hissam’s ambition and willingness to compromise with his personal and occupational ethics was consequences of a deep sense of insecurity that was a result from the parental neglect he received in his childhood,

“Hissam’s father belonged to a generation of men who saw their parental duties ending with paying school fees and periodic admonition for infractions brought to their notice...even his mother was a relatively aloof figure...he always had a soft-corner for all beings and all things neglected” (173)

Additionally, his bitter sweet relationship with Natasha was - “far more than friends-affections requited, tenderness mutual-yet never quite lovers, what were they?” - and then seeing her choosing his best friend Kaiser had scarred him further on his self-belief and self-worth. Then he found himself in front of Brigadier Bakhtiar who was offering him the things, the recognition he desired: the board to treat him fairly and elect him as the editor at *The Daily Pandua*. Bakhtiar was aware of how desperately he was looking forward to the promotion, that his conflicted mind could be manipulated into being a worker of his cause, hence he tempted Hissam in a crafty way which gave it a façade of greater cause for the country,

“This is the big game, Mr Habeeb. There is only a plan. There are prospects...I am asking you to do your part. We know about you position at *The Daily Pandua*. The Board has not treated you fairly. During this time, Board members might be open to suggestions from us.” (29)

Bakhtiar's passionate assurance gave Hissam a sense of comfort that someone might truly understand where his yearnings and pain lied. In exchange he was expected to turn his newspaper as the media wing of the military regime, which he accepted and in just ten days into the new regime, he broke the BNI designed list of the politicians and the business who were about to be arrested, and published the "Eight-Truck Arms Haul" exposé. In addition to that, Bakhtiar needed Hissam as an "intelligentsia" to influence the intellectual apparatus - the 'Civic Forum' to join the regime for the nationalistic cause, as he urged, "Mr Habeeb, this is not a time for timidity. It is time for patriots to step up, even to risks." (27). This invoked Gramsci's idea of intellectuals in his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* where he draws a distinction between the class of intellectuals in a society: there are traditional bourgeois intellectuals, and then there were working-class intellectuals who organically grew among the masses to speak for the proletariats of the society. Here, Hissam belonged to the traditional intellectual class who influenced and shaped public opinion for the ruling class and their status quo through ideological apparatuses, i.e. *The Daily Pandua*. As he failed to convince the Civic Forum to comply with the regime's plan, his responsibility evolved into recruiting members to form a new party for the regime. With his growing responsibility also grew his sense of self-importance and "status" (Ahmed 157). Yet he hadn't accomplished his crown jewel, the editorship in his daily, so he demanded Bakhtiar to do whatever it takes to get him the recognition he most deserved in exchange for his dedicated labour for the state. His pursuit of apparent happiness had gotten him so blind that he couldn't foresee that his greed was about to cost him the life his best friend Kaiser and eventually all the sources of happiness that really mattered to him. Which led this thesis to examine the role of Kaiser and how he was treated by the state apparatuses.

The regime needed Kaiser's compliance and confession to rat out his party comrade, Mostafa, the leader of the SocDem, as a scheme to exile him from politics. Kaiser was, from the beginning, being persuaded by Hissam to join the regime's plan but he was not willing to do that at the cost of the truth and his honour by conceding that he is also a corrupt person, by accepting their false charge **"Kaiser Karim. Developer. Bribes, Tax Dodging. Money Laundering."** (Ahmed 199). Kaiser firmly understood that the players at the helm of the regime who were supposedly trying to clean up the country and end corruption were incompetent and corrupt themselves, and that their method of maneuvering and governing the state matters was hasty and would collapse very soon. He also understood that Hissam was onboard with this plan because he loved the sense of power and authority it gave him, as he "knew the seductive thrill of being in the centre" which surpassed the euphoria of any substance or sexual bliss, it was a blinding ecstasy that was capable of clouding the judgement of even a thoughtful man like Hissam. Since Hissam couldn't convince Kaiser, the state began its display of repressive power by initiating an assault on Kaiser's property "The Atlas Tower" in chapter 6. Their goal was to put him in an embarrassing situation so that he was bound to ask Bakhtiar for favour to stop the assault which in return, Bakhtiar hoped, would oblige Kaiser to comply with his plan. However, Kaiser was not someone to fall for that as he angrily remarked, "They create a problem, they solve it, now I own Bakhtiar?" (Ahmed 134). Failing to bring him in the bag this way, the regime intensified their brutal repression by arresting him in a abduction manner and subjecting him to interrogation and cruel torture. This whole process of RSA unfolded in chapter 11. Through the interrogation, Kaiser got to know their plan for him, why they wanted his compliance which was discussed in the beginning of this passage. Kaiser, faced with two possibilities: betray his honour and his party or face the regime's brutality, chose to stand by his conscience and integrity and

condemned the regime despite their torture and threat. As a consequence, he was sent to the jail where he took his own life instead of losing his dignity anymore at the hands of the corrupt regime's repression. In the end, even in his death, Kaiser's virtue and glory lived on through the love and memory of his family, state apparatuses failed to manipulate him into submitting his obedience for their cause; whereas in the pursuit of superficial elements of happiness Hissam lost everything that mattered; his friends and his loves, as well as his profession – thus becoming another victim of state using its people as mere tools for its own interest.

Conclusion

This dissertation illustrated that people from every socioeconomic class are susceptible to the repressive and ideological manipulation of the state and its apparatuses. People like Khaleque were driven by the imminent threat of their very existence, whereas people like Hissam were faced with an existential crisis that threatened their desire for status and recognition. Yet, this study found nuances even in such apparent black and white distinction of existential desire: that Khaleque and Hissam were not very different when it came to being intoxicated by the sheer euphoria of power and the authority to control people beneath them. In this way, they were manifestations of the greed and hunger for power of the people they were dominated and manipulated by: Sheikh Mujib. Motin, Brigadier Bakhtiar who represented the state. Another finding of this thesis was that the system always overpowered the individuals: it was capable in corrupting the intelligent and perceptive minds of Khaleque and Hissam; even if some individuals defied the machinery of torment to live by their conscience, they were destroyed in literal sense – the demise of Nur and Kaiser.

In addition to its findings, this work may help in assisting further studies on *The Black Coat* and *The World in My Hands* which may include: a deep psychological analysis on human nature and ambition, and its desire of power and control; an examination on the collective trauma of being colonised and how it enables us to be our own oppressors; and maybe a further academic study or literary work on our recent event of July mass uprising which ousted another dictator.

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