

## A CRITICAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENT ALIENATION AND RADICALISATION IN FATHIMA BHUTTO'S *THE RUNAWAYS*

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### ABSTRACT

Terrorism in any of the ways is not fruitful to the human kind. It leads only to perish the entire human race. Human is considered as a social animal. He is unique creature, has an extra sense which enables him to analyse, in this way he differs from all other species of the world. With this rarity he likes to make an assurance that he is above all other living things. By expressing his wide range of knowledge he confirms he is luminary who achieves and registers his footprints all where. But sometimes when he is in complexities he does not have any hold to guide him into a right path. When the young minds are led morally there won't be any catastrophe.

The vulnerability and the foolishness of the tender minds have been catastrophically exploited by the masterminds. Terrorism is controversially linked with religion always. Most of the contributions to literature would be the observations of the happenings of the world. In such writings the sort of queer linkage of terror and religion is beautifully portrayed. One such literary contribution is *The Runaways*, the most recent novel by Fatima Bhutto. She tracks how the experiences of poverty, disaffection and alienation become the pathways to Islamist extremism in the novel. This paper focuses on the humanity of those caught up in the maze of Islamic extremism.

**Key words:** Islamist extremism, transnationality, religion, liberty, existentialism, poverty, identity crisis, jihad

Pakistani literature originated soon after it gained its independence as a sovereign state. The common and shared tradition of Urdu literature and English literature of British India was inherited by the new state. Over a period of time a body of literature unique to Pakistan emerged written in nearly all major Pakistani languages including Urdu, English, Punjabi, Pashto, Seraiki, Baloach, Kashmiri and Sindhi. There were works which played a significant role in documenting the hardships and hopes of Pakistan in the latter part of the twentieth century. Today, Pakistani literature has taken a shape of its own by depicting the complex class system, rigid socio-political web, inter-ethnic hostilities, corrupt administration, cruel feudal laws of its land, fundamentalism, religious oppression etc.

English language poetry from Pakistan from the beginning held a special place in South Asian writing, notably with the work of Shahid Suhrawardy, Ahmed Ali, Alamgir Hashmi and Maki Kureishi, and later of Athar Tahir, Waqas Ahmed Khwaja, Omer Tarin, Hina Babar Ali and others. But fiction from Pakistan began to receive recognition in the latter part of the 20th century, with the

popularity of the Parsi author Bapsi Sidhwa who wrote *The Crow Eaters*, *Cracking India* etc., after the earlier reputations of Ahmed Ali and Zulfikar Ghose had been made in international fiction. In the diaspora, Hanif Kureishi commenced a prolific career with the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which won the Whitbread Award, and Aamer Hussein wrote a series of acclaimed short story collections. Sara Suleri published her literary memoir, *Meatless Days*. In the early years of the twenty first century, a number of Pakistani novelists writing in English won or were shortlisted for international awards like Mohsin Hamid, Asad Shabbir and Mohammed Hanif. Emerging authors Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Fatima Bhutto have garnered wide attention.

Fatima Bhutto is realistic Pakistani writer. She is a niece of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. She has written a book of poetry, two works of nonfiction, including her bestselling Memoir *Songs of Blood and Sword* and immensely acclaimed novel *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, which was longlisted for the Women's Prize for fiction. Her book *The Runaways* is an explosive novel that asks complex questions about modern identity.

This paper discusses the depiction of the human cost when violence shifts from abstraction to reality and also highlights the existential angst of the young generation through the characters Layla, Anita Rose, Monty and Sunny. Their inherent fears, sense of loneliness and dislocation, anxieties have been brought out in this study.

*The Runaways* hold up a clear mirror to the way societies in many parts of the world are shaping moulding, distorting and deforming the young minds. In other words, the book is a need of the hour that can tackle the issues of raising fundamentalism. It tells us that extremists are made, not born as in the case of Sunny a disenfranchised boy from Portsmouth. He is the only son of a wealthy widowed father Sulaiman Jamil who "had not studied and so was denied the life he deserved" (15). He escapes to England to give his son a life of luxury. He has done everything for his precious son's happiness. But "nothing lasted very long for Sunny Jamil" (25). Sunny's mother died when he was two years old and since then his protective father has always been beside him asking "You have a father who loves you. What more could your poor pa have given you?" (25). But even then Sunny was alone "speaking into void" (39). Even "the Maryams the Aishas and the Kareenas" who stalk Sunny at clubs and cinemas could not offer him any sense of belonging. "He was done with all that" (41). Sexuality is a puzzle and it's his reluctance to come to terms with it that leaves him vulnerable to the predations of charismatic religious leader. Sunny spent hours googling "Arabic translations, reading blog posts about jurisprudence, collating and collecting fables and histories" (42). He shared his learning and understanding of Islam through his Facebook and waited for response. He wished someone would meet him at the intersection of his confusion and emptiness, "would lift him from his troubled self" (43).

Sunny's tragic experience with the gay Stefan of the gym also escalates his worries and leaves him mentally disturbed. He blames himself for everything that happened between them. The more he blamed the more was he drawn towards spirituality. He memorized Omar-"you come at the king, you best not miss" (50).

As days passed by Portsmouth appeared to be a wasteland to Sunny. He wondered "Why hadn't pa stayed in India with his people, where they would have belonged?" (51).

At the mosque Sunny loved the secret company of Naya who was Ben's sister. He hated Ben for his racial comments. Ben would often question Sunny about his Taliban friends. Sunny wanted to be known a wanting so bad that it was an ache, "stitched across his skin so tightly, if he acted rashly, he felt he would be torn apart"(77). He wanted to make others feel his importance. By proclaiming to the whole world his identity, he wanted to establish his existence. Till now he has not succeeded in that. His very self is yearning for recognition. This pathetic situation has been very well exploited by his cousin Oz who returns from Syria. He tells Sunny that he is "looking for everything but the truth" (96).

According to Oz women are distractions from the self. "Women since Eve were out to dirty the message" (96). Oz returned from Syria as a different person and everyone was captivated by what Oz had to say. He glorified Syria – "the seat of Islam's most divine Caliphate, a kingdom that commanded respect from Europe" (97). Sunny too was drawn towards Oz. he felt there was something radiant even beautiful about him. Further Oz explained that the west had gone mad, had lost sight of the path to truth, "letting gays have parades, bringing women out of the home, making abortions common, raising sex change operations" (100). Oz indoctrinates poor Sunny and questions his troubled soul. He asks, "why we got to code ourselves all the time like People of Colour, Asian descent?" (100). To Oz, the west was finished and corrupted beyond repair.

Before going to Syria Oz was selling dime bags of weeds to make ends meet but now he has a foot in the future in truth since Syria. "He is now fluent in politics and current affairs. Sunny along with Oz eagerly awaited by the computer for calls to come in from Tikrit. They watched the faces of those men light up on Skype as they spoke about the Ummah Movement's jihad and how blessed they were to finally be in a place where the strict law of Shariah was followed. Oz further explained that Mujahids are fighting to protect Islam. It is every Muslim's duty to fight for Islam and die for it.

The Islam that Sunny knew before the coming of Oz was mercy. It was submission not violence. It made no distinction between sons Sunninor Shia. There were all one - all Muslims, all connected. Sunny did not want Oz to be angry with him. So he like an obedient lamb listened carefully as he didn't want to "lose the one thread he had ever found that led somewhere" (120). Slowly Oz had changed Sunny's world. Sunny too began to breathe, see, hear, fell like Oz. Radical Islam began to flow into Sunny's veins. At last Sunny felt that he would suffocate under the weight of his father's dreams. "Where would Sunny go to escape the mourning of this life?" (142)

Like more privileged kids of the day, Sunny too wanted relief from the nothingness of the present world. He is sick of all the modern amnesties as he is leading a posh life, unaware of the sufferings and sorrows of the common man who toils to make his both ends to meet. Since Oz had been "prepared to end his life: to journey, to fight, to die" (144). Nothing threatened to stop him from detonating himself against the world. There was nothing in his life worth preserving, nothing he wished to hold on. He wanted to do something different in the name of religion and thereby establishing his identity in this unknown world. But Sunny's father Sulaiman was a practical man. He called religion "a manmade disease, a way to control the weak" (144). But Oz and Sunny, the future jihadists brushed aside the thoughts of Sulaiman and marched towards their goals.

Oz introduces Layla to Sunny as he would not travel with Sunny as he might be on the radar. According to Oz Layla is a genuine fighter, a renegade and that she alone was responsible for a twenty percentage increase in media attention to the cause. She had many followers, gaining them by the second, every single day. Oz addresses her as “Our Sister” posting the videos and even Twitter could not shut her down, did not even “understand the level at which her class to jihad were reverberating” (146). She was the first Muslim to force those questions out into open on social media. She was a warrior, a lone wolf.

Oz asked a couple of his pals who had spoken to Sunny on Skype to join them at the earliest. Meanwhile Oz would lie low in England to raise some funds, recruit some more soldiers. Before leaving Portsmouth, Sunny connected his pa’s bank details to his phone’s direct debit and increased his data package. He went to the cemetery and laid daffodils on his mother’s grave. Sunny was in dilemma, unsure of his decision, though he wanted to escape from that place yet he felt how hard it was to leave. He could not understand what he felt or was that right. Somehow he made up his mind and convinced himself that this was the “sacrifice, the hardship for a higher purpose, to fight for a beautiful cause” (152).

Sunny was a scapegoat at the hands of his own cousin. He hardly knew anything about the Umaahh Movement. When he reached Mosul, like him there were hundreds of boys crossed oceans, betrayed families, abandoned comfortable lives, much of them spent behind iPod screens and videos consoles, to reach Mosul to fight. Monty was also one of them.

Monty from Karachi, is from an incredibly wealthy family, his father owns half of the city. When the beautiful and rebellious girl called Layla joined his school, Monty falls in love with her. She is mysterious in character. He follows her into Iraqi desert, calling her name even in his troubled sleep every night. From the experiences of Monty and Sunny, one can understand the depth of the seductive power of radical Islamism, Layla is “the princess of jihad”, the symbol of its beguilement. For Monty, “everything began and ended with Layla” (189).

Fatima Butto makes use of the third person perspective thought, which allows her to follow each character effectively. For Anita Rose, it’s the dignity of servitude and the constraints of poverty that compel her to seek an alternative life. She lives in one of Karachi’s biggest slums with her mother and brother. She is determined to escape her stifling situations. Her mother works for a rich family. When a kind neighbour introduces her to poetry and political radicalism, her envy turns to anger. He makes her rebel against minority oppression. She being a Christian was ill treated in school as well. “The girls on the bench would squeeze Anita between them” (12). Mira would call her “Kutekebachhi”(13). Her classmates made her feel unwanted and useless.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper analysed the socio-economic condition of Pakistan that ill-treats the minorities, violates their basic right to exist through the characters like Layla and Anita Rose. Apart from the class issue, religion plays a vital role in moulding the minds of the younger generation.

Fundamentalism is at its peak which paves the way for Islamic extremism as is evident from the lives of Sunny, Monty, Layla etc. Individuals become 'lone wolves' and deviate from the mainstream when society fails to accommodate them and their need.

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