



RESEARCH PAPER

Women as 'Others' in Bhutto's *The Runaways*: A Feminist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to expose the brutalities and unjust behavioral patterns of men especially in Pakistani society through Fatima Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways*. Following the said objective, the study dismantles the settled notions about women as feeble, other, weak, and deviant and a way forward to think women as free, independent and equal member of the society. In this work, the textual analysis has been carried out under Simon De Beauvoir's ideology of feminism. Through Bhutto's novel *The Runaways* (2019) this research argues that women are being suppressed and oppressed in this patriarchal society; they face inequalities and are given inferior status in the society. The female emancipation has been ignored and eradicated by the powerful and corrupt faction of society, male. Thus, it concludes oppression and objectification of women in the male dominant society of Pakistan and how do the social issues in Pakistan pestering the women while shattering their feminist beliefs painted by Bhutto.

KEYWORDS Efficiency of Local Government, Municipal Services, Sindh

Introduction

Women are not given their due status in patriarchal societies as Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways* has also exposed in this research. Bhutto has unveiled women's exploitation, marginalization and subjugation within Pakistani patriarchal society. Gender stereotypes are challenged here and women emancipation is emphasized. A French feminist writer and theorist of gender studies in her famous work '*The Second Sex*' has painted the myths of women and their stereotypical womanity. According to her point of view the conception of 'women' as 'other' has been implicated to the society and they have been behaved like deviant, weak, inferior, abnormal and the second sex. She feels sadness on the bitter situation and harsh reality that women have accepted the roles imposed on them by males and unconsciously they have agreed with this misconception of their being marginalized and treated as 'other'. Males and females both adapt the stereotypical gender roles that are imposed on them by their culture and societal system. The traditional roles of both sexes have always been observed for ages. In today's modern society females have not equal rights and they are still being marginalized by the patriarchal society. It is our patriarchal society that assigns to men a superior status than women. In this way, women face inequalities in their society. This concept is not beneficial for women. By dint of this concept women got many injustices over the years. This study shows subordination and 'otherness' of women in the patriarchal atmosphere and it depicts that how the fundamental womanly freedom has been diminished by the patriarchal society.

In Pakistan women are still suppressed by the patriarchal atmosphere. This male dominant system may cause various injustices faced by women. Women confront

silently by living in the Pakistani community where they are supposed to be the victim. In our country more than thousands of women are the victim of men and marginalized by society. They suffer from alienation, physical torture, mental stress due to the cruelty of men including arrange marriages and domestic violence. Pakistani writer Fatima Bhutto is considered important because of the women's representation in her novel. In this research, Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019) highlights the status of women in Pakistan. Fatima Bhutto 31 years old member of Pakistan's one of the most famous political family, Bhutto family - that has produced two prime ministers, her aunt Benazir Bhutto and her grandfather Zulfikar Ali. Writing from her adolescent age, Fatima, has produced a number of literary and non-literary fiction.

With its intricate combination of concepts – personal, national, and transnational identity; the connection between fervor and self-destruction; and the nature of the matrix in which we live – Fatima Bhutto's novel *The Runaways* creates a complex fictional topography. Emotional response of the protagonist of novel points to a new vigor of supremacy where selfhood and politics, empire and psychology, turn out to be intricately linked. The author presents a displaced Indian Muslim immigrant named Sunny who is driven to adapt to his adopted nation of England even as he gnaws at a new culture. His father, however, has failed in his attempts to blend in with British society, which depresses him. The civility, justice, and reason of the English are indisputable in the eyes of his father, Sulaiman Jamil. His adoptive culture shows him little sympathy even though his father has denied his Indian heritage. His father blatantly emulates British social and cultural norms, making him the epitome of the dislocated immigrant. Sunny symbolizes the empty, virtually invisible immigrant. A migrant runs the risk of either unthinking assimilation or horrific reincarnation in their quest to re-create identity and become visible, unless they are successful in establishing a new transnational space. In an effort to gain visibility and find significance in his background, Sunny, alienated from British culture, adopts the views of fundamentalist Islam. The identity he seeks to establish as a "sentinel" of the pan-Islamic and transnational Ummah Movement in Mosul, Iraq, however, is as hideous and inhospitable as the hegemonic endeavors of nation-states, all of which he is ignorant of. The similar circumstances that Anita Rose's Christian family faces – her brother turning to organized crime to support him – also reveal the Islamic theocracy that lurks beneath the surface of Pakistan (Khan, 2020).

The author implies that the reality of exile and the resulting sense of displacement are equally complex as the sacredness attributed to the idea of pan-Islamism through the characters of Sunny, Monty, and Layla. That none of the main characters accepted the challenge of moving on from the past and overcoming it to forge a better version of themselves disappointed me. The protagonists' unwillingness to acknowledge and support the progressive, emancipatory, and pluralistic vision that Islam has fostered throughout the world equally disappointed me.

Literature Review

Fatima Bhutto, a member of one of Pakistan's most well-known political families, tells a moving story in her 2019 book *The Runaways*. This book takes place in the Middle East, Pakistan, and England. The three main characters in *The Runaways* are also the three runaways, and their adventures center around them. By Bhutto, the book is divided into four sections. Bhutto's personal life experiences are reflected in her expression of violence. Bhutto imparts to the reader a visceral understanding of the destabilizing sensation that arises when "violence has started to follow you home," not just for a few days or weeks but for years at a time (Sethna, p. 1). The story follows three young people

from disparate social backgrounds who are suppressed and aimless in their pursuit of the ideal place to call home. *The Runaways* (2019), her debut book, is set in the Karachi, Pakistani slums. The tale of three young people, full of violence and rebellion, is told in *The Runaways*. "You are searching everywhere, but this is the right place," a character in the book says to Sunny. Similar to modern literature, Bhutto's book placed a strong emphasis on writing about the lives and sufferings of women. In her discussion of the oppression and defiance of a young Pakistani woman, Bhutto also presents a significant and thought-provoking argument. Formerly residing in the largest slums in Karachi, Anita Rose is a disgruntled young girl. She is from a low-income household. She receives massages from her mother, a "maalishwali, who gives massages to wealthy women's worn-out bones. Anita Rose, though, is optimistic about a better life. When she first meets her neighbor, a man whose bookcases offer a way out. She is a half-Muslim, half-Christian girl who lives in poverty with her brother and mother. She is adamant about leaving her oppressive situation and her struggles with education. She changed her identity with ease in order to live a better life. She was given the Layla identity. She gives up her actual identity and self in order to live a better life in contemporary Pakistani society, where women have long fought for equal rights. Furthermore, Bhutto claims that it is a nation of "divided loyalties, and sacrifices" in *Heard on Morning Edition* (2015). Pakistan is a nation that requires its citizens to make sacrifices. Any violent place, in my opinion, requires its citizens to make some sacrifices (p. 1. Perhaps she is bringing it up because her grandfather, Zulifikar Ali Bhutto, was killed by a military dictatorship in the latter part of the 1970s, and this country has demanded sacrifices from her family. The other sacrifice is Shah Nawaz, whose father Murtaza Bhutto was shot dead by the police in 1996. Shah Nawaz was actually murdered in France in 1985 under suspicious circumstances. The 2007 bombing claimed the life of her aunt, former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. This book is effective on several levels. As Bhutto frequently writes about violence and how Pakistan is portrayed incorrectly. Her books are primarily about.

Despite hailing from a family that had a contentious political reign in Pakistan, Bhutto possesses a powerful writing voice. Her charitable and nationalist views are widely recognized. Despite hailing from a political family doomed to failure, she writes for both her "powerful relatives and the common citizens of her country.". She talks about young people too, saying they have "no hope for better life" and must make difficult choices (Sethna, 2014, p. 1). Bhutto discusses the lives of young people in Pakistan and their struggle for survival in *The Runaways* (2019). According to Feroze, Anita's brother, in the movie *The Runaways*, "it is the only way for our people to survive here.". Anaita also adopts a new name, saying, "Osama call me Layla, it's who I am now" (Bhutto, 2019, p. 262). Bhutto is renowned for holding fervent feminist beliefs. In *The Runaways* (2019), one of the key protagonists Anita Rose encounters numerous obstacles in her quest to discover her rightful place in society, the author delves into the issues faced by Pakistani women. As she states in *The Runaways* (2019), "this was a matter of survival," she sacrifices her true identity for this, going by Layla (Bhutto, 2019, p. (264). In her book *The Shadow of Crescent Moon*, Bhutto also questions the stereotype of Pakistani women, presenting the idea of common Pakistani women as resolute, fervent, and uncompromising. Staff members of IANS (2013) investigated Fatima's perception of women.

Brian. Vaughn and Adrian Alphona, London-based booksellers, review the current state of society, which places a high value on writing about women. Anita Rose was an impoverished girl who lived in Karachi's slums. Because she is a woman and a Christian, she is subjected to double oppression and exploitation. She struggles to

survive. In the modern world, where everything seems terrible, young people fight to survive in the novel (20 Sep. 2017). According to Asian Games author and editor Muhammad Cohen, it will be challenging to locate your rightful place in a burning world. Bhutto tackles a number of issues pertaining to contemporary Pakistani youth in *The Runaways*. As the niece and grandchild of prime ministers, Bhutto is destined for Pakistani politics and must consider her own place in the world. Bhutto says, "You don't get to go back to it." I used to believe that I was fleeing the violence I had experienced as a child. However, I was never able to get away from it because I would always write about it, reflect on it, watch it again, and try to grasp it from different angles. You never really get to run away, in my opinion. (Bhutto, 2019). Amitabha Bagchi, an author and associate professor of computer science at Delhi University, is another critic who offers critiques of Bhutto's *The Runaways*, as it is a book about violence and the burning desire of the Pakistani youth to discover who they really are. Sunny is a perplexed figure who does not belong to anywhere (Bagchi, 2018).

While experimenting with his own sexuality, Sunny, the misfit from Portsmouth, chafes at his father's love and expectations. In this research, I want to examine women's positions and the representation of women in Pakistani society that contemporary Pakistani writers are presenting in order to know that how much they are relevant to actual situation. Through these three diverse and young protagonists, Bhutto struggles to understand the question which is at the heart of this poignant novel: what is it to be a young Muslim in an increasingly polarized and violent world?

Material and Methods

Theoretical framework for this research falls under the paradigm of Feminism. Further the research follows descriptive approach for the textual analysis of the selected work. Following the history of the word feminism, it is noted that Auclert in her Journal *La Citoyenne as La Feminite* used the term Feminism in France in the late of 1880s and she attempted to criticize patriarchal practices and demanded for the equal rights of women in addition of influence by French revolution. In Britain by the first decade of the twentieth century, the term appeared in English and then in 1910s in America. In America in 1960 by a feminist called Friedan composed a book *The Feminine Mystique* that was a discussion about how women in the states had no jobs, no careers and even if they had a job the then they did not attain progress. Feminist literary theory, as a term, had been applied during the mid-1980s. Conventionally, criticism was used to refer reading of texts; while theory referred to the interpretation, evolution and examination of the philosophical and political underpinnings of the text.

In today's world theory appears simultaneously in feminist anthologies and the feminist literary theory includes both practice and theoretical approaches to literature (Gamble, 2006). Snowgrass's book of encyclopedia on feminist literature puts feminism as "A policy backing women's political and social rights as equal to those of men" (Snowgrass, 2006, p.656), which shows that instead of degrading any gender, the agenda of feminism is to establish equal rights for women.

Feminism theory struggle hard for equality. In society women are not given equal rights as men have. It campaigned for women's rights such as the right to vote, the right to hold office, to work, to earn, to own property, to receive education and to have equal rights within marriage. Feminism is a belief that is based on economic, political and social equality. Gender discrimination is not an issue of today; throughout the history women have been victimized by patriarchal system. Male dominated societies across the world view women as submissive members of the family. In ancient societies women were

confined to domestic duties. Their only duty is to serve their husband and family. They could not take part in politics, nor could they get education. Women were remained in their homes and in bringing up their children. This role of women remained unchallenged for centuries.

Regardless of social class, women's status in France was always subordinate to men's for centuries. As they participated in the fight to achieve the goal of revolution, women came to understand the value of themselves and the necessity of emancipation. Ironically, the French Revolution did not recognize women's rights even though it led to the states recognizing the personal freedoms of its citizens. According to De Beauvoir, the very idea of "woman" is a male construct: for a man, a woman is always the "other" since he is the "seer," meaning that she is the object and he is the subject. Men define what it means to be a woman. The *Sex Second*, Beauvoir's most well-known and significant work (Beauvoir, 1949), served as the inspiration for second wave feminism. The second sex talks about how women justify being the other in order to accept their place in the world. She argued that domesticity and femininity are artificial constructs that restrict women's freedom rather than inherent qualities of womanhood. Through Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019), this study examines and focuses on the social construction of women as the "other."

Results and Discussion

There are some efforts, carried out by Pakistan and Indian critics to trace the impact of feminist thoughts in Pakistani literature. Pakistani novels occupy the world of contestation and confusion but this is a sound belief that Pakistani fiction in English responds to the global articulation. Pakistani fiction appears as the artery and treasure trove of stories that are interesting and the writers are presenting the sound and firm concept of Pakistani society. Moreover, these Pakistani writers are exposing the real problems and challenge which Pakistan faces today via their fiction. On the other hand, they use their writings to depict the problems and challenges that Pakistan will face in future.

The problems that are experienced by women could not be separated from a patriarchal society that surrounds. In patriarchal society the status of women is considered below the male and is considered less important and inferior to men. Pakistan is a country that is still facing the problems of women due to a male dominated society. This patriarchal system may cause many imbalances and gender inequalities faced by women.

Women always suffer in Pakistani society. They are directed to violence. For example, *The Runaways* talks about the struggle and sacrifice of good mothers. Zenobia is Anita's mother who struggles hard and does best with her great responsibilities of upbringing of children particularly in case of daughter. Even she does not care of her health. She spends her whole life for their children. She works as a *maalish-wali* (one who provides massage services). She never thinks for her own self. Being a mother, she neglects her own life. When Anita thinks of her mother, "she could still smell her, a warm scent of sweat oils- clove, apricot, mustard, almond" (Bhutto, 2019, p.34). They are not rich. In Pakistani society the biggest crime is to be a woman and also poor. Therefore Zenobia works all the time for her children. In a patriarchal society, there is no place for poor people. Bhutto describes a mother's struggle for her children. Patriarchal system is responsible for their pitiable condition. They have been exploited, brutally killed in the name of honour, sexually abused, and threatened, suppressed and deliberately subjected to unspeakable violence. Women have lost their true self and individuality in modern

Pakistani society that is totally running by men. Women face the issues of isolation, alienation, helplessness, emotional and psychological stress and trauma due to these inequalities.

Many modern Pakistani writers have inked down the novels, they have highlighted the issues of women. The Pakistani fiction depicts the problems of Pakistani society. Because literature is the reflection of society. So, to solve out the problems of women it is necessary to highlight the patriarchy of Pakistani literature. In this research, Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019) highlight the problems of women in Pakistan.

The Runaways is a story of three young people named Anita Rose, Monty and Sunny who are all in search of their self-identification in a modern world. Through her characters Bhutto has worked on the theme of betrayal, violence, discrimination marginalization, and subjugation of women, consequences of choices made, love, determination and search for true identity or right place.

The novel works on multiple levels. First it talks about the problems of the people of Karachi of Pakistan how they are compelled to make difficult choices regarding their existence and identity. They are being detached from everything which can make them happy even by the very persons they loved. They even don't have their true identity. They change their identity for better existence as Bhutto writes, "it's the only way [...] there is only so far our people can go in this city". What has my name ever done for me?" (p. 131-132). She also writes "this was a matter of survival [...]" (p.264). Bhutto says that the people of Karachi are left with no hope for better life. She also describes the lives of modern women in Pakistan. Pakistan is a place in which everyone has to sacrifice something for their survival. It is a country that demands sacrifices for their own people.

Bhutto is a feminist writer and always writes about women rights and their individuality. In her novel *The Runaways*, she explores the subjugation of women and their difficult existence. All female characters in this novel suffer a lot to find their right place. Because Pakistan is a country of dividing loyalties. She throws light on the lives of poor women who struggles hard to lead a better life in Karachi. Bhutto writes that "this city will take your heart" (p.3).

The Runaways explicates the issue of women's identity and oppression in society. There is a variety of women portrayed by Fatima Bhutto from the traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and open-minded women mother, wife, daughter and girlfriend as presented in Beauvoir's book *The second sex*. They are created continually to lose out their real identity and turn into fake vulnerable and dependable with nothing of their own (Beauvoir, 1949). In *The Runaways*, Bhutto narrates that in our society women are not subjugated as autonomous as men's are but they are being considered as second sex. Bhutto described the lives of Pakistani women who lost their true identity to formulate a better world for themselves. Antia Rose is the main protagonist of the novel who suffers a lot for her better existence in a male dominated society. She is oppressed by the society and lost her identity. She loses her real name that shows her true identity. She calls herself Layla- a new name, new identity. "Call me Layla. It's who I am now" (p.263).

Everybody is born along with an identity by birth. Anita is treated badly by the society that is resulted in a complete loss of her identity. She decided to leave this city. Anita says "I want to be free [...] this wasn't a mistake, this was a matter of survival-being Layla- was her way of fighting" (p.264). She leads her life in poverty in a very bad condition. Her only companion is her Red notebook. She does not want to have a name

that marks her. In Karachi women are stripped from their basic rights and being marginalized by society. Anita has no other choice except she loses her true self. It is the only way for the people of Karachi to survive. She leads very miserable life. Her appearance reflects her condition truly. Her slender frame was overwhelming the size of the thin cotton shalwarkameez she was wearing. With her full lips and a mole on her chin, she almost looked like a woman rather than the adolescent she was, even though her limbs were gangly and her wrist was speckled with ink (p. 263). she lost her innocent childhood and her pleasures in this miserable life, where she always tried hard to get some moments of happiness. She really needs a new vision that will help her to understand her identity. As Jerry Pinto says about this novel, 'The Runaways is a novel that holds up a clear mirror to the way societies in many parts of the world are shaping, moulding, distorting and deforming the young' (p. 1).

Her mother is a maalishwali who massages the bones of rich women of Karachi. Her mother struggles hard to earn money. She works day and night even on Sunday to run her house. They belong to a poor family. Anita her mother Zenobia and her brother Ezra live in a very small house. Even they have no many sources to enjoy. As it is stated that: "we don't have any gas left, nothing to cook with" (p.9). They do not fulfil their basic needs. She always goes to their neighbour's house to ask for something. This is what a woman is expected to lose her real identity since her early age due to the many roles that she is forced to play. Society compelled her to make difficult existence.

Anita is being treated badly in a patriarchal society. In this environment she feels lonely. Even women have gained much respect as equal but still they are looked down upon their sex. Anita tries to breakdown the restrains of the society. That's the acceptance of her unique human individuality but there is still something hindering her behind in spite of her economic and social independence. Mariyam Haider, a writer argues that Anita's alienation and subjugation lie in imposition of an unequal society in which she fights to express her views and lives in a world that only treats her as a servant. She also says that *The Runaways* is a "Heart stick for the promise of a new world," Bhutto describes that *The Runaways* seek to shed the vestiges of personalities that the society places on them" (p.1, 2019). Bhutto unveils the discrimination and suppression of women in this patriarchal society of Pakistan and this research discusses it by explaining the idea of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to analyze the portrait of Pakistan's society, culture, traditions, social conditions and customs, projected by Fatima Bhutto Bhutto represents the new woman's voice. She wants to replace the traditional image of woman in search of self-identity, seek freedom in every walk of life. In the 1970s according to feminists 'gender roles' were expressed as the restricted behaviour appropriate for women. But now in recent years gender identities have become mean to see our women from biological sex or sexual orientation. The need for women to seek their identity is the message in this novel. Bhutto says that women have no value in patriarchal system. Even Anita takes a new identity Layla, but this new identity does not give her better status. She is still treated badly by Rahim and she is still alone. Nothing is changed. "As Anita Rose by any other name was still as sad, still as lonely" (p. 310). Through her novel Bhutto wants to explain the oppression of women in a male dominated society as projected this idea in Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*.

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