



Rearticulating Islam: Fatima Bhutto's Critique of Jihadist Representation in *The Runaways* (2018)

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Abstract

The War on Terror gave rise to prominence of various Islamist jihadist organizations in Muslim countries in the second decade of twenty-first century. Notorious for execution of war crimes, human rights violation, beheading, and slaughtering, these groups distorted the image of Islam as the West deliberately started looking at them as representative of Islam. As a result, Islam as a religion was defamed by the West in the wake of War on Terror. One such organization is ISIL, which has close similarity with Bhutto's portrayal of the Ummah Movement in her novel, The Runaways. The present study employs Spivak's (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as theoretical framework, to investigate Fatima Bhutto's The Runaways as an attempt to reclaim the marginalized voice of Islam against its misrepresented image. Jihad has been portrayed in the novel as reclaim of agency by the alienated, marginalized, and downtrodden as a form of their resistance to the West and colonial legacies. Bhutto is critical of terror done in the name of Islam and the militant groups in Iraq like the Ummah Movement which play a negative role to defame Islam in the name of jihad. Bhutto, therefore, tries to reclaim Islam's voice in the novel by revealing true face of the Ummah Movement which in the name of Islamic jihadist organization is not following any law of Shariah. Bhutto has also portrayed the War on Terror and colonial legacies as reasons behind marginalized groups radicalization and easy brainwash in post-9/11 sociocultural and geopolitical scenario.

Keywords: Islam, Jihad, *The Runaways* (2018), *The War on Terror*, Textual analysis, Voice

Introduction

The War on Terror gave rise to prominence of various Islamist jihadist organizations in Muslim countries in the second decade of twenty-first century. Notorious for execution of war crimes, human rights violation, beheading, and slaughtering, these groups distorted the image of Islam as the West deliberately started looking at them as representative of Islam. As a result, Islam as a religion was defamed by the West in the wake of War on Terror. One such organization is ISIL, which has close similarity with Bhutto's portrayal of the Ummah Movement in her novel, *The Runaways*. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or by its Arabic acronym Daesh, is a Salafi jihadist organization based in Iraq and Syria with its provinces in other Middle Eastern countries, South-Central Asia, and Africa (Shinkman, 2017).

Bhutto has tried to reclaim Islam's voice in the novel by revealing the fact that the reason behind Muslims' radicalization is the War on Terror. Abbas (2021) asserts in this regard that a specific

historical trajectory related to Islamophobia, radicalization and the War on Terror does exist. That historical trajectory has its origin within the roots of “orientalism” and general racism that existed during the colonial era. It seems to remain intact in the twenty first century (p. 404). Bhutto tries to reveal the true face of jihadi organizations like the Umma Movement which spread terror in the name of Islam; but in reality they have nothing to do with Islam. The novel reveals that the fighters of Ummah Movement are mostly psychopath and addicts. In the same way, Ummah Movement’s jihad has been portrayed in the novel as a platform for likes and following on the social media. Finally, she highlights the agony of Muslims in the Middle East who are victims of the War on Terror and subsequent emergence of different jihadi organizations. Abbas (2021) further states that the War on Terror has “divided” the world into the Muslim world and the rest of the world thereby making the world an unsafe place (p. 404). Similarly, Kanwal (2015) remarks that the War on Terror has greatly effected Islam and Muslims by “equating” them with terrorism (p. 2).

Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* concentrates on describing the ways in which powerful narratives and discourse misrepresent the subaltern. Spivak has used the term ‘subaltern’ for individuals or groups considered inferior in certain context. However, the term can be used for religion as well which is considered inferior and lack the right of representation. Islam lacked representation in the context of War on Terror as it was misrepresented by the dominant discourses of the West and radical jihadist groups. Kanwal (2015) asserts in this regard that “negative images of Muslims have continued to shape Western attitudes and speech in such a way that the figure of a Muslim has become a metaphor for barbarism and violence, meaning that Muslimness has become synonymous with terror” (p. 3). Bhutto’s *The Runaways* represent a nuanced image of her religion i.e. Islam as an attempt to reclaim its voice.

This study focuses on West’s interference in Muslim countries and radicalization of Muslims in the name of War on Terror, resulting in distorted image of Islam. Abbas (2021) states that the main reason of Iraq’s invasion was “geo-strategic interests” in the Middle East for which weapons of mass destruction were used as justification which did not exist at all. As soon as Iraq was invaded in 2003, it sank into chaos resulting in the emergence of “so-called Islamic State” after a decade (p. 402). The three major characters in the novel are: Sunny (Salman Jamil), a young British born Indian Muslim living in Portsmouth, England; Monty (Mustafa), a rich young boy from Pakistan living in Karachi; and Anita Rose, a poor young Christian girl from Karachi. They join a militant group in Iraq, the Ummah Movement in 2016-17 for different reasons. Islam’s voice has been reclaimed through their jihad for reasons other than Islam. Abbas (2021) notes in this regard that “concerns to do with radicalization and violent extremism will continue to remain important not because they are a problem of religion but because they are often a problem of structural disadvantage and inequality” (p. 403). Jihad has been portrayed in the novel as reclaim of agency by the alienated, marginalized, and downtrodden as a form of their resistance to the West and colonial legacies. Abbas (2021) further notes that joining the extremist groups is sometimes a person’s “expression of agency” (p. 403). The novel focuses on Islam’s misrepresentation by the West through their unjustified lens of looking at jihadist organizations as representatives of Islam. Bhutto emphasizes that in many cases, jihad of the radical groups is a form of personal resistance of alienated, marginalized and downtrodden individuals. Bhutto is critical of terror done in the name of Islam and the militant groups in Iraq like the Ummah Movement which play a negative role to defame Islam in the name of jihad. Bhutto, therefore, tries to reclaim Islam’s voice in the novel by revealing the true face of Ummah Movement which in the name of Islamic jihadist organization is not following any law of Shariah. Bhutto has also portrayed the War on Terror and colonial legacies as reasons behind

marginalized groups radicalization and easy brainwash in post 9/11 scenario.

Literature Reviews

Sudha (2020) in "A Critical Study of Adolescent Alienation and Radicalization in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runways*" explores the complex issues of adolescent alienation and radicalization by understanding the reason why some teenagers fell disconnected from the world around them and how the disconnection can sometimes lead to extreme or radical behavior. The researcher aims to analyze the representation of adolescent alienation and radicalization, and to identify the factor contributing to these phenomena. Adolescent alienation refers to the feeling of disconnect and isolation that many teenager experience. The article concludes that socio-economic problems and strict religious views hurt minority groups, leading them towards extremism.

Shaikh and Hussain (2022) in their article, "Exploring Identity Crisis in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*: A Psychosocial Perspective" examine identity crisis in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*. The researchers use textual analysis method by utilizing Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as a theoretical framework. The analysis reveals that Bhutto's novel portrays the contemporary world, particularly in Pakistan and England, where characters suffer from identity crises due to poverty, social frustration, and emptiness. These factors contribute to a confused identity, making individuals victims of identity crises.

Kharal et al. (2022) in their research article, "Deconstructing the Metanarrative of Jihadism: A Postmodern Study of Fatima Bhutto's Novel *The Runaways*," explore different elements that influence characters' mind towards fanaticism in the novel. By applying 'illegitimacy of totalizing narratives' by Jean-Francois Lyotard as theoretical framework, the researchers aim to find different factors behind radicalize behavior of a certain characters in novel.

Sarwar et al. (2023) in their essay, "Inspecting Core Issues of Male Protagonists in *The Runways* by Fatima Bhutto: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Study," aim to explore the psychological impacts of social, sociological, and financial issues on an individual personality being radicalized, particularly on young generation. The article also explores certain personal factors like abandonment, fear of familial loss, self-esteem, and other personal fears that lead to the male protagonists' radicalization in the novel. Using Freudian Psychoanalytic theory, the study has been carried out through descriptive analysis method to decode characters dialogues, behaviors action and more specifically their dreams. The article concludes that psychological core issues of low self-esteem represent desire and fear in the novel, which forced the male protagonists to be extremists.

Ahmad and Mustafa (2023) in their essay, "Roots of Radicalism: Analyzing post-9/11 Situation in *The Runways* by Fatima Bhutto," examine lives of main characters influenced by capitalism, modernity and homelessness. In broader context, the article analyzes the novel as a contest of Islamophobia in post 9/11 West. The study has been carried out through postcolonial critique of the novel to reveal the reasons behind radicalism of the main characters.

Rabbi et al. (2023) in their article, "Alienation in *The Runaways* (A Novel by Fatima Bhutto): A Psychoanalytical Reasoning for Fundamentalism and Radicalization," examine the suffering of young adults from alienation in contemporary post 9/11 situation resulting in their involvement in terrorist activities. To explore the theme of alienation from psychoanalytical perspectives, the researchers have employed Lacan's concept of other. The article investigates the possible reasons for terrorism in shape of young people's gun violence contrary to the association of fundamentalism and radicalism with religious origin.

Sahar et al. (2024) in their research article, "Women as 'Others' in Bhutto's *The Runaways*: A Feminist Analysis" problematize the patriarchy dominating behaviors towards women in the

novel. By using textual analysis as methodological framework, and Simon De Beauvoir's ideology of feminism as theoretical framework, the article aims to explore the traits of extreme cruelty directed toward women by the men in Pakistani patriarchal society. Analyzing the character of Zenobia and Anita in Bhutto's *The Runaways*, the article states that women like Zenobia and Anita are considered as 'Others' in Pakistani patriarchal society.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The present study is qualitative in nature. Reclaim of Islam's voice has been analyzed in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* through textual analysis. Textual analysis is a research methodology or a data gathering process for researchers to gather information about the ways other human beings are making sense of the world (Mckee, 2003). It is a research methodology that involves interpreting text data and addressing various research questions. It "allows us to see how similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be (Mckee, 14). Textual analysis can be applied to different types of texts, including written, visual, audio, and digital. A text is anything that we interpret or make meaning from. It can be a book, a television programme, a film, a magazine, a graffiti, an advertisement, a piece of furniture or ornament, and so on (Mckee, 2003). The methods used for textual analysis vary depending on the type of text and research question. According to Mckee (2003), "when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text (p.1). The process involves selecting the text, coding the text, analyzing the text, and interpreting the text.

The present study employs Alan McKee's (2003) *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* as a methodological framework for textual analysis. McKee's book frames textual analysis as a qualitative research method to investigate how meaning is made in a context. McKee focuses on the function of texts within culture instead of just what texts say. According to McKee (2003), all texts are polysemic i.e. they are open to multiple meanings. He believes that meaning is not fixed or inherent in the text. He further asserts that the social and cultural context of both the text and the reader should be considered in textual analysis. The analysts, instead of being objective or attached, should know about their interpretive position. According to McKee, while doing textual analysis, we are not interested in deciding the right interpretation, rather, we are interested in finding out "likely interpretation" (p. 63).

The reclaim of voice in the novel has been addressed using Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) as a theoretical framework. Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' for individuals or groups considered inferior in society due to their class, gender, caste, or other reasons. Subaltern, which means 'of inferior rank', is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci for those particular groups in society who are victim of "the hegemony of the ruling classes" (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 186). Spivak's essay critically examines the representation of marginalized groups in postcolonial contexts. Spivak argues that the subaltern is always spoken for by the dominant discourse and that their voice can never be truly heard. Though Spivak has focused on use of the term 'subaltern' for lower class workers and women, it, however, can be used for ethnic groups and religions in certain contexts. The present study explores Islam as subaltern religion on the basis of its marginalized voice in post-9/11 era.

Results and Discussion

Bhutto's first reclaim of Islam's voice is to highlight the fact that the basic reason behind Muslims' radicalization in the wake of War on Terror is Muslims' 'othering' leading to their social and political marginalization in the Western world. As portrayed in the novel, Sunny is an easy victim of brainwash because he suffered alienation on the basis of his 'othering' in Portsmouth, England. He has been easily brainwashed by his cousin, Oz (Ozair), into joining jihad of the

Ummah Movement. As narrated in the novel, Oz tries to brainwash him when he himself came back from Syria by saying that “You’re looking everywhere but the right place” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 96). Oz knows about Sunny’s alienation and suffering from lack of place in the Western world, and that’s the reason he further explained that “the elites are eating up the world. And at the same time, they are casting you out. Oz placed his hand on Sunny’s chest, right above his heart. Because you and me, Cuz, they’ll never accept us” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 100). Oz further brainwashes him by playing Muslim card while talking about capitalism. He says that capitalism make you want more and more things. It is always adding more things to the list of what you needed. But you could never have them. As narrated in the novel, Ozair says that men like them would always be lacking behind because they are not white. They will always be left out because they are Muslims and they are “different” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 100). Sunny believes in most of what Oz says because he is a victim. He is seen as ‘other’ on the basis of his religion in the Western world. This marginalization leads to his alienation and makes him vulnerable to be used and exploited.

After their Skype call with fighters of Ummah Movement at Oz’s place, Oz further brainwashes Sunny by playing Islam’s card. Oz tries to convince Sunny by saying that our reason of fight is to “protect” Islam as it is our religious duty to fight for Islam and to die for it (Bhutto, 2018, p. 116). This is how marginalized and alienated subjects in the Western society are brainwashed in the name of Islam; and the West labels all the Muslims as radicals and Islam as religion of radicals. When Oz notices certain hesitation in Sunny, he tries again playing ‘Sunni’ card this time by telling Sunny that he is not “a Sunni” because a real believer would not be sitting in England. Instead, he would be out there for jihad and would be defending his people from infidels (Bhutto, 2018, p. 118).

Similarly, apart from Muslims’ radicalization in the Western world, Bhutto tries to highlight Muslims’ radicalization in the Middle East as well the result of the War on Terror. Abu Khalid, the commander of Ummah Movement, has been portrayed as member of Saddam’s army before the American’s invasion. As narrated in the novel, “The brothers said Abu Khalid had been drafted into Saddam’s army just before the Americans invaded” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 166). A question arises here is that had America not invaded Iraq, there might not have been any Ummah Movement and other such jihadi organizations. According to Fawaz Gerges in his book, *ISIS: A History*, some thirty percent of the senior members in ISIS’s military command were former army and police officers from the disbanded Iraqi security forces. They were drawn towards Sunni Islamism and ISIL by the United States de-Ba’athification policy following invasion of Iraq (Ruthven, 2015). Abu Khalid changes side as soon as Saddam has been overthrown of power. As narrated in the novel, “He defected as soon as the statues of the dictator were pulled out of their pedestals, and became an interpreter for a well-respected journalist. That was why Abu Khalid knew how to fight the Americans, because he had been one of them once” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 166). The well-respected American journalist is reference to Mother Jones as narrated in the novel: “Monty had never heard of Mother Jones before, he didn’t know who she was or why she had come to Iraq, but the brothers said she had worn a ‘No blood for Oil’ badge the whole time she had been out here” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 166). First America invades Iraq in the name of weapons of mass destruction. Then journalists are planted in Iraq with a badge ‘No blood for Oil.’ The result is a civil war in Iraq and Syria being fought till this day.

The third instance of Muslims’ radicalization as portrayed in the novel is through Abu Khalid’s comments on Layla’s videos. As narrated in the novel, Abu Khalid, the commander of Ummah Movement commented while making Layla’s jihad’s video that millions of people around the world were watching her videos. All the people who felt “alienated, lost and angry” were watching Layla” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 271). The passage shows that the only people who watched

and liked her videos or the Ummah Movement's videos are the alienated, lost, and angry. It can mean that the creation of alienated, lost, and angry will lead to radicalization of people. The War on Terror led to the alienation of Muslims in the West; they felt lost and angry; as a result, Muslims tended to be attracted towards jihadi videos and jihadi organizations. Blaming Islam for that as religion of radicals is sheer injustice according to Bhutto.

Bhutto's second reclaim of Islam's voice is through the portrayal of jihadi organizations like the Ummah Movement as a reason of defaming Islam. Since, the West looks at jihadist organizations as representative of Islam; such organizations defame Islam because they spread terror in the name of Islam. By talking about subalterns' misrepresentation in Western media and discourse, Spivak takes a stand against a specifically intellectual form of oppression and marginalization. The Ummah Movement has been portrayed in the novel as a group of psychopaths and addicts who claim to implement Shariah, but, in reality, they do not know anything about Shariah. As narrated in the novel, when Sunny intends to join jihad, he is at Oz's place in Portsmouth waiting by the computer for call from Hama, Tikrit, and Ain al Arab. During the call, Sunny watched the faces of those men who were younger than him. Their faces light up on Skype as they talked about the Ummah Movement's jihad and also expressed their feelings of being blessed as they were finally in a place where the law of "Shariah" was strictly followed (Bhutto, 2018, p. 116). As portrayed in the novel, in reality, they do not follow a single law of Shariah. Being a group of psychopaths, the Ummah Movements' jihad is based on false claims.

Bhutto's tries to reclaim Islam's voice by portraying jihad of the Ummah Movement as an adventure for the sake of some purpose other than serving Islam. Jihad has been portrayed in the novel as an adventure taken by the alienated, lost, and angry. The three characters in the novel join jihad for different reasons. None of them join it for the sake of Islam to implement Shariah. Sunny joins it because he feels alienated and lost in the Western society. He joins it as an adventure to have his place in the world. Layla as a Christian girl joins it because of her viral nude video. Monty joins it to find Layla as he is in love with Layla. Similarly, all other fighters portrayed in the novel do not follow the law of Shariah except wearing beard. All of them are young men who seems to be alienated, lost, and angry. Reaching Nineveh, Monty looks at the number of fighters. As narrated in the novel, "Only then does Monty notice the number of soldiers – twice as many as had been at their Mosul camp. So many of them, more than a hundred bearded young men, machine guns slung across their backs, jostling for the commander's attention" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 369). Sunny's jihad as an adventure is obvious from his caption with a picture uploaded on Tumblr during his move from Mosul to Nineveh in Iraq. As narrated in the novel, "Sunny taps his Tumblr open and tries to upload a photo: a tabby, curled up near his Rita (Kalashnikov). *Come to Iraq, see the world, ha-ha. #jihadtourism*" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 205). Bhutto has raised a strong voice for Islam through Sunny's hashtag, "jihad tourism." Few alienated, lost, and angry people join jihad as an adventure for the sake of tourism, and the consequences have to be faced by all the Muslims around the globe. Kanwal (2015) remarks in this regard:

'The War on Terror' rhetoric has accelerated a shift from Orientalist epistemology to terrorist ontology, a phrase that I use to refer to a post-9/11 climate in which "Muslimness" has become synonymous with terror(ism) and violence and in which every Muslim can easily be labelled as a terrorist (through the conflationary rhetoric of Arab/Muslim identities as well as of Islamic fundamentalism/extremism). (p. 3)

The West's lens might be looking at Monty too as a radical Muslim wishing to erase infidels from the face of the earth. However, the reality is that Monty does not know and care anything about Islam or the infidels. His only reason to join jihad is as an adventure to find his beloved, Layla. As narrated in the novel, Sunny and Monty have to cross a desert on foot to reach Nineveh where

Layla was posted. Monty's only reason to be here has been portrayed in the novel as he thinks that "It had only been three months, just about, since he had been out here in this dry, miserable wasteland. He always knew he would find Layla, love of his life, beautiful Layla, but in his wildest dreams he hadn't thought they would be reunited this easily, not this fast" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 168). The passage shows that his only reason to be fighter in the Ummah Movement is to find Layla. But, ironically, he too will be taken as representative of Islam through Western perspectives. Bhutto has raised her voice in the novel for this unjustified representation of Islam.

Monty might seem to the world as a regular jihadist, as narrated in the novel from Monty's perspective when he along with Sunny were on move to Nineveh: "They were guerrilla fighters, rebels, and this was the least-dangerous assignment they would have – it was just walking, just observation, like Abu Khalid said, intelligence-gathering" (Bhutto, 2018, p.188). But deep down, Monty is not concerned about intelligence-gathering. His sole purpose as narrated in the novel was to prove himself to Layla: "Monty only wanted to be the kind of man Layla could be proud of. A real man, not a reflection. Not the small, frightened man he had been when she left him" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 188). Jihad is just an adventurous trip for him "everything began and ended with Layla" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 189). Yet, being just a number in the list of jihadist, he too is defaming Islam as the West looks at every individual in the list as regular jihadist fighting for Islam. Similarly, when Sunny asks him at the end of the novel whether he is ready for some blood or not, Monty answers, as narrated in the novel that he is out there to "live," to find a girl, and to be with the girl he loves (Bhutto, 2018, p. 338). But he could not say that. How can someone be a representative of Islam whose sole purpose in jihad is to find his beloved? How can Islam be defamed on the basis of someone like Monty? These are the questions that Bhutto tries to ask the Western world as part of raising her voice for Islam.

Similarly, Bhutto's tries to reclaim Islam's voice by portraying jihad as an escape from the harsh realities of life. Anita Rose, a young Christian girl, joins jihad of the Ummah Movement as 'Layla' to escape from harsh realities of life when her illicit video is leaked. Ironically, a Christian girl becomes representative of Islam in eyes of the world and her actions lead to defaming Islam. Laila's reason to join jihad as an escape has been narrated in the novel from Monty's perspective when Sunny shows him Laila's video. On that occasion Monty thinks that "They don't know anything, they don't know that the man who made the tape owned a TV station; someone found it on his work computer and leaked it" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 403). That video was the harsh reality due to which Layla needed an escape from Karachi, as Monty further thinks, "And it was this – this very thing – that had baptized Layla in fire and driven her to the Ummah Movement, to Iraq" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 403). The passage shows that Layla's only reason to join jihad was an escape from society she could not face anymore. Yet, she is counted as a number in the list of jihadist and ultimately becomes the reason to defame Islam. Bhutto raises a strong voice for Islam through Layla's projection as representative of Islam in the West's lens.

Bhutto further reveals the fact in her novel that most of the fighters in the Ummah Movement do not mean jihad in the true sense of word, rather, they have been deceived and brainwashed into joining jihad. Sunny is one such case who has been deceived by his cousin by sending him to Iraq and himself stayed back in England. After coming to Iraq, Sunny kept on writing to his cousin, Oz, but did not get any response from him. As narrated in the novel, "Sunny has been writing to Oz for months now, since he got out here – texting, emailing, the works – but his cousin had dropped off the face of the earth. Vanished. Gone" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 182). Getting no response from Oz, Sunny goes into a state of self-deception thinking he is fighting a holy war. In reality he does not know anything about jihad. As narrated in the novel, "Sunny didn't want to think, even for a second, that coming here had been a mistake. He just wanted to watch some Snaps, check

in with his followers, who expected things from him now. He was out here, fighting a holy war” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 324). Later, all his holy war is about posting his pictures and videos to gain Oz’s attention.

Similarly, Sunny posts on Twitter that he would make it out of this situation by getting wilder and more “ferocious” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 301). It’s when Sunny is completely disappointed from Oz’s coming or taking him out of this situation that he decides to fight. His jihad is a kind of revenge on Oz as Oz, representing the West now, has started running a newsletter with the name, ‘Reforming Radicals.’ Even his posts are intended for Oz to see. His sole purpose later, in fighting and killing, is to let Oz know that he is courageous like him. As narrated in the novel, after slaughtering the mayor of Nineveh, “Sunny feels his body towering now, his courage flying. With his laurels and guerrilla cred on point, how can Oz fight him now? Oz is a pygmy. Sunny is a giant (Bhutto, 2018, p. 392). This thought process of Sunny about Oz shows that he is a deceived fighter whose sole purpose in fighting a holy war is to take revenge from the person who has deceived him. Similarly, Sunny asks Monty to make his video while slaughtering Layla and thinks that his cousin will be able to tell right away from his treads and war name that he’s been promoted. Then, after he emails Oz, Sunny’s putting this straight onto the “World Wide Web” with a message for Oz that he is coming for him Cuz (Bhutto, 2018, p. 419).

Bhutto’s final case of reclaiming Islam’s voice is by revealing the false claims of the Ummah Movement. The Ummah Movement claims to be fighting a holy war; while, none of their fighters’ actions seem like fighting jihad following the law of Shariah. Even Sunny too claims to be defending Shariah as he tells Monty during their move to Nineveh: “You think I came here because I had nothing else to do?... I came here to defend Shariah” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 231). Spivak argues that there are a number of factors due to which subaltern’s voice is not heard. The most important is that powerful people in society like academics, religious leaders, or people who are otherwise privileged always speak for them. When they do this, the elite rob subalterns of their own voice. In case of a country or ethnic group as subaltern, the powerful countries or ethnic groups always speak for them, robbing them of their own voice. In case of religion as subaltern, the powerful members of that religion, like jihadist organizations in case of Islam, represent it, robbing it of its true voice.

Contrary to Sunny’s claims, the reality of his being in Iraq has been narrated in the novel as he thinks in regret that his cousin has sent him out there with promises “tinted in gold.” Oz did not stop for a second to think about him and what he was going through and the danger he was living in (Bhutto, 2018, p. 234). Like Sunny, many fighters in the Ummah Movement might be facing the same situation who too, being deceived but having no other choice, might be claiming now to defend Shariah. It has been portrayed in the novel that the fighters have joined by their choice, but they are not allowed to leave by their choice. They are not allowed to go back. The fighters have been taken their passports taken from and burnt. The young fighters of the Ummah Movement seem to be trapped into fighting jihad. As narrated in the novel, “You belong to the Ummah Movement now, Abu Khalid, who choppered in that day, congratulated the new recruits as they flung their passports one by one into a smouldering pile of documents, burning slowly in the sand” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 173). Against the law of Shariah, the young boys are not fighting jihad with their choice and own free will.

The second example of Ummah Movement’s jihad being based on false claims is that women are used as a glamorous element as motivation for war. Peresin (2015) asserts that an estimated 550 Muslim women from the West joined ISIS in 2015. This number of women was 10% of ISIL’s foreign fighters from the West. The use of women by Ummah Movement for the sake of glamour is against the law of Shariah. Layla has been described in the novel as ethereally beautiful as Abu

Khalid played the men a video: “And there she was, ethereally beautiful, cloaked in black. There was Layla, standing proudly on the fertile banks of mighty Tigris” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 168). Similarly, Monty has been told by Ibn Usman that Layla was the only ‘sister’ out there who was allowed not “to cover her face” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 178). Not letting Layla cover her face is to add glamour to jihad to attract more and more young people. Layla is also made to wear make-up as Monty notices at reaching Nineveh: “Monty can’t tell, from where he stands, but here, unlike in the YouTube videos, it seems as though Layla is wearing make-up” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 375). How the Umma Movement does recruit women has also been revealed by Bhutto in her novel. They recruit beautiful women by taking advantage of their situation the way Layla’s situation is being taken advantage of. After Layla’s explicit video got leaked, she received invitation from Abu Khalid as narrated in the novel: “He had seen her videos; imagine that, they had reached him all the way in Iraq. Was she ready to take her message to the battle-fields? To be reborn, recast, in a pure and certain fight” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 271)? As soon as others get to know about her explicit videos, she is no more needed and Abu Khalid orders her beheading.

The third example of Ummah Movement’s jihad being based on false claims is the fighters’ use of social media and dating website during jihad. Sunny has been portrayed in the novel opening his profile page on Tinder while he is on his move from Mosul to Nineveh during jihad. As narrated in the novel, “Sunny double-clicks away from his email and looks through his apps. It takes a moment of scrolling through folders before he finds it. He opens Tinder and heads to his profile page” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 180). Tinder is a notorious dating website and Sunny’s use of Tinder during his holy war is contrary to his claims of defending Shariah. Sunny’s jihad is more a fight over social media with Oz. After being completely disappointed with any response from Ozair, he posts on Facebook by writing that do you think you or some you love is an apostate. Then he explains that an apostate is a traitor or a backstabber who turns his back on his “religion” or on his “family” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 331). This post is actually intended to counter Oz’s posts as Oz has started running a platform with the name of Reforming Radicals. Sunny believes Oz is an apostate; but ironically, Sunny himself is an apostate as he is the one who has turned his back on his family and religion fighting a war he does not believe in. All his focus is to be known as he suffers identity crisis. As narrated in the novel, he thinks, “How do you make a post go viral? Hashtags. But they’re a pain to think of” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 332). Sunny’s frustration is at peak when he sees Oz getting more popular on media: “Oz is on GQ and CNN and even BuzzFeed (Tens*xiest rebels of 2017), with literally millions of people lining up to agree with his shit, and Sunny can’t even get a high-five on a 100-word Facebook post” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 333).

The last example of Ummah Movement’s jihad being based on false claims is that the fighters of the Ummah Movement have been portrayed in the novel as drug addicts. Although they claim to be fighting Allah’s war, the fighters of Ummah Movement can be seen as using drugs. After Sunny and Monty reached Nineveh, Sam welcomed them giving the impression of Allah’s help: “*Mashallah*, Sam nods, waving some of the brothers to them. ‘That’s why I love jihad – you commit, and Allah clears the way’” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 367). Sam, the second in command, has been portrayed in the novel taking opium as he well comes Sunny and Monty at Nineveh: “Big day today. Sam shakes his head as he pinches a tiny corner of opium out of the bag and places it on his tongue. He doesn’t offer Sunny none, like he hadn’t just walked across a desert for the past week, like he isn’t even there” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 367). However, Sunny too is offered opium later when he is promoted after slaughtering the mayor of Nineveh. Sunny’s opium taking has been portrayed in the novel when he is about to behead Layla after everyone get to know about her video. As narrated in the novel, “Sunny digs his hand into his pocket and brings out a tiny plastic bag. He takes a small pinch of the sticky paste Abu Khalid gave him and rolls it in the palm of his

hand. Promoted baby. ‘Bout time.” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 412). As Monty notices, “He rolls the paste into a pea-sized ball and places it under his tongue” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 412). The paste is raw opium as narrated in another passage about sunny as he talks to Monty about making video of Layla’s beheading as a series of Classic Jihadi Videos, “while rolling a third little pat of raw opium” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 412). He even tries to convince Monty too to take it telling him that all other take it. As narrated in the novel, “He holds out the tiny ball of brown paste to Monty, although he knows he won’t take it. Monty shakes his head even after Sunny tells him Abu K says it helps. Sam takes it too, on the regular” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 413). The above passages show that the fighters of the Ummah Movement who claim to be following the law of Shariah are actually opium eaters.

Conclusion

Reclaiming Islam’s voice, Bhutto finally represents a nuanced image of Islam in contrast to the image the West has in mind of Islam in the wake of War on Terror. As narrated in the novel, Sunny finally agrees to join jihad when he is persistently brainwashed by his cousin, Oz. Yet, the real image of Islam that he knows is completely different from what Oz told him. What Oz told him about Islam was that it is the duty of every *Sunni* to kill *Shia*. As narrated in the novel, Oz says that *Shia* are *Wajib ul Qatal* and we, Sunnis have “a right” to kill them (Bhutto, 2018, p. 119). What Sunny understood of Islam was completely different. All he knew about Islam before his cousin had been to fight in Syria was “mercy.” As narrated in the novel, “he had known Islam only for its refuge, its tolerance. It was submission, not violence. It made no distinction between sons, neither Sunni nor Shia. They were all one – all Muslims, all connected (Bhutto, 2018, p. 120). But, he could not dare to say it on the face of his cousin as Oz posed to be very angry talking about killing of Shia and Sunny did not want to lose the one thread he had ever found that lead somewhere. Sunny’s understanding of Islam before going to jihad of the Umma Movement is the nuanced image of Islam that Bhutto tries to highlight.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that other novels or literary texts may also be explored to understand how other writers tackle the reclaim of voice in the wake of post-9/11 sociocultural and geopolitical scenarios. Similarly, the researcher recommends that governments and policy makers should make sure to let their citizens have agency and voice as autonomous individuals. Denied agency and voice leads to marginalization and alienation of the citizens. Marginalized and alienated citizens can pose to be a serious threat for the national security as they are target of easy brainwash.

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