

Critically Analyzing War on Terror in the light of Fatima Bhutto's "The Shadow of the Crescent Moon"

Sara Zainab¹, Dr. Perveen Akhter Farhat², Dr. Akmal Basharat³

^{1,2}Department of English Literature & Linguistics, Lahore Leads University, Pakistan.

³Head of Department PhD English Department of English Literature & Linguistics Lahore Leads University Pakistan

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Abstract— This article analyzed the human psyche, their loss, and their sufferings in the war of terror with reference to the description of *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*. It is about the hegemony of politicians and religious hypocrisy. Fatima Bhutto broke the boundaries of trauma and stress in this particular novel. Bhutto chronicled how injustice and enormity had driven her characters to different dispositions. Attention is paid to the behavior, feelings, and sentiments of the characters. This analysis discovers that human beings are always engaged in the process of development. The intention of this research is to show how Bhutto explored the experience of disaster, the consequences of war, and the process of searching for one's loved ones in which the characters indulged throughout the novel. Why was the atmosphere among the three brothers strained? Why did Mina attend the funeral orations of unknown children and create a scene there? Why was Samarra unforgiving? The answers to the above questions are discussed in this article respectively.

Keywords— War on terror, critical analysis, the shadow of crescent moon, book review.

I. INTRODUCTION

Fatima Bhutto, a scion of a widely known political dynasty of Pakistan is the author of highly-regarded works of fiction. She is a prize-winning Pakistani novelist. Her major previous works are *Whispers of the Desert* and *Songs of Blood and Sword*. *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* is her first fictional work written in 2013 and in 2014, it was long-listed for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. Bhutto has an unpleasant political background. Her grandfather, the former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged in 1979 by General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq and then her father, Mir Murtaza Bhutto, was murdered for which Fatima Bhutto accused her aunt - Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto - who later herself was assassinated. In this particular book, Bhutto highlighted the political violence and complexities of a war that anguish the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) close to the Afghan border in Pakistan. FATA is the

center for terrorist activity and partly ruled by the Taliban. This land is also home to a multi-sided war where American drones targeted the Taliban, Sunni Muslims bombed Shia Muslims and insurgents fought against the army for the sake of independence from the central government. In Dawn, Razeshta Sethna reviews that "*Bhutto smartens her fiction by using her characters and their stories to explore the souring relationship between Pakistan and America and its implications at the height of the 'war on terror'*" (Sethana, 2014).

The main objective of this article is to critically analyze the writing style and novel of Fatima Bhutto, to mention the strengths and weaknesses of her novel.

II. SUMMARY

The Shadow of the Crescent Moon sets in the fictional tribal region named Mir Ali that borders Afghanistan. Fatima Bhutto's debut novel begins with one tense morning of Friday during Eid as three Pakistani brothers and two of the women they loved sway in and out of the hardships of war. The whole novel took place over the course of one single morning. Bhutto accustomed the third person narrative that exchanged between the perspectives of the characters. All of the brothers met at the breakfast table before leaving for the prayer in three different directions as none of them was aware of whether one of the mosques will get besotted. They chose different locations because it was too risky to gather all the family members at the same mosque that could easily be hit. As Bhutto stated in her novel, *"No one prays together, travels in pairs or eats out in groups. It is how they live now, alone"* (Bhutto, 2013). This novel is a heart-wrenching piece of writing. Along with political forces, characters suffer religious forces as well.

Aman Erum is the elder brother who had just returned from studying in America. He is very courageous and has no interest in dwelling in Mir Ali. In his teenage, his father Inayat Mahsud wanted him to join Inayat's mission against the central government of Pakistan for the independence of this northwestern region so that it could be a part of Afghanistan. Aman Erum had an affiliation with Samarra, a member of the independence movement. Gradually Aman Erum realized that neither he nor his dreams will fit into the tribal life he observes around him. Similarly, Samarra, a taboo-breaking personality who knew how to shoot a gun and ride a motorbike. She also had a desire to free Mir Ali. In the interviews, when Aman Erum was asked about his thoughts of 9/11 and the fall of the Taliban, his repeated answer was, *"two airplanes hit foreign buildings, this is what people in Mir Ali heard. What they knew about this new war, what they understood about the events that turned their town into a battlefield once more, was this: those planes were flown by heroes"* (Bhutto, 2013).

Sikandar was the middle one who instead of going abroad while having the opportunity chose to be a doctor in the town's reprobate hospital where only expired medicines and vaccines were available. His wife Mina was a psychologist by profession working in the same hospital. She was depressed because of losing her only young son Zalan in a terrorist attack on the hospital. She then spent her time visiting the houses of the dead children. She gave them bathe and embraced their mothers she didn't know. Mina was

unable to accept the reality that is why she attended the funerals, prayed for them, recited poems while giving them bathe as a way to find her own son. She found solace in this whole process (Bhutto, 2013). Bhutto's characters are deeply tortured both physically and psychologically.

Hayat was the younger brother who was the most idealistic and inflexible. He continued his father's mission of fighting for the northwestern region. He was then involved with Samarra and they both had become a part of the Mir Ali insurgent movement. Anyhow, Samarra's connection to the terrorists or freedom fighters was strong as compared to Hayat. Samarra is not nourished by elementary idealism but by a rebellious attitude. She had become the victim of rape by the soldiers from the Pakistani army when she was younger. She wanted to become a leader to punish the attackers who were not berated yet.

After breakfast, Aman Erum traveled to the mosque by taxi. On his way to the mosque, he had flashbacks from his childhood memories. Bhutto constructed the memories from the flashbacks of the characters' lives to exhibit the pain and suffering they were in. Sikandar made his way to the hospital to have a look at the situation and Hayat moved to the town riding off on his motorbike. Since their father, Inayat had passed away, all of them had separated their ways in order to accomplish their desires. Inayat had fought for years against the deceptions of the state and he often warned his sons that they would have to compensate for their choices. He disclosed to his sons that *"each and every member of the household will know that pain is of no consequence when fighting for the collective"* (Bhutto, 2013).

Aman Erum was desperately finding a way to depart from Mir Ali for good and Sikandar proceeded in search of his wife Mina as she was not in her senses and went off to the houses of the strangers for serving the funerals of their children. For now, Hayat isn't unattended. He was in the companionship of Samarra and they both are on their course of action to assassinate the Chief Minister. While they move secretly, Aman Erum perceived them along with each other and placed them together with the fact that they were hatching a plot to murder the Chief Minister (Bhutto, 2013).

The novel closed with a lot of ambivalence. At the end of the novel, an attack took place but there prevailed ambiguity about whether the minister was murdered or if it was Hayat and Samarra who assaulted him. There was a recommendation that Hayat betrays her in the sequel. Mina

was the mere character whose crescent edged with hope instead of brutality and moral decomposition. During one of the funeral orations, she found the old Mina because of confronting the Taliban for the attack in which she lost her son. The issue wasn't not resolved but there is a viewable personal purification that predicted something good for her forthcoming. Lucy Beresford in The Daily Telegraph stated that "*The Shadow of the Crescent Moon captures so well is not just the trauma of war, but also the conflicts of contemporary Pakistanis, torn between remaining faithful to the legacy of previous generations, and their own dreams of choosing their own destiny*" (Beresford, 2013).

III. CRITICAL EVALUATION

Critical evaluation is basically to determine what an individual thinks of a specific thing about what is written and told in either that's a book or an article (Currence, 2017). A person can write a better critical analysis by questioning the steps that are presented by the writer as to how and why it has been done by the author in this particular book. It is the duty of a review writer to demonstrate that how things can be modified and converted into a different situation to fit in as no research study is foolproof (Anonymous, 2020). Critical evaluation signifies the critical review that does not mean it requires the negative posture of the author. As done in the following section, both the strengths and weaknesses of the book of Fatima Bhutto "*The Shadow of Crescent Moon*" are argued below.

3.1 Strengths

Being a political fiction writer Fatima Bhutto portrayed a stunning story of the loss of identity, political indifference, and complexities of war. Current political novels "*The Collaborator*" by Mirza Waheed (2011) and "*The Terrorist*" by John Updike (2006) marked the violent disputes and conflicts through fiction and the extensive role of governments and the fundamentalist movements. Whereas Bhutto narrowed her fiction by restricting her characters and their narratives to explore the hostile relationship between Pakistan and America and its intimations at the high point of the 'war on terror'. She criticized the corrupt system of government and the way the young generation is treated, how loss and suffering and impacts of historical and religious forces exploit the personality of the natives. "*An extraordinary first novel which reads like a politico-religious thriller. Compelling*" (Abads, 2014). She denounced the cruel system of war that pulls the innocents in

it. As Samarra who is a rape victim spoke to the officer who struck her during her imprisonment accusing her of being an insurgent and betrayer: "*You are the ones who have sold everything in this country you defend so urgently. You sold its gold, its oil, its coal, its harbors, even its airspace*" (Bhutto, 2013).

Women were the most important characters of the novel as they were remarkable for their courage and strength of heart in the region where they could not even move with their own choice and their voices were out of bounds. Samarra's character was quite strong. After being raped at her younger age she did not let herself become fragile, she developed her personality more vigorously and determined to punish the culprits. Similarly, the character of Mina remained the most fascinating throughout the novel even in all her madness. She lost her young son but in spite of going into trauma, she consoled the mothers of the dead children. At another place in the novel, Mina with her husband Sikandar is traveling to the hospital in a van where the Taliban annoyed them with frail beards and blue turbans on their heads and it was Mina who had the strength to stand in front of them. She eagerly accused them of injustice and collapsed in front of all. It might be the reaction of losing her only son by them that shocked the Taliban commander. She yelled: "*These men are students of justice. They can be accused of being violent, of being rash, of anything but injustice*" (Bhutto, 2013). She continuously accused them so full of rage and pain whereas her husband was brutally beaten by the Taliban. They torture the people in the van only to know whether they were Sunni or Shia. Compared to the female characters of Nadeem Aslam's (2008) "*The Wasted Vigil*", Bhutto's female characters were more positive that delivered the memorandum to all women to remain strengthened in every situation as it is the best way to deal with griefs (Sethna, 2014).

The Shadow of the Crescent Moon has been glorified for Bhutto's descriptions and consideration of detail. In her twitter page, Bhutto once posted Vladimir Nabokov's quote, "*My loathings are simple: stupidity, oppression, crime, cruelty, soft music*". Her novel consigned all of the above elements and also provided their prolonged consequences. The first element of stupidity exposed radicalized Sunni Muslims who culminated in a thrilling way including one of the brothers at the end of the novel. Crime and oppression could be seen in the treatment of the Taliban with the natives of Mir Ali and how the Pakistani military destitute the natives of the tribal areas. Cruelty prevailed in

the deaths of the innocent children who either became the victim of American drones or local militants. The last element is soft music that resided in the character of Mina, the wife of the middle brother Sikandar. She generally sang the sweet poems at the funerals of unknown children (Adams, 2015).

Although *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* has some shortcomings but its strength lies in the permanence. Terra Nullius (2013) is of the view that once the reader starts the novel, he wants to read the end as well and perceives the events depicted in the novel. Bhutto's writing is fascinating. The picture of the village, Mir Ali sticks in the mind of the readers along with its graphic details and images. She portrays daily life as "*the battered yellow Mehran taxis*" and "*the Chitrali pakol hats*" (Bhutto, 2013). According to *The Times* (2013), "*Bhutto writes of an extraordinary place where beauty lives alongside brutality, with superb poise and a kind of defiant lyricism*". Bhutto gave space to her characters which is the most positive side of her writing. Comprehensively, *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* is a valuable book.

3.2 WEAKNESSES

Bhutto also faced criticism on her literary endeavor for writing about a country and people as she depicted the Pakistani army in an extremely negative sense. A review by Samra Muslim is published in *The Express Tribune* that reads, "*A major disappointment is Bhutto's writing which is inconsistent and tends to vary from poetic to breezy, to extremely perceptive*" (Muslim, 2013). Since her childhood, she experienced the loss of innocence. She has a bloody family history as her grandfather was executed by the Pakistani military, her uncle was given poison, her father was murdered and her aunt was assassinated. She is criticized for her biased nature of writing as she has an unpleasant political background that is why she portrays the Pakistani army fully black as they tortured or harassed the innocents to the ecstasy (Sethna, 2014).

This contemporary article also points out that the character of Samarra could easily be flawed but to the author's consideration she has a heroic personality. Bhutto used the term of freedom fighter for her but in reality, she was a potential terrorist as she planned the murder of the chief minister. Bhutto portrayed things in such a manner that everything is going wrong in Pakistan. Other authors used a comparable storyline with astonishing literary terms but Bhutto's work only focused on developing (Sethna, 2014).

The narrative of the novel is quite complicated and deep as it shifts suddenly. "*The Shadow of the Crescent Moon complicates all the expected narratives of the war on terror...Engrossing*" (Sacks & Journal 2015). The technique of flashbacks that is used by Bhutto in this novel confuses the readers whether the event is of present situation or past. When Aman Erum traveled to the mosque he had flashbacks. Almost all of the characters had flashbacks from their miserable lives (Bhutto, 2013). Moreover, the ending of the novel is open, which is the most irritating thing. It leaves the reader in ambiguity, and it is up to the reader what he imagines. If you want to read a book casually then it is a usable book but if you have a desire to get lost in it then this book will leave you unhappy. The nature of this book is very political, it interprets a very meager political picture of Pakistan (Nullius, 2013).

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* successfully looks beyond the borders and boundaries to present the shared experience of pain and trauma in the war on terror. In her work, Bhutto represents the intricacy of human life. She also stresses the psyche of characters that is further explored in this contemporary article. Consequences of war and demonstration of the development of Bhutto's characters are also discussed in this research.

This article also sheds light on how the Taliban torture people and haunt them with terror attacks in the name of religion. Taliban's extreme level of brutality increases the psychological problems for characters as Mina suffers from mental health issues. In this gracefully written novel, characters are pushed to make atrocious choices. As the crisis of this single morning disclosed, the novel moves around one woman.

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