Alienation in *the Runaways (A Novel by Fatima Bhutto)*: A Psychoanalytical Reasoning for Fundamentalism and Radicalization

Ayesha Rabbi

English Department, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

Saima Hassan
English Department, National University of Modern Languages, Karachi, Pakistan
Shehla Anwer Kurd

English Department, National University of Modern Languages, Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss how Young Adults are suffering from alienation in the contemporary post 9/11 situation resulting in their involvement in terrorist activities. The work is contextualized by referring to Fatima Bhutto's novel *The Runaways* (2019). Fundamentalism and Radicalism are often associated with terrorism having religious origin. This research intends to explore the possible reasons behind young people and gun violence. The theme of alienation is further explored from a psychoanalytical perspective drawing from Lacan's concept of other. The nuanced study of the novel will help understand the psychological condition of the young people caught in extremism and radicalism.

Keywords: *Alienation, Identity, Radicalism, Fundamentalism, Lacan, The Runaways*

Introduction

The theme of alienation has often been discussed in the existential context[1] as it is the dilemma that most people suffer from in the contemporary society (e.g. Nettler, 1956; Saleem, 2014). The disorder and the confusions of the modern world have rendered man fearful and helpless and is unable to cope with the frustration and loneliness leading to anxiety, estrangement and absurdity. The young adults are the most vulnerable to suffer in the crumbling world full of confusions making them directionless and feel futile (Sartre, 1943). Furthermore, the war on terror waged in the post 9/11 world in the name of curbing Islamic fundamentalism has aggravated the situation (e.g. The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Hamid, 2007). Since, then, a lot of studies have been carried out focusing the sociopolitical problems that have emerged (e.g. Borradori, 2003 among many). A lot of fiction written on the subject of war on terror (e.g. O'Gorman, 2015 among many) have been received well both by the critics and the public addressing many questions ranging from political conflicts to ethno-cultural issues concerning identity presenting either America or the Muslims as Others but very few works have addressed the complexities that underlies the reasons that causes such extremism in the contemporary times. Different studies have been carried out in various disciplines to

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[1] Existentialism as a theory focuses on the choice, freedom and the existence of the individual (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022)

ascertain the repercussions caused by the cataclysmic event of September 11, 2001, for instance Borges (2013) cites 9/11 fiction where the plot of a fiction work is primarily informed by the incidents relating to 9/11. Fundamentalism and especially Islamic fundamentalism are used synonymous to terrorism since the aforementioned event. The bourgeoning organizations like Al-Qaeda , ISIS and others that carry out the violent activities in different parts of the world is another question mark on the efforts to understand and address the threats to world's peace. Different reasons for different situations have been laid down to arrive at a unanimous conclusion consensus for terrorism. Psychoanalytical approach is one theoretical dimension that answers such broader questions and helps us delve into the problem to reach a solution that is applicable to all situations leading to violent activities. This research tries to probe into the unconscious working of the young people likely to be caught in such violent activities.

The Runaways by Fatima Bhutto (2019) is one such novel that discusses contemporary subjects like fundamentalism arising from identity issues amongst the diasporic community resulting from power structure both at home and abroad. The focus is on the underlining reasons that make young people to join terrorist organizations like ISIS. Unlike the previous fiction works, the writer rules out religion as the only cause of fundamentalism. Three different young characters are introduced in the novel with diverse backgrounds who struggle with their peculiar anxieties in determining their place in the world. Among the three diverse characters, Anita Rose and Monty are from Pakistan while Sunny is a second generation migrant Indian British. According to the writer, radicalism or fundamentalism has nothing to do with religion. Anita Rose, a Pakistani Christian girl living in the slums of Karachi, a metropolitan city of Pakistan. Her desire to become part of the affluent class of Karachi drives her to be caught in the trap of the propagandist radicalized groups. Monty, in contrast, though from the affluent class lacks purpose in life. Sunny, son of an Indian immigrant widower suffers from alienation and identity crisis because of his diasporic status in England and the expectations that his father has from him. All of them battling with their own set of anxieties find themselves clueless and directionless and finally latch onto the propagandist narrative as a place to fulfill their desires.

Literature Review

A large body of literature has been produced thematizing different aspects of war on terror mainly highlighting the sociopolitical impacts on domestic and international level. As the range of topics that have been discussed are many so are the writers who have penned these subjects. The writings have been produced both by the Americans and the non-Americans alike. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2018) are few amongst the list. *Terrorist* (Updike, 2006) explores the traumatic effects of post 9/11 situation in a dystopian fashion restricting its effects to the domestic level while the

Falling Man (DeLill, 2007) also encompasses terror and the related otherness at the international level crossing domestic borders. These novels discuss Islamic radicalism and its effect on the victims in the Western context. The two novels address the changing relationship of America with the Middle Eastern world specifically in context of religion and ethnicity. The novels offer more of a postcolonial reading of terrorism and fundamentalism rather than viewing it as a primitive savage act. The term terrorism contextualized in a postcolonial context helps us compare it with the colonial oppression and negates the politically charged definition of terrorism which is directed only at the non-western as enemy. The discourse that was created in the immediate post 9/11 situation drew heavily from the differences between Islam and the West. This was evident in the speeches made by many American politicians to justify war on terror and also ran their election campaigns raising slogans against Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism (e.g. Bush, 2003; Bush, 2004 a,b; Domke, 2004) The same threat can generally be felt in the public and media discourses against al-Qaeda and ISIS. For them the war on terror was between the west and Islam as explained by Huntington (1996) in *The Clash of Civilizations* (Islam is antagonistic in its ideology to the West). The same is then justified in Edward Said's (1978) Orientalist discourse where the East stands as the Other to the West and is usually considered as the main drive for the cataclysmic 9/11 incident and other similar events afterwards. The oriental image of Islam and East has always been represented as savage and exotic which has led to the close parallels to be drawn between Muslims and terrorist activities as Ahmed Gamal (2012) quotes John Esposito "for many in the West it is axiomatic that Arabs are nomads or oil shaykhs, denizens of the desert and harems, an emotional, combative, and irrational people. Islam is equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women". One finds the example for a similar discourse in *Terrorist* (2006) where the protagonist is young Egyptian American, who is driven to take revenge and kill the non-believers by the local Muslim cleric. His confused political and cultural identity makes him turn against the society he is living in. His changing appearance and ideology gradually become a sign of difference and makes him the Other in the American society and is treated as an outcast. He finally commits the terrible act of killing many people in a suicide bomb attack. The *Falling Man* (2007) also deals with a similar subject where the two plots converge to bring in the story of the Muslim protagonist Hammad and the terrorists who finally launch the 9/11 attacks. The writer also focuses on the psychological effect on the lives of the victims and the New Yorkers. The young involved in terrorist activities in both the novels are presented as normal beings and do not suffer from any psychological ailment. They are shown as educated young men coming from urban middle-class families. Such examples have been fictionalized on the model of Mohammed Atta, one of the highly educated al-Qaeda leaders involved in 9/11 attacks. The scholarship produced to ascertain the social ethnic reasons for terrorism has not been able to draw any clear pattern. Terrorist leaders like Mohammed Atta deny the attempts to connect economic deprivation with terrorism. They are portrayed as educated young

men fighting against global capitalism making use of modern technology to the extent that it is even termed as cyber-jihad[2] by them.

We see similar representations made by the Muslim Asian writers in their fiction. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (2007) presents Changez, a successful Pakistani American Princeton Finance graduate who works for a renowned consultancy firm gets disillusioned with the American political policies and is gradually termed as an outcast for his differing opinions. Kamila Shamsie's (2018) novel *Home Fire* also throws light on how young Muslim boys get caught in the violent activities and the suffering it brings to the migrant Muslims in Great Britain. Fatima Bhutto's (2019) novel *The Runaways, also* contribute to the existing discourse of terrorism and fundamentalism. Explanation of some of the important terms e.g. fundamentalism and radicalism in the present context is pertinent as Bhutto believes that labeling it as radicalism rather than Islamic fundamentalism would be more appropriate as the causes of terrorism is not only just religion but many others. Hence, psychoanalysis can help us in understanding the phenomena of fundamentalism or radicalism in order to know the unconscious functioning of the members of the groups labeled as fundamentalist or terrorist.

Theoretical Background

In the last two decades, fundamentalism has become a buzz word in the western world discourse regarding terrorist activities. Different definitions and explanations are presented on different forums by a large group of scholars (Altemeyer & Hunsberger,1992; Kunst, Thomsen & Sam, 2014; Kunst &Thomsen, 2014; Nagata, 2001; Harris, 2008).

Some consider it as a reaction to gain a sense of identity while others see it as lust of power to impose their agendas (Cowden & Sahgal, 2017). However, little attempts have been made to understand the unconscious working of the characters involved in terrorist activities. The etymology of the word fundamentalism can be traced back to early twentieth century in the USA. "Initially it was applied to some Protestant groups which advocated a return to the original Christian founding beliefs through a literal reading of the Bible. Soon, the phenomenon was further identified in the three Abrahamic religions." (Abella, 2018, p. 643) Fundamentalism is either thought to be as religious or political. "The term 'religious fundamentalism' is conventionally applied to any movement advocating strict adherence to certain tenets held to be fundamental (i.e. non-

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[2] Cyber jihad is a term coined to loosely describe Islamic extremist terrorists' use of the Internet as a communications, fundraising, recruitment, training, and planning tool in their battle against the enemy. Other authors who have referred to a cyber jihad in a similar context include, U.S. Govt. Vulnerable to Cyber-Jihad, Security Summit Hears, WASH. INTERNET DAILY (Mar. 21, 2006); Marc Lynch, Al-Qaeda's Media Strategies, 83 NAT'L INT. 50 (2006). While not a complete list, some of the most commonly named enemies of Islamic terrorist groups include the Unites States, Western European countries, secular Arab governments, and Israel; see World Islamic Front Statement Urging Jihad Against Jews And Crusaders, Feb. 23, 1998, http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm (naming the United States, Israel, Zionists, and Christian Crusaders as enemies of Islam) (Davis, 2006).

negotiable or not open to question)."(Abella, 2018) The other forms of fundamentalism also share essentially the same characteristics showing a common sign of intolerance towards differing opinions by developing a feeling of being 'othered'; feel oppressed and try to revive their authentic past. The definition of the term fundamentalism has been tried by many scholars from various disciplines; Anthropology, Sociology (Coreno, 2002), Psychology (Altemeyer & Hunsberger,1992), Political Science. A report of 4000 pages, published under the auspices of American Academy of Arts and Sciences between 1987 and 1995 (Marty & Appleby,1995) concluded the chief reason of becoming a fundamentalist to be their resistance to modernity but it is not true in the contemporary time. This conclusion is set more in the postcolonial context as the so called fundamentalists' aggressive activities are seen as a survival strategy to restore the past and the ancestral traditions that they have lost to colonialism. It can be seen as a reaction avenging the destruction caused to them by the colonizers aiming to restore the lost identity. But as mentioned earlier, this reason is not applicable to the contemporary fundamentalist groups as they rely more on modern modes of technology to achieve their goals. The two major terrorist groups al-Qaeda and ISIS use technology for their propagandist work more efficiently, specifically ISIS use social media tools more to reach out to the world (Klausen, 2015; Weimann, 2004; 2006;2010; 2016). Hence, the hypothesis of their resistance or struggle against modernity is therefore nullified. The question arises, what then is the struggle for? An alternative hypothesis at this stage can be that it is not a matter of modernity or religion but more a matter of politics and power where religion is used to exercise power or gain political strength. This hypothesis can best be applied to the leaders who run these terrorist organizations but this does not seem to bear relevance to the young people who are manipulated by these groups. Do they get caught in the complex web to find answers for their confused identity or they also want to assert power and show their presence to the world?

The present hypothesis would work well if we extend the meaning of *fundamentalism* to its other forms. The idea of being attached to a set of beliefs considered infallible and a mean to achieve ultimate truth through that can be extended to other forms of fundamentalism[3]. If our definition rests on this idea of fundamentalism, it would be easy to find answer for the underlining causes that make young people part of these groups. Such groups provide them the opportunity to satisfy their belief of attainting the truth which they think can be provided by joining these fundamentalist groups which are considered the sole possessors of truth. So far, the term fundamentalism has been referred to as commonly used in the discourse against terrorism. There is another less used term *radicalization* which also holds relevance when we try to probe into the reasons that lead to such violent actions. According to Chambers (2018) radicalism is also not a properly understood term and is often roughly associated with Muslim terrorist activities. She quotes Melissa Dearey;

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[3] https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Fundamentalism

> In place of a definition,…… the assumption appears to be that everyone knows [radicalization] when they see it, and so we are able to proceed with the tasks in hand while awaiting further conceptual clarification. Despite our admitted lack of understanding of radicalization, it has emerged as a concept that has displayed substantial "epistemological creep" into contemporary discourses about freedom, security, identity, crime and deviance.

Radicalism is mostly understood as a process that brings radical change and is associated with a negative connotation. The process is neither inherently negative nor uniquely a Muslim approach as has been shown in the popular media. In her article Chambers (2018) further delineates the complexities attached to the process of radicalism. According to her, the earlier attempts to understand the term relied on three approaches. The sociological approach looked for the common social status of these terrorists whereas the psychological approach probed into personality types. The third approach primarily rested on the group dynamics that exist in these terrorist organisations. All these three approaches have their rebuttals. Many evidences of the jihadists coming from the economically stable educated backgrounds deny sociological approach (Kruglanski, Belanger & Gunaratna, 2019). Relying on the psychological approach to find mental reasons for their indulgence in such activities can also be easily denied as there are less evidences of the terrorists suffering from mental illness. Chambers (ibid) relies on Marc Sageman's (2004) experience as a CIA operations officer besides being a forensic psychiatrist that he pens down in his book *Understanding Terror Networks*. He rejects the idea of finding common sociological or psychological backgrounds as a cause of terrorism but he believes that personal circumstances, friendships or in case of males the strong bonding that results because of similar religious or political outlook or mere the longing for an adventure drive young people to join the jihadist groups. Self-employed jihadists, on the other hand, who do not share the above reasons of indulging in such activities homesickness or cultural alienation could be presented as the main causes.

Taking both *fundamentalism* and *radicalism* into account allows us to find common threads in these two different phenomena. The wide ranging facts delineated as the possible causes for fundamentalism and radicalism make it proper for a psychoanalytical study. Ranging from individual anxieties, fears, and dreams to serious mental illnesses are central to psychoanalytical study. It will, therefore, be helpful to study both fundamentalism and radicalism from a psychoanalytical perspective which not only encompasses the general phenomena of fundamentalism and radicalism but will also be helpful in identifying the underlining specificities. Furthermore, it will help us in understanding the apparently healthy activities in a pathological context which makes them alienated from their community consequent upon in their involvement in violent activities.

If we look at both fundamentalism and radicalism from the point of view of basic psychoanalytical perspective, it seems to be a universal phenomenon as the elementary anxieties are basic to all humans and make each one of us susceptible to be caught in such activities. Here elementary anxieties refer to the basic conflicts that humans suffer from;

identity crisis, need of belonging to a creed, religion or cultural group, satisfying one's ambitions, anger, frustration caused by unpromising situations. The unresolved conflicts sometimes drive to other means to fulfill their needs (Edgerton, 2011; Osborne, 1956). Among the young adults during a psychoanalytical therapy the questioning of their being suggests a feeling of alienation. Though the concept of alienation is usually associated with Marx (1844), resulting from false consciousness in the proletarian class, alienation has become an important idea in the post WW II context (e.g. Edgerton, 2011; Osborne, 1956 among many). The existential side of alienation is most commonly discussed and understood, however, some critics have tried to combine the concept of alienation with different critical theories (Osborne, 1956). Alienation is usually seen as "the negative result of a dominant social-cultural-economical discourse" (Verhaeghe, 1998). As has been discussed above, identity is basic to human existence. It constitutes our elementary anxieties consisting of identity crisis often blaming our surroundings for our position in society and what could have been achieved. This is the first step in the realization that we are alienated (Nettler, 1956). The second step tells what decides their alienation; a system that creates an idea of false self in them and to restore the true identity it is important to rid of this false consciousness. The same notion of false consciousness can be applied to psychoanalysis where the person suffering from alienation can be helped to get rid of the false identity. This false identity can be the result of harmful effects of religion, political ideology or social class. Thus the question remains of our true identity as We always tend to see our true identity as better than what we are now. This suggests our complex relationship with the world where we start seeing ourselves in relation to the world as *Other*. This self-conscious about our personality divides our inner self into good and bad where we always tend to see ourselves as bad. The main cause of alienation is the relationship that we develop with the outside world. Verhaeghe (1998) suggests different reasons for alienation. "Modern urbanized civilization for Rousseau, religion according to Feuerbach, capitalism for Marx." He further draws parallel with Freud's concept of identification. A human child only becomes human when he starts identifying himself with the outer world. The same concept is used by Lacan (ibid) in his identification of Other. For him too identification is integral to humansand that human child growing outside any cultural religious context does not build any human identification. Thus, alienation for Lacan is identification gone wrong. The mirror stage in Lacan's psychoanalytical approach suggests the beginning of this identification process with the mother. This identification process is applicable at both the developmental level of a child and at a larger social level. In Verhaeghe's (1998) interpretation, "in both cases, an image is presented to a child or adult with the message: "This is you". If the presented images mirror what the child is indeed experiencing, the resulting identification is congruent" and at the social level "the identificatory models presented by the Other should mirror a supposed essence of the subject. The analogy goes even further. In case of incongruent mirroring and the resulting alien self, psychotherapy is required to correct the alien aspect."(Verhaeghe, 1998, p.368) The concept of alienation is not easy to understand as the very cause that leads to alienation is the reason for our identity. The outer world is presented as Other to our self since the

mirror stage. This Other is positive if our feeling is congruent with the outer world and vice versa. The concept of alienation becomes more problematic when a person suffers from Marxist's false consciousness and approves of the same system that is the reason of his oppression.

For Lacan (1932), the process of alienation starts as early as from the age of six months. The child starts recognizing his body in relation to the (m)Other. The images presented by the (m)Other is the first source of his identification and is foreign to us as it comes from the outside world. In Verhaeghe's (1998) explanation of the Lacanian concept of the 'schema of the two mirrors', "the accent shifts from the body and the partial drives to the Other and his desire. The desire of the Other is enigmatic for the child: "What does s/he want from me?" The answer is not obvious, and the question evokes anxiety. The result is never a satisfactory attempt to be identical with what one supposes that the Other desires, in order to master the anxiety" (Lacan, 2019, p. 370-371). He further explains "[T]he attribution of our identity comes from the Other, the subject must identify with the presented images and signifiers. This occurs in a relation in which the Other assumes responsibility for removing the original unpleasure or arousal" (Lacan, 2019, p. 372). For the definition of his subject Lacan (ibid) draws heavily from Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) concept of signifier (word) and signified (the thing it refers to). This relation between the signifier and the signified is explained in relation to the subject as:

> "[T]he important thing about the subject is that it has no essence, no ontological substance. Its production is by the signifiers, coming from the field of the Other…The division does not take place between a real or authentic part and a false external one; the division defines the subject as such. The subject is split from its real being and forever tossed between eventually contradicting signifiers coming from the Other." (Verhaeghe's, 1998)

As mentioned earlier, there exists a parallel between our elementary anxieties and the causes of fundamentalism and radicalism. Both phenomena work to seek the ultimate truth to satisfy one's thirst of identity. That search for identity is problematic in psychoanalytical terms and leads to alienation (Nettler, 1956). Bhutto's (2019) latest novel *The Runaways* deal with the phenomena of fundamentalism and radicalism by identifying all the possible causes that lead to such activities. Bhutto is a Pakistani writer born in Kabul. Born in a renowned Pakistani political family, she enjoys a keen insight into the international political issues along with the social issues which become the subject in her novels. Her experience of living in the United States and England provides her with a more immediate exposure of the contemporary issues that the world is facing today. *The Runaways* is a literary thriller that is set in three locations: Karachi in Pakistan, Portsmouth in England, Mosul in Iraq. The novel revolves around three main characters set in England and Pakistan with the three plots converging in Iraq. The novel's structure is also divided into chapters with each chapter unfolding the life of one of the characters

coming together towards the end with one common aim of joining the terrorist organization.

The Runaways is about a powerful global subject highlighting the reasons that drive young people to be caught in the web of terrorists. The multinational and multi-religious background of the three main characters give it a global appeal; one of them living in Pakistan, another in England while the third character moves in between Pakistan and England. Each one of them despite their different backgrounds share same elementary anxieties related to identity. In order to find an answer to why these characters are caught in the propagandist narrative, Bhutto weaves in a story with characters having different economic, cultural and personal problems.

The first character discussed is a Christian Pakistani girl, Anita, who lives with her mother and brother in the slums of Karachi. Her mother is a 'maalish wali', masseuse in the affluent neighborhood of the city. Despite the fact that Anita is born to a poor mother, she aspires to the same affluent life that her mother works as a servant. "Anita's mother worked as a *maalish wali*, massaging the tired bones of rich women with her scented oils", (Bhutto, 2019, p.35) she went with her mother to different big bungalows where her mother rendered her services. "But the house in Clifton was Anita's favorite, with the large living room covered in paint that looked as though someone had run their fingernails through it, white streaks through burnt orange, and the wall-sized windows that reflected beams of light everywhere, like Christmas sparklers." (Bhutto, 2019, p.35) Her heart would ache with a burning desire whenever she would see the residents of the house had their every wish granted. Throughout the novel narrating Anita's part of the story, the writer very clearly shows her shame at her economically deprived situation and her fascination with the affluent class of the city which she tries to imitate.

Her alienation arises from the unequal economic structure of the society. She desires to be heard and master the same way her mother's masters command and enjoy the offerings of life. Anita in her struggles to overcome poverty started learning English. She would often sneak out of the house and watched TV at the tea stall in the corner of the street and longed to be free to follow her dreams. "She heard a talk show host interview one of the ladies from one of her favourite serials. *It's such a blessing, you know*, Shela Kazmi said in English that sounded like velvet felt against the skin, smooth and luxurious and unaffordable, *to be able to follow my dreams and do what I love."* (Bhutto, 2019, p. 81) She detested her present self and identity. Her present sense of identity came from the outside world which treated her as Other and made her alien but being oblivious to the reason of her alienation, she endorses the same system that gives her this painful identity. Osama, her radical neighbor introduced her to the revolutionary poets of Pakistan and discussed literature and history with her. While they were discussing a black writer, Osama tells her: "The only way to look at powerful societies was through the people they excluded…The blacks encapsulated all the sorrow of their history in art – in music, in literature, in dance. The way the Sindhis or Baloch did here. Even as they suffered, the blacks sang to the world of beauty and terror. 'I don't belong anywhere,' she said." (Bhutto, 2019, p.260)

Her answer clearly tells of the alienation that she feels at her heart. The sense of belonging to a group is important in the process of knowing oneself. One day while discussing Habib Jalib's (radical poet who was imprisoned for many years for writing poetry against the sitting rulers) poetry Osama gifts her Habib Jalib's poetry. On the dusty old book she notices the remarks: "*Confiscate the fields from the landowners, take away the mills from robbers, redeem the country from its dark hours …*" (Bhutto, 2019, p.261) Her interaction with Osama gives her strength to resist against the system that shatters her dreams. Both the brother and the sister change their identity and names to be accepted by the society. The journey from Ezra to Feroze and Anita Rose to Layla shows their efforts to overcome their alienation in the society but dramatically the novel in the final chapters unravels the true identity of Layla who has been caught in the terrorist' narrative when the system she is part of is unable to satiate her desires. She has been presented as a jihadi bride motivating and enticing young jihadis to fight and die for the cause.

In an answer to the question related to Shamima Begum, the jihadi bride who was denied entry into Britain, Bhutto refers to a report published by King's College (2018) that many young women joined ISIS between 2013 and 2018. She is concerned with the fact that we need to address the question of as to why so many young women in the first place is joining these terrorist organizations and are able to travel as far as Syria from Europe. In the novel Layla is called by names as "Bride of Damascus, Daughter of Jihad, Pride of the Martyrs, Niece of Struggle." (Bhutto, 2019, p.177) In words of Abu Khalid, the ISIS leader, he "wanted the world to see the quality of women joining their movement. It wasn't just dumpy British schoolgirls running away from home, not just sad, lonely girls looking for husbands, but real women, free women. True fighters" (Bhutto, 2019, p.178). But ironically she has been presented as a seductive ornament to entice and motivate the young men. Layla's struggle to liberate herself has been manipulated by these terrorist organizations. Like Layla both Shamima Begum and Hoda Muthana suffered exclusion because of their colour and race and ISIS provided a place for acceptance where the image of eth inner world and the outer world seems to be congruent. In a place like ISIS, they are not only accepted but are given respect and are made leaders. The reward is great in a sense that they feel themselves and believe to have found the authentic identity which is obviously not true.

The second character that is introduced is Monty, who is the son of an affluent father in Pakistan. The family alternatively lives in Karachi and London, has an English speaking Filipino servant who is preferred over a local maid for her fine English. Monty is sent to a posh American school where Layla becomes the dream girl of his life but her presence brings destruction in his life following her all the way to the war terrain in Mosul. Monty's mother and father are presented as contrasting characters. Her mother grows religious and gradually rejects the ways of her husband's life who drinks and is not as religious as she is. Monty's father is obsessed with his masculinity as he argues with his wife about their son's upbringing by criticizing her that "you're raising a sissy" (Bhutto, 2019, p.57) His father often criticizes him for his masculinity and tries to present himself as asserting father as a role model. Instead of becoming a role model, his parents' behavior is the cause of confusion and identity crisis. Monty's parents while in England

try their best to disguise themselves as true English people. "The sun – rare for London – had given Monty a migraine and he spent the day trying to hide it from his parents, who drank Pimm's – even Mummy, because Papa told her there was no alcohol in it – and ate strawberries and cream like real English people." (Bhutto, 2019, p.54) Both the parents present conflicting images to the self-image that Monty possess and leads to incongruent image of self in contrast to the outer world.

Another reason for Monty's anxiety is the constant interaction that he has with the impoverished part of the city which sets a big contrast to the life they live. Every day on his way to school, he witnesses the poverty of the city ranging from the servants that work at his home to guard working at his school gate. His journey to war ground of Mosul is complicated in a sense that seems to be driven by the love of a girl. The image of the girl that he encountered in the outside world seems to be satisfying to his self-image and put his anxieties to sleep instead of rooting them out. His presence at Mosul was not inspired by any jihadist intentions but to look for the love of his life. "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, 2019, p.168)

Through the narrative of Sunny, the third protagonist of the novel, the writer presents another reason for the growing radicalism among Muslims. Through his story, the readers are presented with another set of circumstances that can lead to the involvement of the young people in terrorist activities. Sunny is the only son of first generation Indian Muslim immigrant in England. His father, Sulaiman Jamil, a widower, has worked hard to assimilate in the English culture and has integrated himself into the English lifestyle. In the collection of his father's books Sunny finds books like "*How to Dress like a Quintessential English Gentleman: The A to Z of Savile Row* was one of the pages Pa had marked. Sunny could just see his father, smoothing down the page as he studied it, so it wouldn't crease. He had even written in the margins, copying the instructions on how to tie the perfect ascot."(Bhutto, 2019, p. 39) Sunny, on the other hand, gets angry and confused at the growing intolerant actions that he has to bear against his race and religion which in turn make him feel alienated at the place that he has called home all his life. He often uses social media as a medium to express his anxieties and confusions that he faces. In one of his posts on Facebook, quoting Imran Khan's words (famous Pakistani player turned politician) he writes,

> Why we strong Muslim men always gotta go around in jeans and suits and ties like we don't got a PROUD culture of our own? Why read Shakespeare when we have our own holy book – worth a thousand pages of English classics? Why we follow their laws, their democracy, their ideas when we have the hadiths, the Shariah, the purest guidance to a virtuous, Islamic life? (Bhutto, p.39)

As time goes on, Sunny gets more disillusioned with the culture he has lived all his life. Sunny who would enjoy the company of Desi girls starts spending his time on internet,

posting acrid posts about West and in favour of his religion. To him, now religion seems to be the perfect solution for his conflicting identity. As in another post he writes: "What does it mean in the modern world? Yo, fiqh is the key. You know any other people who have so much study, so much pro-fun-dity in their world? Deep knowledge, deep deep comprehension. This is the illumination of Islam, it seeks answers to all questions and guides its followers exactly towards the right path." (Bhutto, 2019, p. 42)

His posts do not catch much attention and nobody seems to care about what he is going through. Soon he lands in the quagmire of identity crisis. His childhood Muslim friend Binyamin or Ben as he insists to be called has started giving him cold shoulder. In order to find answers for his conflicting situation he goes to a local Bangladeshi Imam telling him that "he was lost" (Bhutto, 2019, p.72) but does not find his words consoling enough. Eventually he is caught by his Syrian return cousin Oz, a strong supporter of Islam and Sharia. Oz seems to be cashing in the situation as he appears to be a blow of respite in Sunny's troublesome life by giving him a purpose of life. His father's disappointment with him, rejection from his friends and the society leads him to dissociate himself from the society and suffers from extreme alienation. He often struggles with his father's expectations from him and utters words like "I'm not good enough, I ain't real. I'm nothing, invisible. Remake me into something beautiful. Something you can believe in." (Bhutto, 2019, p.191). Another reason for his alienation is his conflict with the culture he has been raised in, which is growing deeply and is evident in his posts.

> "It isn't hard enough for us? Muslim, brown, second gen but still getting called Paki all the time, day and night, day and night, living in migrant central, homes no bigger than jungle camps? It isn't enough being a liberated man of colour and having to stand up to the world? Men who understand the codes of being, codes by which you reclaim your RIGHTFUL place, your HONOUR, RESPECT, codes by which you soar or you drown, you DIE – that's who we were raised to be." (Bhutto, 2019, p.199)

Oz further endorses his alienation by giving him a false hope of a false identity by exposing him to the jihadist narrative adorned with liberation and purpose. In Oz's words:

> "The elites are eating up the world,' Oz explained. '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. We're the periphery, we'll never be the centre. We're not like them. We come from a different culture. They don't understand our people, our struggles." (Bhutto, 2019, p.100)

In a long time, Sunny seems to be happy finding a purpose. In the writer's words:"Sunny was going to be different – people would respect him. They would remember him. Recognize him. Already, Sunny was happier than he had been in months. Oz lifted his

grief, only he had the power to do that. His cousin, his friend, his brother in arms, for a while his everything." (Bhutto, 2019, p.102)

The alienation and desolation that these characters run from, comes back deeply in the deserts of Iraq. During his stay at Mosul, he realizes that his cousin Oz would never be coming back; he directs his jihadist energy against his cousin. Sunny also lacks clear motivation and uses his social media accounts to constantly instill energy in him through his angry and provocative posts that he puts up.

Conclusion

The Runaways is a coming of age story set in the contemporary world posing questions of identity with the young adults using different means to validate their existence and identity. What complicates this search for identity is the hostility shown to anyone who looks different.

The novel is mainly about the search for truth but it is as much about what truths should be sought after. Sunny's cultural conflicts, Monty's lack of purpose in life and Anita's ambition are relegated to the background when they are pushed to take the most terrible decisions of their life. Thus, the novel suggests the need to look into the causes that lead the confused and frustrated young people to take up arms. These young people do not end up fighting for a jihadi cause but comes out as a reaction against their inability to cope with the crisis they face. Identity has become as much a political problem as it is personal in the contemporary times.

According to the writer, the novel does not revolve around Islamic radicalization as it is always associated with religion. Anita Rose puts up a good case to negate this hypothesis. In an interview, she explains that, "I wouldn't call it 'Islamic' radicalism at all. Look at the world today – radicalism isn't the exclusive property of one people or one religion. Young people are vulnerable to anger and violence all over the world" (Basheer, 2019). At another moment in an answer to the question about radicalism she explains the West's blindness to see the true meaning of it:

> "There's an industry in the Western world built on creating this singular narrative on what radicalism means and why it happens, and it's clear now – two decades into the War on Terror era – that that industry has no clue what it's talking about. The West doesn't understand radicalism – either by design or default – but that lack of understanding is making things worse. It's anger, isolation, alienation, pain – that's what drives young people to take up arms against the world. Not religion." (Reynolds, 2020)

The world of runaways fervently takes us to an apparently lucid world of radicalization from the beginning to its end with complexities involved in the process. By taking us deep into this journey it focuses on that the path to radicalization is not undertaken on the vehicle of religion but factors like economic deprivation, desolation, bad friendships, love, rejection from family and society also play their role. By highlighting these factors the novel calls for an urgency to look into the unconscious working of these vulnerable young people's mind in order to prevent them from being runaways into a dangerous world. In one of the interviews the writer beautifully sums up the causes of young people

getting involved in terrorism rather than simply holding radicalism responsible: "When people have dignified work, a home, a feeling – that of security that comes from knowing they are a vital part of the fabric of their country and community – they don't run away to die. They don't pick up arms if they are assured an honourable life in their home countries" (Bhutto, 2019). The discussion then suggests that if young people are refused to be integrated into the society or community they are part of, they are vulnerable to be taken up by any vision that accepts them. The young people are not radicalized because they hold certain religious ideology but because they are pushed against the wall and are made to feel alienated.

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