



RESEARCH PAPER

Fragmented Identity and Radicalization in Bhutto's *The Runaways*

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore identity crisis and its correlation with the process of radicalization in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*. The research closely examines how characters in the narrative navigate and grapple with elements of their identities that are fragmented or in a state of flux. The state of alienation, poverty, and social anxiety emerges as crucial in contributing to radicalization within a society. Bauman's (2000) theory of liquid modernity works as theoretical framework which is central in understanding radical tendencies of the characters and individuals in the novel. The analysis of the selected text concludes that the individuals suffer from identity crisis while encountering poverty, social frustration and isolation. The findings of the study indicate that individuals suffer due to material concerns, social exclusion and divisions, alienation, internal emptiness and lack of belonging that lead them to identity crisis, fragmentation and radical tendencies.

KEYWORDS | Fragmented Identity, Radicalization, Extremism, Liquid Modernity, Consumerism, Globalization

Introduction

The study investigates the problem of identity crisis, fragmented identity and radicalization that arises due to cultural forces and global effects on people. Pakistani society has many types of social, political and cultural challenges that contribute to fractured identity and radicalization. There is a strong connection between identity crisis and the process of radicalization, which are rooted in one's history, religion, socio-economic status, political mindset and conflicts. Consequently, the individuals remain at risk due to the instability of one's nation and state. Pakistan has a variety of people belonging to different ethnic groups with diverse culture, identity and history. There are many key factors like power and control of a particular politically strong ethnic group that arise feelings of marginalization and estrangement in people. Islam plays an important role in people's life for shaping identity in spite of the fact that Islam has multiple dimensions, explanations and practical exercise all over the country due to sectarian divide. There are multiple national customs, practices and standards that show the cultural diversity of people nationally as well as internationally. Fragmented identity and radical belief system have become common in the contemporary world. This study aims to highlight the complex interlink of fragmented identity and radical tendencies in individuals particularly in the context of postmodern world.

The idea of identity with its fragmented nature is prevalent in this postmodern world. The collapse of traditional and conventional systems results in fluid and complicated identities. The world is in a constant change and people are passing through

uncertainty and self-contradictory identification. Postmodern identity crisis are due to cultural diversity and technological advancement that has transformed the idea of a single and permanent identity. In the contemporary world, there are various flexible types of identity that destabilize the concept of fixed self-identity. Fragmented identity is the part of different cultures, ethnicity, sexual orientation and genders, in this situation the individuals face fluctuation in identity that keeps on shifting. The development of mass-media and information technology has made identity a very complex idea to comprehend. It is critical to focus on cultivating individuals' minds in order to prevent them from falling into extremism and radicalization. Heine (2020) stated that "Thought precedes action as lightning precedes thunder" (p. 4). The need is to invest efforts to improve individuals' cognitive ability, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging to encounter with extremism. We must create a culture of value system that is resilient to the encroachment and imposition of extremism and radicalization.

This research highlights the elements that contribute to radicalize young minds for political and diplomatic advantages. The issue of fragmented identity and radical mindset in individuals is multifaceted due to its historical roots in Pakistani society. Pakistan has a long history of political instability, ethnic conflicts, and terrible violence which provides an ideal environment for both extremist organizations and political entities to exploit young people. The target of radical group of people are young individuals with vulnerability, deprivation and disillusionment. These individuals are particularly from impoverished regions or minority populations and they are offered a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging by groups with radical mindsets. These organizations frequently spread extreme ideologies that violate religious or sectarian sensitivities, raising themselves as Islamic defenders or proponents of ethnic rights. The individuals with radical tendencies face many risks including struggle with divided identity, sense of belonging, life threat, injustice, anger and conflicts. Therefore, young minds foster hatred towards institutions and authorities. The emotional struggles, family challenges, and feelings of isolation from society can also make people vulnerable. These conditions may develop radical beliefs that provide a feeling of purpose or belonging to people facing identity crisis. The emergence of extremist ideologies and sectarian conflicts between Sunni and Shia have caused internal conflicts and radicalism in the Muslim community. Jalal argues that, "at the root of Pakistan's national identity crisis has been the unresolved debate on how to square the state's self-proclaimed Islamic identity with the obligations of a modern nation- state" (as cited in Leake, 2015, p. 196).

Bhutto (2018) is notable for her bluntness on social and political issues, endorsing for human rights, gender equality, rights of minorities, and social justice. Her writing often offers compelling insights into the complexities of contemporary Pakistan, undertaking the topics such as terrorism, violence, corruption, and the struggles of ordinary people amidst political upheaval and turmoil. Sethna (2014) appreciates Bhutto as a skilled writer of socio-political narrative because she uses literary abilities to create an astonishing story of conflict, treachery, political turmoil, and shattered identities in her works. *The Runaways* (2018) is an enthralling novel that probes the lives of three young people, who are struggling to find their place in a world filled with chaos and uncertainty. Through the characters of Anita, Monty, and Sunny, the reader is taken on a journey through the bustling streets of Karachi, where the characters navigate the complexities of love, friendship, and identity. Bhutto's narrative illustrates the themes of resilience, loss, and the power of human connections. As the characters confront the harsh realities of their surroundings and they discover the strength within themselves to produce their own paths and pursue their dreams. This study is an exploration of the human spirit and the universal search for belonging in a world that is uncertain and seems detached. Bhutto's

contributions in literature and social criticism have brought her international recognition, establishing her as a powerful and leading voice in the contemporary Pakistani writers.

Literature Review

Different Layers of Identity

Identity is a fundamental aspect of an individual's existence, and it remains defining characteristic throughout his/her life. An individual can have multiple layers of identity, which include national, religious, or ethnic affiliations. The most important is how a person deals with different challenges in life. The question is what are the crucial factors that shape an individual's identity? These factors can be social, theological, geographical, or cultural. Mills (1959) stated that history plays an important role in understanding life and our own identity, as the contemporary world around us, which influences our life and character, is created by past events. Another main factor related to creating identity is culture. When a new child is born, his/her socialization starts with that moment, by embracing different values, norms beliefs prevailing in that particular society. As a result of individual's socialization and indoctrination, one's identity is formed. This socialization continues till the end of life and becomes an integral element of that individual. Hall (1990), a prominent cultural theorist offers two distinct definitions of cultural identity. The first definition views cultural identity as a shared and fixed essence, a sort of collective 'one true self' held by individuals with a common history and ancestry. This perspective sees identity as something stable and unchanging, rooted in the past. The second definition, however, considers identity as a dynamic and ongoing process of becoming rather than simply being there in the world. In this view, cultural identity is not static but is continually shaped and reshaped through experiences, interactions, and historical contexts.

Interlink between Identity and Radical Tendencies in Pakistani Fiction

Pakistani fiction writers portray the social and political turmoil in the region and the struggle for democracy among military coups and power struggle by the dictators. Their works provide satire on the power system and the inequalities that prevail in the society. They also portray ethnic, sectarian, and religious conflicts to criticize the dogmatic mentality and fundamental beliefs prevalent in the society. The interconnection of identity, politics, terrorism and violence in Anglophone Pakistani literature explores the multifaceted aspects of social variations in relation to ethnicity, gender, and social roles. The study uncovers how writers express and construct fragmented identities in the text that shed light on the ways in which cultural and political factors shape literary representations. Most of Pakistani works explore how social factors and individual identity interplay closely in Pakistani literature. The inability of nationalism to deal with social disparities as well as the prejudice within the country has fostered and contributed to the identity crises. The nationalist subject matter in Anglophone Pakistani literature is that Pakistan is seen as a failed state with dead ends. Apart from that, there is a variety of prevailing problems in Pakistani society due to which, the individuals suffer from identity crisis. Resultantly, Pakistani writers have touched almost all of the important issues for the development of identity (Kanwal & Aslam, 2021).

The Idea of Fragmented Identity and Liquid Modernity

Bauman (2000) believes that in our postmodern world things have become more fluid and unclear. This is like trying to grab onto water and just when you think you've got a grip on it, it slips through your fingers. This is how modern world is changing and he used the term liquid modernity to describe the uncertainty and fluctuation. It suggests that

our old views about ethics, the moral norms and values on which we have long relied, may not be as dependable as we consider it. Identity in a postmodern world has become uncertain as individuals are exposed to an abundance of diverse cultural influences, shifting social norms, and the constant reinvention of the self. The traditional notion of a constant and definite identity directs individuals to cope with different types of identity and fluctuating behaviours. This breakdown may result in creating uncertainty and imbalance because individuals attempt to harmonize their disconnected pieces of identity as a requirement of the place and society of their living. Still, people may acquire a more negotiable and complicated identity which may be freeing as well as empowering. The individuals may create a sense of a more meaningful and independent identity by understanding their true selves with the help of flexible identity. Moreover, fluid identity can help individuals to avoid being categorized into a specific identity, allowing them to freely express different sides of their personalities. People can also get benefit from flexible identity regarding their selection of career by exploring various directions and possibilities without being restricted to a fixed identity. Further, people with flexible identity may build deeper understanding and connection with others around them.

The Process of Radicalization

Radical mindset is very complicated to understand as it refers to grasping extreme point of views, opinions and activities under the guidance of specific group of people. The individuals and group of people with radical beliefs offer resolution of the internal and external conflicts, injustices, and existential crises. The people with radical belief system interpret the meaning of their life and existence and offer the same to others with radical tendencies. The comprehension of self and other give meaning to the life of both individuals and groups. Such individuals may have an existential crisis in life and they combat with fundamental concerns and social norms which radical ideologies can fix through appealing their sense and playing with their psyche. A person's cognitive growth is also involved in competing with all these factors. Radicalization occurs when individuals are convinced by others to embrace an extreme and inflexible attitude, most often centered on ethnic, religious, or political views. This strategy involves convincing people to adopt extreme positions on a variety of social issues while claiming supremacy over others with different viewpoints or perspectives (Ruwan et al., 2020). Dogma and orthodoxy in society frequently lead to extremism by promoting rigid, inflexible ideologies which offer little tolerance for disagreements or different point of views. Fundamental beliefs and orthodoxy can give certain individuals a feeling of stability and identity. However, they can also create an ideal environment for extremism when they become dogmatic, distinct, and impatient of variance. Dogma mostly supports a single point of view and disenfranchise the opponent beliefs frequently ignoring or criticizing variation in the prevailing culture, ideology and faith.

Extremist Tendencies

Extremism is the act of taking one's convictions far beyond what society accepts as normal. Even if individuals with extremist tendencies may have passionate views on politics, religion, or social problems, they often use force or violence to get their way rather than having a peaceful discussion about them. The extremist groups do not respect the rights or opinions of others that is why they can be detrimental. The roots, causes and nature of religious extremism among Muslims through this qualitative analysis show that mostly studies on radicalization focus on the dynamics of extremist groups and how they exploit the frustrations of vulnerable people. The extremist groups or organizations capitalize the humiliation that people face in the society. It is essential to recognize the sociocultural causes like poverty, alienation and corruption that contribute to extremism,

vulnerabilities and frustrations. Our social environment influences how we perceive the world and develop our views. The understanding of underlying causes of intolerance in the society contribute to extremism that provides insight into the motivations which pushes individuals toward the radical movements. The social factors and political upheaval such as discriminatory institutional systems, social norms and lack of democratic values might make an individual vulnerable and drive them to join radical organizations (Haq, 2023).

Dissatisfaction and Radical Mindsets

The relative deprivation and perceived injustice are critical concepts in social psychology, often used to understand feelings of dissatisfaction and the resulting behaviors in various social contexts. The individuals perceive and react to disparities of their current situation and their expectations or comparisons with others. Gurr's (1970) theory of relative deprivation states that people face obstacles and difficulties that prevent them from attaining their objectives, goals and their basic requirements. Consequently, deprived people feel a great sense of loss that ultimately arises the sentiments of anger in them. The sensation might be worsened by a natural desire for revenge against the cause of the deprivation (Daliri, 2004). When a government fails to provide security, economic stability and opportunities for prosperity, it often leads public to resentment and anger towards the overall system. The foundation of relative deprivation theory is the idea that people frequently feel that they lack something relative to some standard of comparisons. Individuals can encounter a relative lack of material possessions like vehicles or money, as well as intangible assets like respect or status in the society. People not only feel comparatively devoid of material goods, but they also feel relatively deprived of justice and basic rights. The social shift and developments in society can result into the deprivation of some factions of the community because a government's primary responsibility is to ensure equal opportunities and justice for all its citizens. If certain segments of society are deprived of the fundamental rights, it can lead to unrest and rebellion. All the above mentioned factors can incite extremism by fostering hatred and anger in those people, who believe they are unfairly disadvantaged. The perception of inequity and unjust treatment can lead to radical beliefs as individuals strive to rectify perceived injustices, often using extreme or violent means.

Economic Inequalities and Globalization

The economic inequality and poverty are significant triggers for extremism, as these conditions provide suitable environments for radicalization. As Neumann (2013) highlights that economic hardship and social inequality are significant factors that contribute to radicalization. When individuals face persistent poverty and huge economic disparities, they often feel disenfranchised and marginalized. As a result, this provide a chance for extremist groups to exploit vulnerable individuals. The relationship between poverty and inequality is also complex and varies across time and geographical space. The globalization is an emerging phenomena in the 21th century and the economic growth has been associated with both reductions in global poverty and greater disparities in wealth. People are now in enormous problems with goods because of overconsumption, which has created a significant divide between the wealthy and the poorer classes. Globalization and consumerist culture have led to duality as reductions in global poverty and increased wealth disparities which highlight the complexity of poverty and inequality in social circles (Clark et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Bauman's (2000) theory of liquid modernity has been used as a theoretical framework for the analysis of Bhutto's (2018) novel, *The Runaways*. Bauman's concept of liquid modernity helps in critically evaluating the modern world. His work focuses on the idea of fragmentation and division. He throws light on all the important issues regarding the problems faced by individuals in the postmodern era. Bauman provides the critical social commentary on a wide range of subjects, including the Holocaust, utopia, globalization, identity, fear, and consumerism. He frequently pursues the hidden potentials, opportunities, and unexplored routes for enhancing human lives. His works are distinct from traditional sociology in their flexibility and adaptability. Many scholars have alluded to his work as "liquid sociology" due to its unusual approach (Jacobsen, 2014, p. 85).

Neumann (2013), a well-known expert on radicalization and terrorism has substantially improved the understanding of radicalization and its processes. In his thesis *The Trouble with Radicalization*, he offers significant insights into the spread of radical ideologies in society and their consequent repercussions for people. His views on extremism provide important awareness regarding identity issues and socioeconomic marginalization. Neumann's studies are crucial for understanding the causes and process of radicalization and extremism, especially in the context of terrorism and political violence in the modern world. His writings investigate the role of social, psychological, political, and economic factors in promoting radical and extremist beliefs in the society. Liquid modernity is a concept by Bauman to describe the contemporary postmodern condition of constant change and mobility in social, economic, and personal domains. This notion, emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and stands in opposition to the previous age of "solid modernity", which was characterized by solid institutions, transparent structures, and regular patterns in life. In solid modernity, the industrial revolution, the creation of nation-states, and the expansion of capitalism, resulted in a relatively secure social order with more defined identities and responsibility. Bauman's notion of liquid modernity emphasizes that how contemporary society keeps on shifting and changing, influencing relationships, identities, and global economy. He compares this to the past age, when people were like pilgrims seeking some deeper meaning, but today they are like tourists seeking several, ephemeral experiences. Bauman adopts the metaphor of fluidity to depict the transition from solid, stable modernity to fluid, and ever-changing social existence. (Mattiazzi & Vila-Petroff, 2021).

The transition to liquid modernity occurred in the second part of the twentieth century, driven by fast technology breakthroughs, globalization, and the change from industrial to information-based economies. These modifications destroyed many of the stable structures of past era, resulting into a more fluid, unstable and uncertain world. In this postmodern era, traditional sources of identification and social connection, such as family, community, and job, have become less stable. People who were expected to possess qualities of adaptability and self-sufficiency in order to cope with the continuously changing world. They were required to constantly reshape their identities and navigate through the challenges presented by the ever-changing environment. Traditional foundations of contemporary society, such as class, religion, family, country, and political philosophy, have been undermined by an increased emphasis on consumption. The social relations have been converted into commodities, leading the advertising of identity itself. Individuals lack permanent reference points and social or cultural rules in this era of "liquid modernity", and making it harder for them to organize their lives and integrate within class and citizenship frameworks (Bele, 2022).

Postmodernity and liquid modernity are related notions that address contemporary issues in modern world. Postmodernity challenges modernity's certainties by promoting skepticism toward grand narratives while accepting variation and relativism. Bauman's (2000) concept of liquid modernity expands on this by emphasizing the fluid, fleeting aspect of contemporary society, in which stability and long-term commitments disappear by a sense of flexibility and rapidity. The above discussed frameworks highlight the transition from stable, predictable systems to a more fragmented and unpredictable world. These concepts demonstrate the dynamic interplay between cultural relativism and the mobility of social and individual identities in the modern day.

Bauman (2000) used the term liquid modernity to describe today's increasingly globalized and consumer-driven societies. In this atmosphere, boundaries have become flexible, and we live in an uncertain age as identities are strained and divided. Liquid modernity can be viewed as a development of modernism, or rather, a refined form of it. Individuals in consumer cultures are given numerous options and the freedom to select, but this freedom also produces instability, allowing people to shift quickly from one social position to another. As Bauman (1992) explains that "The marriage between freedom and insecurity was prearranged and consummated on the wedding night; all subsequent attempts at separation proved vain, and the wedlock remained in force ever since" (p.12). This mobility creates a hierarchy in which the wealthy majority takes benefits while the poor and disadvantaged are denied. By coining the phrase liquid modernity, Bauman presents a theoretical viewpoint on the future state of our society emphasizing the dynamics of changing social interactions and the decline of interpersonal connections.

In short liquid modernity is defined by fluidity, transience, and unpredictability as opposed to the solid, set structures of classic modernity. In this condition, customs, values, and interpersonal bonds collapse, leaving people to make their way through a world where change is the only constant thing. People have to continually adapt to this fluidity because they must deal with the problems of a fast changing and unexpected world. In Bauman's perspective, there's an emphasis on how this ongoing change impacts social ties, cultural customs, and individual identities. His legacy is a complex one, influenced by his views on liquid modernity and his analysis of signs of the times, such as love, individualization, work, and refugees (Beilharz, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Bhutto's (2018) *The Runaways* offers a compelling exploration of the complex interplay between social, psychological, political, and cultural factors that contribute to extremism. The study masterfully illuminates the vulnerabilities exploited by those who seek to radicalize young minds. The radical mindset and extremist tendencies develop in this postmodern world due to uncertainty, disparity and inequality. Bhutto asks a great question "how far would you go"? and the inquiry to construct the interconnected issues related to personal and national identity, the attractiveness and risks of fanaticism, and the complexity of power games of a globalized world. The paper analyses the individuals with fragmented identities in *The Runaways* and reveals that the lines between personal and political can create and develop fresh power relations.

There are many factors that can help in understanding the radical tendencies and identity crisis of characters for instance migration can be considered a defining feature of contemporary society that serves as a crucial point for analysis. Bhutto (2018) mentions the challenges faced by individuals while transnational identities in a world are increasingly divided by chaos and uncertainty. The study raises questions about the resurgence of fundamentalism and its connection to broader social, cultural, and political forces. *The*

Runaways is also a powerful indictment of a world that has failed to provide a sense of belonging and purpose for its young people. As a result, they become vulnerable to the alluring promises of extremism.

Postmodern Fluid and Fragmented Identity

As societies become more interconnected and cultures are merged with each other, the sense of belonging is threatened. This thing increases the dilemma of identity crisis and the shift towards multiple, fluid, and unstable identities in the present world. The issue of identity is masterfully explored in Bhutto's (2018) novel *The Runaways*. The main characters are surviving with identity crisis as they cannot establish a sense of meaning and belonging in their lives. Anita faces financial issues, while Monty and Sunny struggle to find any purpose in their lives despite having all the material and financial resources. Anita lacks significant resources to change her life, as "her mother worked as a maalish wali, massaging the tired bones of rich women with her scented oils, pressing their backs with her old body" (p.35). Consequently, she faces various challenges from the start of her life, such as her mother asks her to go to neighbors to get necessary items for cooking. Moreover, she lives in pathetic conditions where self-degradation is pervasive. When she sees different toys, video games, and other luxuries in the homes of other children of her age, her sense of insecurity and longing for things create a negative impact on her identity.

Sunny, a British-born Desi, boy struggles to adjust in Portsmouth culture. Despite having everything materially, he suffers to find his true self in a country where he does not belong to culturally or mentally. There is a lack of significant meaning in his life to cope with the identity crisis. His father wants to make an impact in life and succeed in business, but Sunny is not willing to pursue his father's dream. Bhutto (2018) narrates that "Sunny went for long walks, circling Portsmouth, trying to find refuge in what appeared to him to be only a wasteland, a town of forgotten people" (p.51). Feeling overwhelmed and tired of life in Portsmouth, Sunny turned to social media to find people he could connect with. He longed to escape his current reality and to create a new life. Although he worked as a teacher at a Friday school voluntarily, he felt isolated because everyone there was much older. While his father wanted him to embrace European culture, Sunny struggled to fit in due to feelings of loneliness and not belonging to London.

Monty belongs to a very wealthy family in Karachi, where he enjoys all the luxuries of life, and his papa is a millionaire businessman. "Everything Monty knew about culture he had learned in London" (p.54). Monty never found any assimilation with his home country, as they usually visit London during holidays to spend their free time and enjoy luxurious life. Monty's mother is a religious lady, who often listens to religious scholars' TV shows. On the other hand his father has no interest in religion and does not want Monty to become like his mother. He says that "You are going to spoil the boy, ruin him" (p.55). Monty's parents held differing ideologies, which created a division within the family and left him feeling neglected and isolated. He spent most of his time with friends, enjoying life without serious responsibilities, due to a lack of parental guidance. His school life was characterized by parties, superficial conversations about girls, and body shaming. Despite deep feelings of love for Layla, he struggled to build a solid relationship with her.

Bauman's idea of liquid modernity provides a significant perspective for understanding the dilemmas and challenges faced by people in the postmodern world. The structures and rules that once provided a stable sense of belonging have transformed into a complex and uncertain reality. As he states that "Identity - 'unique' and 'individual' can be carved only in the substance everyone buys and can get hold of only through shopping. You gain independence by surrender" (Bauman 2000, p. 84). Individuals now face deep

identity issues due to the fluidity and instability present in all aspects of life. Many people struggle to adapt to the fast-changing nature of society that is creating a significant gap between generations in following traditions and the culture to which they actually belong. The concept of liquid identity is highly relevant in this modern world, where constructing a stable identity and sense of self has become increasingly difficult and challenging.

Alienation and Discrimination

The portrayal of alienation is prominent in Bhutto's (2018) novel. Characters find themselves adrift and overwhelmed by loneliness. They feel disconnected from all that surrounds them, lacking a sense of belonging or connection. Anita, living in poverty, finds solace in the ideas of revolutionary figures like Comrade Osama Shah, who inspires her through the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib. Osama uses her alienation and social frustration for tempting her towards insurrection and revolt. He suggests that becoming a revolutionary will give her purpose and a sense of pride. Bhutto masterfully captures the grievances and resentments of those on the periphery and those who are deprived from their fundamental rights. People from different regions, lacking basic necessities, feel ignored and marginalized. Bhutto tells about the one way out and "The only way to look at powerful societies was through the people they excluded... Even as they suffered, they sang to the world of beauty and terror. 'I don't belong anywhere'" (2018, p.260).

Anita and her brother changed their names to attain a prominent identity within society. As Christians they faced dire circumstances, reflecting the plight of minorities in Pakistan. Social injustice and disparity compelled them to alter their identities to secure opportunities, which would otherwise be denied to them. Anita, a devout student, received revolutionary books from her old neighbor Osama. Bhutto (2018) points out that "Confiscate the fields from the landowners, take away the mills from robbers, redeem the country from its dark hours" (p.261). The books further fuel Anita's alienation and her exposure to the revolutionary poetry of Habib Jalib. Jalib's verses critique the elite and land owning class, portraying them as the primary exploiters of the poor. This reinforces Anita's perception of an inevitable struggle against the powerful forces. In a desperate attempt to transcend the alienation associated with their identities, Anita and her brother adopt aliases. However, this act of self-reinvention fails to achieve the desired sense of belonging. Finally, the radical ideology of Anita give her solace and peace by getting attached to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Extremism and Fragile Self

In the postmodern world, extremism and radicalization pose huge threats that cause significant harm to societies and also hinder the progress of civilized nations. These extremist behaviors are a particular concern in underdeveloped countries, where existing challenges, like poverty, discrimination, and class differences aggravate the allure of such ideologies. Bhutto (2018) presents a powerful narrative to explore this issue and its multifaceted nature. In the rapidly changing and unpredictable postmodern world, extremism and fanaticism are on the rise. A burning question for communities is identifying the underlying societal fault lines that ignite such radical behaviors. The mechanisms and psychology behind this phenomenon are challenging in a modern era. Through the journey of three protagonists, Bhutto shows us the factors that make individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies and radical forces.

Anita residing in Karachi's slum areas and encounters with the vulnerability that fuels extremism. Her mother, a domestic worker, struggles to make ends meet, which

forces the whole family to rely on neighbors for basic necessities. As Bhutto explains that the disappointment of Anita as “what has my name ever done for me” (p.132). Anita has a life of poverty and humiliation. School becomes a place of further torment, with taunts from classmates amplifying her pain. Her sole solace comes from her neighbor, Osama, who ignites a fire within her, urging her to fight against the unjust system and to reclaim her rights. He bestows upon her the title of lioness, inciting her towards radical action to conquer a world that has failed to provide equal opportunities and justice. The devastating betrayal by her own brother, who forces her into prostitution and captures the act on video, shatters the last vestiges of her self-worth. Anita sheds her past after being stripped of her identity and dignity and becomes Layla. In this new persona, she encounters Monty, who falls deeply for her. However, the trauma she has endured leaves her emotionally unavailable. It is then Osama, her mentor and self-proclaimed teacher, who intensifies his indoctrination, urging her to fight the system and its injustices. Torn between her brother's demand for secrecy and Osama's call to arms, Layla navigates a precarious path. This study poignantly captures Layla's internal struggle: “Her brother had trained her to lie low; Osama had guided her to fight. Somewhere between the two was where Layla would survive” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 352). The desperate circumstances, abuse, and a longing for belonging, Anita, now changes her name to Layla, finds a defiant sense of purpose in joining ISIS in Syria. The extremist group provides a sense of belonging and offers a delusional path to reclaim the power and respect she craves for her life.

Sunny, a young man from India living in Portsmouth, England with feeling of alienation and lost in a foreign culture becomes susceptible to the extremist views and behaviors. Oz manipulates Sunny's insecurities and cultural displacement, portraying Muslim life in the West as incompatible with true Islamic faith. He presents Jihad as the sole purpose for Muslims and justifies violence in the name of Sharia law. Oz claims they have the right to kill those who oppose Sharia, stating, “They are wajib ul qatal, we have a right to kill them” (p. 119). Sunny, already disillusioned and searching for meaning, finds solace in Oz's words. Oz tells him that, “you are not a Sunni because a real believer wouldn't be sitting here; he would be out there, defending his people from infidels and moral collapse” (p. 118).

In Oz's extremist views, Western society is morally corrupt. He sees freedom between men and women as sinful and blames it for societal decline. Oz identifies a vast group deserving of death, including “Ahmedis, activists, Americans, seculars, blasphemers, drinkers, romance novelists, women magazine writers, apostates, Valentine's celebrators, Kurds, women who don't cover their hair, immodest women, women in general, and now Shias” (p. 119). Extremists target vulnerable individuals to exploit and manipulate their weaknesses and anxieties. They offer a distorted sense of purpose and belonging, justifying violence against those with different viewpoints. Art and fun are often considered harmful and criminal in the view of these radical forces. This rigid and orthodox mindset is imposed on individuals, fostering hatred towards any artistic or literary activities.

Identity in a Consumerist World

The postmodern age is considered as rapidly evolving social order of the world to advancement in technology and scientific discoveries. The structures and norms are in a constant state of flux that contain desires and behaviors of consumers. This ever changing environment has profound implications for individuals, who find themselves in a direct and complex interplay between personal identity and the relentless pursuit of consumerism. In this new social order, individuals often feel compelled to compete with the market's relentless drive for innovation and glamour. The allure of consumer goods is

so pervasive that the resisting societal pressures becomes increasingly difficult. This heightened consumerism contributes to feelings of alienation and social exclusion among many individuals.

This research explores and analyses the struggle between elite and lower class discrimination through the character of Anita. As Bhutto (2018) pens that, "When she was in class four, Anita had her own troubles. She didn't have time to worry about being poor" (p. 12). She grows up in poverty, and her world is completely contrasted with the opulent lifestyles. The contrast between her own circumstances and the high show of wealth and her observation of this act create a sense of inadequacy and a longing for a valuable place in life. This contrast highlights the emptiness and confusion that can arise in a society dominated by consumer culture. Sunny and Monty from a different socioeconomic background, also compete with the pressures from the community due to lack of connection and stability in the relationships. Despite of their privileged upbringings and all the resources for comfortable life, they are unable to take way of the bandwagon of the consumerist lifestyle. Sunny's experience in Portsmouth reveals the challenges of a culture that prioritizes conformity and appearance. He finds himself attracted to the lifestyle of Oz (his cousin, who completed his training at Syria in jihadi movement) and adopts his point of view in an attempt to gain social acceptance and privilege in the society. This shows the power of consumer culture to shape identity and behaviors. Monty on the other hand is also competing with a different aspect of consumerism, the pursuit of love and belonging.

Bauman's (2013) concept of *Consuming Life* offers a valuable contribution for understanding the dynamics of capitalism culture in this new world order. In a consumerist society, individuals are influenced and encouraged to define themselves through their material possessions and consumption of things rather than focusing on developing intellectual and logical capabilities. This persistent strive for material goods and lavish experiences can lead to the loss of individuality and can create a sense of dissatisfaction. Capitalism emphasizes on marketing and advertising which further increases and makes complex this trend by creating a constant desire to adopt for new products and lifestyles. According to Bauman (2000), "If the society of producers sets health as the standard which its members ought to meet, the society of consumers brandishes before its members the ideal of fitness" (p. 77). The characters in narratives of *The Runaways* illustrate the challenges a person faces in a world dominated by consumerism and globalization. Anita, Sunny, and Monty each of them struggles to find his\her place in a society that prioritizes appearance, material possessions, and sub-ordination. Their stories reveal the human cost of a consumerist culture that often leaves individuals alienated, empty, and dissatisfied in their lives. These things at the end lead to an existential crisis and makes them vulnerable to find their place while adopting radical behaviors.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the crisis and challenges of identity faced by young people in today's rapidly changing and uncertain world. Everything updates and evolves with a blink of an eye, and it is challenging for youth to connect with a stable identity and to establish the solid relationships. The rise of populism, social media influences, and the globalized economy all contribute to the formation of new identities in this postmodern world. The politicians now a days attract people and play with their emotions by offering them practical solutions to their problems. Another example is of media and technology that has diminished the critical abilities of people. The solutions given by the politicians are direct, but are delusional. Moreover, the social media blurs the lines between reality and illusion and makes it difficult to make a demarcation between reality and fiction. The study concludes that fragmented identity and radicalization are interlinked with each other

in this ever evolving unstable world. When people lose identity, they become vulnerable and radical in their beliefs. The Individuals with poor resources can easily become victim of manipulation by extremist groups. This research anticipates that individuals should be open to cherish their own culture as well as the culture and diversity of others. Moreover, tolerance for self and others is important to deal with fragmented identities and radical ideologies.

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