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Exploring Identity Crisis in Fatima Bhutto's The Runaways: A Psychosocial Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores identity crisis in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* from psychosocial perspective. It is a contemporary novel of Pakistani English fiction which embodies the core issues of radicalism, terrorism, religious segregation, existential, identity and social crisis. Hence, the researcher explores identity crisis and its factors represented in the novel from psychosocial perspective. The researcher has followed Textual Analysis Method of research. The primary data are textual, gathered from the novel, and supported with secondary data from books and articles. The researcher has used Erikson's concept of identity from his theory psychosocial developments as a theoretical framework to analyze the novel. It highlights the causes and factors of Identity crisis in a social system. The analysis of the data concludes that Fatima Bhutto has sketched the real portrait of the contemporary world, especially with reference to Pakistan and England. The characters here suffer from identity crisis while encountering poverty, social frustration and even emptiness in luxurious life. People's suffering from poverty, family issues, sense of emptiness, and social stratification in their world are major factors which lead the individuals to a confused identity and thus they become the victims of identity crisis.

Keywords: Fatima bhutto, identity crisis, psychosocial development, the runaways

Introduction

Fatima Bhutto is a contemporary Pakistani English fiction and non-fiction writer. She belongs to the political family of former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Ashraf & Hussain, 2022) ^[1]. Her writings significantly explore the issues of shattered identity, political turmoil, conflict and primarily the political narratives (Sethna, 2014) ^[10]. She develops her themes through her intense knowledge of socioeconomic and political fabric of the world (Anam, *et al.* 2021) ^[14].

Similarly, this research study takes place in the background of already existing studies on the novel, *The Runaways* (2018) by Fatima Bhutto (Bari, 2019; Khan and Okhlama, 2020; Inskeep, 2020; Shah, *et al.* 2022 ^[13], and Ashraf & Hussain 2022) ^[1] whose conclusive remarks are discussed in literature review section. However, in this research study, the researcher argues that Bhutto's characters Anita, Sunil and Monty suffer from identity crisis. They, living in displaced locations, come across a number of psychosocial factors.

Anita suffers from poverty; Sunil suffers from social frustration of identity crisis, and Monty lives emptiness which causes his identity crisis. This psychosocial sphere causes identical issues in their personality. They become the victims of identity crisis.

Moreover, to reach the comprehensive conclusion and justification of the research argument, the researcher, in this regard, has utilized Erik Erickson's (1994) psychosocial development as a theoretical framework to interpret the selected novel. Additionally, the current research study explores the theme of identity crisis in Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways* (2018) through psychosocial perspective. It highlights the problems faced by common people who become the victims of identity crisis. The researcher, from psychosocial perspective, significantly investigates how Fatima Bhutto has treated the issue of identity crisis of the mentioned characters, and what are the situations which cause identity crisis in the characters of the selected novel.

Literature Review

Previous Literature on the Novel

This is a literary tale that reveals the experiences of youth who have been displaced, as well as their own anxieties about identification, rather than just extremism and awful crimes. The novel covers the concerns of what vulnerability drives the young to seek redemption through Islamic terrorism, and whether men would renounce their normal life desires. Bhutto questions the individuals quietly, allowing everybody to penetrate the thoughts of the escaped prisoners. Her views are typically pessimistic rather than sympathetic, therefore, she resists simple remedies (Bari, 2019). Moreover, Bhutto's narrative creates a dense literary landscape, with its complex combination of ideology - national, and global identification; the link between desire and self-destruction; and the construction of the grids throughout what humans survive. The sensitivity of the individuals show a novel spiral of relations of control wherein politically affiliated and personal, imperialist and psychic forces are all profoundly interwoven (Khan & Okhlama, 2020).

Furthermore, the author also notes on the work to an interviewer that there have been really various elements influencing Muslims' extremist stance against Islam. The story discusses how psychosocial causes, rather than theology, drive individuals to radicalise. This is a dominant geopolitical continuum, not always religious conviction. Unemployment, isolation, and sociopolitical dislocation are essential points among all of the protagonists, whether they are male or female, and it has been attempted to pinpoint inside the fictitious plot, that also produced terror and grimness from the religion based fanatical rebuttal (Inskeep, 2020). More additionally, Scholars Shah, *et al.*, (2022) ^[13] have recently researched the traumatizing components in Bhutto's works. The Runaways mainly contains trauma as a result of psychosocial instability, conflict, mortality, bereavement, languages, and fear. Lastly, Bhutto's novel retains significance as it narrates the reasons behind radicalization. She has addressed that only religious faith does not cause radicalization in individuals, but factors like alienation, identity crisis, social frustration and poverty, etc cause the way towards radical attitude to Islam and violence (Ashraf & Hussain, 2022) ^[1].

Previous Literature on Identity Crisis

The importance of identity is largely related to modern sociology, there are two concepts. Identity is vital and catchy. Second, sociology makes it clear and vivid that ideas about identity are unpredictable and inadequate. The current identity crisis has been of two kinds; social crisis and theoretical crisis. There are various courses that demonstrate the "role" of pre-contextual research into the use of Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castell. This shows complexity of it before it was develop by two renowned chief sociologists of the globe. What might demonstrate this, notwithstanding, will be identical signs indicating that identities from the advanced portions of the globe do not remain problematic as per their contentions demand. There is an extrinsic confusion between it to estimate the identity as essential. This is beneficial for well-being and collaborative action (Bindle, 2002) ^[2] Moreover, Hajiyeva's (2015) ^[7] study analyzes Pakistani English literature from this perspective and see how Pakistani writers use it to examine ideas and provide different opportunities to predict the time in future of each culture which is a failure of defined idea of canon of barriers amid nationalist and cultural identity. Identity has been a confused

amalgam of race, ethnicity and roles of gender, geographic area, belief, and many more. It was concluded that identity has two concepts, regional and cultural. The former one is generally taken as blanket term for identical attribution and nationalist bias base on distinguishing one from others, including hate of other race. Pakistani English literature delivers a chance to reach followers and conveys this.

Theoretically, extraordinary issue of identity was enlivened by the semi-centennial of Erikson's milestone book "Character: Youth and Crisis," distributed in 1968. Erikson composed on his idea of character both when 1968. It has generally served to merge way of life as a focal development in formative brain science, binds it to immaturity in both expert and well-known circles, and is accordingly an achievement worth recognizing. Kay (2018) investigated the Internet, and especially web-based media, as a particularly present-day personality formative setting, while at the same time noticing that the chances and difficulties managed by present day innovation share a reasonable calculated connection to the mechanical advances that Erikson distinguished in his composing a very long time previously. Character is at that point likewise coordinated into and changed by these later formative difficulties. They addressed potential relations and indeed, even codependence between young people's character and grown-up (Schechter, *et al.*, 2018).

As a result, it is viewed that aforementioned literary investigations indicate a significant range of researches on existing related literature and identity crisis. In order to address the issue, the novel is explored through all the above mentioned constrained topics. Therefore, the researcher in this study explores identity crisis from psychosocial perspective to understand the selected novel differently, and also to contribute in the research arena.

Research Methodology

The researcher has utilized Textual Analysis Method of research to conduct the analysis. It is a non-empirical research methodology to evaluate and analyze literary works with reference to a proposed theoretical/conceptual framework. Therefore, the researcher has carried out analysis in the light of Erick Erikson's (1994) ^[5] concept identity from his theory of psychosocial developments as theoretical framework. Since textual analysis method is generally limited to the text, movies, games, etc, the data for this study are based on the text of the novel, The Runaways (2018) by Fatima Bhutto. The novel is analyzed with close-reading technique with reference to the selected thematic excerpts and context. The primary data for this research study are text generated from the selected novel, whereas the secondary data are taken from books, magazines and articles, etc. The analysis is conducted with the help of theoretical references as primary reference, and other scholarly comments and arguments as secondary references.

Theoretical Framework

Identity, according to Erikson (1994) ^[5], is an essential structuring principle that evolves continuously all across lifetime. However, identity to Erikson refers to a purely specific sense of individuality, which includes their encounters, connections, opinions, ideas, and memory. This contributes to the development of a consistent personality which stays relatively consistent although if novel features of the person emerge or are reinforced through times (Cherry, 2021).

Children in adolescents (ages 12-18) struggle with identity versus role confusion. The primary task of a teenager, in the opinion of Erikson (1994) ^[5], seems to create a concept of identity. Teenagers are troubled by issues like "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do with my life?" Most teens experiment with multiple selves to determine which option that suits; they examine multiple positions and concepts, make objectives, and strive to uncover their mature self. Teenagers who are competent at this time have a feeling of belonging and therefore are capable to stay loyal to their views and ideals inside the midst of adversity and the viewpoints of others. When teenagers are indifferent, they need not actively seek their individuality, and are driven to comply. However, teenagers may acquire a poor feeling of individuality and suffer identity crisis whether they remain indifferent, and do not actively seek identification, or are driven to adhere to the families' ideals. Those individuals would be complex about their identities as well as fate. Adolescents who seek to assume a significant role are probably to have problems as grownups to discover oneself. Similarly, Anita, Sunil and Monty are young characters in the selected novel. They also cannot decide their identity because of their psychosocial crisis. They always live the confused identity, roaming from one identical point to other. Their poverty, social frustration and emptiness in luxurious life do not allow them identical rest. They in nutshell, cannot decide their identity. Therefore, the researcher has used the concept of identity crisis from psychosocial theory to interpret and analyze the novel accordingly.

Textual Analysis

According to Erikson (1994) ^[5] identity is the existence in the society. In his theory Erickson (1994) ^[5] gives the concept of 'Identity Crisis', which means chaos in identity. He states that, the age from 12-18 years is the important age of leaning for teens. At this age they experience new things and try to find their place in the society and purpose of life. At this level adolescents need to understand the tasks which they have to perform. Moreover, he says when an individual faces failure, and social problems at this age, he becomes the victim of identity crisis (Suedfeld *et al.*, 2005). In response to an identity crisis, an individual may start playing with different behaviors such as employment, school, or political activity to search meaning to his life.

Similarly, in the novel *The Runaways* (2018), Bhutto narrates the story of three young characters; Anita Rose, Sunny and Monty. She raises the question of identity through her characters. The first protagonist of her novel is a Cristian young girl known as Anita Rose; she lives in the Machar colony Karachi. Bhutto sketches her character as a very poor girl, who always tries to escape from poverty and wants to live a luxurious life. Second, Sunny British a born confused simple boy, (BBCD) his father has migrated from India settled in Portsmouth England before the separation of Hindustan. He lives very suppressed and confused life, always trying to do something new but due to his confused nature and hybrid culture he becomes the victim of identity crisis. The third protagonist of the novel is Monty, who comes from the elite class family of Karachi, the only son off his parents. Monty has never got the real love of his family, mostly, he has lived alone, because his parents were busy in their daily life.

Anita: Identity Crisis in Poverty

Anita, who is always been unhappy from her life because of her poor background of the family. She is sent to the home of

Osama Shah to borrow the things. She has lived oppressed and miserable life. At her school, her classmates use to tease her, and they always ignore her because she has come from the lower-class family. She is also ashamed and feels guilty for being poor. No body accepts her as argued by Thom and Coetzee (2004) ^[18] about psychosocial theory. When she wants to Osama Shah for borrowing things, she bows her eyes down and does not make eye contact with him because of shame in her eyes. She has wished to look like a beautiful woman which she had seen in the TV, but in reality, she has suffocating home. In the lines Bhutto (2018) clearly portrays Anita's life and hypocrisy of society "Anita Rose closed her eyes and tried to imagine herself as one of the women she had seen in the dramas on TV who sat in pink chairs and had their beautiful light-brown hair washed and dried in salons" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 9). It is so ironic that she dreams of luxurious life and wants to look like an actress in TV serials but in fact, she has nothing just because of guilt, shame, and an oppressed life. She tries to develop her female identity as Gilligan (1982) ^[6] puts it as a major factor in psychosocial theory of identity crisis. These lines also show hardships of her pathetic life. Anita's family has not enough resources to run family. Her mother use to do massage to elite women as they can have a good life. Bhutto (2018) mentions that her dreams are to look like an actress and a beautiful woman. In reality, she has miserable incidents in her life, because of societal values. She is being ignored by people and society does not accept her on the basis of social stratification and class system. Because of these factors she becomes the victim of identity crises. In this modern world there are no moral values but wealth values. The class system, wealth value and social stratification are factors which can lead individuals to the identity crisis.

Moreover, at the age of school life, Anita is awarded with the responsibility to take care of hungry birds. Most of her childhood passes while being worried about birds. She goes to take care of birds at Clifton house where her mother, brother and she work. While facing these bitter realities of life she becomes rebel from her life and wants a free and good life. Her only dream is to have house with big bedroom at Clifton side. At the age of sixteen years when her mother (Zenobia) takes Anita with her to the Rahim's mother for a job to work at their house. First time in her life, she refuses her mother to work. Anita is so confused and depressed at her childhood. She does not have time to play like other children, she has her own problems and worries "Anita had her own troubles. She didn't have time to worry about being poor." (Bhutto, 2018, p. 12). She has a confused identity; she does not know what to do and how to escape from this life. Anita goes to Osama shah for learning and listening to his revolutionary lectures that have opened her eyes and shown her new path of life. While portraying the life of Anita, Bhutto (2018) mentions that the factor of poverty and social pressure has lead Anita to the confused identity. The Psychosocial development theory also refers that when an individual tries to do something and when he/she faces the failures in life, his/her becomes the victim of identity crisis. While trying every possible method to make her life comfort, Anita meets failures. At the end, she leaves her home and goes to Iraq and Syria for fight.

Additionally, Anita lives in inferiority complex because of her social status. She has many dreams but none of them comes true in her real life. She never has a real boyfriend in her life, she always faces this crisis. "My name is Anita Rose, she wished Rahim could have known, Anita like an actress, Rose

Like a flower.” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 36). In the mentioned lines Bhutto (2018) highlights the emptiness of her life. Anita has always identity issues. She wants to have good life as people know her by her name. In this materialist world people around, do not judge by looks and honesty but class and status. She wishes Rahim to talk to her and to call her baby, but her class and present status are not strong enough to have relation with him. Through these lines, one can understand that in this modern world people do not have emotions for other people, they have value for money, status, and class (Marx and Engels, 1912). Anita forgets her real identity and wants to adapt identity of an actress because evil mind-set has tangled her mind that people, who are financially strong and look good, they are accepted in the society.

However, at an end, Anita appear as Layla, it is Anita has given herself a new name. She has very pathetic life “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). She is brought to Dubai. She is forcefully hired in a prostitution where she is directed to kill the sexual thirst of the frustrated elites. She is utilized as a sex toy by Elite Arabs and they had make her sex videos and upload on social media. Her life survives in being a prostitute. However, she started her journey in the search of peace and comfort but the confused state of her mind led her towards unknown path, she told lie, hid her real identity and selected the path which was not right for her. It clearly manifests her confused identity. In the search of high status and good life, she has disguised herself with new identity Layla. But in return she has got nothing, expect sexually abused and ashamed life. Anita has no idea of Syria, but now her life has become so hard to live as a normal life. The reasons behind this were religious lectures of Shah and the family acts especially the concerns of her brother. It leads Anita to Syria for fight.

Sunny: Identity Crisis in Social Frustration

Sunny British born Indian, has always tried to search for the meaning of his life. Due to his hybrid identity, as Bhabha (1994) ^[3] observes that a mixed creature becomes 'otherness' since the opposite seems to be no longer in his standing. He has changed. He constantly tries to find his place among people around him. Similarly, Sunny belongs to middle class family where he always faces a lot of problems; confused identity, family issues, and no friends. He lives life full of mistakes and dishonesty. Sunny has never remembered Safia Begum, has not felt mother's love, and doesn't think what it means to be a son of mother. His mother had died and his father was busy in his life. “I don't know why I'm here. Sunny' said to the imam, closed to tears” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 77). Sunny goes mosque, hotels, and to the long walk without any reason to find comfort and meaning of his life. He spends most of his time while using social media networks. Before turning to nineteen years, he used to be frustrated because of his sexual arousals. For this, he meets a long with a lot of girls at night. But when he turned nineteen, he lived a confused life and was afraid of future. He tries to find his identity but he never realizes that he really belonged to British, and people are not going to understand him there “Sunny never felt he belonged in Portsmouth. Ben and those guys, they never understood him.” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 101). Bhutto (2018) tries to mention that hybrid culture, loss of social relations, and family issue are the main factors which lead an individual to identity crisis.

Besides, Sunny has never found his real identity. He is always confused about his future. He meets his cousin Oz who has come from Syria. Oz is an Islamic man who encourages Sunny to spend life according to Islam. While spending some time with Oz, sunny feels that Oz is the only person who can lead him to a peaceful life. Sunny starts to spend time with Oz and he listens to his Islamic lectures. Oz tells Sunny that if he really wanted to find comfort in life, he should have joined the group of people who live their life according to Islam and fight with the evil world. Oz encourages Sunny to go to Syria where he can find the real meaning of life, and he also tells him to fight with them. Sunny never realizes that he is real British so he has been confused and has no relation with people over there in England. Sunny spends most of his time while using social media networks “Why do we always ape the west? Sunny wrote on his Facebook.” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 39) Facebook and Twitter, but after meeting with Oz, he starts sharing posts about Islam and Islamic culture to get the attention of people, but no one has responded his posts. Above lines clearly explain the confused state of Sunny's mind. He suffers a lot while having double identities. Sunny is never at the right place at right time. He is always confused and oppressed.

Additionally, Oz tells him about the hypocrisy of western people that they would never accept them because they have totally different culture, religion and country “We come from a different culture. They don't understand our people, our struggles.” (Bhutto, 2018, p. 100). Oz has told Sunny that the western people are on the wrong path so far from religion, they don't have the real sense of life. They are different from them. Finally, Oz convinces Sunny for Jihad in Syria, where he meets other protagonists of the novel Monty and Anita. They both are also in the search of peaceful life but they never realizes that their path will lead them to the dark world, where they will get nothing but only blood and killing. In Syria, Sunny comes to know about the reality of his trustworthy cousin Oz. Bhutto (2018) clearly states that the western people will not accept them as they have different religion and culture. And they will never understand Muslims. They consider them terrorists and barbaric people as per Said's (1978) ^[12] orientalist discourse as Chandio *et al* (2021) have analyzed Ayisha Malik's characters of women as 'other' creatures treated with colonial discourse. She also highlights the hypocrisy of world that all humans are same but the social stratification has created the differences among them. According to Erickson when the individual at young age does not find any way, he/she becomes confused and suppressed in identity. While finding the meaning of life, he tries many ways. Similarly, in the novel *The Runaways* (2018) all the proponents attempt at different ways to find the meaning of their lives but in the end they all go to Syria for Jihad.

Monty: Identity Crisis in Luxurious Domain

The third and last protagonist of the novel is Monty, he is the only son of his parents. He has never seen any worry in his life, always lives a luxurious life while going to cafes, Bars, outing with friends, and traveling. Monty has his own world far away from realities of the world. He lives in his dream. Akbar Ahmed spent very short time of his life with his son, Monty. So, he used to live in imaginary world. His life gets a turn when he meet a beautiful and brave girl. He has seen in his life in his school known as Layla. Monty is so shocked to see her, but she has her own life, and she is unafraid of world. On the other side, Monty has lived life being afraid of future, he has never felt free like her so he wanted Layla to come in

his life. After sometimes, Monty falls in love with Layla, and wants to know her and talk to her but he is not brave enough to talk to her. Everyone in the school wish to talk to her because she is pretty and they tease her.

One day, Monty dares to talk Layla but he is quiet and nervous "Monty wanted her because she was fearless. And he was and had always been afraid." (Bhutto, 2018, p. 90). Layla asks him question about the world that what do you know about the world? But at first, he does not reply. She has worn men's shirt many times larger than her size so Monty was just gazing at her. Layla Again questions him, then Monty replies that there is nothing, he does not know anything (Bhutto, 2018). In the novel through the character of Monty, Bhutto (2018) highlights that Monty has luxury of life but even then, he has no meaning of life, he is always confused of his existence he cannot find the goal of his life.

Moreover, Monty has the world of fantasies, he is far from the real meaning of life. He has not seen any problem or tear in his eyes. He enjoys life with his friends Kashif and Shavez, they flirt many girls and had been with them but Monty has never found the real girl for him. "He'd never had a real girlfriend" (Bhutto, 2018, p. 58). After falling in love with Layla, his life has changed. He feels new feeling. Layla showed him new path of life. She used to tell him lectures and about the revolutionary poets like; Habib Jalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz which comrade Osama had taught her. Monty seems unknown to them because he has been in the imaginary world. He reads English writings and novels, he even watches Hollywood movies, but he does not know about his own culture, language and writers.

Besides, considering what kind of life Monty spends, Bhutto (2018) tells about his weak mind and confused cultural identity. "Don't you feel strange, speaking a language every day that's not your own? Layla asked Monty. But Monty had never spoken anything besides English." (Bhutto, 2018, p. 106). Even he is a Pakistani and his language is Urdu but he has not spoken to his own language and never accepts his own culture truly. Monty is stuck in the deep sea of class system, because he is from elite class, so, he feels ashamed to speak his own language Urdu. Layla tells him about his real identity that he should be proud of his culture and language. She also suggests shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi and tells him about his life. Monty feels the state of spirituality. Thus, in the last, when Monty comes to know about Layla that she is in Syria, he also goes to Syria, in the search of her real lady.

Conclusion

Miss Bhutto in her novel *The Runaways* (2018) portrays the real picture of the societies like Pakistan and England, where the individuals are leaded towards the confused identity. Nobody becomes the victim of identity crisis by his own choice but the evil systems of the societies are responsible, which lead him/her towards confused identity. She highlights that individuals living in poverty, social frustration, and even in luxurious life can become the victims of identity crisis.

In the Anita comes from very poor family and lives in the Machar colony Karachi. Anita has lived life full of worries and sham, her only wish is to have a luxury home at Clifton, but she has only her mother's suffocated home. Her dream is to be a good woman and look like an actress. Moreover, Anita goes to Osama Shah for learning and to listen his lectures. She becomes the victim of identity crisis because of her poor background of the family. It is her mind-set that people with big bank balance are the real men and they are accepted in the society. Moreover, Sunny opened his eyes in England, who is

a confused simple boy. His father was a diaspora hailing from India and settled himself in the sphere of England before partition. Sunny always lives an oppressed life he always tries to find his identity, but he never realizes that he really belong to Portsmouth because nobody is there to understand and talk to him. He lives in identity crisis of social frustration. Furthermore, Monty comes from the elite class family and he is also the only son of his parents. He has life full of fantasies, spending while outing with friends, McDonalds, Super cars and summers in England. He has lived very normal and meaningless life before meeting with Layla. Monty falls in love with her, when Layla separates from him, he feels broken and alone. He lives in the identity crisis of luxurious domains. Fatima Bhutto's *Runaways* is a true representation of this modern world which highlights the hypocritical systems of our societies. The author manifests that in the contemporary times of the world, people have been looking for resolving the issues of identity, place, existence, meaning of life and so on. When they cannot find it, they select the path which leads them towards unknown dark path and confused identities.

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