



**BAHRIA UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD E8**  
**DEPARTMENT OF H&SS**

**TOPIC**

**Class conflict in South Asian societies, A marxist examination of monetary power in the runways by Fatima Bhutto**

**Submitted By: Sheraz Iqbal**

**Enrollment No : 01-117221-024**

**Supervisor: Sir Usama Javed**

**Date of submission: 20/10/2025**

**BS English Literature 8A**

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction .....	6
Research questions .....	9
Research objectives .....	9
Rationale .....	11
Significance .....	13
Delimitation of the Study .....	15
Literature Review .....	17
Methodology.....	22
Discussion.....	24
Conclusion.....	40
References .....	44

## Declaration

I declare that all material in this thesis is my own work, and that any material which is not my own has been duly acknowledged. Furthermore, I affirm that no portion of this work has previously been submitted or approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Author's Name: Sheraz Iqbal

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

It is certified that the work presented in this thesis has been carried out and completed under my supervision.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's Name: Sir Usama Javed

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Bahria University, Islamabad

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## Declaration

I, Sheraz Iqbal, student of BS English (8th Semester) at Bahria University, Islamabad, hereby declare that the research work titled “Class conflict in South Asian societies, A marxist examination of monetary power in the runways by Fatima Bhutto” is my original work. This thesis has been carried out by me under the supervision of Sir Usama Javed and has not been submitted, wholly or partially, for any other degree or diploma at any university or institution. All sources of information and data used in this study have been duly acknowledged in the text and references. I take full responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of the content presented in this thesis.

Student’s Name: Sheraz Iqbal

Enrollment Number: 01-117211-024

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

In the thesis of the article, there has been an attempt to explain the class conflict of South Asian societies with the help of Marxist thinking on capital in the Runways.

Using Marxist theory, class conflict and systemic class oppression in *The Runways* by Fatima Bhutto will be examined in relation to the South Asian order in which the capitalist spine of the system organizes power, ideological, and oppositional relations. The economic system of the novel structures social mobility and individual agency through primary Marxian class conflict, alienation, and commoditization of the sense of worth economics of an them in which the rest of the nation is drawn into the system while Bhutto demonstrates stark class realities in Karachi. In the novel, characters either accept and internalize the frameworks which are designed to control and limit their agency, or challenge them. This examination shows the novel in a new light as it deeply criticizes *The Runways*, which unflinchingly exposes dehumanization in a neoliberal order, the absence of collective solidarity which is fragmented into individualistic aspirations. *The Runways* shows how the material conditions of politics of class deconstruction, withdrawal of potentials, and class dissent of the self which are primary to owning the defiant position – the internalized oppression of the domestic worker, the upper class and the elite in a marriage performative activism – which are central to the Marxist argument of ideological domination.

The primary contribution is exploring the connection between economic structures and social discord of the novel, which calls for further investigation on the causality of a real-world class system. This is important because it highlights the contemporary relevance of class-sensitive critique. This research also extends the Marxist theory and class awareness approach to South Asian literature as a gap within the field is justifying the existence and importance of class analysis in these parts of the world and the increasing global class disparity.

## Introduction

The Runways, a novel by Fatima Bhutto, is a remarkable piece of literature which masterly and critically analyzes the South Asian metropolis and considers Karachi as a reflective point on the global conflicts of contemporary capitalist. In fact, the major class conflicts, rampant poverty, and severe social alienation as upheld through the lives of the characters in the novel necessitate the application of a Marxist approach.

The novel outlines, through intertwining the fates of the rich, the poor, and the disillusioned ideologist, how economic power controls the social order and viciously limits personal freedom. One can use Marx's alienation, commodification of labor, false consciousness and class struggle concepts to illuminate the underlying capitalist structures in South Asia, as portrayed in Bhutto's narrative, to demonstrate how the repressive power structures exploit the working class, condition social beliefs, and ultimately, how the system eliminates any possibility of real escape, even capturing the chance to resist.

In The Runaways, one of the earliest and most gut-wrenching effects of capitalism is the social class division it enforces. Karachi in the novel is a city with draconian lines both physically and socially where riches and crushing poverty are side by side, yet the two are separated by a yawning gulf. The divide is not simply a difference in living standards, it is a difference in existence. The wealthy elite, such as the teenager Ali, are cocooned in boredom and detachment, with all their needs satiated, yet devoid of any real fulfillment. Socially, Ali is positioned in a preordained shelter, which is a fortress that shields him from the city's brutality, yet it alienates him from any productive activity, a genuine work, and reality. The situation is the exact opposite for the runaway servant girl, Layla and the women of the same class. For them, living in poverty is a cage. Her so-called aspirations are negative, and are focused on just surviving, and her freedom is systematically denied she is zombie-ically programmed by the society she is trapped in. Bhutto indicates that within a system run by capitalism, riches are more than material acquirables; they also govern one's sentiments, scope of aspiration, and the chances of attaining them. The 'runways' of the title are thus powerful symbols of these deceptive routes to a different existence. These routes are within one's gaze and easy to attain, but for the poor, the economic poor, the routes are ultimately, and paradoxically, the routes to which they are economically bound.

Through the lens of Marxian philosophy, this form of rigid class stratification is maintained and reproduced through the process of the commodification of labor, which is exposed by Bhutto with unapologetic realism. Capitalism at its core is able to bracket out human imagination and the ability to work, putting them on the shelf to be bought and sold at a price, devoid of any meaning that ties the commodity to the worker. The lower class occupants of the novel exist as definable commodities. Layla,

as a domestic servant, is not appreciated for the value of labor put in, but for a service rendered, for which she is paid a meager sum and constantly abused. She is the material and temporal resources which the rich, in this case the royalty, and serves as an chastisement of capitalism which equates people to means of a production. The exploitation machine in this case is the commodification of the worker, the surplus value of her labor, the value she brings in is greater, and her pay is substantially lesser. In this case capitalism serves a mechanism to ensure that the working class is absent of any means to accomplish anything and is ridden with dependence and poverty.

Monty, the aged and retired communist militant, typifies historical awareness of his exploitation, and his ideology takes head on the calcified paradigm that considers human life as a cost and profit. With the help of Layla and through her experiences, Bhutto elucidates that commodification is not a theoretical economic construct, but a reality that strips the worker off his humanity, divorces him from his own work, and perpetuates the prevailing class distribution of the Pakistani society.

The exploitation is further unexplained by the Marxist theory of false consciousness, a phenomenon by means of which the ruling class fails to recognize and ignore their own exploitation by projecting their own interest as the interest of the whole society. The novel sheds light on the conditioning of the mind concerning the whole consumer society and the upward social mobility. The Western brands, the Western life portrayed by the media, the idea that money is an absolute and ultimate selfishness, and the numerous ideas and ideas argues the abundance of false consciousness. The lower grade social class is socialized to aspire to the class that is economically well off, so that they would value themselves through the system of purchase which is beyond their reach, instead of tossing and tumbling the system which perpetuates them in poverty. All exploitation is ideologically justified and rationalized to portray immobile class structure. The ruling class willingly carry on their self-imposed custody, by adopting and assimilating the value system of the upper class. The oppressed, instead of visualizing action against the system, only dream of individual survival within the system and direct their angry frustration towards other members of their own social class. These internalized ideologies is a constant struggle that characters in Bhutto's novels face.

The very idea of the letting go of one's issues and relocating to a different space in search of a totally different and better life is a product of one of the capitalist ideologies which claims that the act of running away to avoid problems is a form of escape that can address the alienation one suffers from, thus any form of escape that one imagines still lies under the delusion of market control and does not present a genuine threat to be dealt with.

The culmination of these processes—stratification, commodification, and ideological conditioning results in a complex state of alienation, which is, according to Marxist criticism, central to Bhutto's novel. This alienation operates on different, but interconnected, levels, as described in the objectives of the study. First, there is the economic alienation of the worker from the value of their labor. Layla's domestic work comforts and brings order to her employers, but she does not claim any value in return and does not own the space she perpetually tidies. Her alienated labor is an external, forced, unfulfilled, and mere mode of subsistence activity, which does not epitomize her capabilities. Second, this is social alienation, which alienates individuals from personal relationships. The novel depicts relationships that are dominantly influenced by class and money. The engagement of a servant with a master is one of dominance and subservience as opposed to mutuality. Within the same class, the scarcity of resources cultivates distrust and competition, dispelling the possibility of class unity. Then, there is cultural alienation, which is a form of ideological domination. The elite, as in the case of Ali, are absent from the sociomaterial realities of their society, and the value system in which they operate is an insulated bubble of imported culture and ideals.

The economically disadvantaged are encouraged to promote appreciation a culture that is structurally inaccessible to them, which is in absolute contradiction to their lived realities, thus creating a glaring disconnect with the narrative that is woven by the culture at large. To put it more tragically, there is self alienation which is the collapse of the unique self whose identity is the outcome of the loss of identity in the process of being put under a state of domination. Individuals of the class encapsulated by Layla have no option than to perform acts of self disowning for their own self preservation. Not without conflict with the self, a facade of the obedient subject, or the pauper by choice masquerading as a grateful slave must be donned. This behavioral disposition syndrom, perhaps the dominant syndrome of the system of capital which is kagged to capitalism at the hip, is essentially a capitalistic behavioural model. Fusion of internal scompartments as described will become the state of being of the being who has been infested with capitalistic traits upon loss of identity. A person in such a state has lost the ability to comprehend the full scope of their own existance. Agency in such a condition is of a precarious order.

Similarly, the novel does not describe a world completely devoid of struggle, as conflicts doburst the narrative, most notably, the case of Monty, the old communist whose presence alone signifies a certain line of capital struggle. However, as she does with Monty, in one of Bhutto's most insightful comments, the ability to even stage a rebellion in a boundless capitalist society and have it subdued, repackaged, and void of revolutionary vigor is astonishing. Monty's ideas seem to be out of sync with the times. He is out of touch with a city that worships the prayers of neoliberalism. Although the characters' destinies are intertwined, they do not culminate in a unified working-class revolt. Their journeys toward emancipation

are independent, frantic, and ultimately hopeless in the face of a smothering the system's rationality. The runway does not extend toward freedom but rather returns to the same, deeply embedded injustices. The somber realism is a focal point of the novel's Marxian criticism. It argues individual acts of defiance, as intense as they may be, are not enough. The system is proven to be astonishingly intact. It is able to absorb dissent, turning it into simply another story, another narrative, another product, or another narrative.

Undoubtedly, Bhutto's interpretation of capitalistic frameworks in South Asia is thoughtful and comprehensive. A Marxist critique is compiled with the exploration of the lives of the protagonists in which the frameworks of economy, society and class structures are addressed, human labor is commodified and the ideologies of 'false consciousness' are maintained. The scribbled pages of people's lives provide a glimpse of how systems control which essentially is the separation of economics, society, culture and the individual, and equate static control structures to some systems of domination. The novel captures the dystopia as a powerful critique and an ode to the city Karachi. The 'runways', instead of exploration and transformation, chained to the dystopia control systems self-identified to the systems resistances. The bewildered spaces provide glimpse of resistance through the violent structures. The exploitation and the exploiter devoid the condition of self which is a human condition. Fortified by facts, the novel captures oppression which is chained to soul sleeping systems all fixed by capitalism. It extends as the ultimate prediction of capitalism. It underlines contours of memory and silently defines the loss of hope. Most desperately, it stretches a case of class, the limits are defined and murmuring. It is the aide-memoire of the era alive to discipline with the scope of Marxist realities.

### Research questions

1. In what ways does The Runways illustrate class conflict and economic inequities in South Asian society?
2. How does The Runways depict alienation in capitalism concerning work, socialization, and one's self?
3. What does the notion of false consciousness serve in the novel in terms of class subordination and ideological suffocation?
4. What is the impact of labor commoditization in the novel regarding systemic subordination?

### Research objectives

1. To study class and economic inequality depicted in *The Runways* through a Marxist framework.
2. To analyze the novel's capitalist framework and its resultant forms of alienation: economic, social, cultural, and self-estranged.
3. To examine the mechanisms of false consciousness that inhibit class solidarity and perpetuate exploitation.
4. To examine the marginalized characters in the novel and how they are affected by the commoditization of labor in neoliberal capitalism.

## Rationale

The Runways by Fatima Bhutto offers itself to Marxist scrutiny not as a theoretical imposition, but because the novel itself is structured around the antagonistic elements central to Marxist inquiry: the unflinching violence of class conflict, the relentless exploitation of class, and the deep, pervasive alienation that suffuses existence in the capitalist world.

The narrative serves as a surgical dissection of a specific socio-economic ecosystem, Karachi in this instance, in which unrelenting neoliberal capitalism cohabits and, more often than not, partners with lingering feudal remnants. This postcolonial condition is particularly dysgenic, enabling an incisive analysis of how social relations are skipped, subverted, and hallowed out, and how genuine challenges are off-ramps in response to the prevailing order. The class analysis of Western industrial societies is a hallmark endeavor for Marxists. Applying this to *The Runways* is not only necessary, but dislocates a South Asian frame where global capital localizes structures of domination and in doing so, intensifies a counter-Eurocentric critique that is often, and least expectedly, assumed in this tradition.

The novel steps away from the sentimentality and exoticism of poverty and presents capitalism untamed and raw in form and extractive in nature. This can best be seen in the commodification of human labor, where man is valued only for his instrumental worth. Take the case of the runaway servant girl. She is not only destitute but also a slave whose body and time are purchased for domestic servitude. Her painstaking labor, which serves the elite, is rigorously discounted, and the surplus she produces is appropriated to sustain the class which subjugates her. Such oppression is the heart of the system and not a mere deviation. Bhutto also illustrates the way this economic base creates a superstructure of ideological control, of which Marxism calls false consciousness. The aspirations of the poor are often directed towards the very symbols of the oppression which are branded commodities and fanciful living—a paradox of cruelty which guarantees their submission through active participation in their own oppression. This is the internalization of the values of the oppressor, and it shatters the possibility of class unity, scattering rage inwards or laterally, towards other marginalized and oppressed people, as opposed to upwards, towards the systematic causes of their suffering.

These variegated forms of systemic oppression converge upon the Marxist concept of alienation, which Bhutto examines in unforgiving detail. First, alienation from the labor process. The alienated outwardly takes the servant's work, which is an external, coerced activity from which she is distanced. Next, there is social alienation, where authentic human connections are substituted for class transcended, submission, and dominance transactional bonds. The elite teenager, Ali, is equally alienated, albeit in a different

register. His life of luxury detaches him from material reality, which in turn yields a profoundly hollow life steeped in ennui and disconnection from society's sinews. This brings us to the third type: self-alienation. Self-estrangement, where one is severed from one's genus, one's human potential, is far more pronounced. The servant has to surmount her identity to live, submissively acting the part of a dominantly disaffected elite, while equally dominant disaffected performers, both, are dehumanized. This fusion of roles captures the dehumanizing tendencies of capitalism. The corrosive ability to alien all classes, albeit asymmetrically, from their humanity.

The novel has yet again enriched the field of postcolonial Marxist critique through the unflinching depiction of the futility and co-optation of resistance. Monty's character, the aging communist, is paradoxically both static and kinetic, locked into an historical, organized form of class struggle, and struggling within a sleek, globalized neoliberalism that appears to have rendered him and his form of class struggle powerless. Dissent is no longer battled with, rather, it is absorbed. It is here that *The Runways* moves beyond a simplistic application of Marxist theory, and complicates it through the particularities of the Pakistani context. The novel illustrates that within the postcolony, global capital, coupled with state oppression, feudal loyalties, and global capital's fragmented and fragmented and seductive form, revolution, is obscured. The runways of the title suggest more than paths to escape. They are symbols of co-opted or failed launches of rebellion, as well. Thus, acts of defiance, individual and collective, are positioned as inadequate, overwhelmed by the system's adaptive, immense resilience and sufficiency.

Ultimately, *The Runways* uses the Marxist lens not to support a certain political program, but to do a deep diagnostic of the present. It finds the postcolonial "development" model's promised progress while enforcing vicious inequality contradiction. In describing the classic concerns of alienation, commodification, and class conflict in relation to Karachi, Bhutto's novel does more than just describe the phenomena of capitalist dehumanization. It ignites an important rethinking of how one resists a system that appears to close every avenue of escape. It is a profound work of counter-knowledge, defying the dehistoricized narratives of neoliberal progress and the sometimes overbearing boundaries of Western theory, arguing that the struggle for humanity is center to the contemporary oppressive architecture of our world.

## Significance

Approaching Fatima Bhutto's *The Runways* as a chapter in her work focuses on an embrace critique brings a integration to the novel's focus on the human condition aimed at the deeply ingrained critic of capitalism, which in Bhutto's Karachi, acts as a faceless demon dead to the social overturn ever which drives a wedge in the possibility of cohesive stratum leftist sentiment. Like the Marxist Bhutto surfaces, the novel's Karachi is not a passive stagnant place in the lower level of an urban hierarchy, but a sweateng capital region of violence and expropriate renders Bhutto's characterization of capital as a disposable of modern post-colonial leftist critique appropriate. For it, the work is a marvelous critique on the human cost of capital in the Global South. Where the effect is at once, to popularize the post-colonial capital, to study submissive differences in class and the South, and to in which, propose a novel critique of miss in the system which embrace and silent capital.

The novel includes of the conquest of the advancement of capitalism through consent, which was termed false consciousness by Marx. In *The Runaways*, the characters are ensnared in a thick network of ideological illusions, serving the interests of the dominant class. The elite teenager's engagement with social problems is a manifestation of performative activism, an empty action that enables him to show moral concern without contending the economic structures that benefit him. This is similar to the case of the servant girl's self subjugation, in which she stands the chance to rationalize her own victimization as a given order, and possibly even aspires to the very emblems of the wealth she is positioned to be subjugated under. Most painfully, the case of the aging communist activist underscores the uselessness of even the most rational ideological challenge within a hegemonic system that has shifted to more alluring and refined methods of control.

The dynamic described indeed resonates with the other example of empty rituals of acceptance in the case of Mkhitarian's performative conversion; in the novel, the characters are made to assume postures and profess creeds that are antithetical to their genuine pursuits, which is a form of psychological violence that secures systemic stability with far greater efficiency than mere brute force.

The attack on misogyny and violence is anchored in imperialism and colonization, which the novel reveals slowly as mechanisms entwined with both exploitation and the paradox of 'value' and 'civilization' extraction. Bhutto refuses Neo-Colonial misrepresentation of underdeveloped economies and, instead, embraces the crude, extractive rationale of a world in which human beings are reduced to their functional utility. The labor of the Servant class is stripped of all claim to human dignity and is

merely an expense to be incurred at the lowest possible cost. The surplus value they generate—the difference between the wealth and the meager wage, the work done to create, and wage paid to the worker—is the wealth that is systematically and institutionally priced and appropriated. Each of these processes serves to impoverish the middling and enrich the ultra-rich, thereby strengthening their interdependence, which in turn, fuels the stark inequality which positions the capital as the center of the city. Thus, the novel serves as a poignant rebuttal to the misleading The ‘progress’ of so-called developing economies and, through a postcolonial lens, demonstrates that the neoliberal project in South Asia’s with local development tends to cement local structures, which in turn, gives rise to a new and twisted form of oppression that combines the detached and alienated violence of global capital with the persistent anachronistic filaments of feudal subjugation.

The inexorable outcome of this exploitation is an extreme and nuanced degree of alienation, which divides people from their labor, their community, their dormant prowess, and from themselves. The alienation of the worker from the product of their labor, which only serves to enrich another, and the alienation of the worker from the act of production, which becomes an uncreative coerced activity to survive, is alienation of the most profound kind. Alienation becomes social when genuine human bonds are substituted for class-defined transactional relationships. The poor, like the disillusioned teenager, live in a state of alienation, trapped in a bubble of consumption which divorced from the material realities of their society, which breeds existential emptiness. Their discord is an alienation from any notion of collective strength born from an unbroken unity, which is held together by the endless discord for scarce resources. Ultimately, this leads to self-alienation, where the individual ceases to independently exist. They cannot recognize their own needs and desires beyond the roles the system compels them to fulfill.

The other side of systems collapse is the hard question posed by the novel: is there any resistance of any consequence? *The Runways*, which has no sympathy for its characters, is commendable for the thoroughness with which it examines this question, testing the bounds of rebellion in a context where the word ‘rebellion’ can be appropriated. The trajectory of the characters—the ‘performative guilt’ of the elite, the servant’s frantic escape, the communist’s stale orthodoxy—each in their own way, and mostly in vain, demonstrate the different ‘runways’ to liberation. The title of the novel works as an extended metaphor for failed take-offs, where the economic and social structure of a country promises certain succour but ultimately denies it. The novel argues that the acts of rebellion within the overarching framework of late capitalism, especially in the complex postcolony, are so scattered and isolating that they seem like a joke. True resistance is conscious, reclaimed, and reconstituted solidarity which the system works to thwart.

## Delimitation of the Study

The coming study, although positioned within Marxist philosophy, will intentionally boundary itself to retain a more focused and nuanced analysis of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runways*. The principal boundary shall be the strictly classical Marxist approach, concentrating on the primary economic and class relations as elaborated by Marx, with particular attention to class struggle, alienation, labor commodification, and ideological, political, and cultural hegemony or false consciousness. Other critical frameworks such as postcolonial, feminist, and ecocritical theories will be acknowledged, but subordinated to primary analytical frameworks. For example, although the patriarchal dominated structures that complex Layla's oppression will be acknowledged, they will be understood more in a Marxist manner as primary confirming the capitalist logic of exploitation, as opposed to the absence of oppressive system.

The same goes for Pakistan's postcolonial history, its colonization and later position within global capitalism, will be treated as the essential context within which these class relations unfold in a particularly intensive way, but the main argument of the study will not be a postcolonial comparative reading of the rest of the national literatures. Such a delimitation is purposeful. It permits one to investigate, not in a panoramic way, but in a focused manner, the economic workings of the novel, claiming that it is class which the novel stakes as the primary determinant of its characters' lives and prospects.

Moreover, this research will restrict its object of analysis to the diegetic world of *\*The Runways\**. Unlike texts by Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, or Aravind Adiga, this study will not sustain a comparative analysis with other South Asian texts, though there will be short references to them to underscore the particularity of Bhutto's treatment. The main evidence will be the the narrative, character development and symbolical structures of the novel. This includes a focused study of the three primary protagonists—the elite teenager, the runaway servant and the aging communist—as archetypes of various class positions and disposition to class relations. This analysis will show how their individual trajectories not aimed at constructing a cohesive revolutionary narrative, but rather at demonstrating the fragmentation and the co-optation of resistance. The 'runway' as a major metaphor of failed escape and the city of Karachi as a character in its own right, signifying the contemporary urban, neoliberal face of class struggle, will be pivotal to this study. The research will, however, not contest the novel's representation of Karachi to the real world in a sociological or anthropological way.

Although the realism in the novel is a significant aspect of its strength, this analysis will stick to the boundaries of literary critique, treating the novel as a constructed culture artifact that mirrors and comments upon the sociological context as opposed to a direct sociological account.

As far as theoretical application is concerned, the study will focus on explaining the four aspects of alienation 'from'... the product of labor, the labor process, species-being, and other human beings. This is along with the psychological and social disintegration the characters undergo. It will show how the status quo is sustained through the workings of false consciousness, from performative activism of the elites to the self-subjugation of the servants. This study is clear in its aim to use the novel to illustrate and interrogate these concepts of Marxian theory, and hence, does not intend to redefine the theory of Marxism. Still, it is a major and indeed, recognized limitation, to impose a theoretical framework of 19th century Europe on a South Asian context of the 21st century. The study will therefore take the novel as a means to show how the post-colonial condition, including lingering feudal elements and the particular embodiment of global capitalism, may stretch or trouble a classical Marxist analysis. The conclusion will not be that Marxism is no longer relevant, but rather that it's use is to be precise and responsive to the local context, with *The Runaways* as a striking illustration of what is required.

## Literature Review

In other literary works of Fatima Bhutto, Ashfaq, Cheema, and Bashir undertake a postmodern examination of Bhutto's *The Runaway* and its themes of immigration and diasporic identity, and the cultural politics of the world after 9/11. With respect to the theories of multiplicity and monologism dissent, the thesis research within the studies of the novel concentrates on the polyphonic narrative structure of the novel which articulates the diverse voices in the middle of the prevailing socio political strife (Ashfaq, Cheema, and Bashir). The analysis focuses on *The Runaway* as it explores the questions of identity, religion, and nationalism in a fast changing world and exposes the rigid boundaries of cultural displacement and belonging (Ashfaq, Cheema and Bashir). Much of the research illustrates how engaging identity politics within Pakistani English fiction illustrates the intersections between the literature and the socio political world in order to help the reader appreciate the critical ways in which Bhutto's work imaginatively reconfigures identity (Ashfaq, Cheema, and Bashir). The work, therefore, situates *The Runaway* within the context of studies on migration, hybridity and contested national narratives. Ashfaq, Bariza, Bilal AsmatCheema, and Zohaib Bashir.

This paper is titled 'Reimagining Identity, Religion and Nationalism: An Inquiry into the Polyphonic Voices in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*'. *Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR)* 3, no. 1 (January 11, 2025): 409-418. In this article, Sahar, Saif and Khan use feminist literary criticism to analyze gendered oppression in Bhutto's *The Runaways*. The work takes issue with the patriarchal order in Pakistani society which, in an Orientalist manner, has historically structured the social system in a way that marginalizes women and reinforces the stereotypes of female inferiority and deviance (Sahar, Saif and Khan). In the book, Sahar, Saif, Khan emphasize that Bhutto's novel brings to light the toxicities and systemic inequalities that women face, and profoundly challenges the traditional conception that women are so docile they do not even 'belong' to this world. In the words of Sahar, Saif and Khan, the study claims that the novel illustrates the ways in which hegemonic male dominion obliterates female agency through insidious manifestations of patriarchy and a pervasive sense of oppression and objectification.

While analyzing these social concerns, the research also adds to Bhutto's critique of the Pakistani gender relations by proposing that women be regarded as fully autonomous and equal members of the society (Sahar, Saif, and Khan). Subsequently, the research positions *The Runaways* as a feminist work that wrestles with the deeply rooted patriarchal notions and sheds light to the plight of women in a patriarchal society. Sahar, Zareen, FarwaSaif, and FarkhandaShahid Khan. "Women as 'Others' in Bhutto's *The Runaways*: A Feminist Analysis." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2024, pp. 460–467.

Sani, ShamimahMirah, and Yudiana (2018:41) in this research study specializes in a postcolonial literary critique of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2010) and aims to explore different forms of identity, resistance, and cultural hybridity using Stuart Hall's representation theory.

The study analyzes Bhutto's narrative techniques and character portrayals in particularly highlighting how the novel delineates boundaries to colonial and postcolonial power structures by constructing protagonists who actively resist socially constructed and normative identities and sociabilities (Sani et al.). Referring to the above analysis, identity in postcolonial contexts is fluid, and characters of Bhutto's try to negotiate complex sociocultural structures which are underscored by the legacies of historical events and current relations of power (Sani et al.). Unlike the rest of comparative studies, this one undertakes an in-depth analysis of *The Runaways* through the prism of Hall's framework to shed light on Bhutto's distinct feature in postcolonial discourse which is thecorpule representation of the subjugated silenced (Sani et al.). In this regard, the research shows how the novel acts as a locus of tension in decolonizing narratives and refiguration of self with the purpose of selfhood which describe the problems of globalized representation (Sani et al.). The research entitled *Representation of others and Resistance: A Postcolonial study of Fatima Bhutto's The Runaways* (2018) is authored by Sani Shankar et S. Saqib Aziz. *Arbor*, vol. 11, no. 2, 30 June 2024,

In this research, Aisha and Khan analyze the complexity of the dynamics of radicalization among youth by engaging in an intensive reading of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*.

The research examines the socio-economic factors and personal betrayals that drive the protagonists Layla, Sunny, and Monty into the realm of the fictional Ummah Movement in *Aisha and Khan*, through the lens of Miller and Chauhan's framework of the push and pull factors of radicalization. I use Greenham's close reading approach to dissect the narrative on syntactic, semantic, thematic, and antithetical levels to affirm that in *Aisha and Khan*, Bhutto's portrayal of the systemic violence and inequality faced by the characters in radical spaces (brutal spaces) exposes the characters' de radicalization and un- disillusionment. The main points show that oppressive conditions (the "push" factors) in society, school, and the family drive youth to join extremist groups, but the moment they enter, the "these groups cannot deliver justice" (the "pull" factors) paradigm works and disillusionment (*Aisha and Khan*) sets in. Literature as a whole stands as the strongest pillar to challenge the narratives of radicalization, and it is suggested that it be further pursued as interdisciplinary studies of literature to help address this global crisis (*Aisha and Khan*). "Aisha, and Dr. Rab Nawaz Khan. The title of this paper is, 'Exploring Radicalization in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*.'" *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, vol. 10, no.

In her 2018 novel *The Runaways*, Fatima Bhutto has been known to use postmodern theory to analyze and attempt to break down the metanarrative of Jihadism. Bhutto is not suggesting that Jihadism is Islamic extremism, rather portraying it as a political narrative imposed by the Western world to the Muslims and subsequently labeled as Jihadism. Applying Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarratives and Baudrillard's hyper-reality theory demonstrates that a jihadist is an alienated, denied, and unjustly treated individual, and is, therefore, not a religious person. This is also dealt with in Freudian psychoanalysis of displacement. Such an individual is termed as a Jihadist, and is a victim of a deformed metanarrative, and postmodern elements of narrative Islam, and in the process, the Jihadist is discredited as a Muslim. This is the crux of the paper by Khan, Huzaifa. Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*. *International Journal of Literary Studies*. Vol, 12, No. 3, 2024. Pages 150 to 162. Khan, Huzaifa\*\*\*\* "In this paper with regard to radicalization, I attempt to understand the psychological underpinnings of the predominant male figures in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*. I argue that beyond the sociological reasons, which include extreme poverty, the absence of an individual's identity, disconnection from the community, and a profound sense of alienation, lie more intimate and personally constructed psychological reasons for radicalization."

The novel's primary narrative focus may seem to encompass social and economic factors, but the analysis uncovers deeper psychological issues and fears — the fear of abandonment, negative self-image, fragmented identity, and existential anxiety — and neuroses that predispose individuals to radicalisation.

Employing Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the study meticulously analyzes the extent to which trauma that has been repressed, and the accompanying biographical amnesia and unacknowledged obsessions, shape the choices of protagonists whose circumstances are otherwise. Both male characters, it is concluded, suffer from neuroses as constitutive of unrelieved mental conflicts which, however, lead to the same extremist group. Unlike most contemporary extremist narratives, the study suggests radicalisation is the product of internal psychic vulnerabilities, rather than solely external repression.

Radicalisation, to the extent that it has advanced sociological explanation, has been predominantly placed, more or less, in the realm of anxiety and the need to control of the repressed. This theory is attempting to bridge the gap between sociological and literary analysis of the work, and Freudian theory more generally, to extend the meaning of the imaginary and the fiction in the aid of understanding the deeper psychological relations of civic violence. Sarwar, Iqra, MuzzafarQadirBhatti, and Mawra Tariq Malik.

Bhutto Fatima's novel, *The Runaways*, evaluates the socio-political intricacies of disengagement in the contemporary space, specifically concerning identity, social media, and politics of radicalization, through the lens of resistance. What does techno-optimism and techno-pessimism mean in her evaluation of the

digital age? Bhutto critiques the polished fantasy of online radical extremism, and, in turn, in a media fragmented world where traditional and digital identities construct user. extremism, belonging, or dissent, There is a still broken prism glorified of radicalism. Her digital discourse shows Bhutto's techno pessimism.

The novel's three protagonists, Monty, Layla and Sunny, are central to this discourse. The three are captivated by the fictive ISIS affiliate The Ummah Movement or 'Um' suggesting uncertainty and hesitation. The latter is a simulacrum in the Baudrillardian sense, where the hyperreal constructs the digital concealing the harsh truth of the tangible.

A particular emphasis is placed on Sunny, a British Muslim character, as a mentally fragile and vulnerable young man who is potentially susceptible to online radicalization. He unpacks his trajectory along the axes of information, communication, and technological precarity to articulate how digital environments exploit precariousness and alienation.

Bhutto acknowledges the desire to resist subjugation, yet passes the judgement that the unfolding of jihadist defiance is currently irremediably afflicted by ostentatious online exhibitionism combined with corporeal violence. In the novel, revolutionary rhetoric is cloaked in bigotry and nihilism. Its critique of mediated extremism in *The Runaways* contends that the embellished, mediated, and romanticized notion of rebellion has, in the end, been fundamentally transformed into a perilous spectacle, mangled by the digital sphere. "The Precarity and Predatory Behaviour of the 'Mediahideen' in Fatima Bhutto's *Isis* Novel *The Runaways*." *Representations of Precarity in South Asian Literature in English*, edited by Claire Chambers, Springer, 2022, pp. 189–213.

To this day scholarship on *The Runaways* has considered postmodern identity, feminist oppression, postcolonial resistance, and radicalization, but there remains a critical gap in the scholarship that hinges on the class conflict and monetary power in South Asian societies within a Marxist framework. Ashfaq et al. (2010) on diasporic identity, Sahar et al. (2017) on feminist critique of patriarchy, Sani et al. (2012) on postcolonial representation, Aisha & Khan (2018) on radicalization, and a number of others fail to account for the socio material structures underlying the social hierarchies of the novel.

As I intend to show, Bhutto's *The Runaways*, represents class exploitation and alienation as emerging deficits in capitalist South Asia, and serves as a Marxist critique chronicling the dominance of monetary value rule over social relations. This reading, as opposed to the others, will apply the foundational Marxist concepts of alienation, surplus value extraction, and commodity fetishism, and in addition false consciousness, to demonstrate the walls of economic oppression in which Bhutto's characters ranging

from the elite of Karachi to the overexploited working class inhabit. This work posits class struggle as the primary violence underlying such identity crises, gender oppression, and radicalization, and serves as a better framework to critically engage with them.

## Methodology

This study employs a rigorous qualitative research design which consolidates Marxist theoretical frameworks with the method of close textual analysis to examine the class conflict, monetary power, and oppression in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runways* practically and descriptively. The center of interest is to clarify capitalist institutions in a South Asian metropolis that “form and maintain systems of oppression, condition ideological consent to oppression, and shape the very structures of resistance” within the class, and the author. The research design is fundamentally interdisciplinary, combining the art of literary close reading with the instrumental Marxist economic critique. The novel class, labor, and capital in the tawdry and visceral stratum of the contemporary Karachi as the complex class system the economy expresses in the narrative, characters, and the symbolic geography of the city.

Primary dataset for this inquirythesis is the novel itself. In order to maintain both structure and replicability in analysis, this research applies a rigorous process of thematic coding, which comprises analytical units, tiered units of analysis, and analytical categories which involve textual units within the argument. These analytical categories engage with the narrative to capture the traces of capitalist logic within. First, monetary references is the category which consists of wages, debts, rents, and other reliquaries, which underscore the transactional evaluation of the human and social relations. Second, class-based phenomena is a category which captures the relations and configurations of the employer-worker dichotomy, exploitative ruling-class engagements, and intersections of class unity and collapse. Third, ideological conditioning examines the dominant narrative within the dialectic, the self or character, which can either be a proponent of capitalist domination reflex social realities or rationalize aspirations purely in consumer terms. The category of spaces of inequality is the last and most critical category, which applies to the city’s physical topology, the glaring opposites of slum regions to gated communities, as well as labor areas (factories, domestic, etc.) and the elite consumption regions. These spaces are more than topos for the class relations which are in sophisticated suspension, but rather active accomplices of class hierarchy.

The information collected via the coding process is analyzed using three key concepts of Marxism that form the study's conceptual framework. The first is class conflict , which provides the lens to view the economic inequality and the antagonism between the proletariat and bourgeoisie as not background, but rather the driving force of the tension of the narrative. The second, alienation , is used to explain the complex psychological and social fragmentation of the characters, and how capitalism alienates them from their work, the goods they produce, their own potential (species-being), and authentic social

relationships. The third, commodity fetishism, is necessary for explaining how exploitative social relationships are mystified and represented as simple relationships between objects and money, and how that naturalizes inequality. So that the analysis does not remain purely theoretical, the study employs methodological triangulation which involves consistently relating the literary aspects of the novel to the specific neoliberal economic policies of Pakistan, the charge of post-colonial class structures and inequality Fatima Bhutto herself documented, and Bhutto's political commentaries.

This practice concentrates the critique of the fiction and the critique of the social conditions it aims to represent and interrogate to their historical and social contexts and dependencies.

The research design has several validation measures to improve the credibility, trustworthiness, and rigor of the qualitative findings. These include peer debriefing with scholars into Marxist theory to defend the assumptions and refine interpretative claims, negative case analysis, which searches for and accounts for the possible scenes, character growths, and symbols that contradict the thesis, and where necessary, inter-coder reliability checks. The research understands the inherent limitations of this qualitative textual interpretation. Its findings are bound to be subjective, and the focus is broadly limited to a single literary work. The clear and consistent use of a defined theoretical framework, structured and transparent validation processes, and various outlined measures for interpretative bias mitigation is what drives the research. The purpose is to strengthen the discipline, transparency, and interpretation bias of the analysis to improve the conviction and coherent analysis.

The main purpose of this approach is to use a Marxist literary critique focusing on class and capital in *The Runways* a novel that addresses the exploitation of labor and the indulgence of the elite. Additionally, this approach seeks to fill a major gap within postcolonial literature, which has had a greater focus on culture and identity politics, rather than applying a sustained economic Marxist critique to the peculiar narratives on capitalistic South Asia, a focus which is rather routine in the examination of Western literature. This methodology which combines literary close reading and a Marxist political economy demonstrates that Bhutto's novel, besides fostering fiction's peculiar power to illuminate the, most of the time, obscured layers of class domination, offers a stinging critique on the human costs of neoliberalism. It creates a pioneering framework on the exercise of economic power in postcolonial literature, showing how the literary imagination can operate as a powerful counter discourse to dominant capitalist narratives. Therefore, this study is able to meaningfully engage in postcolonial literature as the emerging body of competitive and interdisciplinary research on inequality in the Global South while also underscoring the importance of literature in the analysis and critique of inequality in social and economic justice as a form of fiction.

## Discussion

Having determined the context that furthers the primary argument of this text, we can now analyze the text in detail. I will begin this chapter with the argument that *The Runway* is not simply a novel with a backdrop of inequality, but rather a painstakingly crafted critique of capital, especially in postcolonial cities. It is representative of the intersectional and multi-angled life narratives that the novel attempts to capture. The structure of the novel is a formal representation of the disunion and fractured solidarity that Marxism speaks of. At this point, we need to apply the paradigm to particular sections of the text. But first, explain the value of using this particular lens on a novel of contemporary South Asian literature.

This method comes up with a critical issue immediately. Can a 19th century European economic theory crafted during the industrial revolution truly shed light on the conundrums of 21st century Karachi, a city marred with colonialism, neoliberalism, and persistent feudal remnants? The project's success depends on understanding that the forms of class have changed. They have changed to a globalised class elite, an informal proletariat, and a burgeoning service class. However, the class relations of exploitation, the pursuit of capital accumulation and the systemic production of human disposability still stand.

The novel invites this reading by foregrounding economic reality as a primary determinant of its characters' fates. The initial discussion must tackle how Bhutto constructs a world wherein human worth is inescapably mediated by economic worth. Characters in this world are not simply caricatures of rich or poor. Their wealth or poverty, in fact, shapes their consciousness, their interactions, and their very possibilities for action. The 'centrepiece' of the novel, the 'runway' as a metaphor, demands further discussion. It not only suggests a line of escape, but also a blueprinted, engineered control zone which prescribes the terms of any escape. This, of course, introduces the Marxian notion of base and superstructure. The economic 'runway' of Pakistani capitalism determines the social and ideological 'take-offs' which are possible. Before answering the question of individual characters, we must address how the metaphor shapes the whole narrative: the desire for transitory or sustained mobility, in fact, is sought within a system one desires to transcend.

A particularly important topic of exploration has been how the author reworks the traditional approach to class. The confrontation of the proletariat and the bourgeois does not vanish but rather takes on a different form within the grid of South Asian society and culture. The elite of *The Runaways* are not mere owners of factories, but rather a comprador class enriched through global and local privilege. The working class is also far from a unified industrialized entity, manifesting instead as a dispersed, precarious population of domestic workers, drivers, and informal laborers. Understanding the motivation of the characters becomes

central to critiquing the novel for its portrayal of resistance—or the absence of this portrayal. Monty is a relic from a bygone era of organized class struggle and is a perfect representation of this struggle. His outdated ideas concerning the existing, dispersed form of capital, and the manner in which he goes about this struggle, place him firmly in the realm of class struggle which appears role. This leads us to a primary idea one must contend with in this piece, which is the idea of a crisis in opposition in a time period where capitalism has shown its remarkable ability to reel in dissent and disrupt a unified identity.

In applying the concepts of alienation, commodification, and false consciousness, we frame our discussion this this understanding of complex and adaptive systems. There is, for example, the alienation of the elite teenager and the alienation of the runaway servant. They are both, in their own ways, products of the same type of dehumanizing economic structures. The primary assertion is that Bhutto's genius is in demonstrating how there is an distributing suffering and in how there is chronic deformation of the humanity of each class in capitalism, with gross inequality. The servant is, and the elite is, too, in a Marxist understanding, in a state of adverse losing, alienated from the actual and real essence of their humanity. The psyche of the elite, commodified in the consumerist society, and the the servant's body, commodified for the labor. This prepares the ground for a more sophisticated examination that moves beyond the simplistic and the moral, and follows the more complex patterns in which the logic of capital, in its South Asian version, which sustains and systematizes all social existence, restructures and reconstitutes the entire social existence, around its own dominant frameworks and values. The following close reading will substantiate these theoretical provocations, demonstrating how the text itself provides the most compelling evidence for a radical critique of the very ideas and constructions the text puts forward.

**He brought her to Saddar after the Friday prayers and when the shops opened, Anita looked for the deepest red and stood in front of a shelf of notebooks. Ezra dropped her off at the shop and told her to hurry, he will meet some people and in ten minutes will pick her up. But none of the notebooks seemed to Rima's. They were simply either too red, and too matte to pick up sunlight.**

**Even after Ezra returned, and as he strolled behind her, she filed a series of notebooks, which he worried suspiciously at as the shopkeeper nepped at her with a mobile, used with a try to stand stoically as hands creased over the kameez, which lay and then ached at some as without a try to bent caps, used, and held aloft and the burst sheets of the shelf, Annie, gently used her arms to yank a grab onto the fragments and notebooks.**

**Judiciously she processed the patterned lay with the complemented, hands as 'legs' the book more distinct: pages, number of the fill and type filled pages. ' do the hateable sit there in a bit "Scarffed course over at the page. ' I will the hateable with burst socks standing say Annie. But this sister has the irascible had the book to check, proper and precisely over.'**

Learning mundane words from the textbooks that usually accompany the school syllabus is akin to being taught rudimentary English. It is as complex as the correct and coherent language that is deemed essential. English bleeding from the lips of the heroine is nothing short of sheer magic, her lifeless body recollected from the pages of a lifeless book and brought to life by a stream of English words.

Gaining easy access to textbooks from the adjoining and rather bazaar, Anita sat with a newly acquired English textbook, laden and crammed with incomprehensible words as the chains holding the dull black English granny and rest of the juvenile words sat firmly around. One waiting for the violence to erupt so that the English teacher could shred and pulverize the perhaps equally ineffectual machine, for a beaten and battered machine can sing an English song. A Marxist critique offers a devastating analysis of how capitalist ideology and class stratification contour and constrain psychic desire and conduct. For Anita, a trip to the shop in Sadder is not a mundane task but a deeply profound narrative of aspiration where she undergoes a materialistic transformation in the pursuit of beauty, sophistication, and social elevation. She embarks on a pursuit for the "deepest red notebook" which serves as a symbol of elusive longing more profound than the desire for stationery; in fact, she yearns for the culture of taste, diversity, and selfhood that capitalist consumerism is poised to offer. Yet, the structural barriers of her class position become glaringly apparent in her failure to find a notebook that is "red enough or too matte." This in satisfaction is a cornerstone of Marxist thought: the working class is condemned to a fate in which they do not possess the means of production, but instead are forced to continually strive for the imitation of capitalist triophedal luxuries.

The interactions in the store reveal more about the social control mechanisms in Ezra's life and its social control mechanisms. Ezra's impatience and the shopkeeper's intrusive stare are more than individual shortcomings. They are relics of the capitalism and patriarchy that simultaneously objectify and control the bodies and agency of working-class women. Anita's presence in the commercial domain is permitted as long as she plays the part of a buyer. Nevertheless, her freedom is always undercut, signaling that her existence is bounded by social forces.

Real English 'is equally idealized as Anita seeks to learn 'real English' from television dramas. She is enmeshed in these middle class values. To dominate a 'velvet' language is to possess something ultra refined, and silk smooth, a badge of class. English is a smart language. Anita has delusion of grandeur in thinking that the command of this code will alienate her class. Here pursuit is self alienation. She aspires to immerse herself into an elite cultural sphere and in the process, is self condemned to utter estrangement, an utter divorce from her culture and language. This is best exemplified in the idea of false consciousness . People accept these values and goals of a dominant class. Their efforts end up in a dominator, their energy becomes a captive to the very system which shackles them. In this case, the desire are not hers, they are orchestrated by the very system designed to accommodate her self utilizing pursuit, in which unchained self remains an unachieved hope, the fundamental condition of her existence.

**“How come people accomplish anything on these things? Akbar Ahmed lifted his chilled glass and took a swig of beer. ‘Why we let BlackBerry go under is beyond me.’**

**Monty, sitting with arms crossed at his knees, and now feeling rather exposed, in his Nike tennis shorts and T-shirt, leaned forward. His father was not typing an email, he was on some Bollywood news site. His screen was enlarged and in a blank search bar he typed with one crooked finger, ‘Deepik.’**

**‘Papa?’ He lifted the legs of his cane chair and edged closer to his father, who, as if being woken up to his son’s presence, paused his search.**

**‘Arre what?’**

**My friend, do you think he could work for you? Or somewhere in the company?**

**Akbar Ahmed looked at his son concerned.‘Who is this fellow?’**

**‘A friend.’ Monty answered nonchalantly, and thought of various ways of telling ‘Layla’s Brother’ of this new job offer, without him knowing who Monty was in relation to his sister. She would have to tell him by herself. She will be very excited. Monty couldn’t help but smile, he was already starting to look after his sister. He was early in trying to help her with her life.”**

Stopping to answer his father’s call, Monty’s father left his phone unlocked, placed face down on the desk. On the screen blurred, pixelated images of his Deepika Padukone in a tight black tracksuit and Roger Federer tennis pop up with her tennis cap on and laughing with the tennis great. He was holding on to the tennis great and laughing.

In a single, powerful vignette, the author captures the subtle workings of class domination and ideological subjugation in the society. From a Marxian perspective, “In the father’s case, he is not simply distracted with the gossip of Bollywood and the gossip that comes with it. Rather, Akbar Ahmed is the father who represents the bourgeoisie, and his tether to capital and labor is one of a leisure, indifferent mastery.” The excerpt, “Don't know how anyone gets anything done on these things?...”, is a prime example of framing the argument in a class context. It is ironic, of course, because in his world to “get things done” etc. is not the same as work that is productive, but managing and overseeing the work done by the multitude. His sadness for the BlackBerry is a symbol of a capitalism, which is the celebrated by many, because it replaces the chaotic and distractive capitalism that he is smartphone represents.

On the other hand, Monty is in a much more complicated situation. While the Nike shorts and T-shirt suggest immersion in the global elite's commodity culture, his posture—“feeling suddenly exposed”—and his advocacy on behalf of a friend suggest the development of a class consciousness, even if it is a bit primitive. In his mind, the attempt to secure a position for Layla's brother is a revolutionary act of solidarity. He dreams of “taking care of her” and “helping her change her life,” which is a classic example of what Marxists would call bourgeois philanthropy. There is no class solidarity in this situation, as this is a paternalistic act in which the bourgeoisie extends favours and, in turn, reinforces the power structure they seek to dispel. In this case, Monty’s act of “helping” is a way of perpetuating the ‘need for help’ in the structure that is being created. His family’s position is strengthened as they are in a position to distribute loosely held opportunities, and control the ideological narrative in society.

What stands as the dominant part of this scene, nonetheless, is the clash of two different kinds of power. Monty is attempting to reach his father on the economic base — the tangible world of employment and income. He is discussing the market in secondary school and the instruments of production (“could he work for you? Or somewhere in the company?”). On the other hand, his father Akbar is completely immersed in the superstructure— the culture, ideology, and entertainmentsphere of the world. The blurry images of Deepika Padukone with Roger Federer are a metaphor for the consumerist and celebrity culture that is, in a Marxist sense, described as the “opium of the people.” For the dominant class, this culture has a major purpose; it conceals the ethical and political responsibilities of one's primary economic rule. Akbar cares more about the faux reality of a bollywood actress and a tennis champion than the tangible socio-economic state of a possible employee.

Ultimately, Akbar’s lack of attention, “Who is this fellow?” as well as his return to the digital performance shows how the digital bourgeois is maintained. By not being willing to even consider the request, Akbar illustrates the chasm between the class that owns the means of production and the class

that has to offer their labor to survive. Akbar does not think of the job offer as an economic necessity or even moral consideration, but rather as a bothersome interruption to his leisure. Thus, this excerpt shows that class power is not always maintained through brute force. It can also be through indifference, distraction, and the unquestionable privilege of being able to not think about the mode of production that provides one's lavish lifestyle.

**Anita looked at the black-and-red cover, a bazaar knockoff, and wet her index fingertips with her tongue. She rubbed the old circles on the glass and the darkened spots of dried wine, hoping that Osama would not see that she noticed the stains.**

**All was to confiscate the fields in the hands of the landowners, take the mills away from the robbers, redeem the country from her dark hours... Yes. What does Pakistan mean? There is no God...**

**Anita softly paused, whilst her index finger lingered over the book, deep in thought.**

**Was it rightfully her possession? Without intending to, she lifted the Jalib, placed it down on the floor, and the moment it dropped, Osama, having fastened his attention to the book, picked it up and placed it right back on her arms.**

**“Don't be anxious,” he slowly replied, justifying her silence before she had the chance of responding. It was understandable. Over the years, the new school had changed her into someone shy and anxious, someone who was even afraid of their own shadow. It was simple to see she was hesitant about everything. ‘There is nothing heretical in it. Osama softly touched the book and a small storm of dust was spawned.**

**Anita Rose genuinely felt queasy. Having had the chance to sneak out of the house, with her brother still outside and her mother in a stupor, she relished the flower scented air, perfumed of the thick honey of Champa blossoms. The strong promise of the coming of rain was felt, but the monsoons had not graced these parts just yet. All of it was irrelevant, however, as the only desire in her mind was to swiftly drag herself to the side of her mother and curl based on the warmth that he body emitted. The floor was cool to the touch, and helped ground her. With a sigh, she slowly lowered her gaze.**

**‘What is it?’ Osama inquired as he approached her.**

**'Ezra's changed his name,' Anita replied, still not meeting her friend's gaze.**

**'His what?'**

**'He says it's Feroze now. He claims it's what it takes for our people to survive.'**

This part demonstrates well the theatrical conflict stemming from the ideological dominion, depicting the fight between a new counter-revolutionary thought and the inward fears which support the current situation. For her, being a reader of radical poetry of Habib Jalib is not the issue of blasphemy, it is the issue of a blasphemy of the blasphemy the upper class. 'Confiscate the fields from the landowners, take away the mills from the robbers' is a pure expression of Marxist class conflict, calling for the revolutionary seizure of the means of production from the capitalist class. The intense rage which Anita undergoes and her attempt to burn the book is the ideology of the regime in place, what Marxism refers to as false consciousness. The 'new school' which is a metaphor for the state institution aimed at enforcing discipline has helped her 'synchronize with the masses' as a result of which she 'is terrified of her own shadow.' Her terror is the self-negligence that keeps the working class from seeking its own radical self where it is imperative to her that any plea for her self-extraction is absolutely radical and beyond the pale.

The physical object of the book is highly symbolic. It is an example of a "cheap bazaar reproduction," stained and dusty. This demonstrates that, in the framework of this society, revolutionary thought is an undercurrent, submerged and even physically debased by the reigning culture. Yet, the class-aware vanguard is, in this case, Osama. His gentle but firm manner of returning the book to her hands—"Don't be afraid... There's nothing blasphemous in it"—is a political gesture. He is trying to help her penetrate the ideological fog, to see that the real blasphemy is not in the poetry, but in the systemic exploitation the poetry seeks to condemn. The "cloud of powdery dust," he sets off is a metaphor for the radical tradition, which is historical and neglected, that has to be revived and brought to light.

The last layer of the excerpt ties the ideological struggle to the politics of identity and assimilation under total oppression. Ezra's name change to Feroze and Anita's comment about it is an indictment of how, under capitalism, the working class is ethnicized and compelled to violently mutilate their identities in order to survive. In Marxist terms, this is one of the most pronounced forms of alienation, self-alienation. He is buying into a self-image of his transformed identity. Transformation into a self-alienated "self" branded with a "fur coat" for purposes of self-commodification to enhance one's exchange value in an unfriendly employment market. The perception that this is "the only way for our people to survive" is an indicator of systemic oppression that forces the oppressed into self-erasure, misdirecting resources

from class struggle to self-absorption and, in the end, pointless assimilation. This self battle is externalized in Anita rather. She is imprisoned in a brutal alternative that forces upon her the renunciation of her developing political consciousness and social survival, a choice that, in the end, class power will feed upon because it, in its essence, is the losing battle, preserving the divisions and the corrupted souls of the working class.

**Sunny ran a hand through his hair, to smooth it all down. In any case, he had not before taken anyone to meet his pa.**

**He said that if decided to wake up by three, he might come for a late lunch. Sunny's pa arrived at two, which was very early, and Aloush was still not coming. But Sunny was still anxious. Why was it so critical to be at Apollo with Pa? Why was it so important for Aloush to be met? He did not need validation from his pa and he did not need validation from Oz. Why did it matter to him what they thought?**

**'Darling,' he said with the thimble of the turkish coffee which he held daintly, and with his lips embraced he said, 'yeh kya bakwas hai?' while his face was coined in a soft pucker.**

**'It's a new thing,' mumbled Sunny. 'Why always shun new experiences?'**

**"To me, what is new?" asked Sulaiman Jamil while carelessly placing the fragile cup and creating a puddle of black liquid in the saucer. "New is what I live my whole life doing, new and new, every time. This here is not new, it is a substandard, beta, filthy and low class."**

The blood seemed to rush to Sunny's head. His head was shaking and the only thing Sunny was thinking was to shut it all out, to blink it down and retract himself away. What was not new is the handkerchief and the dress with it's shades and complementing trowsers and the waist coat his father used to wear. This was something as if he read in the GQ magazine, his accents were as if he was born and raised on those, and the suit, the dress was in the past. Who was Pa kidding? To him he was just subservient all his life to the Empire, bowing like a servant all the time.

'Stepping outside the box was never something you were capable of doing,' Sunny said. 'Look at yourself, what are you trying to prove? The other night Sunny while going down the Apollo's basement stairs, he had tripped over and while trying not to fall managed to graze his knuckles with the wall'.

He continued to pound his still raw knuckles against the table remembering the faint twinge of pain from his almost fall. Light as it was, it was still a strong enough reminder of the pain associated of the fall. He did not fall. He would not.

This tense interaction portrayed in the novel “Sunny” and his father Sulaiman Jamil illustrates well the intra-class struggles and the display of social rank in a capitalist society. The Apollo restaurant serves as the stage for Sulaiman’s much ridiculed competitive techniques for dealing with the class system. The class system from a Marxist lens sees Sulaiman as a **comprador bourgeoisie** and an aspiring petty bourgeoisie whose class identification pivots on the imitation of colonial and neo-colonial domination. Sulaiman is not aping the Western ruling class; he is performing. He is “serving” the Empire as appropriate Sunny’s phraseology. The Apollo’s ‘low-standard’ and ‘not a clean place’ Sulaiman section is a sociological textbook example of **cultural capital**. He seeks to distance himself from what he considers socially inferior to him and claim to be part of a global cosmopolitan elite. Sulaiman’s description of life as “new new new” evidences his capitalist thinking which equates obsession and progress with consumption.

On the other hand, Sunny personifies a radical, though somewhat disoriented, division. The Apollo, with its gritty, basement level reality, stands in stark contrast to the ‘imported’ aesthetic of his father. More so, the Apollo represents a genuine, intimate space that is completely isolated from the other. The Apollo is also a space where the so-called ‘elite refinement’ is shed, a fact Sunny manifests through his ‘grazed’ knuckles.’ These scuffed-up knuckles symbolize active tactile engagement with abrasive, raw, and unrefined environments. The very fact that Sunny uses the phrase ‘you never had the balls’ suggests that his insult is a charge of ideological cowardice. He accuses his father of never challenging the hegemonic order, and in essence, only ever sought to integrate.

Nonetheless, Sunny’s Aloush had troubling issues of his own, all of which stemmed, oddly enough, from the same system that strangles every single individual. No, he certainly does not want his Aloush to meet his father, yet there is a sense of validation that is lost when separating the two. This system is not in place to be dismantled, but rather there for one to assume the role of a chosen “cool” counter-culture, the same way one would assume a seat on a class hierarchy. Sunny’s struggle is captured in the blunt metaphor, “almost-fall”. Aloush’s Aloush is metaphorically, socially, and symbiotically stranded on a flight of stairs, teetering between identities, and a descent that is naively termed, “cool.” The stretch of raw skin that rests the, “neatly boxed” knuckles is slashed and bleeding, yet serves to mark the “cool urban” territory of Sunny’s Aloush. The fight is one of a subdivided ideology, and there is certainly a sense of conflict. Capitalism cannot be terminated, for the loss of it would mean the loss of identity.

Commodified identity us the term that needs to be revisited to understand the `purchased from dependency to power` relationships at play. This is a civil family war. In the end, the lines are drawn- the father on one end. Magazines are luxuries, manners imported. The son rests on the other, tangled in the subculture of Aloush. With class boundaries drawn, the still haunting speak of the Empire is the one class society suffers from.

**“Do they expect me too?” Layla said as Feroze handed her the Emirates economy ticket along with the invitation for spending the weekend in Dubai thanks to his clients. “Me?”**

**“Of course,” he said softly so that their mother wouldn’t hear. “Why not?”**

**“But why?”**

**Feroze was looking down at his phone as he interrupted the rhythmic movements of his thumbs across the Huawei keyboard. He noticed his sister in the doorway of the kitchen in Gulshan. She was wearing ripped jeans with threads at the knees and a slightly oversized, loose silk shirt. “You are a very attractive girl, so why not?” He returned his gaze to the phone.**

**“Really?”**

**Layla lifted her shoulder from the frame and raised her posture slightly.**

**Feroze nodded his head and said, “Really,” as he pressed send.**

**Although he was the one to turn first, his sister touched his shoulder in order to stop him.**

**'But what is it that I have to do?' to.'**

**'Nothing,' Feroze replied without looking at her. 'Nothing that you have to do.'**

They had checked into their Best Western hotel room and called Zenobia to let her know everything was ok and that they had landed. She was elated to see her children on the WhatsApp video looking smart in a room that is tipped to be a hotel guests of high profileas and very generous clients. Jeete raho, she says before Feroze ends the call-live long. God bless. They have not informed anyone else that they are traveling, people ask too many questions, Feroze says. It is so much information that nobody needs to have.

Layla understood.

Lay low. Don't call attention to yourself.

Nothing you don't have to do.

Layla had gotten better at keeping her her head down, juggling multiple worlds at a time, tectonically. Still, there was something that unsettled her.

The way Feroze selected her outfits for travel "modern shalwar kameez cut with halter-necks and spaghetti straps which she had hand tailored at the American School years ago but had not yet put on" and how he escorted her to the parlour the day prior to their scheduled journey and said to auntie at the entrance to spare no expense.

The above passage offers a disturbingly accurate account of how capitalism reduces a person to a unit of consumption and a resource to be used at capitalist's will. The Economy Class ticket on Emirates is not a mere airline ticket; it signifies something deeper. It signifies the "mobility" that has been commodified and "in trade" sealed within the grasp of elite. To Feroze and Layla, who do not possess the financial capability to travel, do not view this "gift" from his wealthy clients as an act of charity. Rather, it is an attempt to secure future "obligations and debts". The entire system is cloaked in commerce. Feroze is the "agent". Layla is the "merchandise" being prep and the "elite clients" are the "purchasers".

Each prompting Feroze with 'but why' and 'me' seems to indicate that Layla has some idea that this sort of an invitation surpasses the economic transaction. Nonetheless, this lightly formed socio-economic awareness must be constructed with the help of the ruling class's ideological machinery. Feroze's answer 'But darling, you are a pretty girl which is why?' strips her of the ruling class capitalist economic ideology. Being beautiful is not a quality of her person but rather something she should, in this context, leverage. She has been reduced to a commodity which must be polished and beautified. Her reaction of 'standing a bit taller' demonstrates the deeply ingrained self-realizations of this logic, or the false consciousness which permits exploitation to be regarded as affirmation. The false consciousness procedure of preparation for the trip is an exercise in commodification. Feroze's selection of her clothing and escorting her to the Beauty Parlour is not an act of brotherly affection, but of a marketable good that has already gone through refinement. The pair of 'more modern shalwar kameezes' are a fusion of ethno cultural capitalism with the aim of being marketable. This is meant to be inscribed as alluringly draped to the privileged class.

Most powerful in this case is the Marxist concept of alienation, which Layla attempts to describe as a general feeling of uneasiness. It is as though she is living in a foreign world—and the world is a disembodied capitalist market, which is why her body is being remade. She is alienated from the self-justifying drudgery of her labor (the “nothing” she has to do, which is self-evidently a form of emotional and possibly bodily labor), because it is obscured by euphemism. “Lie low. Don’t draw unnecessary attention” is the essence of the family’s secrecy, which is the ideology of the oppressed in which the oppressed articulate their own oppression. It reveals their awareness of the fact that this transaction, although it is a case of the family’s surplus economy, is a shadow transaction. It is a case of moral bankruptcy stagnated by the systemic inequality which compels the proletariat to not only sell their labor rationally, but their social person and personal autonomy as well in order to subsist. “Nothing you don’t want to do” captures the essence of ideological mastery in late capitalism. It signifies a process in which free will of late capitalist coercive structures is framed, only to snap in the absence of agency, as desperate acts of self-assertion, and thereby consummating the cycle of the system that is self-oblitative, in which the system’s mechanics are so obscured that the oppressed are left to do the work of exile in self-alienation.

**They also invited me?’ Layla said after receiving the Emirates economy ticket from Feroze and listening to how his clients were willing to pay for her to spend a weekend in Dubai. ‘Is it me?’**

**‘Yes,’ he responded, almost a whisper, fearing their mother would overhear. ‘Why not?’**

**‘What is the reason in this case?’**

**Feroze was busy with the phone and after a minute of shuffling thumbs on the phone stopped to see his sister who was leaning at the door of their kitchen in Gulshan. She had on a pair of ripped jeans, with threads cut at the knees, along with a shirt that was a size big for her and was made of fine Chinese silk and is also loose. ‘Beautiful girl, so why not?’ He lowered his head back to his phone.**

**‘Is that so?’**

**Layla lifted her shoulder from the frame and with almost a straight back.**

**Feroze nodded, pressing Send. He turned to leave but Feroze was stopped by his sister, who was touching his shoulder.**

**“But, what do I need to do?” to.’ ‘Nothing,’ was Ferozes response, not bothering to look at her. ‘Nothing you do not want.’ In their Best Western Hotel room, they had checked in and called Zenobia to update her on their successful landing. Through WhatsApp video call, Zenobia was delighted to see her kids in such a smart room, being taken care of by important clients. Jeete raho, she said before Feroze ended it. ‘Live long.’ ‘God bless.’ They had told no one else they were traveling, ‘People ask too many questions,’ Feroze said. ‘It’s a lot of information no one needs to have.’ Layla understood. ‘Lie low. Don’t draw too much attention to yourself.’ ‘Nothing you want to do.’ Layla was skilled at keeping her head down, but Feroze had said maintaining many lives in the shadows was not as easy, as she took comfort in. Something still made her uneasy.’**

The manner in which she packed for the trip was a tailor-made adoption, in my view, of modern shalwar kameez with a halter-neck top and spaghetti strap undertones, which she had studied and shunned ever since she joined the American School. Havoc had caused as to why she had embraced the modern variation come the following day of flight when he packed her off to the tailor’s with in descending in the company of the aunt near the entrance, messaging the tailoring business that it was a cash on delivery.

Certainly! I will provide a Marxist analysis of this interesting passage.

This passage depicts, in a devastating way, how capitalism, in its advanced neoliberal and globalized form, turns people into commodities and recruits them for self-enslavement through the enticing rhetoric of choice and aspiration. The Emirates economy ticket epitomizes this dynamic. It is not a gift, but an instrument of capitalist discipline and exchange . It is a form of mobility monopolized and tightly regulated by the affluent— a controlled access to a consumption paradise reserved for the economically marginalized. The ‘clients’ of Feroze and Layla, who are trapped in the informal economy, regard this ‘invitation’ as a generous offer. Feroze has now graduated from being a labor seller to a human capital broker , with his sister as the key asset.

Layla's initial answers—"me" and "but why"—show the very first inklings of uncommodified self perception, which an instinct that the self ought to be valued beyond this kind of exchange. But the instinct is instantaneously stomped down on by the ideological hegemony of a system that equates woman’s value to her bodily presentation. Feroze saying "you re a beautiful girl, why not" is exceptionally brutal and efficient ideological conditioning. He takes what can be an economic proposition of some discomfort and reframes it to be a grossly flattering congruency of value, producing false consciousness.

Layla's physical reaction—standing "a little taller"—is a striking illustration of the terrifyingly effective nature of this process. She embraces her own objectification and passes it on to herself as empowerment. It is the very defensive reaction that she can cross the boundary of her assumed autonomy to participate in the preparation for the trip that makes this enactment of reification most clear. It takes the form of systematic commodity fetishism which she is wholly worked upon, a living body suffused with an abundance of her own exotic essence. Feroze's choosing of her clothing like the "modern shalwar kameez," and the trip to the beauty parlour become devoid of acts of care, instead, a form of production and packaging.

The clothes are in themselves important in that they represent an unmarked version of "the exotic," culture sanitised and ready for the market which is to be consumed by those in the elite. It is telling that Layla, is alienated from her body and in this case her body is not her own but rather a product that is being prepared for the market.

The use of language that employs coercion disguised as consent constitutes perhaps the most vivid and sinister aspect of this exploitation. "Nothing you don't want to do" and "Lie low" capture the essence of the ideological underpinnings of this exploitation. In a Marxist sense, this is the most baffling obfuscation of capitalist relations. The system, and especially its agent Feroze, provide the appreciated "illusion of free will" even when there is rampant economic coercion. The options are not about freedom versus oppression. They are about whether one participates in their own commodification or is impoverished. The tragic frame is completed by the mother's "live long" or "Jeete raho" exclamation in the WhatsApp "small screen." She, too, celebrates the children as victims of false consciousness as she cheers them up as they step into a cycle of exploitation that she perceives as a level of social mobility. This entire episode shows how, despite a lack of sophistication, global capitalism still manages to bind patriarchal systems, family negligence, and the exploitation of their own people into a quilt. It is both ironic and tragic that those who get exploited the most are the ones who, on a front, polish the commodity and silence the apathy in the name of survival.

**Typical thoughts, food, even the sound of her brother's voice, the citrus smell of the hotel shower gel which she brought in her small suitcase, made her feel nauseous. It's been a week since she washed her hair. It's been a week since she stood in the dark shower, pouring lukewarm water from a balti onto her skin and body, from a balti onto her skin and body, and She hadn't even gone to see Osama. How could she possibly see him now? After finishing school, Layla entered her mother's bedroom, and closed the door. She lay there, on the foot of the thin bed, switching from**

**crying to dozing off, and thinking about her mother, about anyone, who would finally realize how sick she had been.**

**‘Did something happen between you two?’ Layla recalled her mother asking her brother one evening, after she refused to go to the dining table, and the rest of the family was waiting to eat. ‘You know her,’ Feroze said with a mouthful of roti, ‘always in a mood.’” Feroze, along with the rest of the passengers, had not communicated for the rest of the trip back home. Feroze had not even acknowledged Layla, not since that evening. It’s this 4 year future, he had texted her. Days after returning to Karachi, he only texted her that line. Layla, on her side, received her brother’s text, read it, and subsequently blocked him on her phone.**

Feroze and his mother were thinking and talking so low that they thought Layla would not hear them. It only made it easier for her to shrink, waiting. Sure. As a Marxist would explain,

In this excerpt, the aftermath of exploitation gets clinical, as evidenced by Layla’s despondence and her bodily prim revulsion as a counter of her being ‘othered’ by the exploitation and violation. Her sickness is not a mere mood but a case of profound and deep-seated alienation, self sickness. The self, which suffers alienation is conceptualized in the brutal and visceral state in the body, which the self feels incapable of moving, or tending to the basic bodily function of ‘washing up’ (‘A week since she washed her hair’). The voice and the touch of the family also alienates. The most crucial, however, is the self alienation from one’s active class consciousness as represented by Osama. The sight of her feels shameful, for his presence is a reminder to the fundamental touchstone of system critique, and the paradox of her degradation becomes... Her action is experienced politically as negative, but as a a disengaged , ‘advanced’ self, she suffer alienation from the potential of unity. The family’s internal relations manifest the ways the capitalist logic of exploitation seeps into and corrodes domestic life. Feroze’s blaming trauma on her "always being in a mood" is a significant instance of **\*\*mystification\*\***. He has to render her pain as little as possible in order to eliminate the transaction that he facilitated. "Its 4 yr future" is the capitalist’s voice in a disquieting sms. It reduces a terrible affront on human dignity to the bare logic of a capitalist’s long term profit. There is a suggestion that the temporary misery is but an investment in one’s future, a form of collateral. This is perhaps the highest form of **\*\*fetishism of commodities\*\***, in which human experiences and relations are engulfed in the logic of more-than-now value. Layla’s decision to block his number is a symbolic attempt to untangle the tangled web of economic relations that connect her to him, and deeply, to dismiss his appraisal of her agony as an investment.

Layla's retreat to her mother's bed is a desperate search for a space that is outside this cycle of commodification. A 'thin bed' within a relic of a room is almost pre-capital in its sphere of care. Sanctuary fails. Her mother's question—"Did something happen between you two?"—is out of place. It interprets 'a violation of something that is systemic and economic' as a quarrel between two people. Capitalism does such a fine job of obfuscating its own workings, even from its victims, that it has been aptly termed the "greatest abstraction." The "subdued" Layla "was coiled into herself like a shedding snake" which at this point is a state of suspension that is painfully incomplete. The shed of the snake is a dead skin, outgrown. Layla finds herself uncomfortably perched, as it were, in too shed her skin of innocence and impracticality, but has yet to crystallize into a hardened form of awareness. She is not waiting for care; she is waiting for a critical consciousness . She is waiting for someone to name the system that has shattered her and translate her private, inarticulate illness into a political diagnosis. Her unarticulated silence and illness, from the outset, is an unformed testament to an indictment of the system that exists to exploit people and in the end, leaves behind, their soulless and hollow shells.

## Conclusion

It is apparent that Fatima Bhutto's *The Runways* is not just set in Karachi as a novel, but tackles issues that relate to people's lives in unflinching ways, particularly to the form of the Global South's postcolonial capitalism. The novel's economic base is not absent, but instead, the capitalist modes of production and class relations are the systems of social class that spawn, dictate, and frame the entire existence of the characters—how they think, feel, and what their lives are confined to. The conclusion one reaches when analyzing the lives of Layla, Monty, Sunny, Anita and Feroze case, is that in such a socio-economic system, the illusional self-determination and social mobility seem to escape reality. The “runway” is a metaphor in the novel that suggests a system with the illusion of escape and transformation, but in reality, it is a pathway of controlled socio-economic domination. For the privileged few, it is a runway, and for the majority, it is a combination of stunted take-offs, co-opted rebellion, and psychological devastation. Arguably, this novel is one of the most formidable pieces of literature concerning the relevance of the Marxist critique, as it shows alienation, commodification, and class struggle are not obsolete, but rather have grown to be more intricate and insidious in the twenty first century.

The ultra sublimating and decimating dilemma brought out by this analysis is capturing the many dimensions of alienation. Bhutto shows the simmering disconnect that capitalism creates between people and their basic humanity across all divides, however brutal the pendulum. For the case of the working class through Layla and Anita, this alienation is all too real, is visceral and material. Layla's sickness upon returning from Dubai, her disgust at certain smells, her bathontological inability to wash her hair, and her defaulting into the catatonic state are repulsive and revolting at face value, but are the primary and fundamental self alienation. The body is no longer her's. It is a body edited and abridged, a body dehumanized and transcoded into an object and a thing for the express bargain and devotion of the transcendental soiser and accretion of the so-called apex, and a psyche that paradoxically, and in opposition, disobeys this violence, dejection, and derision. The alienation from self is at its purest and most raw. The case for Anita too, with her fear of revolutionary poetry by Habib Jalib is by and large self alienation with class consciousness. Ideological State Apparatus in her case, the school, so successfully conditioned her, that the path to her own liberation is in itself the most dangerous and revolting crime, therefore alienating her from the means of her self liberation. With the so-called elites, alienation has a differ, but in all manners dehumanizing configuration. Monty's activism that is devoid of meaning and Sunny's posturing rebel is a general sign of alienation from true and real purpose and community.

Their lives are characterized by consumption and behavior and they are well and truly distanced from the productive forces of society.

Their privileged status allows them to remain insulated, devoid of meaningful social interaction and contribution, thus demonstrating the fact that the corrosive nature of capitalism affects all and sundry, even as its toxins are distributed unevenly.

This more profound sense of alienation is produced and perpetually sustained through the reckless commodification of all facets of existence. From a Marxist perspective, in *The Runaways'* universe, nothing is taboo; everything is marked and can be transformed into a commodity. The most disquieting example is the commodification of the bodily and the personal self. Layla is bodily packaged for the Dubai trip. She is dressed and subjected to grooming by her own brother for the sole purpose of maximizing the total value in exchange. Ezra's decision to change his name to Feroze is, in itself, the commodification of a name and a profound alteration for the sake of market viability. In addition, language is part of the commodity system, demonstrated in Anita's quest for a "real English," a language that is "velvet" and that she supposes will elevate her socially. This also applies to the other aspects of social life, in particular relationships that are disaggregated and positioned in transactional terms. Monty's efforts to procure employment for Layla's brother is not a display of authentic solidarity, but actually, a bourgeois philanthropic gesture, cloaked in the illusion of assistance. The relations Sunny and his father have is a conflict over two different types of commodified identities. One is the father's imported GQ inspiration, the other is the son's gritty, subcultural authenticity.

In all instances, the social relationship is supplanted by a commercial exchange, which undermines the opportunity for authentic social bonding, reducing the range of human relationship to a consideration of use-value and exchange-value.

What holds together this system and gives it stability is the hegemony of ideas and the cultivation of a false consciousness. The dominant classes, in Bhutto's Karachi, exercise their dominion not merely through economic means, but far more nefariously, through the capture of evermore thoughts and aspirations. The novel has a multitude of characters who have come to view the system which is parasitic on their being, as transformative. Layla is a 'case study' in false consciousness when she shows pride in being referred to as 'beautiful'. Rather, in a capitalist patriarchal society, this is a 'market' value 'form' ascribed to her. She confuses the appraisal of her market value with her appraisal as a human being and,

as such, a human worth fundamental to the human family. The belief in consumerism as a means of fulfillment, the desire to possess western cultural capital, and the belief in one's individual potential to 'rise' all function to obscure the character's class consciousness. The text of Feroze to Layla; "Its 4 yr future" represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of this ideology and encapsulates the notion of a deeply exploitative experience as 'strategic' and 'investive'. It is a logic which stipulates that the oppressed must abandon self-worth in the name of self sacrifice as a means of attaining subjugation.

It sells the dream of flight while keeping the passengers with the grim economic reality that only certain flights are possible for a very high price. Everything else is tethered to the ground. To dream of soaring high on a plane while the feet stand firmly on the ground is paradoxical. And yet, there is a paradox of its own that runs deeper.

The 'runway' is the perfect symbol for the ideology in question.

One of the most significant aspects of this reading is how it complicates class analysis. The Runways is a significant departure from the proletariat-bourgeois binary of class structure. It depicts class structures as more fragmented and globally interconnected. In Sulaiman Jamil, we see a comprador bourgeoisie whose status comes from colonial and neo-colonial power imitations. We see a rebellious, yet deeply conflicted faction of the elite Sunny and Monty, whose guilt and alienation prevents genuine alliance with the lower class. In Layla and Feroze, we see the precariat whose hyper-vulnerability to exploitation is due to their existence in the informal economy, and we see the residual power of feudal residues in the employer-servant relationships that sadly endure. The complexity of this stratification is a key reason why meaningful resistance is so elusive in the novel. Osama's ideology of communism comes off as a fossil, with no ability to gain a foothold in a society beguiled by the spectacular trinkets of global capital. For now, Layla's defiance is reduced to paralyzing depression and the self-isolating act of blocking her brother's number. It is a deeply personal, not political, act of defiance.

The analysis provided above suggests that within the novel's conception of defiance stifled by hegemony and adaptive capitalism in postcolonial territories, such acts of defiance tend to be insular in nature, easily absorbed, or extinguished by the system. All within the system, 'other' acts of defiance are confined, persistent for traits of postcolonial subjugation, and consequently monitored.

In closing, employing a Marxist lens to assess *The Runways* reinforces the novel's remarkable success as a piece of socio-literary criticism. It shows that Marxist theory is as relevant as ever, providing the sharpest insights with which to examine the inequities, exploitation, and dehumanization of our current moment. In the neoliberal age, Bhutto's Karachi, with its striking inequalities of wealth and poverty,

tangled identities, and globalized economic networks, stands as a microcosm for the condition of the Global South. The novel unflinchingly argues that “development” as it is caricatured today means the rampant and unbridled exploitation of human and material resources to serve the interests of a local and a global elite. The narrative that the study foregrounds makes a bold claim that seeks to amend the literary and Marxist discourses, which take South Asia as a peripheral area of concern. It demonstrates the urgent need to engage with South Asian fiction as radical economic critique.

The Runways provides challenging insights about the trips taken onto the fake runways the reader must confront. Their conditioning, the false consciousness, the willingly accepting commodification, are set under the premise that one can always dream of escaping the reality that endless absurdity the system provides. The novel is not a call to arms in the traditional sense, but a call to consciousness, an excruciating and troubling dream that one has to endure first to be able to endure breaking the elephant bonds.

## References

"The Precarity and Predatory Behaviour of the 'Mediahideen' in Fatima Bhutto's Isis Novel *The Runaways*." *Representations of Precarity in South Asian Literature in English*, edited by Claire Chambers, Springer, 2022, pp. 189–213.

Sarwar, Iqra, Muzzafar Qadir Bhatti, and Mawra Tariq Malik. "Inspecting Core Issues of Male Protagonists in *The Runaways* by Fatima Bhutto: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Study." *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 3, 30 Sept. 2023, pp. 426–434.

Khan, Huzaifa. "Exploring Identity and Resistance in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*." *International Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2024, pp. 150–162. Academia.edu,

Sahar, Zareen, Farwa Saif, and Farkhanda Shahid Khan. "Women as 'Others' in Bhutto's *The Runaways*: A Feminist Analysis." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2024, pp. 460–467.

Ashfaq, Bariza, Bilal Asmat Cheema, and Zohaib Bashir. "Reimagining Identity, Religion, and Nationalism: Exploring Polyphonic Voices in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*." *Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR)*, vol. 3, no. 1, 11 Jan. 2025, pp. 409–418.

Sani, Saqib Aziz, et al. "Representation of Others and Resistance: A Postcolonial Study of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2018)." *Arbor*, vol. 11, no. 2, 30 June 2024,

Aisha, and Dr. Rab Nawaz Khan. "Exploring Radicalization in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*." *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, vol. 10, no. 1, 28 Dec. 2023, pp. 514–529,