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Jeopardised Exhibition of Non-Governmental Organisations; a Critical Discourse Analysis of *Beautiful from This Angle*

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Abstract: *Non-governmental organizations usually get established for the sole purpose of providing aid to the needy and deserving people. The frequent perception of NGOs is usually positive. This research paper aims to discover the other side of the coin in what ways the NGOs work for their benefit without considering the miseries and agonies of those who come to seek their help. Frequently, NGOs are perceived as the most active and beneficial entities in providing adequate help to the people. Such general perceptions have been challenged in Maha Khan Phillips' debut novel under study. Through the textual analysis of the novel Beautiful from This Angle (2010) by Phillips, the paper in hand further explores the circumstances that lead to human exploitation by those in power. Additionally, critical discourse analysis of the primary text includes how "Power tends to corrupt; and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Acton 1887)."*

Keywords: NGOs, VOs, NPOs, CARE Foundation, and discourse analysis.

Introduction

Maha Khan Phillips is a Pakistani novelist and writer of *Beautiful from This Angle* (2010), *The Curse of Mohenjodaro* (2016), and *The Mystery of the Aagnee Ruby* (2009). The settings of these novels are in Pakistan. She is a multiple award-winning financial journalist who was born in Karachi in 1976. Along with being a financial journalist, she had also been producing novels on distinct subject matters. Her academic career marks her as a multi-potential person as she has acquired a Bachelor's degree in Politics and International Relations, and completed a master in International Conflict Analysis from the University of Kent at Canterbury, whereas in 2006, she earned a Master's degree in Creative Writing from City University in London. Her debut novel *Beautiful Form This Angle* (2010) was written on this course because producing a novel for the Creative Writing program of City University London was mandatory. In 1994, Ms Phillips moved to London and is still residing there with her husband and son.

The novel starts with a letter to the editor of "The Sunday News" in which Akbar Mehmood from Texas writes a letter to the Editor and asks not to present the negative, but rare, picture of Karachi which includes night parties, drug taking, and alcoholic indulgence of the residents of Karachi city. This opening letter indicates the upcoming storyline of the novel and further elaborates the story of three best friends i.e., Aynah the party girl, a landowner's daughter Hennah, and Mumtaz, the daughter of a drug dealer. All three friends enjoy strident companionship throughout the novel. This novel not only illustrates domestic violence, immoral night parties, and drug dealing as a business but also majorly focuses on the negative role of NGOs. Aynah and Mumtaz gained steadfast support from their best friend Hennah in preparing a documentary showing the damaging image of Pakistan.

Apart from its publication in 2010, very few literature reviews is found on the novel. A small number of web articles are found and considered as the review of literature for the endeavour in hand. Philips architects the story with the representation of a small group of people whose actions prove parties and indulgence in immoral activities as the aim of their life.

Literature Review

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are non-profit, usually covered under the term Voluntary Organizations (VO), and play a pivotal role in the development of a country and welfare society (Rahman 2005). Countries like Pakistan ordinarily look towards the beneficial contributions of these institutions in the progress of the nation. For the third world or developing countries, it's not practically possible to ensure all the inevitabilities of life for its residents. The crumbling socio-economic situation of Pakistan leads to the prevalence of NGOs in Pakistan. Due to the prevailing sensitivities in the country, the state needs other institutions as a helping

hand in the development and social welfare to share its responsibilities. These organizations tend to provide aid to needy people on humanitarian grounds. “These organizations primarily play the role of providing welfare humanitarian aid and protection from conflicts. In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in the number and size of NGOs and now the working area of these organizations has also increased. These organizations through their growing influence directly intervene in the policy making and the decision making” (Ghani 181).

“With experts gathered from different sectors, non-governmental organizations did wonderful deeds in the development of Pakistan. Unfortunately, the role of a few civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations has spread confusion in Pakistani society that is fatal for workers who put their passion into the development of local communities. Bureaucracy and corrupt practices of state departments also contributed to this atmosphere of distrust” (Ullah 2015).

Along with other necessities, education is also a fundamental component of life. According to the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the state of Pakistan is responsible for providing basic and free education to its citizens. Article 25-A of the Constitution ensures free education as a constitutional right to the citizens of Pakistan. NGOs also play a pivotal part in providing education to the out-of-school population to support education in the country. CARE Foundation is one of the best examples of it. CARE has undertaken to offer an equal opportunity to every child in Pakistan. CARE set up model schools in underdeveloped areas to provide children with equality of opportunity by providing education equal to the best schools in Pakistan (Aziz 2020).

“A large segment of the over 200 million population of Pakistan lives in rural areas facing a myriad of socio-economic challenges. Over 35% of its rural population live in extreme poverty where 54% of rural people are poor in terms of health, education, housing and other indicators of living standard compared with less poverty in urban areas” (Khan 2020). Lack of commitment to the due responsibilities leads to an imbalance in the effectiveness of NGOs as shown in the novel by Maha Khan Phillips. After getting funding from distinct sources, these organizations are supposed to guarantee rapid services to those in need. But the scenario depicted in *Beautiful from This Angle* (2010) communicates situations when people in authority or power misuse their resources and such conditions jeopardize the effectiveness of their community service.

Muhammad Ahsan Rana in his article “Perfect Strangers: The State and NGOs in Pakistan” mentions that “the state’s desire to know more about the workings of NGOs, in particular about their funding, operations, and foreign connections, if any, is understandable (93).” The state possesses the right to collect data, regularly, to ensure that no local or foreign NGO is working against the “interest, culture, and values” of Pakistan (Rana 93).

Maha Khan Phillips' concerned novel sheds light on the negative agendas of NGOs, gender discrimination, and the feudal system in Punjab through the character of Henna (Phillips 47). "Throughout the novel, the author parodies the media and its perception of Pakistan" (Khwaja 2011). "The writer takes present-day Pakistan — a hub of violence and an increasingly misunderstood region — and draws a composite that will jolt, repel, confound and overwhelm" (Jamal 2010). As commented by a critic of Phillips' novel *Beautiful from This Angle* (2010) "The situations depicted here are inspired by real-life but taken to ridiculous extremes. Still, the writer makes this ludicrous sounding premise look and sound utterly convincing" (Jamal 2010).

Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is applied in this research. Textual and discourse analysis are used as research methods. The primary source for this research is Maha Khan Phillips' novel *Beautiful from This Angle* (2010). Secondary sources include books, articles, and other electronic resources on the topic and novel. The methodology used for this piece of writing is partly critical and analytical to trace the reality behind the humanitarian activities of Non-Governmental Organizations.

Analysis

Francis Bacon in his essay "Of Great Place" rightly claims that "Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state, servants of fame, and servants of business;" (1597) Comparable situation has been depicted in the sensational and thought-provoking novel *Beautiful from This Angle* (2010) by Maha Khan Phillips; where most of the characters are shown as the servants of fame and business. This marvellous piece of literature elaborates on the way people of contemporary times use things according to their interests. The actions of three best friends belonging to different strata of society are the major concern of the novel who later agreed to become voiceless victims of domestic violence and honour killing. One of the friends, Mumtaz, the daughter of a drug dealer, coins the idea of producing some documentary on honour killing to raise voices for those women who cannot help themselves. Amynah, another friend, retaliates against Mumtaz's harmful intentions. Mumtaz seems eager to get international recognition for her work for women's rights.

Amynah during her visit to Faridabad gets acquainted with the heart-breaking story of the girl Nilofer, who has been the victim of child marriage, rape within marriage, and domestic violence. Amynah decides to give her friend the finest face and topic for her documentary and evidently in the story, tells her "Your story is sitting right here in Faridabad. Actually, I think I have a fucking brilliant idea" (Phillips 2010). After getting a thrilling story for her documentary to present on CNN, Mumtaz realizes Nilofer's physical appearance is not as attractive as a victim ought to be. That is the reason that she emails Amynah and Henna "Nilofer didn't look sufficiently traumatized when we interviewed her" (Phillips 2010) and that "I wanted to paint

some bruises on her face to make it look *in the moment*" (Phillips 2010). Apart from being Mumtaz's friend, Aynah, the party girl, stays quite stuck to the actual ambition of helping a poor woman as she says to Mumtaz "We're trying to help Nilofer, remember? Forget the bruises" (Phillips 2010). But she repeats her stance that "We've got to film her looking scared and frightened for her life. It must cross on camera that anytime, soon, she might be killed by her husband" (Phillips 2010).

In order to make her documentary very thrilling, the friends arrange Nilofer's abduction with her consent and plan to end her script for the documentary "Two weeks later, we returned to Rahim Yar Khan to talk to Nilofer again. The villagers claim she was kidnapped in the night" (Phillips 2010). While stating so, she will play a shot of a pre-filmed interview of Nilofer who narrates her unbearable but to some extent, scripted situation in such a dramatic manner that people will certainly not help crying. Her words will appear to prove the manipulated story as Nilofer cries in the documentary by uttering "One day, soon, my husband is going to kill me. If Allah is merciful, why then does he let my husband do this to me?" (Phillips 2010) Because Mumtaz wants her documentary to gain extraordinary response, she introduces some fake characters, narratives, and places to make the entire incident real, no matter; whether it has happened or not. Mumtaz opines "The documentary won't be powerful enough if nothing happens to Nilofer" (Phillips 2010). The documentary is named "A Matter of Honour", which presents Nilofer as the one who has been killed in the name of honour. Aynah speaks up over this narration "Technically, Nilofer is still alive, so it's not an honour killing, even if we say it is. Plus, since she has done nothing un-Islamic, there is no way it would be an 'honour' killing anyway" (Phillips 2010).

Phillips, through her marvellous work, really exposes how personal interests work behind the workings of so-called NGOs or various organizations. The character of Aynah seems to be a human being who, apart from being a "Party Queen on the Scene" (Phillips 2010) behaves sensibly and sensitively. She discloses the bare reality of her best friend Mumtaz by saying "All you care about is the bloody documentary and making a reputation for yourself. You care about what happens to Nilofer" (Phillips 2010). The lust for fame blinds Mumtaz as she introduces an anonymous man as Nilofer's husband. She hires Aynah's gardener's brother to play the role of Allah Numani, Nilofer's husband. Moreover, she tries to stop Mumtaz from stating something which will claim an innocent's life. It happens in the novel Allah Numani is arrested by the police before the national and international media. Even, when Chip Johnson; an American senior journalist and anchor person for the channel The Fox News Channel interviews Mumtaz in her documentary questions "If her husband is given the death penalty, what will you do?" (Phillips 2010), she replies "I will support it" (Phillips 2010).

The international acknowledgment changes Mumtaz so shockingly which does not make sense to her friends even. Aynah thinks after her comment on Allah Numani's death sentence in the interview that "Whatever he may have done to Nilofer, the man is innocent of murder" (Phillips

2010). For the sake of a temporary distinct reputation, Mumtaz's action sacrifices the precious life of a human being and the dignity of Sardar Taimur Ali Khan, Henna's father. "Numani, whose case was fast-tracked through the judicial process, has been found guilty of murdering his wife, Nilofer Bibi. He has been sentenced to death by hanging, and is appealing the decision" (Phillips 2010). Writers of every age reflect and represent their respective societies.

The writer realistically elaborates all the circumstances, desires, and consequences of those who use other innocents for their betterment. Though they claim to work for the betterment of society, inwardly such people are seen as lions in sheep's clothing.

Mumtaz transforms into a "women's rights activist" (Khwaja 2011) and thus; when Mumtaz starts relishing the peak of her fame which is based on the blood of innocent Allah Numani, she gets an invitation from PPP leader Benazir Bhutto to join her party and serve for poor women. The text illustrates her position as "Pakistani filmmaker Mumtaz Malik has joined the PPP as a spokesperson and advisor on women's affairs" (Phillips 2010). And that "Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said she was 'delighted' that Malik had decided to join her cause. 'Mumtaz has a high international profile, and the commitment and authority to deal with these issues. I look forward to working with her'" (Phillips 2010). "Mumtaz is putting her precious career above Nilofer's future and is refusing to send her home." She typically reacts to Aynah's stance over his capital sentence's order by saying "It's better to let him die" (Phillips 2010).

The novel appears as a practical example of our society's ongoing scenario. Those who get their desired status become as the protagonist Aynah comments for Mumtaz "Is this the old Mumtaz speaking, or Mumtaz the producer, or Mumtaz the defender of women's rights and the sudden rising star of PPP politics?" (Phillips 2010) But as the wheel of fortune reversed, Mumtaz is killed in the bomb blast on Bhutto's caravan. People, except Henna and Aynah consider her a saviour as her mother Auntie Bunny cries at her funeral "She was above all of you. All she wanted to do was *save* people. She was a selfless person," (Phillips 2010)

Conclusion

The play cards typically used by such non-governmental organizations attract grieved people in need. Another tactic used by the NGOs is under the slogan of women empowerment. To gain their interests, the attractive manifestoes pretend to encourage women's empowerment as shown in the primary text under study. This awe-inspiring work by Phillips explores and exposes certain negative aspects of NGOs and how such organizations pretend to work for the sake of commoners, the deprived, underprivileged, and needy but they find a way to fulfill their lust for more. Phillips artistically exposed the negative agendas of some NGOs behind providing services to the people belonging to pitiable and humble strata. Serving hands like Mumtaz exploit the miserable conditions of the deprived individuals and ultimately earn fame, reputation

along money. Not the aims of all the organizations are alike, but exploitation of an individual's despairs and getting publicity plus money out of it has become exclusively ordinary.

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