

The Strength of Maternal Love: A Close Reading and Feminist Analysis of Zarghuna's Journey in *A Bird with One Wing*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper on the maternal feminism of *A Bird with One Wing* uses the maternal feminism of Catherine Beecher and the Francine Prose Close Reading Model to address the maternal feminism and struggles against such kind of societal and war oppression. The extreme level of care Zarghuna shows to her son, who has Down syndrome, goes against the odds and, eventually, transforms the meaning of being a mother into a form of moral courage. The following paper examines how being a mother challenges Zarghuna culturally since it undermines the patriarchal society using maternal feminism as presented by Beecher. The writer analyzes the ways of rebellion, the muted prayers of Zarghuna, and the muted protests by taking the help of the Francine Prose Close Reading Model. Overall, what comes out in the research is that maternal love is transformational, women are powerful despite the male oppression, and it is a sophisticated text on maternal feminism and the power of resistance within the patrilineal system.

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Introduction

The short story *A Bird with One Wing* by Bina Shah narrates the savage intricacies of the situation where the Pashtun lady of conflict-clad North Waziristan in the person of Zarghuna has to endure the bombardment of the pressures of war, social compulsions and motherly sacrifice through the eyes of the Pashtun lady herself. The war narrative turns into the war of drone warfare, which destroys the family and neighborhood of Zarghuna and she has to face grief, trauma and survival. The journey that Zarghuna takes is no more or less metaphoric than it is literal. It is a story of strength and sacrifice and a dogged determination when faced with her disabled son whom she lovingly refers to as her one of the wing bird. The relation here becomes the focus of the story with the aspect of power and weakness in motherhood.

The tale is also a stinging analysis of the interplay of individual endurance and collective suffering particularly of women in certain patriarchal, war-torn society. Due to its steep symbolic imagery as well as complex narrative style, Shah portrays the maternal identity of Zarghuna as a medium of resistance as well as an empowerment in a world fraught with the systematic subjugation in addition to social marginalisation of a person.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the depth of the character of Zarghuna and the narrative constructed by Shah, which is why such concepts as close reading models created by Francine Prose as well as maternal feminism developed by Catherine Beecher are used in it. Allegory and poetry thus mixed, prose delivers an unprecedented degree of proximity to the text, instead of summarising it, prose makes us analyse it verbally and by its structure with the intent of marvelling at the brilliant details, chaotic memories and revising points of view of Shah. These methods show how Zarghuna is driven to survive and have strength due to the motherhood instinct and the role of traditional culture. Meanwhile, maternal feminism of Beecher can be used as an understanding of how Zarghuna fits into the perimeter of a moral and social influence in her capacity as a care provider and stands as an agent of resistance in a stifling patriarchal system.

In the context of *A Bird with One Wing*, this paper aims at examining the idea of motherhood to reconsider it in the explicit frames of goodness into the frames of agency in the face of an external force of war and internal force of family representation. Based on close reading and maternal feminism, this paper will set out to delve into the depths of the inner elements underlying Shah's story, and the risks of maternal love and women empowerment in the face of resistance against women of favored ascendants.

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Background of the Theory

The 19th-century author Catherine Beecher, for example, said that the nurturing roles of women vested them with moral and social authority (so-called maternal feminism). The roles of woman at home and a mother was not limiting, according to Beecher but liberating and so they had a chance to shape the values of their fellow communities and establish an ethical surrounding. In her widely read *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) Beecher contended that the inborn nature of women, that was caring, nurturing, as well as self-sacrificing was what made women naturally born educators and moralists. This view sees motherhood as a dominant social position able to challenge patriarchal order internally radically transforming the position of women in the public and private life.

Instead, Francine Prose model of close reading suggests that we read texts like they were the jewels in the box, examining a sequence of things: diction, imagery, structure, symbolism. In her book *In Reading Like a Writer* (2006), she urges reading with a special attention to language and what it contains is a mode of accessing more of what a narrative has to communicate. This implies that it is a highly applicable paradigm to explain works of fiction and allows researchers to carry over the perspective of the writer and the thematic dimension of any such story. The present study is therefore of the nature of foreseen by Crafts in her *Narrative* because what I call maternal feminism as an interpretive tool and description tool, in the case of Beecher will be countered by Prose as an analytical tool, and they will guide us in our journey through the maze of *A Bird with One Wing* a text whose themes are doubled namely, maternal narratives as well as critiques of the social and cultural arenas.

Problem Statement

Motherhood linked to war resistance has not been focused on texts as a key tool in terms of literary movements that have focused on resisting the war. Literary studies have missed this point when it comes to maternal protection, none more so, in a patriarchal society where the role of women is depicted as subservient. This lapse in attention restricts our comprehension of maternal identity as an empowerment factor and ignores the aspects through which literary strategies, such as close reading, expose this facet. This means that the feminist discourse cannot accurately reflect the way care can be used as a moral and political resistance. This paper fills that gap by studying *A Bird with One Wing* by Bina Shah in the context of the maternal feminism of Catherine Beecher and the close reading approach of Francine Prose, and demonstrating how the motherly love of Zarghuna acts as a subversive way of protesting against war and patriarchal society.

Research objectives

1. To examine how *A Bird with One Wing* appraises motherhood as a source of empowerment and moral authority within the patriarchal structure, through the lens of maternal feminism in the writings of Catherine Beecher.
2. To explore the maternal strength functions in Zarghuna's survival story, especially in terms of her relationship with her disabled child.
3. To explore how this demonstrates a revolt against social and war oppression in *A Bird with One Wing*.

Research Question

1. How does *A Bird with One Wing* reflect a maternal feminist ideology as a source of empowerment and moral authority within a patriarchal framework, as theorized by Catherine Beecher?
2. How does maternal strength help Zarghuna survive, and what impact does it have on her disabled child?
3. In what ways does this demonstrate a revolt against social and war oppression in *A Bird with One Wing*?

Literature Review

The Bird with One Wing by Bina Shah is a story that has aroused serious academic concern due to its strong portrayal of maternal strength, womanhood, and survival in a war-torn community. Scholars have approached the text as concerned more with the primacy of motherhood, and this has seen a reading of the relationship of Zarghuna with her handicapped son as a source of symbolic strength, sacrifice and resistance. In this literature review, the scholar will look at how these themes of maternal identity, resistance and war have been addressed by scholars based on their approaches of maternal feminism, close reading, and the application of such approaches to analyze the issues involved in the text of Shah.

A maternal feminism, as presented by Catherine Beecher, is a necessary concept of the moral and social resource of female power as care providers. Beecher (1841) explained that in the male-dominated system, the scope of the maternal role was narrowed to the domestic world, but it could also become an

element of some sort of subversive stand-up to this system, developing moral principles and even altering the social order. Through her cards, she can put herself in a place of internal struggle by questioning her own beliefs based on dominant patriarchal ideologies: "for him (the Taliban), it was fine to hit a woman, but she should not hit them." (Ahmadzai, *A Bird with One Wing*, 2016). The role of a mother is to play in the case of Zarghuna is two-pronged looking at how even as she has been struggling to rise up against the oppressive ideologies brought forth by the Taliban how this continues to empower herself as well as other women in the sense that they too can stand up against the oppression of the society that is under the control of men and how this form of oppression is carried over into other women in the sense that they are not supposed to obey the restrictions that society has placed upon them. Examples of other feminist theorists who tried to question the constructions that define the roles of women within the family as being part of larger institutional sets by society include Simone de Beauvoir (1949). The classic play authored by De Beauvoir argues the point of women soaring against the conventional roles but the portrait given about the motherhood of Zarghuna done by Shah shows how women can be rebellious even in the same roles they could suffer the oppression.

Moreover, along with the concept of maternal feminism, we can resort to the model of close reading, which was introduced by Francine Prose (2006) firstly. Prose suggests making close and prolonged analysis of the words, the form, the symbolism of a story. Accordingly, methods of close reading have allowed authors like Clingman (2009) to identify the emotional charge and symbolic power of the text that Shah uses, to explain why the non-linear writing format resonates with the fact of internal struggle and divided memory of the loss and survival in Zarghuna. Similarly, McDowell (2012) has argued that the use of sensory details and alternating views by Shah has been to highlight the traumatic psychological impact of war at the personal level more so among the women in war zones.

Other researchers have discussed the resilience of women displayed by Shah in war situations and placed that story in the context of wider feminist discussion concerning the role of women in war zones. It examines not only the way in which the identities of women are constructed in war, but also the fact that they are frequently coerced into more stereotypical or traditional roles imposed on them, and simultaneously bends them out of shape (Enloe, 2014). The survival of Zarghuna is not an individual experience but rather a collective operation of resistance towards inclination of violent powers trying to bring Zarghuna and her people down to soulless animals. Another form of representation that has been carried out by Shah, with regard to the dynamics of mother-strength, has been expressed not only by how being the accompaniment of a person requires the individual person in that role to act essentially as the mother herself but also being able to transact that as a matter of resistance as well (D'Souza, 2015).

As an illustration, a researcher who examines the stories of trauma and its impact on corporeal reflections of emblems Rentschler (2011) outlines the interconnection between gender and trauma, particularly, toward violence and post-violence. On fueling Rentschler in her claim that maternal survival narratives such as *A Bird with One Wing* allow us distinct information about emotional topographies of women, who live at the backdrop of war-torn spaces, mothering that is typically viewed, as a universalistic, ruling force is transformed in this piece of writing as a disposition disadvantaged by social trauma, and by the weight of having to present such account. Along with the strength it gives Zarghuna, her maternal love serves as an emotion resilience that is violative to social standards pertaining to female emotional work.

The work by Shah also overlaps with postcolonial feminisms, which makes it difficult to agree with Spivak (1988) in her contention where she states that women in postcolonial societies negotiated a wide range of mechanisms of oppression by colonialism and patriarchy. By publicly challenging maternal authority by any means necessary, Zarghuna is a kind of spark of subaltern struggle as Spivak defines it - the grunt of lived meaning as experienced by a woman who defies the rules of patriarchal domination and war as it presents itself in her own personal life. The book, by Shah, replicates the intricacies of the postcolonial identity and accentuates how the personal struggle of an individual to survive is inseparably interrelated to his or her cultural identity and experience of gendered oppression.

The notion of the vulnerability and the power of motherhood has been discussed in the works of the modern feminists. Ahmed (2017) remark how motherhood is the realm of contradiction in which women have to meet the conventional tropes of being the nurturing, at the same time, they are enabled by their own ability to endure and go through the process. The story of Zarghuna makes such an unbreakable divide more complex by revealing her motherhood as defiant both against the patriarchal hold and the external force of violence that is war.

On the whole, the works about *A Bird with One Wing* focus on power of motherhood, opposition, and endurance regarding the reality of war-torn, male-dominated society. The concepts of maternal feminism and close reading provide intensity to the example given by Shah by showing us how Zarghuna and her son are more than just mother and son yet acquired it as a form of rebellion. The literature review has incorporated

several feminist, postcolonial and studies that evaluate the issue of trauma in order to enable the work by Shah to contribute into greater dialog in academia on the abilities of women to bear resilience and develop agency during times of crisis.

Research Methodology

With the help of qualitative research design, the paper examines the book, *A Bird with one wing* by Bina Shah through the lens of the maternal feminism advanced by Catherine Beecher and the close reading style highlighted by Francine Prose. They promote important roles of women by using their influence as mothers (Maternal feminism, 1841 (U.S.)). In this theoretical framework, it is possible to take a look at the role of the mother in Zarghuna, and focus on what features of her motherhood turn into her agency against the background of sociocultural and the war time subordination. This process can be initiated by the close reading model that Francine Prose is willing to provide to this end (Prose, 2006). Zarghuna and her disabled child have a special mention in the case, as their relations also serve as an example of breaking patriarchal chains and devastation that drone warfare spreads throughout the community (Shah, 2021).

The main data used in the work was the story itself with attentively studied details of text, including, of course, character description, thread, and symbolic use. This research requires the use of secondary data such as work on maternal feminism, feminist literary criticism, and close reading that allows placing the study in the context of available academia (Walker, 1995). This paper explains the way in which the story by Shah conceptualizes motherhood as a survival process and at the same time a protest to the oppressive system. This is analyzed through identifying patterns and repetitions through an analytical method organizing these patterns of repetitions and identifying their pattern. Such methodological approach to the feminist theory in a close reading draws attention to the extent of meaning that may possibly exist in a given text along with contributing to the feminist literary criticism in that this study reveals how the maternal strength may possess a subversive potential in an oppressive environment.

Theoretical Framework

This paper dwells on the grounds of maternal feminism of Catherine Beecher, in her own words, this is a concept that motherhood functions as moral force and greater social influence within the masculism structures. Finding an escape in a different identity, the structure presented by Beecher is particularly remarkable in specifying how women bear a distinctive source of power in a domestic environment, in which motherhood potential may and should serve as a source of personal and political oppositionism (Beecher, 1841). Such commentaries turn out highly relevant when turning to Bina Shah's *A Bird with One Wing* that attract attention to the role of Zarghuna as a mother that serves as a spherical of power in a restricting sociocultural context. The motherly role that Zarghuna shares with her handicapped child turns out to be a remedy to the heavyweight push of patriarchy and war within the story, which also coincides with the maternal feminist position brewing that care could be used to challenge the social unbalance.

This work also roots its implication in the conventional close-reading method brought by Francine Prose. In the case of a text, Prose says that a close analysis of linguistic and narrative features of a passage can be helpful in revealing its underlying meanings and their themes (Prose, 2006). The study based on this model reads the literary manifestation of motherhood, in the context of Shah the narrator, in terms of the specifics of symbolism, the text, and the development of the characters, thus referring to the ways in which the symbolism of motherhood is empowered. Maternal feminism and close reading is one way of creating a critical reading of how the story as a text mediates the motherhood as a survival and resistance of Zarghuna, which appeals to the feminist theory, and it also appeals to the literary analysis. This combination structure throws light on the overlap between the personal and political character of motherhood throughout the sociocultural and the war-based suppression.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis chapter, the study will conduct an in-depth analysis of the Bina Shah novel titled *A Bird with One Wing* using the research questions that have been developed during the course of research. Drawing on Catherine Beecher's maternal feminism as articulated in her work "A Treatise on Domestic Economy" (1841) and Francine Prose's close reading model, this analysis hopes to present a complex reading of Zarghuna's anti-women sonification and maternal heroic journey, including her connections to her disabled son and how maternal strength offers a form of resistance to patriarchal and wartime oppression.

Working with material that engages with the politics of maternal feminism, the line "Her son was her bird with one wing; she whispered the endearment as she bathed him, rocked him to sleep, nursed him" can be unpacked as a definitive articulation of the maternal-feminist trope of maternal devotion a mother's love

and unconditional self-sacrifice for her child, particularly if it were a child who might have faced some sort of exclusion in the society. The metaphor of the son as a "bird with one wing", portrays her incompleteness or weakness, but also the transformative feature of the mother as the person who cares for him. This picture emphasizes the fact that the identity of a mother usually functions alongside the welfare of a child, which is a part of maternal feminism, the system of thought based on the significance of maternity and the notion of women as loving and caring people. Bathing, rocking and nursing are phenomena of intimacy and form of relational practice besides being tactile acts; they not only indicate a maternal expression but also represent a revaluation of the feminist substantiation of being a competent and empowered mother. Rather than being portrayed as passive or weak, Zarghuna's devotion shows an active agency in shaping of her son's life as she negotiates social expectations as well as personal struggles. Maternal feminism, in this context, is an appreciation of how powerful, strong and independent the position of a mother can be. The fact that Zarghuna builds strength in her kid shows that motherhood is a form of empowerment that contradicts patriarchal beliefs that the necessity of women in the house is a threat to their future.

"It was for her son that she made herself take step after painful step, pushing herself along the bus's blasted insides. And this was how he felt when he walked. She could do the same for him," embodies the spirit of maternal feminism, which champions a mother's sacrifice and emotional labor as an act of great social and moral significance. Maternal feminism, which has antecedents in the writings of others, like Catherine Beecher, sees motherhood as the culmination of women's world-substantiality, emphasizing women as nurturers and moral people. The mother's choice to suffer physical pain in this passage parallels the empathetic bond she makes to the troubles of her child. She does not just empathize with his suffering but fully feels it, a selfless determination to share and alleviate his pain. This gesture surpasses the singular relationship and corresponds to maternal feminism's view that a mother's sacrifices cultivate resilience and empathy, qualities that inform generations to come. By making her way painfully, like her son does, she showcases the transformative nature of maternal devotion, representing a larger societal critique about the power of a mother's heart and labor.

"Zarghuna knew it even before they told her. After the child was born, her husband had married again, hoping for healthy children that Zarghuna would clearly never bear him." Zarghuna's story—her husband takes another wife, as he believes her to be unlikely to provide him with healthy offspring. This offers a powerful vehicle for contextualizing and reading maternal feminism through the lens of Catherine Beecher's ideals. In Beecher's view, women held a unique moral and spiritual authority within the home, and he argued that they should embrace their roles as nurturers and guardians of the family even in the face of societal constraints. Zarghuna's experience highlights the societal commodification of women's maternal capacity, wherein her worth is reduced in the face of perceived biological inadequacy. It strips away the sacred nature of motherhood, according to Beecher's thought, and exposes the way society fails to see what mothers and motherhood stand for both morally and emotionally. As Beecher slipped an answer into Zarghuna's mind, maternal feminism would affirm her economic and legal independence while claiming it as a mother and a wife that mattered, that her value does not depend on physical fertility but on the fertility of her heart and her ability to guide and imbue her family with moral strength. The husband's choice of a second wife reflects a reductive and dehumanizing approach to motherhood that reduces it to biological reproduction, which directly contradicts Beecher's maternal ideal as critical to both family and social stability. Zarghuna's situation offers a reproach to a patriarchal culture that minimizes the inherent worth of these maternal and spiritual contributions of a woman's life, which Beecher extolled as the bedrock of the society's moral fabric.

"Zarghuna's son had mild Down's Syndrome, a diagnosis that hadn't meant much to her when they told her and hadn't meant much more now that they were telling her. They monitored her closely for weeks after the birth, fearing the news that her child was afflicted and that he had taken a second wife would drive her to suicide. And they had completely misunderstood her." Zarghuna's reaction to her son's diagnosis of Down's Syndrome, therefore, provides such a lens to explore maternal feminism in the frame of Catherine Beecher. Beecher extolled the maternal function as the basis of all moral and emotional fortitude, putting mothers at the center of family stability and societal advancement. Zarghuna's resilience against societal pity and familial concern unveils this moral courage. As many others braced for despair, Zarghuna transcended the stigma of raising a child with a disability, embodying Beecher's ideal of maternal strength infused with love and self-flagellation. Her refusal to fall into despair resists a patriarchal worldview that, when the maternal bond deviates from its normal social form, makes it disappear. From a Beecher's perspective, Zarghuna's unwavering devotion to her child reconstitutes the maternal role as more than a biological function, but rather a moral one, redefining it as a sustained act of endurance and irrevocable love that enables the family and the base of society.

“The child she ended up with was sweet and compliant, sharply intelligent, humorous, and loving. He couldn’t speak clearly and walked with difficulty, but she loved him all the same, perhaps more, in place of her unreliable husband.” Zarghuna’s deep love for her son, despite his difficulties, expresses Beecher’s belief that the highest expression of moral and spiritual virtue was maternal love. For Beecher, motherhood becomes something beyond the physical and moves into the territory of spiritual nurture, a vocation that Zarghuna carries out in her tenacious devotion. Her love for her son, who was sweet, funny, and intelligent, is juxtaposed with her unreliable husband: a portrait of Beecher’s argument that women, as the moral agents of the home, were the true stabilizers of the family unit. Indeed, the absence of her husband’s patriarchal duty is made up for by Zarghuna’s maternal love, serving to bolster Beecher’s assertion of the redemptive and transformative potential of motherhood. By embracing her son’s individuality and cultivating his strengths, Zarghuna embodies Beecher’s dream of maternal feminism as a force for preserving hope, cultivating human potential, and maintaining moral integrity in the face of adversity.

Zarghuna’s experience in *A Bird with One Wing* shows how much society and war make world dull and oppressed but still they are determined to shed the beak of despair on personal suffering. In a culture, that values women based on their ability to reproduce and stigmatizes children with disabilities, Zarghuna is quietly defiant; she accepts her status as a mother of a Down’s Syndrome son. Yet her defiance is manifest in her refusal, not only to stop loving and caring for her child but in the fidelity of her refusal because she had to endure the possibility of losing her husband to another wife for the sake of his quest for ‘healthy children’ and to the judgment of a society keen on writing off women like her. This defiance expresses itself when she whispers to herself, “Which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?” —an expression of appreciation and resilience in her struggles. And her resolution to move herself across the bus’s wrecked interior, despite her pain, parallels her resilience in the face of wider devastation by war, encapsulating a refusal to allow her maternal devotion to be determined by external events. Through Zarghuna, the story illustrates how individual manifestations of love and determination can defy oppressive systems, the stories humanizing the dignity of man even as he faces systemic and situational attacks.

Conclusion

The story of Zarghuna in *A Bird with One Wing* is therefore used to present the concepts of maternal feminism, social-political climate dissent, and oppression in war. The emotional intensity of Zarghuna with regard to her son, who has Down syndrome, through the lens of the maternal feminism of Catherine Beecher pursues the female glory against the attempts of recognition of men to trifle her self-worth as female by comparing the well-being of her child to the well-being of a normal child. Zarghuna instead, envisages her motherhood as foundation of morality and strength, and the power that women can wrench out there, and the power that is often overlooked in this derogatory society. Starting with the husband who left her and going to the children who are too frequently put on the backburner when it comes to locating the happiness and going up the ladder of the profession Zarghuna day by day path is a struggle against the established order and her devotion to her son proves the statement by Beecher that maternal function can be the nucleus of individual and social transformation. It is important to note that the theme of Zarghuna being dedicated to her children helps emphasize the power that women inherited in raising, nurturing and protecting their children which provides women with the strength to fight against such oppression.

The use of the model of close reading as depicted by Francine Prose will give us a better insight of Zarghuna because the multilayers of the narrative sophistication and the drive behind the emotions are maintained. The methodology that promotes the close reading of language, symbolism and thematic development makes it possible to cast some light on the aspects through which the prose can be read much as the inner upheaval, spiritual endurance and silent rebelliousness of the protagonist. The emphasis on how the story is being narrated with the help of descriptive, mostly subtle prose - this approach suggests that the individual acts of defiance staged by Zarghuna have bigger implications in the society than one thinks. As an example, she is praying with mutterings, and it is not only the expression of faith but implicit opposition to suffocating powers that attempt to negate her existence. By doing it, the Francine Prose Model uses language and the construction of narrative as the means of illuminating how hard life has been to Zarghuna yet how its own strength could be evidence to a higher purpose, the art of motherly affection, and how they could be used to overcome the systematic oppression of the women involved in the life of Zarghuna. Beecher in combination with the close reading through the prism of perception offered by the Francine Prose model enrich the perception of the text, but also chiefly places emphasis on the vital necessity of maternal opposition and the liberating influence of female voice in times of Patriarchy.

Disclosure Statement

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