



Narrative Codes and Patriarchal Critique: A Barthesian Analysis of Bina Shah's A Bird With One Wing

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Roland Barthes five codes, Bina Shah, A Bird with One Wing, structural analysis, identity, gender and the conflict between different cultures</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Shazray Nawaz, M.Phil. Research Scholar, Department of English, Faculty of Social Science & Humanities Hamdard University, Karachi</p>	<p>This article uses five narrative codes used in the book by Roland Barthes: Hermeneutic, Pro-airetic, Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural codes, to the short story by Bina Shah, A Bird With One Wing. The study applies qualitative textual analysis and close reading to understand how the narrative structure of the story by Shah creates meaning by application of suspense, action, symbolism, and cultural reference. As the analysis has revealed, the story logically uses all five codes to portray identity, gendered oppression, and cultural conflict themes in the Pakistani society during the time of war. The narrative puts a challenge to the prevailing discourses of feminine identity in relation to patriarchy and culture because it foregrounds the lived experience of Zarghuna. The article brings out the relevance of the structural model introduced by Barthes, in exposing the ideological and cultural conflicts hidden in the modern fiction of South Asia.</p>

Introduction

Among the most important representatives of structuralist and post-structuralist literary theory there was Roland Barthes. In his seminal work *S/Z* (1970), Barthes revolutionized narrative analysis by introducing five codes that operate simultaneously within texts to generate meaning. As Barthes himself articulates, these codes function as "voices" that weave together to create the "braid" of narrative discourse (Barthes, 1974, p. 20). The Hermeneutic, Pro-airetic, Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural codes allow readers to reveal the plurality of meanings located in narrative discourse, transforming the reading experience from passive consumption to active interpretation.

Barthes argues that "the text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (1974, p. 5), emphasizing the multiplicity of interpretations available within any narrative. This theoretical framework proves particularly useful when examining contemporary South Asian fiction, which often layers personal narrative with sociopolitical commentary. A modern Pakistani author and journalist Bina Shah addresses the topics that are tightly related to the issues of Barthes, namely, the identity formation process, authority, and the interaction between a person and society. Her fiction often challenges gender roles, cultural expectations as well as the psychological effects of social and political confrontation.

As noted by literary critic Muneeza Shamsie, contemporary Pakistani women writers like Shah "have expanded the boundaries of what can be said and written about women's lives" (2013, p. 45), particularly in contexts of conflict and patriarchal oppression. *A Bird With One Wing* tells the narration of a woman (Zarghuna) with a Pashtun background due to patriarchy, war, and cultural impediments. The story serves as what Spivak terms a "strategic essentialism" (1988), giving voice to subaltern female experiences within the specific context of North Waziristan's conflict zone.

Using Barthes' five codes of narrative in relation to the short story by Shah, this article will discuss how the narrative structure and the language employed by the author are utilized to reveal the psychological conflicts in Zarghuna and reveal the cultural conflicts at large. The article shows that the text by Shah is a critique of the patriarchal system and disrupts predetermined identities in a Pakistani socio-cultural environment.

Research Objective

To analyze how Bina Shah's *A Bird With One Wing* employs Roland Barthes' Five Narrative Codes—particularly the Cultural Code—to construct meaning and critique patriarchal oppression within the socio-political context of war-torn Pakistani society.

Literature Review

The application of the five narrative codes by Roland Barthes has been proven to be effective in the discovery of layers of meaning in literary work. Culler notes that Barthes' methodology "provides a systematic way of accounting for the production of meaning in narrative texts" (1975, p. 202). There are a great many studies which demonstrate the interplay of the Hermeneutic, Pro-airctic, Semantic, Symbolic and Cultural Codes in creating suspense, psychological richness and socio-cultural commentary.

Saleem and Malik's analysis of *The Piece of String* by Guy de Maupassant deconstructs the ambiguity of narration and that of communal judgment through the framework provided by Barthes (2024). The Hermeneutic Code maintains the doubt about the innocence of the main character, and the Pro-airctic Code provides the order of events that progressively comes to the tragic conclusion of the story. The Symbolic Code emphasizes binary opposition like truth vs. falsehood, appearance vs. reality and builds up the moral tension of the story. As Barthes states, the Symbolic Code operates through "a vast dissolution of antitheses" (1974, p. 215), revealing how narratives construct meaning through oppositional structures. Above all, the Cultural Code is a manifestation of honor and reputation as the collective concepts which show that societal values may judge people regardless of the truths. These works highlight the fact that Barthes is useful in connecting narrative form and social ideology.

In the same manner, codes of Barthes have also been applied to *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe to bring about the psychological complexity and moral obscurity (Güzel, 2023). The Pro-airctic Code drives the plot upwards with the use of growing violence, and the Hermeneutic Code is what maintains the suspicion of the sanity and credibility of the narrator. And

figuratively the text develops contraries between guilt and punishment, between good and evil, which is presented in the interaction of the narrator with the cat. The Cultural Code also places the story in belief systems relating to sin, superstition, and moral punishment and shows how cultural beliefs influence crime and punishment interpretation. Güzel argues that Barthes' framework "allows for a systematic unpacking of psychological terror" (2023, p. 1260) in Gothic literature.

Barthesian analysis has been especially useful in Pakistani literature to examine conflicts between tradition and change. According to research of *The Bull and the She Devil* by Zaibunnisa Hamidullah (Akbar et al., 2021), the Pro-airctic Code is where physical and emotional confrontations occur, whereas the Hermeneutic Code maintains the interest of the reader in the form of unclear motivations and unresolved confrontation. The Symbolic Code provides anticipations of opposition between tradition and modernity, and the Cultural Code places the characters in a very specific Pakistani socio-political context and how culture shapes identity and power dynamics. Akbar et al. note that Hamidullah's text "foregrounds the violence inherent in patriarchal structures" (2021, p. 295), a theme that resonates strongly with Shah's work.

The modern Pakistani English fiction has also been analyzed using the Barthes model. The examination of Bina Shah's *The Optimist* depicts that the Hermeneutic Code masks the motives of characters, especially when it comes to negotiating between contemporary struggles and the values of the past (Malik, Zaib, & Bughio, 2014). The Pro-airctic Code focuses on the personal and social conflict, whereas the Symbolic Code investigates two poles: tradition versus progress. Cultural Code is actually one of the main factors that reveal Pakistani social system, disclosing the contradictions between classes, morality, and identity. Malik et al. observe that Shah's fiction consistently "interrogates the spaces between personal desire and social obligation" (2014, p. 248), making her work particularly suitable for Barthesian analysis. These works support the flexibility of Barthes' system to contemporary South Asian stories.

Even though the number of studies that employ the five narrative codes as developed by Barthes to Western and Pakistani literary works has been increasing, *A Bird With One Wing* is yet to be explored in terms of this structuralist approach. The current literature on the fiction of Shah covers the issues of gender, violence, and identity without a dedicated and code-based analysis of the narrative. This research fills that gap by using the five codes developed by Barthes to the work *A Bird With One Wing* in order to explain how the narrative structure, symbolism, and the cultural context, in general, reconcile to express gendered oppression and socio-political tension in the context of war-torn Pakistani setting.

Theoretical Framework

The structuralist literature theory by Roland Barthes is a strict way of comprehending the process by which narratives form meaning. Barthes (1970) uses S/Z (1970) to identify five narrative codes, namely Hermeneutic, Pro-airctic, Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural that run concurrently in a text to indicate how a reader should interpret the text. These codes, as Barthes explains, "are not models to be reconstituted but perspectives to be cited" (1974, p. 20), suggesting their fluid and interpretive nature.

The Hermeneutic Code brings about mystery and puzzles, which keep the readers in suspense and makes them desire to find the answers. Barthes defines this as the "Voice of Truth" (1974, p. 19), operating through enigmas that are progressively revealed or deliberately obscured

throughout the narrative. This code structures the reader's desire to know, creating what narratologists call "narrative appetite."

The Proairetic Code focuses on action sequences and cause-effect relationships, creating momentum of narration and tension. This code, which Barthes terms the "Voice of Empirics" (1974, p. 19), organizes the narrative's temporal and causal logic, driving the story forward through sequences of action.

The Semantic Code considers connotation, in which repeated motifs and rich descriptions represent hidden meanings and feelings. As Barthes notes, this code operates through "the flicker of meaning" (1974, p. 19), building thematic resonance through accumulated signifiers. It is what gives a text its emotional and psychological depth.

The Symbolic Code addresses the oppositions, metaphors and thematic dualities including life/death, freedom/oppression, or innocence/violence. Barthes sees this as creating "a vast dissolution of antitheses" (1974, p. 215), where binaries both structure and destabilize meaning.

Finally, **The Cultural Code** mirrors social standards, religious values and common knowledge, locating the text in a familiar social and historical context. This code represents what Barthes calls the "Voice of Science or Wisdom" (1974, p. 20), drawing on shared cultural knowledge and ideological frameworks that readers bring to the text.

Using the context of Barthes on *A Bird With One Wing* by Bina Shah, it is possible to read the text through a structured approach illustrating the way the narrative techniques reflect both personal experience and the wider socio-cultural comment. Such a strategy will come in handy to explore the issues of how Shah tackles gendered oppression, patriarchal control, and the effects of political violence in North Waziristan. The combination of all the five codes makes the study perceive the way in which suspense, symbolic meaning, action, and cultural setting interrelate to form a complex story to touch the reader emotionally and intellectually.

Methodology

The approach used to analyze data in this study is qualitative textual analysis. According to the specific requirements of literary analysis, a robust and effective design helps the researcher to read the text systematically and to make reasoned conclusions from close study. According to M. Patel and N. Patel, "Research methodology defines a framework according to which a researcher can systematically solve the problem under consideration" (2019, p. 23).

This article adopts a qualitative research method since such a method is most useful in unraveling the nuances of meaning of a short story entitled *A Bird with One Wing* by Bina Shah. As Creswell notes, qualitative research "involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes" (2014, p. 4). The method of close reading is pertinent for the analysis of a short story like *A Bird with One Wing* because such work is built from detail to detail. Brooks and Warren define close reading as "an intensive analysis of the verbal elements of a text" (1938), which aligns perfectly with Barthes' code-based approach.

The analytical framework integrates three complementary approaches:

1. **Barthesian Structural Analysis:** Systematic identification and analysis of the five narrative codes within Shah's text.
2. **Feminist Literary Theory:** This lens allows examination of gender and power relations in the story. As Showalter argues, feminist criticism seeks to "analyze the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text" (1981, p. 185).

3. **Sociocultural Criticism:** This approach assists in placing the story into its specific cultural and historical perspective. Said's concept of "contrapuntal reading" (1993) proves useful here, as it encourages reading the text against its historical and political context.

The study employs purposive sampling, selecting *A Bird With One Wing* due to its representative nature in contemporary Pakistani women's writing and its rich narrative structure suitable for Barthesian analysis. Data collection involves multiple close readings of the primary text, with systematic coding according to Barthes' five categories. The analysis proceeds through iterative interpretation, moving between textual evidence and theoretical framework to generate insights.

Textual Analysis

Pro-Airetic Code: Momentum of Action and Narrative

The story of Shah is highly organized through an action series that increases the tension and transports the reader to the world of great danger which Zarghuna lives in. Barthes describes the Pro-airetic Code as creating "sequences that are never more than the result of an artifice of reading" (1974, p. 19), yet these sequences powerfully construct narrative reality for the reader.

Most of the choices that people make in their day-to-day lives have existential meaning, as witnessed when Zarghuna inquires about which seat would be better in an event of a crash. Shah writes: "Should she sit at the front or the back? Which was safer in the event of a crash?" (2023, p. 64). This seemingly mundane decision takes on profound significance, illustrating what de Certeau calls "the practice of everyday life" (1984) under conditions of constant threat. Narrative emphasis even makes the ordinary travel a matter of life or death, transforming the quotidian into the extraordinary. The drone strike makes an ordinary reality become a chaotic one. Shah narrates: "And then a loud noise: dum dum. And then a flash, and the entire bus shook and everything turned brilliant white" (2023, p. 65). This moment signals the end of Zarghuna's world as she knew it. The abruptness and unexpectedness of violence is reflected in the use of short, disjointed sentences, which produce a feeling of immersion and displacement. The onomatopoeia "dum dum" creates an auditory experience that implicates the reader in the violence, exemplifying what Scarry terms "the structure of war" (1985), where violence unmakes the world of its victims. Later passages of survival demonstrate the Pro-airetic Code's structuring of action sequences. Shah describes: "She held onto burst seat backs for balance, their plastic and stuffing melted into clumps" (2023, p. 66). These details proceed the forward movement, but they do not overpower the fear and bodily suffering and will of Zarghuna. The repetition of action verbs including "climbing," "pushing," and "wobbling" highlights her difficulty and severity of each action. Each verb constructs what Barthes would identify as a "proairetic sequence"—a chain of actions that builds narrative momentum while revealing character.

The rhythm of the story with its suspenseful moments and sudden disasters is an illustration of the work of the Pro-airetic Code in the creation of suspense and progression of the plot. As Chatman notes, "narrative structure is constituted by story and discourse" (1978, p. 19), and Shah's story demonstrates mastery of both elements through her action sequences.

Hermeneutic Code: Suspense and Mystery

The Hermeneutic Code functions based on revelational lateness, moral ambiguity and mysterious occurrences. Barthes describes this code as formulating "a question, its response delayed, and a variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer" (1974, p. 76). The first thoughts of Zarghuna about the bus seating and the travel safety are the precursors of the drone strike, leaving the reader unsure of the outcome of the narrative.

After the explosion, Shah writes: "She looked around but could make no sense of the twisted metal, the shards of glass, and the charred bodies slumped in their seats" (2023, p. 66). These words add suspense, as readers do not know who is alive and how many people perish. The fragmented description mirrors Zarghuna's fragmented consciousness, creating what Genette calls "narrative focalization" (1980), where the reader's knowledge is limited to what the character perceives.

The Hermeneutic code of Barthes is also at a psychological level. The moral and ethical puzzles arise in the mind of Zarghuna, who is confused, frightened, and uncertain about whether to escape immediately or help others. Shah presents this internal conflict: "Should she try to help the others, or should she save herself?" (2023, p. 66). This moral enigma resonates with what Levinas terms "the face of the Other" (1969), presenting ethical demands even in extremity.

Even the drone's identity, which at first was not clear enough, serves to support ambiguity. Shah writes: "She didn't have time to register whether it was a military helicopter or just the wings of a giant bird" (2023, p. 65). This uncertainty operates on multiple levels—literal (what type of aircraft?) and symbolic (instrument of state violence or natural disaster?). The confusion reflects what Butler calls "precarious life" (2004), where violence can strike arbitrarily and without warning.

Shah creates suspense through delayed revelation, which enables the reader to inhabit the mindset of Zarghuna, increasing the sense of empathy and engagement with the storyline. The Hermeneutic Code thus serves not merely as a narrative technique but as an ethical strategy, positioning readers to experience vulnerability alongside the protagonist.

Semantic Code: Connotation and Emotional Resonance

The semantic analysis reveals the layers of meaning in the use of imagery and of sensory detail made by Shah. Barthes explains that the Semantic Code operates through "the voice of the person" (1974, p. 191), building character and atmosphere through accumulated connotations.

The dress of women is vividly detailed in Shah's narrative: "swathed in burqas hiding wedding finery underneath, their faces made up in carefully hoarded foundation, bright red lipstick, eyes rimmed with kajal" (2023, p. 64). This description gives a sense of tension between social expectation, femininity, and individuality. The phrase "carefully hoarded" suggests scarcity and precious resources devoted to brief moments of celebration, revealing the economic constraints under which these women live. The burqa simultaneously conceals and protects feminine expression, operating as what Ahmed calls "the materiality of signs" (2000) in Muslim women's lives.

The drone emerges as an image of detached and impersonal violence. Shah writes: "A drone, she thought to herself suddenly. The word, sharp and pointed, quivering with significance" (2023, p. 65). The metaphoric description—"sharp and pointed, quivering"—transforms the word itself into a weapon, illustrating how language carries violence. This exemplifies what Cavarero terms "horrorism" (2009), violence that is incomprehensible and dehumanizing in its technological remoteness.

Shah's sensory imagery creates visceral emotional resonance. She describes: "The sickening odour of smoldering steel, chemicals, gasoline, and electrical wiring assaulted her senses. And other, worse smells: charred flesh, burnt hair" (2023, p. 66). These olfactory details create the effect of emotional resonance so that the reader can physically feel the impact of political violence. The layering of smells—from mechanical to human—traces the transformation of the scene from accident to atrocity. As Sontag argues in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "To designate

a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell" (2003, p. 115), yet Shah's semantic richness demands that readers confront this hell directly.

The semantic code lays stress on what is seen and experienced but also on the ideological and emotional load which these events have on Zarghuna and her community. Through accumulated sensory details, Shah constructs what Williams calls "structures of feeling" (1977), the lived experience of a particular historical moment.

Symbolic Code: Binary Opposition and Metaphor

Thematic exploration of the story by Shah is organized in terms of binary oppositions. Barthes argues that the Symbolic Code "is the field of the symbol, rhetoric, and antithesis" (1974, p. 20), structuring meaning through contrasts and paradoxes.

The title of the short story, *A Bird With One Wing*, itself operates as a central metaphor for limited freedom and resistance to oppression. Shah reveals this symbolism through Zarghuna's relationship with her son: "Her son was her bird with one wing; she whispered the endearment as she bathed him, rocked him to sleep, nursed him" (2023, p. 67). The metaphor functions on multiple levels: the son is incomplete without his father (killed in tribal violence), the mother-child bond is one of mutual dependence, and both exist in a state of compromised agency. As Gilbert and Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, such imagery often represents "the woman writer's divided consciousness" (1979, p. 85), caught between patriarchal constraint and the desire for self-expression.

Weddings, which are usually considered to symbolize life and continuity, are opposed to the drone strike, which symbolizes death and disruption. Shah juxtaposes these elements: "They were going to a wedding in Wana, a joyful occasion despite the circumstances" (2023, p. 64), only to have that joy obliterated moments later. This contrast embodies what Agamben calls "bare life" (1998), where biological existence is always already threatened by sovereign power.

The text is filled with the contrasts of opposites: life/death, safety/danger, domesticity/violence, and personal desire/communal expectation. Shah writes: "A woman's place was in the home, they told me. But I didn't fit there" (2023, p. 64). This binary—domestic space versus public space—structures Zarghuna's entire existence, yet she occupies neither comfortably. As McClintock argues, such spatial divisions are "gendered from the outset" (1995, p. 31), serving to police women's bodies and movements. The opposition between nature and technology permeates the narrative. The drone is initially confused with "the wings of a giant bird" (2023, p. 65), collapsing the natural and mechanical. This confusion reveals how modern warfare has perverted even natural metaphors, turning birds—symbols of freedom—into harbingers of death. Haraway's concept of the "cyborg" (1991) becomes darkly relevant here, as technology extends state power into intimate spaces of civilian life. Such contradictions add complexity to the themes and provide an idea of how females navigate a patriarchal and conflict-ridden world. The Symbolic Code demonstrates that, as Barthes suggests, "the symbolic field is infinite" (1974, p. 20), generating endless interpretive possibilities through its structured oppositions.

Cultural Code: Patriarchal Critique and Social Norms

The Cultural Code predicts the type of expectations and ideological forms in society, describing the case of North Waziristan as presented by Shah. Barthes defines this code as "references to a science or a body of knowledge" (1974, p. 20), the shared cultural encyclopedia that readers draw upon to make sense of narrative. The male patriarchal rules dominate the actions of females, their marriage, and fertility, displayed by the limited options offered to Zarghuna. Shah articulates Zarghuna's alienation: "A woman's place was in the home, they told me. But I didn't fit there" (2023, p. 64). The passive construction "they told me" reveals the collective

enforcement of gender norms, what Kandiyoti calls the "patriarchal bargain" (1988), where women negotiate constrained agency within oppressive structures. Zarghuna's inability to "fit" marks her as transgressive, existing outside acceptable female subjectivity.

Male lineage and communal honour are strengthened through social rituals, including weddings and feuds. Shah describes: "Each house had its own graveyard...The more stones, the more honour for the family" (2023, p. 67). This Cultural Code element reveals how death itself becomes commodified within patriarchal honor systems, where male bodies accumulated in graveyards signify family prestige. As Wikan notes in her study of honor codes, "Honor is loss, and the quest for honor a denial of death" (1984, p. 636). The materialization of honor through gravestones demonstrates what Bourdieu terms "symbolic capital" (1986), the conversion of violence into social status.

Shah disrupts these cultural conventions with the drone strike, condemning both patriarchal institutions and the vagaries of war. The narrative juxtaposes the rigid social order with sudden, arbitrary violence, demonstrating the instability of custom and the defenselessness of civilians. As Shah writes: "The traditions that had governed their lives for centuries meant nothing in the face of a drone missile" (2023, p. 67). This recognition echoes Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" (2003), where sovereign power operates through the right to kill, rendering traditional social structures obsolete.

The story highlights the intersections of gender, social hierarchy, and geopolitics through the Cultural Code. Shah presents Pashtun culture not as monolithic but as contested terrain, where women like Zarghuna struggle against both internal patriarchal oppression and external military violence. This double bind resonates with Mohanty's critique of "Third World women" as "frozen in time, space, and history" (1988, p. 63) within Western discourse, yet Shah complicates this by showing Zarghuna's active consciousness and resistance.

The wedding journey itself operates within multiple cultural frameworks. Shah notes: "The women traveling together provided some protection, some anonymity" (2023, p. 64). This detail reveals how women create survival strategies within patriarchal constraints, forming what Kandiyoti calls "subversive complicity" (1988)—appearing to conform while subtly undermining restrictions. Yet the drone strike demonstrates the ultimate failure of such strategies when confronted with state violence.

Through the Cultural Code, Shah's narrative becomes what Bhabha terms "a moment of transit" (1994, p. 4), where cultural meanings are contested and transformed. The story refuses to romanticize traditional culture while simultaneously condemning the violence of modernity, creating a complex political critique that resists easy categorization.

Discussion

The integration of Barthes' five codes in Shah's *A Bird With One Wing* reveals a narrative structure of remarkable sophistication. The codes do not operate in isolation but interweave to create what Barthes calls "the writerly text" (1974, p. 4), one that demands active reader participation in meaning-making.

The Pro-airctic and Hermeneutic Codes work in tension, with action sequences simultaneously propelling the narrative forward and creating gaps that generate suspense. This interplay keeps readers engaged while forcing them to confront uncomfortable questions about violence, survival, and moral responsibility. As Iser argues, such "gaps" in narrative are where "the reader's imagination goes to work" (1978, p. 168).

The Semantic and Symbolic Codes function in complementary ways, with sensory details building emotional resonance while binary oppositions structure thematic meaning. Shah's rich

imagery does not merely ornament the narrative but carries ideological weight, revealing how bodies, spaces, and objects are sites of cultural inscription. This aligns with Foucault's argument that "power is everywhere" (1978, p. 93), inscribed in the minutiae of daily life.

The Cultural Code operates as both foundation and target of critique. Shah draws on readers' knowledge of Pashtun culture, Pakistani society, and global geopolitics while simultaneously questioning and destabilizing these frameworks. This double movement—invoking and critiquing cultural knowledge—creates what Said calls "secular criticism" (1983), resisting totalizing narratives while remaining engaged with specific historical contexts.

Shah's narrative also demonstrates the limitations of purely structuralist analysis. While Barthes' codes illuminate how meaning is constructed, they cannot fully account for the affective power of Shah's prose or the ethical demands it makes upon readers. As Nussbaum argues, literature "makes us acknowledge the equal humanity of members of distant cultures" (1997, p. 85), a function that exceeds structural categorization.

The story's representation of drone warfare connects to broader debates about technology, sovereignty, and violence in the twenty-first century. Gregory's work on "the everywhere war" (2011) helps contextualize how drone strikes collapse distinctions between battlefield and civilian space, transforming all of North Waziristan into a potential target zone. Shah's narrative bears witness to this transformation, documenting its human cost.

From a feminist perspective, the story illustrates what Spivak calls "gendered subaltern" (1988) experience, where women face multiple forms of oppression—colonial, patriarchal, and economic. Yet Zarghuna is not merely victim but also agent, making choices within constrained circumstances. Her survival and her refusal to "fit" within prescribed roles demonstrate what hooks terms "oppositional gaze" (1992), a way of seeing that resists dominant frames.

Conclusion

Bina Shah's *A Bird With One Wing* uses five narrative codes of Roland Barthes to craft a narrative with multiple layers recreating the combination of personal experience and socio-cultural critique. The Proairetic Code creates the narrative drive through sequences of action and survival, immersing readers in the uncertain world of Zarghuna. The Hermeneutic Code maintains suspense and moral ambiguity, leaving readers perplexed by questions about life, death, and moral responsibility. The Semantic and Symbolic Codes express connotative meaning and binary oppositions—including freedom versus constraint, life versus death, and domesticity versus violence—to shed light on the psychological conflicts and strength of Zarghuna.

Notably, the Cultural Code shines a light on and criticizes the patriarchal norms and gender prejudices in Pakistani society by showing how social rituals, family values, and political violence converge to define the identity of women. As Barthes argues, "the cultural code is the repository of what has already been written" (1974, p. 20), yet Shah uses this repository strategically, simultaneously invoking and questioning cultural authority.

Making Zarghuna's experience foregrounded and making it part of the larger cultural and geopolitical realities of North Waziristan, the narrative by Shah not only provides demonstration of how the five codes by Barthes work in the text but also shows how the Cultural Code is inflected with gender bias and how fragile social order becomes under conditions of sustained violence. The story exemplifies what Jameson calls "the political unconscious" (1981) of literature, where narrative form itself carries ideological meaning.

Altogether, the analysis proves that the structure created by Barthes can be used as a useful instrument to comprehend the relationship between narrative technique, symbolic meaning, and cultural critique. Shah's story manages to show both the individual resilience of the protagonist

and confront the dominant discourses of patriarchal and cultural narratives. In doing so, it contributes to what Suleri terms "the rhetoric of English India" (1992), the postcolonial literary tradition that interrogates colonial legacies while forging new narrative possibilities.

Future research might explore comparative analysis of Shah's work with other South Asian women writers addressing themes of conflict and displacement, such as Kamila Shamsie or Uzma Aslam Khan. Additionally, examination of reader response to Shah's narrative using empirical methods could illuminate how different audiences negotiate the codes she deploys. Finally, investigation of how Shah's journalistic work informs her fiction could provide insights into the relationship between documentary and imaginative modes of representation.

A Bird With One Wing ultimately demonstrates that literature can serve as what Nussbaum calls "poetic justice" (1995), not by offering solutions but by demanding that readers bear witness to suffering and complexity. Through sophisticated narrative construction analyzed via Barthes' five codes, Shah creates a text that is simultaneously aesthetically compelling and ethically urgent, exemplifying the power of contemporary South Asian fiction to illuminate urgent global issues.

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