

## The Currency of Journalism within a Literary Discourse: an Analysis of Moni Mohsin's *The Diary of Social Butterfly*

INAM UL HAQ

Institute of Social and Cultural Studies  
University of the Punjab, Lahore  
Pakistan

### Abstract:

*This research paper draws on Moni Mohsin's The Diary of a Social Butterfly (2008) to prove that the use of journalism in South Asian literature is of high assistance to the readers. This is because literature helps journalism and journalistic study to keep alive for the readers, and that literature lives through time whereas journalism inspires readers only when fresh.*

**Key words:** Moni Mohsin, *The Diary of a Social Butterfly*, Journalism, South Asian Literature

### Introduction and Literature Review:

Moni Mohsin started her literary career by her novel *The End of Innocence* in the year 2006. She used to write fortnightly columns titled "The Diary of a Social Butterfly" in the daily Pakistani English newspaper *The Friday Times*. On the immense success of these columns among Pakistani and Indian readers, Mohsin got the impression that she should be compiling them and making them into a book. So *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* became a book in October 2008.

Through this diary, Moni Mohsin has made news that has made a difference in the lives of millions of people,

important. News is essential to the readers and listeners only for a single day. The next day the news, though very significant, loses its taste and is thus forgotten immediately. News is important because it tells us what is happening around us in the wider public examples.

I would like to give a reference of Richard Wilbur's poem here which is "After the Last Bulletins".

Wilbur points to a very important fact of life of what is significant today may become insignificant tomorrow. He takes the newspapers for example and says that the newspapers which are fresh today and most welcome for and accepted for reading, become stale and useless the other day... News are again printed and held important like the other day and this cycle keeps repeating all the times... This printing of newspapers is cycled every day and it is taken to be routine matter rather than a serious one. (Web)

News that has been consumed is worthless. It is left to be torn apart by the winds and battered against the surfaces

And the wind rises. The wind rises and bowls  
The day's litter of news in the alleys. Trash  
Tears itself on the railings,  
Soars and falls with a soft crash, (315, 5-8)

This book has taken International, National, State and Local issues affecting the country and has presented to the readers with a calendar of these happenings for them to remember. For instance the author has mentioned that how Pakistanis had been termed as terrorists and Islam as a terrorist religion. Though Butterfly, the protagonist of the book, did not care even a bit for this matter because she had other important things to worry for but as Intizar Hussain writes in his short story "Shahadat" that in such times it becomes very hard for Muslims to even disclose their actual identity.

He remembered one time when he was travelling on a bus, a baniya kept conversing with him for a long time, and asking about his school and so on. 'Lala what is your caste?' He was

first reluctant, but then answered, 'Sir I am a Musalman'. And if someone asked him the very question now, would he be able to say that...? (129)

For Pakistani people this book is a key to their past between the years 2001 to 2008, which they have experienced and the effects of which they still come across in their lives. The events mentioned in the book are very important in making the history of this country.

We have seen great works by authors of solid grounds in the history of English literature who have used the same technique as Mohsin has, in their works. And their books have obtained immense fame and acknowledgement by the readers worldwide. One of them is by Charles Dickens titled, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

The 45-chapter novel was published in 32 weekly installments in Dickens' new literary periodical titled *All the Year Round*. In May 1859 through December 1859, Dickens also republished the chapters as eight monthly sections in green covers. Dickens' previous novels had appeared only as monthly installments. The first weekly installment of *A Tale of Two Cities* ran in the first issue of *All the Year Round* on 30 April 1859. The last ran thirty-one weeks later, on 25 November. (Web)

In this novel Dickens has written about the political and social conditions of the French and English people, before and during the French revolution.

Neel Mukherjee, a writer and critic, wrote in *Time Magazine Asia* on the January 26, 2009 article, "Articles & Reviews – *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* by Moni Mohsin", which was published on his blog, that, "At first glance, it would seem paradoxical that the seven years which saw a momentous realignment of the geopolitical order, with Pakistan as one of the most vital components in the unstable equilibrium, would lend itself to uproarious comedy." (n.pag) And as it has been encountered by the study of this book that these seven years

included

...the period that saw, among other things, 9/11, a very real threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the steady religious militisation of Pakistan, a president caught between the demands of the USA and a refractory Islamic fundamentalism at home, the worst earthquake in the country's history in October 2005, and imposition of emergency rule. (n.pag)

*The Murder of Aziz Khan* by Zulfikar Ghose is also a book strictly dealing with the political perspective of Pakistan after it got its independence. In the synopsis to the book it is written that:

This book presents a picture of Pakistani society in its earliest years through Aziz Khan, a representative of ancient and traditional values, and the Shah brothers, who exploit the resources and people of the new country for their personal gain. The intricate story gradually unfolds to reveal the emotions of its characters and describes the suffering of Aziz Khan with poignancy. (n.pag)

The book, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* by the former Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, deals not only with his life story, but also includes his views on war against India, Nawaz Sharif and the plane hijacking incident. Also it includes his confession that he had no choice but to side with America after the September 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers.

Thus these books of literature have given not only a great insight to the readers about the political changes occurring nationally and internationally around them. But, also they have made such events live in the minds of the readers for a larger period of time than they were used to before.

### **Research Methodology:**

This is a qualitative research follows the hermeneutics tradition and thematic analysis is used as a tool to decipher the

currency of journalism in South Asian Literature.

### **Data Analysis:**

*The Diary of Social Butterfly* (2008) is the second book by Moni Mohsin. Before this book she has written *End of Innocence* (2006) and she has recently written another book titled *Tender Hooks* (2011).

Najam Sethi, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *The Friday Times*, for whom Moni Mohsin works, urged her to compile her columns of “The Diary of Social Butterfly” into a book. These columns were then compiled into a book in the year 2008.

Mohsin writes in the “Afterword” of the book that “True to my original belief to address real-life issues, I have attempted to confront the concerns that govern the daily life of a character such as the Butterfly.” Also the columns “held a mirror up to the” readers, “but were sufficiently good-humoured to cause no- or very little- offense” (225).

The column and then the book have educated and informed the readers about the happenings around them which they easily forget and this has been done by the author not in a serious but a very funny tone.

In the book, when “Musharraf” and “Vajpayee” are urging to “agree on N-free zone”, Butterfly is terrified by the fact that “Jonkers” has fallen “for Miss Shumaila” (15). When “Taliban threaten to destroy all statues”, she comes to know that “Floozie” has run off “with best friend’s husband”. (1) When the world is making headlines, these are the troubles Butterfly is facing in her life and this is the book all about.

At every month’s entry in the diary, the first heading or the highlight of that month is of a major world event affecting the *real* people, then the incident that has affected the protagonist Butterfly’s life. Defining the character of Butterfly, Mohsin writes in the “Afterword” of the book that “I needed a

fictitious character who would not only be my mouthpiece, but also personify all the neuroses and insecurities to which people in her position are prey” (224).

Butterfly thinks that all the people around her are jealous of her for one reason or the other and that they are always planning schemes against her. As she tells the readers that:

Well, to start with, my KG teacher who used to make me stand in a corner for calling her ‘kameeni’. And the people who came to check me out for rishtas when I was at college but never proposed. Kuttay jaisay. And Mullo, for not inviting me to her last dinner when she called our whole gang except me. And Flopsy for copying my dining room furniture, and Teensy for stealing my Filipina, and Janoo for calling me a ‘talent-free zone’. And of course, Janoo’s whole family—The Old Bag, the Gruesome Twosome, and their cheapster husbands and cheapster children for being themselves. (10)

Moni Mohsin has introduced a number of words in her vocabulary for the book which can be termed as ‘desi’, because they are an amalgamation of the languages: Urdu, Punjabi and English. These words and phrases include “three-tiara cake”, “paindu pastry”, “do number ka maal”, and “what cheeks!” which is a personal favorite of the author.

According to Moni Mohsin “Every story dictates its own style”. This is evident in the book as every political occurring is mixed with the life of Butterfly by the author and presented to the readers so that they can actually relate to it.

The fear in the people living outside Pakistan, aroused by the constant linking of terrorism with the country, is humorously explained in the diary. Butterfly’s cousin Oscar comes from America to stay at her place for some time. But due to his fear of the current state of the country, he stays at home all the time. Butterfly tells the reader then that, “Shweeto, Oscar’s so worried worried about the bombs-shombs innocent jaisa. Just like a foreigner.” But “Janoo says he’s just an ABCD

loser. ABCD? Haw baba, don't you know? American Born Confused Desi." (51)

Moni Mohsin in her humour shows the readers, how the people of Pakistan who are not directly affected by the serious issues of the world, and who do not care about anything but themselves, are now suffering. In the wake of 9/11, when America was "planning war in Iraq", Butterfly started hoping that Pakistan makes peace with India, so that it could lead to the solving of the Kashmir issue (58). This would have helped Butterfly to obtain cheaper shawls because "Ab tau prices of any decent shawl have gone so high, so high keh bus." (59) And so in "October 2002" when Pakistan and India tested their missiles, there was nothing for Butterfly to do, so she went for hibernation till November. (61)

Terrorist activities started all around the world and the entire blame came on the Muslim extremist groups. In "January 2004", 12 people are reported "injured in Karachi blasts" (100). In "March 2004" the headlines that shake the world are "190 killed in Madrid train explosions" (105). In "May 2004", "19 soldiers among 28" are killed in "Kashmir blast" (110). The strategy that the US thus applies to stop terrorism and to actually avenge the 9/11 attack is by sending its forces to Iraq and as a result "22 Iraqis die in air strike" (112). This is actually the start of the series of attacks that are then done on the Iraqi people, damaging both their lives and their properties. In the wake of the 9/11 incident, America and Britain had closed their doors of their countries for Pakistanis and it became difficult for them to obtain visas. Visas were either stopped or made extremely hard to obtain for Pakistanis especially because they were being termed as terrorists. Butterfly in the meanwhile got very bored of Lahore's heated weather and started blaming Janoo for it: "It's all his fault anyways that I'm stuck here for the whole of the summers". Actually the major factor affecting Butterfly her is that "Anybody who had a little bit of get up and go has got up and

gone to London.” (85)

“August 2007’s” entry in the diary is titled with General Pervez Musharraf’s secret meetings with Benazir Bhutto in Dubai. This is a time when the nation was thinking doubtfully of the then President, Pervaiz Musharraf’s loyalties with the country and his own interests in gaining more power over the country. But for Butterfly this act of the President and the fact that he cannot “share power” with any other favorite political leader of the people, does not have any substance. She says:

Okay, I admit, there were a couple of little things, like that Red Mosque phadda where he led the chicks with sticks hold all of Isloo to handsome for weeks and weeks before blasting them off the face of the earth, and then there was the punga he took with the Just Chieftess, but really, these are such choti-choti things like house prices vaghera, that I tau feel that we should forgive and forget. (206-207)

In the same month, Butterfly comes to know that the “goras” have admitted that the death of the then Pakistani cricket team coach, Bob Woolmer was not a murder but it was a natural death. On this she records her anger in the diary by writing Dekho zara. After all those suspicious looks at our poor, namaazi, God-fearing players, and all that talk of match-fixing and poisoning and doing DMA testing of them and muttering-shuttering about bribery and corruption, they have big beards and can’t speak too much of English and throw the occasional match doesn’t mean our boys are murderers. I tell you, goras are so racist. If New Zealand’s or Australia’s coach had died, no one would have said a thing. Just because it’s big, bearded, brown us... Honestly! (207-208)

The political picture of Pakistan is so unproductive and non-trustable that Butterfly wonders, “God knows who will come now, Benazir or Nawaz?” And this is true because it has been the tradition of politics in the country that whoever comes into power plays his or her own monopoly regardless of the interests of the people.



Then when in “December 2007”, “Benazir Bhutto launches election campaign” and “Nawaz returns from Saudi Arabia”, like the entire nation, Butterfly is also confused and cannot understand why all these changes are taking place (217). The most important question here is that, who will benefit from it.

Despite the fact that Butterfly as her name suggests, is a person who is free from all the worries that affect others, we find that when Benazir Bhutto is assassinated in “January 2008”, she becomes quite expressive. At this Butterfly sadly exclaims that “I don’t feel like going to any parties, any weddings, any GT’s even. Why? Because Benazir is dead. I don’t feel like going anywhere or doing anything. I don’t know if I will ever feel like... why am I sad? So, so, so sad? I feel like someone in my family’s died. I miss her” (220).

The Pilgrims commenced the Journey towards the silhouette  
of Sun, The blazing blue whose hinges were Glittering Gold

And the water shadowed gleaming under its feathery-rays, A  
Magic Carpet, a lost wooden Pony. Without A Unicorn.

A journey it was from Cradle to Grave, They knew none.  
legions dying of strength as storming stream drew them  
together.

Floating on the blue water light void their eyes bluer than the  
welling whirlwind; their heart dropping with the water  
splashes over their faces.

They prayed. Their sins and sufferings long past away. Bright  
Yellow but not Gold.

Pregnant Clouds hinged with Silver thunder. Lightening, A  
shudder. Deception they Lived through, Yellow but no Gold.

Deceived by natural law, hopeless and disillusioned they

would be disfigured soon. Instinctual pride draped off in white foam. Floating, sinking dying. They envisioned.

Whirlwind wheeled them into the whirl pool of Awe and dismay

Their bodies gyrated under the huge machine controlled by Him. Innocents.

The planks still floating; their bodies devoured by the black sea. The void.

The Legions met their fate but knew none.

It is not our choice but the Choice of One.

Planks 'Dancing like Daffodils' as if mimicking the poor mortals

Who are nothing But Shadows and Dust....

(“Shadows and Dust” by

Nida Huma, inspired by the article author’s dream)

## **Conclusion:**

Through this research paper it has been proved that whenever journalism has been included and discussed in literature, it has gained a position of settlement not only in the books that are read more often, but also in the minds of the readers. Moni Mohsin has shown to the readers through her book *The Diary of a Social Butterfly*, that news and its consequent effects cannot be avoided. And it is a fact that news never loses its effect. It is always as important as it was when it had just occurred in the form of a happening.

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