

Representation of Supernatural Creature in Shazaf Fatima Haider's A Firefly in the Dark

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to deal with Jinn as a supernatural element in Shazaf Fatima Haider's, A Firefly in the Dark to overcome individuals' stereotypes about Jinns. Haider (2018) has used magical realism in her book that is expressed through folklores told to the protagonist, Sharmeen, by Nani which eventually enables her to fight against the adversities of her life. The perspective of Zamora (2004) about Magical Realism has been used to deal with supernatural element that explains that supernatural creatures' existence is something normal and they should be accepted as good or bad according to their characteristics. The nature of the study is qualitative and carries out textual analysis of the text in order to express people's perception regarding Jinns. The findings of the study are grounded in the notion that different types of Jinns really exist in the world. So one should not always think of Jinns as bad and harmful to humans, because Jinns have powers but human beings are blessed with power more than Jinns.

Key Words: Magical Realism, Supernatural Creatures, Jinns, Acceptance.

1. Introduction

This study intends to explore supernaturalism as one of the elements of Magical Realism that impacts people's perception about the existence of Jinns in their daily life. Magical Realism is the literary genre in which the authors depict elements of magic in a real life world for different purposes. Magical things are not only to be expressed by the narrator

in a realistic setting, rather magical realities should be believed as a part of substantial reality, whether they are visible or invisible. They do exist somehow in the world, but their existence is always questioned (Bowers, 2004, p.29). Supernatural creatures are always questioned in real life; few believe on them because they may have

experienced it whereas others deny it because they have never gone through these experiences. There are different societal beliefs regarding Supernatural creatures which really impact people in their daily routine and they sometime feel helpless because of the fear of these supernatural creatures; though they had not experienced it.

This study aims to explore supernatural elements in detail to give an insight to people about their perception of Jinn from the perspective of Zamora (2004) who says that “the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence”.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To explore the supernatural element of magical realism in Shazaf Fatima Haider’s novel, *A Firefly in the Dark*.
2. To provide an in-depth analysis of supernatural beings to clarify peoples’ perception about *Jinn*.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does Shazaf Fatima Haider inculcate supernatural elements of Magical Realism in *A Firefly in the Dark*?
2. How does Shazaf Fatima Haider portrays the existence of supernatural creature (Jinns) in daily life?

1.3 Problem Statement

The current research deals with the identification of supernatural elements in the in Shazaf Fatima Haider’s, *A Firefly in the Dark*. The author portrays supernatural creature

(*Jinn*) as the character that is not only linked with negativities but also with positive acts. The researcher exposes the supernatural elements in characters by doing textual analysis.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Magical Realism is the literary theory that is focused by researcher for this study. Magic Realism was first seen in use by Franz Roh (a German Historian) in 1927, but he never defined this term (Baldick, 1990, p.164). According to Wendy B. Faris (2004), Magical Realism aims at fusion of fantasy and real world to create something extraordinary inside an ordinary existence.

Magical realism is considered as a descriptive genre of fiction that includes both magical elements and reality which coexist with equal philosophical status to present fantasy and reality. Zamora quotes that “the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence_ admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism” (2004). The researcher in this study has focused on Zamora’s (2004) perspective of Magical Realism that states that supernatural creatures are acceptable in daily life.

2. Literature Review/ Research Gap

Magical Realism and its elements are not explored yet to deal with representation of *Jinns* in the text *A Firefly in the Dark*. Moreover, Kanwal and Mansoor (2021) have discussed the representation of gender stereotype,

matriarchy, young girl's empowerment against sexual harassment through Sharmeen's (protagonist) Jinn (Jugnu), but they have not considered the representation of *jinn* as supernatural element in *A Firefly in the Dark* by Shazaf Fatima Haider (2018). This is the gap that researcher aims to cover in current research.

The term magic realism was first coined by Franz Roh. He utilized this to visual arts that was an emerging movement of the time. According to Franz Roh (1968) magic realism actually a reaction to Expressionism. In 1920s critics determined that those Expressionists seek to elaborate personal inner experiences by keeping in view the natural images, but Roh (1968) argues that magic realism is very much different to those of expressionists.

The view of magic realism is totally different as it does not involve any superheroes with fancy super powers or any other supernatural gadgets. On the other hand there is no room for magic realism in science-fiction. Supernaturalism in Magic Realism does have components of magic and mythical creatures like *Jinns*, Dwarves and elves.

3. Research Methodology

There are multiple methodological approaches to deal with different types of text for the analysis. The researcher here applies Zamora's (2004) theory of supernatural elements of magical realism. To do so the textual Analysis is used to understand and analyze the impact of jinns'

representation in Haider's (2018) text *A Firefly in the Dark*. Textual Analysis is done by extracting the text quoted by *Jinn* and it is analyzed under the lenses of supernaturalism to support the utilized theory.

3.1 Method

The researcher has used textual analysis as a method to explore about jinns, their types, origins and people's stereotypes attached with them.

4. Data Analysis

This chapter aims at analyzing the novel in the light of Magical Realism; a literary genre that presents the magical elements in realistic world through expressions. There are different elements of this theory, but the one that is used for the analyses of this paper is 'supernatural element'. Supernatural element of Magical Realism includes Jinns, Jannerees, Fairies, and Demons in it; here the researcher is focusing only on the representation of Jinns in Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel, "A firefly in the dark" (2018).

The title of this novel is very significant; 'A Firefly' is always associated with some hope because it contains light so it can help people to find right way in their difficult times. *Sharmeen*- the protagonist of this novel becomes really dejected after her father's accident because he is in coma. *Sharmeen* is really attached to her father but cannot talk to him because of his condition. She takes support of her grandmother whose stories of Jinn provide her relief and she finds solace in *Nani's* company. *Sharmeen* calls her

Jinn by following the instructions of her Nani by having the hope that her *Jinn* would help her after her *Nani's* death. There are different types of Jinns presented in the novel, and their origin is also depicted.

Haider (2018) talks about origin of Jinns in the start of the novel when *Sharmeen's* Nani tells her that Jinns are made of "Smokeless fire" (p, 3). *Nani* further explains that, ".....the first flame ever created by God was pure. It blazed and yet did not burn, sustaining without destroying: a beautiful lamp in the sky. From this the earliest Jinn were born" (p, 3). Here the author seems pointing towards decline of *Iblees*, the first Jinn who was very dear to Allah but was thrown away when he denies bowing in front of Adam. The first ever Jinn was smokeless because it was pure, later on it becomes 'acid smoke', because of rebellion that Jinn (*Iblees*) has done against Adam by denying Allah's order. Shazaf Fatima Haider herself writes in chapter no.3 when she describes *Sargosh* (a bad Jinn) that he is "...a Qarin of *Iblees*, his job is to do his best to lead people astray" (p, 173). This above sentence makes it clear that there are different Jinns in this world; few are those who repented on the action taken by *Iblees* and have chosen the right path- they are good Jinns, and few are those who have not repented rather decided to follow the same satanic path. The representation of jinns is also there in Quran as well, so there is no reason of denying their presence in real world (Surah Al Jinn, 18-22). According to

Zamora (2004), supernatural beings do exist in this world, and the above mentioned detail of the ever first jinn clarifies the confusion about jinns presence in this world.

In first chapter, author introduces *she-Jinn* that is one of the types of Jinn. She- jinn lives in a willow tree just outside *Sharmeen's* room. *Sharmeen's Nani* tells her about she-jinn that willow tree is "the special abode of *Janeeree*: a cruel she-jinn who lived in the cocooned spirals of the tress's dead leaves" (p, 2). *Nani* calls she-jinn cruel jinn maybe because she abodes a man and gives birth to his son without his willingness (as he was not aware that the beautiful woman in front of him is a she-jinn). Further author claims about the *Janeeree* of her novel that she is resistant to purification by not repenting her faults and choosing the right path, and the smoke is residing inside the *Janeeree* like an evil (p, 4). The *Janeeree* seems to "adopt the path of the damned, walked by all who are disobedient" (p, 4), and do not want to change herself. Haider (2018) also tells about *Janeerees'* identification that how a person can identify them when she says, "Women who never eat are often she-jinn in disguise- waiting for men to go to sleep, feasting on human bone in the dead of night" (p, 6).

In contrast to the above mentioned *Janeeree*, *Sharmeen Fatima* Haider presents another *Janeeree* in Chapter 14, who sacrifices herself just to protect 'so many', she is the one, "made from smokeless fire, living under the

yoke of Sargosh and his whisperings, watching his tyranny over mortal men” (p, 155). The *Janeereee* becomes good after realizing her tyrannical attitude towards the people whom she has destroyed and it becomes evident on page 156 when she gives reason of her atonement that she did this only, “To atone for a man I destroyed once, a long, long time ago”; she eventually wants to reconcile that man by helping those who were in trouble due to Sargosh’s tyranny. Zamora’s (2004) idea of integration of rationality of supernatural beings in literary realism seems visible in Haider’s (2018) writing (through representation of both good and bad jinns) that can inspire an individual to believe on his idea.

Haider (2018) also writes about *Labartu* that is a celestial demon and consumes humans newly born children to survive (Black & Green, 1992). Author writes about it as, “A Labartu: a fire-demon that lives on the first breath of newborns. It sucks their life and is regenerated.” (p, 7). This is a bad-jinn that spoils human infants to get energy for continuing her life. Here Zamora’s integration of materiality in literary realism becomes visible when *Labartu* sucks life of infants just for its materialistic approach of being more powerful and remain alive.

Wisdom can be observed in jinns also, and “*Amluq*” is one more type of jinn that possesses wisdom. He is creation of demon and human’s unity (Farooqi, 2012) and is represented by Haider (2018) in Chapter one when she

refers to *Morpir* who is, “born of jinn and man, neither jinn nor man, he was an *Amluq*” and he is “Sultan of the jinn” (p, 189) because of his knowledge of both worlds (magical and real, as he belongs to both humans and demons). *Amluq* is presented as a good Jinn and seen, “as he was now, not old, not young, traversing the world; his eyes sometimes blue, sometimes glowing like the embers of a dying fire----” (p, 189); the blue color of his eyes is symbolic of peace and comfort whereas “embers of a dying fire” is used as a metaphor for fading memories. So *Amluq* (*Morpir*-a type of jinn) has his mother- a *Janeeree* and his father- a human, and he is protected by jinns and destroyed by a human (*Kaali Darhi*) in this novel; that is why his eyes’ changing color refers to experiences of both worlds. He bestows the authority of calling jinn “when the bearer of beads is in need” (p, 45).

In chapter 3, author writes about “*Naai’da*” as, “the most strongest and most powerful of jinn” (p, 26); this reference of jinn has been taken from Greek Mythology in which *Naida* is, “one of the nymphs of flowing water—springs, rivers, fountains, lakes” because of their residence in flowing water they are considered as kindhearted, benevolent and beautiful (“*Naiad*,” 2018). Here in this novel author introduces *Naida* through *Sharmeen* who reads about it in a book in her room.

Sharmeen’s (protagonist) jinn is presented in the novel as good jinn who keeps on changing its shapes according to the situation. For the first time he

appears as a “firefly” that is symbolic of hope, so he comes to show *Sharmeen* a hope and a way to get rid of troubles. But the reason of coming in the form of a firefly given by author through Jinn as a narrator is, “I try and appear in some form of harmless disguise, to ease the shock. Which is why I hover before you as a firefly” (p, 83). Here *Jugnu* is justifying his reason of coming in form of firefly that people get frightened if jinns come in their original form, that’s why he came in form of a *jugnu* that is a beautiful creature and humans can easily get them affiliated with it. *Jugnu* talks about *Humzaads* also on page no 84, and tells *Sharmeen* that he is her ‘*humzaad*’. *Humzaads* are the jinns that are created with every newborn human child on his/her birthday alongwith one angel, and *Hamzaads* are jinn who incite human to do evil things, (Waswaas in Arabic whereas *Humzaads* in Persian) but *humzaad* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) accepted Islam and never performed evil things (“Dar-UL-Ifta Ahl-E-Sunnat - Reality of Hamzaad,” 2019). That is why Haider (2018) has also presented *Sharmeen*’s jinn as a good one rather than evil.

Later on, in chapter 11, *Sharemeen*’s Jinn appears as a “*dung beetle*” that symbolizes the cycle of life and taken as a good charm in Egyptian Mythology. This form of *Sharemeen*’s jinn represents him as a good jinn because he is not using any living thing for survival rather the dung that is useless and left by human beings to decay; jinn is not a source of danger for

any living creature. This example makes humans conscious of the fact that they should leave the dung for the jinns who feed on it; this idea is present there in Islam as well; “What about the bone and the animal dung?” He said, “They are of the food of Jinns. The delegate of Jinns of (the city of) Nasibin came to me--and how nice those Jinns were--and asked me for the remains of the human food. I invoked Allah for them that they would never pass by a bone or animal dung but find food on them (Bukhārī, 1944). *Zamora*’s (2004) idea of jinns acceptance can be supported here through this above example and those who don’t believe on jinns existence can ponder on it to correct them.

Vampires are compared with jinns sometimes because of some similar characteristic; this type of jinn is observed in chapter 11, when *Sahrmeen*’s jinn (*Jugnu*) tells her about “*The Lyllurian*” (p, 102) who are jinns but have characteristics of vampires and feed themselves on the dead bodies in the graveyards, spellbind humans and play with them to keep entertaining themselves. These are the types of jinn who are not that much bad that they would take human life; they just tease humans. So, people should change their view of jinns as scary and fiery creature that will suck blood out of them, because jinns also have different attributes like humans.

Jinns are used for black magic as well to complete the wicked task of black magic, and ‘*Si’ilat*’ (p, 108) is a jinn that is known as wicked jinn in

folklores of Saudi Arabia. It is a quick shape shifter and mostly disguises itself in from of females (Al-Saleh, Khairat, 1985). Haider (2018) mentions about this jinn in her book that it is called by practitioners of black magic to complete their wicked task, and it the one of the fearful jinns. It is totally opposite to the previously mentioned jinn who just teases humans to amuse itself but doesn't give any harm to them. Hence people needs to be aware of the fact that bad jinns though exist but they should learn about the fact that how they can save themselves from these kinds of jinns instead of just staying with their conventional perception of jinns.

Jinns are shape shifters and this idea is really common among people in society. In *A Firefly in the Dark*, Sharmeen's jinn keeps on changing its shape to perform different tasks for helping her. In chapter twelve, it comes in form of the "gecko" and narrates that "A gecko, however, is our best disguise, especially when in spying mode" (p. 122). Gecko is used as a symbolism and is worshipped as a Godby Polynesians, but in Christianity they are linked with devil (Garth C. Clifford, 2021). However, *Sharmeen* Fatima Haider has presented gecko here as a good character because it intends to help *Sharmeen* by sticking to the wall to listen the former thoughts that were prevailing in her house. *Jugnu* is of the view that people will not give any harm to gecko and will leave it alone. Here again the characteristics of the good jinn are shared, and it is emphasized that even

jinns are careful of humans and want to save themselves from humans (p, 122). Towards the end *Jugnu* disguises himself in the form of a 'dove' (p.182) that symbolizes purity, faith and love. It comes to take *Sharmeen* to meet *Morpir*. People can imagine beautiful dove as a good jinn who can help them to get rid from the possession of bad jinn like *Sargosh*.

Sargosh is the most malicious of the jinns that appears as "emerged in a mist of black, dark like coal, bearing upon the *janeeree*" (p, 157) that possesses the human body to sustain his life; he used to spoil other celestial lives for his own life. He tricks *Sharmeen* also by his false temptation; this indicates to people that they should avoid the temptation of any kind to save themselves from getting entangled in the web of this kind of supernatural jinn. Another powerful jinn in this novel is *Ifrit*, who is "thoroughly unpleasant individual. Spoil sport, really" (p, 189). *Ifrit* is rooted in Islamic mythology that can be traced in Surah An-Naml ("Surah an-naml - 1-93). *Ifrits* are strong but they sometimes spoil men.

5. Conclusion

The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality or to wound it but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things. (Zamora & Faris, 1995, p, 119-123).

Zamora's idea of unfolding the mystery of supernatural beings fits well with the Shazaf Fatima Haider's style of representing jinns in *A Firefly in the Dark*, that researcher has explored in this

novel to provide a detail description of jinns. People have associated themselves only with the negative image of jinns, and they do not want to look upon the other side because of the fear that is their in their minds regarding jinns. Sometimes people just don't believe on jinn's existence. Researcher has tried to provide the references to different types of jinns' origins during the textual analysis to clarify the ambiguities that exist in people's minds. References from Islam can help people to make their beliefs strong about jinns existence that are created even before humans.

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