

**MALAPROPISMS AND HUMOUR IN MONI MOHSIN'S
"THE DIARY OF A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY"**

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Abstract

Moni Mohsin is one of the most popular and well read writers, based in London (U.K.). She is the sister of Pakistani journalist Jugnu Mohsin and an avid observer of Pakistani high society. Mohsin's wit is unparalleled, as in observing and describing with humour the follies and foibles of "butterfly" who is a quintessential society lady and absolutely unaware of anything beyond her turf! Mohsin's beautiful portrayal of the "Social Butterfly" is way beyond anything that has ever been attempted by any writer of the subcontinent. This paper attempts to present her unique humour and malapropisms, that result from the blend of cultures which is unique, and have not only tickled and entertained many, but also influenced and educated them tremendously and powerfully !

Malapropism can be simply defined as the incorrect use of words, instead of the appropriate ones, resulting in clever and witty humour. Famous Pakistani writer Moni Mohsin's *The Diary of a Social butterfly* is one such interesting and witty work, this book is a collection of her articles published in *The Friday Times (TFT)* from the year 2001 to 2007. Mohsin is an avid observer of Pakistani high society, a keen eye, from which nothing escapes, sister of the famous journalist Jugnu Mohsin, she is a witty, and clever weaver of words, and her book, has plenty of hilarious, humorous and wicked malapropisms. She tells of the Pakistani high society, and its inhabitants, in a manner which is unique, and spectacular to read. Mohsin has given an entirely new meaning to the word "Hinglish" as well ! Her book could be called a fusion of Urdu and English, as spoken by the people like "butterfly" in their daily interactions with each other. The introduction to her book and "butterfly", reads as follows:

“What? What do you mean, ‘who am I’? If you don’t know me then all I can say, baba, is that you must be some loser from outer space. *Everyone* knows me. All of Lahore, all of Karachi, all of Isloo---oho, baba, Islamabad--- half of Dubai, half of London, all of Khan market, and all the nice-nice bearers at Imperial hotel also. But since you seem to be an outer-space wallah, an astronot, alient or whatever you people are called, chalo, I’ll ignore karo your ignorance this one time only, and tell you about me.

I live in Lahore. In a big, fat kothi with a big fat garden in Gulberg, which is where all the khandani, khaata-peeta types live. And don’t listen to the newly rich cheapsters who live in Defence vaghera and say that, ‘No, no, Defence is Lahore’s best locality,’ because they are liars. They are just jay----jealous, bhai!” (vii)

“Butterfly” lives in her own sweet bubble, and is ignorant about the difficulties, that the common people have to face, in Pakistan, in their, day to day existence. She considers herself an ace-socialite! And makes it a point to attend all the happening parties, get-togethers and ‘do’s’! She is as vain as they come! Describing her husband ‘Janoo’ and her son ‘kulchoo’ she says:

“Anyways, we have ten servants----cook, bearer, two maids (one Filipina and one desi), two drivers (one for me, one for Janoo), sweeper, gardener, and two guards who both carry Kalashnikovs, wear khaki uniforms and play Ludo around the clock at the gate. All of these people look after me, Janoo----uff, bhai, my husband----and our son kulchoo.

Kulchoo is thirteen (or is it fourteen?). Anyways, his voice is becoming horse and yesterday I was noticing he needs threading on his upper lip. He likes doing something called Wee and Bookface. Naturally, kulchoo goes to Aitchison College, which is Lahore’s best school....Janoo also went to Aitchison, and from there only he went to Oxford in London, and from there he came back three years later an Oxen. I shouldn’t be saying this, because he is my husband and you are total stranger, but Janoo is very bore. He likes bore things like reading-shedding, watching documentaries and building schools in his stinky old village. Did I tell you Janoo is landed? Well, he is. But unfortunately his lands are not in Gulberg, where everyone could see them and be jay. They are hundred miles away in a bore sa village called Sharkpur, which I haven’t been to, thanks God, for nearly four years.

Janoo’s mother is a window, sorry, sorry, I meant widow and I call her The Old Bag. .. She is fat, bossy, wears Bata shoes and can’t speak English. But thanks God a hundred million times, she doesn’t live with us. Janoo has two sisters----the Gruesome Twosome. They are big cheater cocks and always doing competition with me, poor things. Not that anyone can do competition with me. Mummy (that’s my mother) says I’m unique.

I am very sophisty, smart, and socialist. No ball, no party, no dinner, no coffee morning, no funeral, no GT----uff, now I have to explain GT to you also?” (viii)

“Butterfly” is totally and wholly engrossed in her household and her own sweet world, which is full of petty and mundane issues, that are mighty ‘serious’ for her, and she ignores everything that does not holds her ‘valuable’ attention or interest or has any advantage, from many points of views, for her !

“February 2004

Troops prepare for raid in South Waziristan
Butterfly betrayed by family

Mummy's come back from Haj without my holy water. She says she spilt it by mistake, but I don't believe her because she's come back looking ten years younger when everyone else who went in her group is at death's door.... You should see Aunty Pussy----bilkull bride of Frankenstein, with big-big hulka under her eyes and skin all lose lose and pale jaisi....why should Mummy's face look all smooth and creamy, just like Yeh-Lo (vo Bent Affleck ki girlfriend nahin hai? The one who got the pink diamond, baba)?" (102)

Her socialization skills are unique! And the humour emerges from the fact that she takes herself and her social status, too seriously! No matter how tragic the world situation is, butterfly does not give up socializing! Her social commentary is interesting in its own way, and definitely worth reading. She is a caricature of all those, who want to see and be seen in the social circuit, and have a tremendous social network, but few real friends of any worth or value!

“January 2005

Tsunami hits Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, India

Butterfly attends fifteen parties in three days

I've also got such bad kismat. The party season's on my head and I've gone and got bronckite-us. So much of fever I've had. And cuff. And cold. And nothing's helped. The only thing that's helped is a homo. (Pathic, bhai.) Homo-pathics are very in these days. Doctors ko tau koi poochta nahin hai. And good thing also: jab poocho antibionics transcribe karr detay hein. Antibionics take karr-karr keh my intesticles have rotted, I swear.

But despite my illness, I've not missed a single party or shaadi. Because I know how much people look forward kar rahe hote hain to my coming. So first I went to Sheheryar Ali's wedding....

Then there was that lunch for Sara Guleri. Bhai, jiss ne write kee thi na voh book *Meatless Ways*. She teaches at Yales....Lunch was nice but I left before the guest speaker's speech because I didn't want to miss the final episode of *Kyunke Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*.

But imagine what happened when I got home? Kulchoo was watching *The Meekest Link* on BBC. I told him to switch it off but he said first I had to buy him a Sony Flatron for his room. Look at him! When did he get so materialistic? So matlabi? Where does he learn it from? Must be school only. Everything bad comes from there only.

Anyways. Then there was Ahmad Rashid's Christmas party, full of left-wings-wallay, you know, Rashid Rehman, Najam Sethi, Ijaz-ul-Hasan, and the whole NGO crowd. Wearing khaddar and talking bore-bore things like politics, and economics. Food was good, but. Turkey and lamb roast and crispy salads with lovely dressing gowns.

After lunch mujhay thori si weakness ho rahi thi, but then I took two of my homo pills and drove out to Bali Bedian bash. Everybody was there, including Shaukat and Marina. (Bhai, voh New York wallay.) I hear she knows everybody who's everybody, including Coffee Annan, Moody Allen, and Paris Sheraton, sorry, Hilton. Main ne daba keh PR kee, rushed around saying hello to everyone----even those I didn't know, because I thought if they are at Bali's they must be important or rich or both. Preferably both.” (128-129)

Mohsin's "butterfly" is not only vain and ignorant, but also quite naive and gullible; she has no idea about how the practical world works, she lives in a world which is as vain and superficial as she is herself! 'Butterfly' is flawed in many ways: she is a ridiculous show off, a party queen, even an ambassador of goodwill, between India and Pakistan! (As she looks up to the Indians, and has some Indian friends as well!) But she is definitely not contrived, and malicious, like many uncouth, jealous and destructive women, who consider themselves as society queens, and superior to others, while seriously trying in each and every manner to

destroy and damage the confidence of others. “Butterfly”, on the other hand, is a fashionable housewife, moderately educated, and has a superiority complex! She loves to flaunt her dresses! Has no clue whatsoever, and is totally unaware about, the real problems of the day, and of the people who survive them bravely so very close to her, her ignorance often leads to misplaced sympathy for others, for instance:

“February 2005

Musharraff pledges to hunt Uzbek militants

Butterfly gets tricked by her cook

Ek tau this tsunami is also not stopping. Now it’s also come into our house. Taken off all our servants and all our clothes....’Six daughters, five sons-in-law, four sons, four daughters-in-law, 25 grandchildren and one wife, all missing? I asked.

‘Yes, Begumshobji,’ he cried, dabbing at his eyes with his apron. ‘All missing. House gone, family gone, cattle gone, life gone.’

First tau I felt like saying, ‘And who’s going to cook the big khana I’m having for forty people next week?’ But then I thought of Janoo sitting in front of the TV, shaking his head,

And muttering, ‘What a disaster!’ At the time I’d thought he was talking about The Old Bag, who is a walking talking disaster, but later I realised he meant the Tsunami. So I put a big pathar on my heart

And said to Qamar that he could go but first I must check with Sahib.

‘No, Begumshobji, let me go just now only,’ he pleaded. ‘I beg you.’

So, being the saint that I am, I retented, and on top gave him twenty thou also to help him rebuild his house. He left grinning from ear to ear. It made me feel so good, na, helping the needy like that. I swear I felt jannat ki hawa on my face.

‘When Janoo came home I told him of the big sacrifice I’d made. Qamar’s gone,’ I said.

‘Where?’

‘To East Pakistan.’

‘You mean Bangladesh.’

‘Whatever,’ I relied airily.

‘Why?’

‘Because I think so we gave them freedom. And they chose a new name.’

‘Not Bangladesh,’ snapped Janoo. ‘Qamar. Why’s he gone?’

‘Because’, I said, speaking very slowly as if to a retarded child, ‘his village has been swept away by the Tsunami. And his whole family’s been missing.’

‘The only thing that’s missing.’ Shouted Janoo, ‘is your brain. Don’t you ever listen to the news? The Tsunami never got to Bangladesh!’”

So when Sandra, my Filipina, came and said she wanted to take early chutti and go home to Vanilla, I blew a fuse. ‘I suppose your family’s missing also. Well, missing or not, no one is going from here till I say so.’ (130 - 131)

“Butterfly’s” use of ‘cease fire’ for seizure, ‘skulking’ for sulking, ‘headlights’ for daylight, ‘Referendum’ for referendum, ‘chloroform’ for cholesterol, ‘Marilyn Brando’ for Marlin Brando, ‘reception’ for deception, ‘sole’ for soul, ‘Frock Hudson’ for Rock Hudson, ‘investigated’ for invested, ‘Godfortaken’ for godforsaken, ‘egg-centric’ for egocentric, ‘Nodding Hill’, for Notting Hill, ‘Suzy Wrong’ for fashion designer Suzy Wong, and so on and so forth, are what lead to humour in this wonderful entertainer of a book ! This work could definitely be called her best, it also tells of the finer nuances of a culture, which is in throes of change and coming to terms with the modern world, while trying to retain its ancient spirit.

“Butterfly” is contrasted with her serious, sombre, and intelligent husband “Janoo”, who is her complete opposite! He also stands vindicated after her many humourous blunders!

Mohsin’s art of stirring up wit, humour and satire is unparalleled. *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* has been immensely popular in India, for many years now, the similarities in the Indian and Pakistani way of life, cannot be ignored at all. It also strengthens the fact that human nature is similar all over the world, despite cultural values and small differences. It is a book which helps in understanding the world, that is not quite dissimilar, from our own, with all its human flaws, all the cultural nuances, similar settings and personas of vanity, unintentional comic instances, and so much more. *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* is a guide to understanding it all. Mohsin’s juxtaposition of the seemingly mundane, with the mighty serious, has made this work, worth reading; her commentary on the contemporary events is an eye-opener, though expressed in the most simple of ways, through her mouthpiece, the ever vivacious “butterfly”!

Works Cited

Mohsin, Moni. *The Diary of a Social Butterfly*. Noida : Random House India, 2009