

Portrayals of Females Characters in the novels of Multan and Lahore based female writers

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Abstract:

Gender is one of the most important topics of sociolinguistics and being studied since last two decades. It has been analyzed in terms of comparison and contrast between two genders and sometimes, on one gender to realize its specific traits. Present research sets out to investigate how female characters are specified by their authors and how different qualities are attached to them by using a number of features. For this purpose, feministic model given by Mills (1995) is used to locate those qualities in the novels of two Pakistani female writers, Omaira Ahmad and Bushra Rehman belonging to two different regions, Lahore and Multan respectively. Their two main female characters have been analyzed in the light of feministic model. Results reflect that both writers use almost same linguistic elements to represent their characters' traits e.g. fragile, weak, simple and being influenced by others easily.

Key words: feministic model, female depiction, gender specific terms

Introduction

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Gender is one of the most researched areas of sociolinguistics. It will be of interest to mention that in the previous history of sociolinguistics, gender was ignored in terms of research and as an important social factor. Earlier, men were known as sole social power and women powerless, so their part was ignored altogether, then in 1970s, a change began to appear and woman's role was also considered to be taken as sole study in itself. It was argued that women were also a part of literary social circle and their reason of absence was because men occupied most of the social power opposite to the other gender. It was a kind of a turning point in sociolinguistics history. Now a rapid interest is developed in it and both genders have been analysed in a number of ways, a multidimensional area we may say. It has been analysed on the basis of comparison and contrast between male female speech, aspects of discourse in the context of social norms, stereotypical differences etc. Present work sets out to investigate the difference between writings of two different authors in their depiction of female characters. For this purpose ,writers from two different regions have been selected. Their stylistic strategy of female character will be analysed in terms of how they depict women i.e. as a strong society member, as powerless meek indoor character, strong and active, emotional creature and so on. It will see what are the linguistic chunks and forms they use to describe feminism. A comparison will lead to the difference in their writing style and gender depiction. Two writers from Lahore and Multan; Omaira Ahmad and Bushra Rehman are selected. Their novels 'Amar Bail' and 'Paying Guest' are selected for the analysis respectively.

Problem statement

"Regional differences lead to different linguistic choices in description of female characters".

Research Questions

- How Feminism is depicted in the writings of Omaira Ahmad and Bushra Rehman?
- What specific adjectives they use to depict female characters?
- What is the difference between both of the writers?

Literature Review

Gender is one of the most debated and t discussed issue of sociolinguistics. A number of authors have worked on this factor and a lot of theories have been developed. It is noted that each individual has a separate style of speaking and writing language that reflects his identity and a lot other things like his education, background, and region etc. We may say that language is a tool of communication and expression. Following are some of the similar works conducted to realize how gender is represented in various ways.

Hadzajlic (2010) conducted a research on school kids investigating how they represent masculinity and femininity in their stories. His paper investigated how students of ninth grade represent both genders and how they view their roles respectively. Students were asked to write stories and express their ideas how they see the roles of man and woman. His findings show that men are taken as outdoor workers, strong and super heroes and women are presented as domestic and docile. It was a qualitative research in which students showed gender equality too. Still students could not escape the traditional impression of men as superior to women.

Another significant work has been done by Ali (1995) in *Gender Writing/Writing Gender: The Representation of Women in a Selection of Modern Egyptian Literature*. She has selected six authors to see the gender representation in their writings. She analyzes how a gender ideology is incorporated in their works and how a discourse related to gender is described. Her study reveals that some of the authors are contented with the

traditional role of genders in society while other criticize this notion and go against typical gender ideology. However, there are clear distinctions in the writings of male and female authors themselves as their viewpoints and methodology for depicting gender is different.

Thomas (1999) discusses the major issue of personal identity by giving names like first or last names. Name provides a person his identity and his separate personality that depicts his characteristics and even habits. It's the specific name that sets an individual member apart from other members of the society.

In the case of female portrayals, Mills (1995) "Feminist Stylistics" is of great significance. She has done research on how and in what ways females are represented in the literary writings. She has also developed a model for this specific analysis i.e. which traits of personality, specifications and adjectives are used to highlight a female character.

John Macalister (2011) has analyzed gender representation in writings intended for children. He has given gender discrimination and gender stereotyping in writing for children. He has used corpus linguistics approach and developed a corpus of relevant data to analyze gender biasness. He gives evidence that stereotyping is crucial factor in contemporary writings. Gooden & Gooden (2001) have worked on typical role of females in writing for children. They are of the view that stereotype role of women represented has deep and determined effects on the minds of children. Eighty three Notable Books for Children from year 1995 to 1999 were selected and analyzed for gender's main character, illustration and title. Here the traditional role of male and female is as usual where males show masculinity and females show indoor and meek characteristics depending largely on males.

Methodology

Since language is used as a tool to perform and express a lot of functions, it is also used to define the identity a woman possesses. Present research sets out to investigate this phenomenon that how female writers modify the powerful tool of language to express their identity in their writings. For this purpose, they use a number of linguistic elements like usage of adjectives to define feminism and fragile type of vocabulary. On the other hand, they may also want to show that although a woman is delicate, feeble creature, it has iron will power too. Both of the elements of feminism will be discussed and analyzed in this work. Feministic model given by Sara Mills (1995) has been a great contribution to feminist approach since she has done some other remarkable works in the same field like *Discourses of Difference: Women's Travel Writing* (1991), *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), *Feminist Reading/Feminist Readings* (1996), *Gender and Politeness* (2003), *Language and Sexism* (2008) etc. Model of Mills (1995) has been applied to the writings of two female writers belonging to two different regions within the same country Pakistan; Lahore and Multan. Lahore based writer Omaira Ahmad's novel "Amar Bail" and Multan based writer Bushra Rehman's novel "Paying Guest" have selected for analysis. Both novels are read and their text is analyzed by keeping in view Mills' model. Every society has its own set of norms and writers belonging to that specific society depict these norms in their writings. Selected novels fulfill this purpose thoroughly and represent gender in different terms. Following is a list of items that have been analyzed in these two novels: Amar Bail and Paying Guest.

Amar Bail by Omaira Ahmad

This story revolves around two characters Aleezay Sikandar and Omer Jehangir. It's a love story dealing with emotions like love, hatred, corruption of our society, human weaknesses, sacrifice and the tension that exists between Aleezay and Omer.

They both belong to broken families and desperately seek purity of love and affection. The writer ,Omaira Ahmad has basically focused on the character of Aleezay, how she has depicted this girl's character is obvious from these lines taken from chapter nineteen:

Aleezay is sensible and simple girl who is excited about her tour to visit some countryside, her grandmother is apprehensive about her trip to far away village and keeps asking Aleezay to be cautious about it, to her queries which are repetitive; she answers them with patience and tolerate her grandmother's questions without making faces. (P-149).

She is also a novice in knowing the world realities around by hearing Omer's conversation and revelations about her expected countryside visit, when he reveals why her going there would be useless. (P-154).

She is full of self-respect and dignity as it is seen from the paragraph where Omer laughs on her and mockingly when he comes to know about her visit and she is shocked and in wonder, she asks him the reason (P-150).

Another mentionable fact about Omaira's writing is that she has consistently tried to make her female character as novice as possible. Her male character and hero of the novel, Omer is repetitively using phrase "Aleezay Bibi" just to mock her and make fun of her not knowing harsh realities. In the whole chapter he has used this phrase four times to show her low level of realistic and mature understanding of the outer world. Moreover, the title 'bibi' in the local culture narrates the sense of domesticity and cultural restraints over women in general.

At the end of the chapter, she hears Omer's conversation fully and then answers his informative talk in a few satirical lines. Here, Omaira shows that although she is not much aware of ground realities still she has a vision and she is not a total fool (P-159).

Paying Guest by Bushra Rehman

Paying Guest is a collection of a few short short stories like “Chand se na Khelo”, “Qufal”, “Mamooli Aadmi”, and the last one is “Paying Guest”. All stories contain different themes and female identities out of which one short story “Chand se na Khelo” is selected. It is actually about a girl named Zehra who is an American and falls in love in love with a Pakistani man named Zunair Ahmad Siddiqui. Bushra Rehman has used a number of adjectives to show that Zehra was like a typical Pakistani stereotype girl, although living in American society. Following are some of her traits that make her character interesting and worth reading:

She is happy go lucky kind of girl who likes to enjoy life and makes the reader smile too with her spontaneous dialogues and actions (P-11).

Zehra is outspoken and bold too, when she gives her opinion about Zunair. She talks in a way that makes him ill at ease, Bushra’s selection of words itself is bold when she writes “Zara si tound (tummy) nikli hui thi wo pighal gae hai” (P-15).

At some points, Zehra is apprehensive about Zunair’s behaviour. She finds him someone she doesn’t know and at times, she thinks he is too familiar to her. There is a situation going on in her mind about trusting Zunair or not. Here again, that weak female point appears that reflects lack of will power and overwhelming reliability on someone who is total stranger to her a while ago (P-31).

Although living in an American society she has an Eastern vision and she wishes to make her marriage as eastern as possible. It not only shows her ties to her roots back in Pakistan but her love for her motherland too. The way she gets married to Zunair is typical Eastern marriage. Her resistance and emotions towards her husband proves her a typical example of Pakistani girl (P-42).

Discussion & Results

Both writers have been analyzed by keeping in mind the model given by Mills (1995). It is obvious that most typical female traits are present there and depicted somehow or the other in their own specific ways. Still it is worth mentioning that Lahore based writer Omaira Ahmad's ability of character building is not as strong as Multan based writer Bushra Rehman's. Aleezay's character is typical female, showing resistance at the end of the chapter while Zehra's character shows some variety and strength. So, it is obvious from the analysis that a number of character traits, abilities, weaknesses and strengths have been depicted as it is always expected from female writers in portraying their characters.

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