

Gendered Language used in Umaira Ahmad's Urdu Novel "Meri Zaat Zarra-E-Benishan": A Feminist Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

Feminist stylistics analyzes how language uses gender to create subtle meanings that, in turn, unconsciously embed biased images in our minds of people and the world. Mills' Feminist stylistic model (1995) analyzes the linguistic structures being exploited or subjugated concerning male or female and the related gender terms and values present in the text. Text is analyzed at three levels of word, sentence, and discourse to flag the gender issues within the text. Mills' model is applied to the Urdu novel "Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan" written by Umaira Ahmad which is a story of Saba and her difficulties in her life. The text reveals how females in Pakistani Society endure difficulties to survive and are subordinate to males and their language is different from males. The writer has followed the norms and values of Pakistani society in describing female characters and the language they use. The overall study elaborates the way sexism and gender discriminatory messages, linguistically illustrated, are conveyed. Moreover, the assumption of only male writers being responsible for the negative portrayal of females in the text is falsified as the writer being a female manifested the negative portrayal of females.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist Stylistics, Sexism, Linguistically Manifested

Introduction

Feminism is a scholarly approach as well as a collection of political and social movements that largely defends the political, economic, personal, and social rights of women. Historically evolving from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced interrogation of how these inequalities play out at the intersections of gender, sex, sexuality, identity, class, and race, it uses an interdisciplinary lens to investigate and correct issues of social inequality. The field of language, gender, and sexuality has also emerged along similar lines encompassing various aspects of theory, methodology, and political standpoints (Bucholtz 2014). The feminist linguistic scholarship includes liberal, radical, and material ideas, each emphasizing notions of deficit, difference, dominance and violence or class-based gendered understandings of language as well as the deconstruction of male language by the poststructuralists (*ibid*).

Continuing in the same tradition, feminist stylistic tools endeavor to explore and document how gender differences are subtly enmeshed linguistically in literature, texts, and language (Montoro, 2014). It shows how women are discriminated against within the literary or non-literary text. Stylistic tools are helping in granting women escape from the discriminatory messages enmeshed within the text by avoiding the use of

sexist language. Improvements are to be made to change the point of view of the reader as well as of society.

Umiara Ahmed's 1999 Urdu language novel *Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan* follows the story of a girl, Saba whose life is summed up in the title where her being or self is compared to a speck or particle that leaves no mark or sign of existence. Accused by her mother-in-law of infidelity, abandoned and scorned by her husband Arfeen and her immediate family, abused by her much older second husband, she lives a tragic life supposedly paying for a sin she didn't commit. Her suffering does not end in her life, but her honor is redeemed after her death by Arfeen finding out the truth. The novel also shows how those who falsely accused her suffer in their lifetimes. Throughout, the story is suffused with patriarchal notions of society and how it harms women. Saba, though suffering in life, comes out as a higher moral being as she forgives her tormentors. The present study aims to find out answers to the following research questions by an analysis of the text of the novel:

- 1) How does/did the text assume the reader to hold gender-specific perceptions?
- 2) Which type of text is produced by the writer? Does the text promote any gender discrimination present linguistically?
- 3) How are the women and the impact of society on them shown in the selected text?
- 4) How is the language used by the author in the text, especially to represent female characters, socially influenced?

For the analysis, Mills' (1995) model of feminist stylistics is used in which she has stated the types of analysis of the text at three different levels i.e. word, sentence, and discourse. She points out that when the issues regarding the use of negative connotations arise, it is also important to illustrate how and to what extent our perception of the world is affected by the language we speak. It also paves the way to answer whether the language of a speaker reflects the world or it is the language that influences the way the world is perceived.

Literature Review

Although the feminist stylistic perspective is credited to Mills (1995), literary investigation reveals feminists' multiple attempts to elaborate it for better comprehension. Specifically, aiming to document how gender concerns are linguistically encoded in any text, feminist stylists exhibit from their work that gender issues are materialized linguistically (Montoro, 2014). As De Beauvoir (1949) said, "One is not born, but becomes a woman", that it is not the birth but the society that shapes and constructs the gendered identity of the individuals especially of women through multiple ways of which texts enmeshed with gender codes are one way according to feminist stylistics.

It has been observed that linguistic devices are capable of not only inscribing the gendered notions of how males and females in a society ought to be but words and language also formulate different worlds for men and women. Britton (1975) in this context has rightly described that the whole world in which females are to live is made by males and females can make their world by interpreting how males have done that through the construction of masculinist language.

Apart from these findings, feminist stylists also highlight the linguistic capacity of garnering and perpetuating social discrimination through the use of biased language. Key (1996) illustrated that sex discrimination is also demonstrated linguistically. He reveals the relationships among sex, gender, and social values and the linguistically manifested discrimination in literature. Key rightly illustrates that sex roles are by and large defined by social factors. Hence with the undertones of gender-biased texts and literature, these social factors become highly gendered with constructing women's identity and role always subordinate to men.

Likewise, Spender (1980) pointed out the sexist features in a conversation to all audiences. She also described the influence of language in shaping the world and how the dominant and powerful groups make

certain symbols and give them meaning according to their benefit. This potential is present in the patriarchal system, where the male is the dominant group while the subordinate group is the females. Language is thus shaped in such a way by this powerful dominant group to keep the gender inequality intact with women always characterized not only in inferior light but also through a male-centric prism.

Marks and Courtivron (1980) in such context rightly documented that females have always been identified from a male point of view. Females can be superior or inferior, different or same, or equal to males; but females are valuable only from a male perspective.

Regarding the distinctive linguistic practices of men and women Cameron (2008,2020) explained that the language of males can be different from that of the females for the purpose of creating their own identity and constructing meanings for their own sake hence constructing specifically gendered masculine and feminine identities.

Thus, linguistic analysts rightly iterate that the structure of language helps to determine the ways in which the world is understood and perceived by different individuals. The use of sexist or gender-biased language perpetuates gender inequality and characterizes women in a subordinate role.

Data Analysis

This section consists of three different sub-sections of analysis at word, sentence, and discourse levels.

Word Level

At the word level, both the general and specific usage of sexism in a text is analyzed by examining the individual words. It also reveals the way this sexism affects the perception and reaction of readers. The sexism present in a literary or non-literary text propagates and constructs a specific view of women in a particular society.

Vetterling-Braggin (1995) suggested that a phrase or sentence is sexist if it gives an idea, supports, reasons, or results in the oppression of women. However, this definition binds sexism to language about women so this definition is extended to encompass that, a phrase or sentence is sexist if it contributes and promotes the impolite, oppressive, and disrespectful distinction among the sexes.

Mills discusses generic pronouns like 'he', which are used to refer to both males and females, but in grammatical practice the pronoun refers to only one sex thus eliminating the existence of the other sex. Urdu has no such generic pronouns.

Generic nouns are the nouns that exhibit sexism as they are gender-specific and male-oriented. Every language has ready-made phrases that have gender-specific nature, but they are fixed in that language to the extent that it is impossible to omit them or to convert them to gender-free phrases. Urdu in such context has the following generic nouns:

1) *Qad aadam khirkion me sy bahir ka wasee lawn apni poori khoobsorati kay sath nazar aa rha tha.* (p.18)

2) *Wo drawing room ki qad aadam khirkion sy bahr lawn ki traf dekh kar chonk utha tha.* (p.37)

In these sentences, the word 'qad-aadam' (height of a man) has a sexist connotation that the height is described from a male point of view and it also shows that it eliminates the presence of a female.

Sexism is present in the terms used to refer to women. These terms include the affixes attached to the terms for males thus leading to the deviation from a male term. The female terms derived from male terms are described as marked with respect to the male unmarked form. Urdu has such terms but no such term is present in the text analyzed.

Cameron (1990 as quoted in Mills, 1995) explains 'Naming and Androcentrism' that the name we give to the objects and world is the set of cultural norms that fix the reality in the cosmos of profuse and confusing sentences that are loaded with much possible meanings rather than the arbitrary names or the manifestation of the reality of the world.

Naming females from a male perspective represents the female experience of the world through the prism of males. This naming also affects the social status of a female. The terms used for males such as Mr. do not represent his marital status but Mrs. a term used for females show their marital status and represent her in the light of her husband. Likewise, the term Miss represents that the referred female is not married. There is also a great tendency that females have to change their second name after marriage thus depriving them of their family name.

There are some other cases in which the first name of males and females is concerned. Some names can be taken by both males and females. However, some female names are derived from male names. This reflects the negative dependency of females on males in terms of derivation of their names too. Such cases exist in the sample and are analyzed as follows:

1) The first name of the writer Umaira Ahmad is also derived from a male name Umair. However, the other way around derivation where Umair a male name might be derived from Umaira which is a female name is not applicable.

2) Aamira is again a female name in data derived from the male name Aamir reflecting similar connotations.

Power relations are also manifested in the ways females are named or talked about. This leads to the T/V distinction by Brown and Gilman, the 'tu' and 'vous' pronouns. 'Tu' is used informally, among partners that are equal and travels downward in power hierarchy while 'Vous' is used formally, among partners that are strangers and travels upward in the power hierarchy. Following are the examples of Tu Pronoun from the text:

1) *Saba: tum aaj phir university aa gay ho?*

Arfeen: tumhy acha nhi lga? (p. 26)

Arfeen was 5 years older than Saba, but they were equal partners as they were married.

2) *Sara: kia aap mujhy apny pass rakh saken gy?*

Arfeen: yeh sawal kiyun kia tum ny? (p.14)

Here it is shown that Arfeen treats Sara as she is younger than him and has no such power and authority so he uses 'tum', while Sara used 'aap' as she is asking Arfeen who is much older and endows power and authority.

Following are the examples of 'Vous' Pronoun from the text:

Chokidaar: Aap kon hain aur kyon milna chahti hain un sy? (p.11)

When Sara went to meet Arfeen, then the watchman who had never seen her there before used the pronoun "Aap" for Sara (stranger) and used "Un" with respect for his boss (power from downward to upward).

1) *Sara: main aap ko kia keh key pukaarun? (p.15)*

When Sara came to live in Arfeen's house, she asked him what she can call him. Here, it is again the power hierarchy moving upward, showing the unequal power status.

2) *Arfeen: Saba bibi aap tou pehly hi F.Sc kar chuki hain. Aagy aur kia parhen ge aur phir parh kar aap ko krna bhi kia hy?*

Saba: aap itna parh kar kia kren gy? (p.22)

When Arfeen properly meets Saba for the first time after returning to Pakistan, there is age as well as power difference, so both use aap to address each other.

The semantic derogation of women shows that the terms used for females are humiliating for them and represent them in a negative light in comparison to the male terms. These terms include the pairs in English in which the term for a male is positive while the term for a female is negative. Such terms from the data are described below:

Aawara! churail! Harafa! Main ny tumhy yahan bister dekhny ke liye bhaija tha? (p.35)

1) The word "harafa" has a negative connotation. This term is used only for females who are characterless. There is no such term or even its equivalent term to show a male's bad character.

2) The word “Aawara” used for females has a greater negative implication for females (characterless) than a male (who wanders all day and is irresponsible).

3) The word ‘churail’ is also used for females who have evil powers that can be dangerous for others. Endearments are terms that are used to show love and affection. However, the endearments used for females describe associated females as an object or thing that can be consumed like sugar pie, etc. These terms demean and negate the qualities of females as their use either compares them with small animals like ‘my chick’ or something else that can be consumed or is edible like ‘honey, sugar’ etc.

The meaning of words of a language is created/constructed by the society and groups in which the language is spoken. The dictionaries are also gendered; as they are male-oriented. The same is the case with Urdu dictionaries.

Sentence Level

The individual word can have more than one meaning, so when the words are analyzed in isolation, then they only give denotative meaning, thus there is no account for the context in which that word is used. Certain things are compulsory for words so that they can make sense; co-text and context.

Already constructed phrases have sexist elements embedded within which cannot be challenged as they are invented over a course of time in society. These ready-made phrases can show the female behavior with a specific context. Urdu has many ready-made phrases that show the cultural and traditional context embedded within and the pre-constructed ideologies including sexist messages that readers perceive without even knowing. These are rooted so deeply that readers don’t even consider them sexist or gender-biased.

Following are the ready-made phrases present in the text:

1) *Wo (chokidaar) kuch dair khat hath me liye us ka chehra dekhta raha phir shayad usy us(Sara) par tars aa gya tha* (p.11)

Females are considered weak and powerless beings, always wanting to be commiserated by males, so the sympathy is shown by the watchman.

2) *Agar ami apni marzi sy shadi na karti tou aaj main ami ke rishtydaroon ka samna karny sy is qadar paryshaan na hoti.* (p.28)

If a female marries willingly to a male she loves, against her family desire then she commits an unforgivable sin which haunts her and her children for the rest of their life. This is the situation that Sara faces when she goes to live with Arfeen.

3) *Kaash ye bat ami ny bhi soch li hoti ke is trah ke rishty aulaad ke liye kitna bara azaab ban jaty hain.* (p.28)

Here Sara wished that if her mother had known that such nature of relationships become a constant source of affliction for the children she would have not been embarrassed.

4) *Usy khadsha tha ke agar us ny pehly unhe apni job ke bary me bataya tou wo shayad usy job dhondny ki ijazat bhi na den* (p.32)

In Pakistani society, females are not readily allowed to do jobs. So when Sara started to find a job, she didn’t inform Arfeen as she knew that he would not allow her to work.

5) *Wo Aadil ki tarah yahan sy bhag nahi sakti thi* (p.36)

In Pakistan, females are severely punished for having affairs while males are not punished. So when Saba was accused of having an extramarital affair with Aadil, he ran away while Saba could not do so. Her running away would have been tantamount to confirming her being a culprit.

6) *Taai Ammi (Arfeen’s mother): tum fikar na karo Arfeen! Tum dekhna, main tumhary liye hesi Parri dhondhti hun.* (p.51)

In Pakistani society, the daughter-in-law is thought to fulfill a criterion. After Arfeen’s divorce, her mother has again started to find him a bride and here Arfeen’s mother is talking to Arfeen that she is trying her best to find a fairy-like bride for him.

7) *Taaya abba us par jooty barsaa rahy thy, wo kisi harkat, kisi shor ke baghair khaamoshi sy pit rahi thi.* (p.37)

· After Saba was accused Saba of being characterless, Arfeen's father punished her by beating her with shoes in front of everyone, conveying the message that a female must be punished for her sins. However, Aadil, who was also present with Saba, was not punished at all. He ran away but only Saba was punished severely with the thought to make an example out of her for other girls of the family.

8) *Kisi ny nahi, main ny khud andaza lgaya hai, main bachi nahi hun, main barri hun, cheezon ko samajh sakti hun* (p.39)

· As females are considered immature, they are mostly not told about family issues so, here Sara knew nothing about the past but deduced that her mother ran away with a man she loved. Arfeen asked her how she knew this. She replied that she is no longer a little girl; she has grown up and can understand things.

9) *Main ny paida hoty hi tera gala kiun nahi ghoont dia tha.* (p.40)

· Females are thought to be a burden and a threat to male respect in society. When Saba was accused of having an affair, her mother said that she should have buried her alive when she was born.

The meaning and purpose of the speaker are interpreted by 'Presupposition and Inference'. Brown and Yule (1983, as quoted in Mills, 1995) described the distinct stages to understand the intention of speaker or writer in conveying a message as;

- i) What message does the speaker or writer intend to convey?
- ii) To know the required facts and knowledge
- iii) To decide which inferences to be made.

The inference is what a reader or listener interprets and deduces from the information conveyed by the speaker or the writer.

There are two types of information. One conveys simple facts about the universe and the other is the real information the speaker wants to convey. The reader or listener makes certain assumptions to interpret this information. These assumptions are embedded within clauses and phrases, rooted in societal conventions. They become part of our unchallenged background knowledge.

1. *"aur agar yeh koi badtameezi karta to main kia karti?" wo behad fikarmand thi* (p.26)

· After Haider went for his pen in the study, Sara was there. She decided never to come again in the study and thought if Haider had done something to her, what possibly she could do. Here it is presupposed that females are weak and thus unable to defend themselves.

1) *Sara: "aap rehny den, main utha lun ge"*

Arfeen: "tum nahi utha sakti" (p.14)

· When she tried to pick up her bags packed from the flat, Arfeen said that she cannot carry her bags. This seems to be a reiteration that females are fragile and hence they require male support in every walk of their lives.

2) *Arfeen: main tou tumhari aasani ke liye keh raha hun. Boht hosly ki zarorat hoti hai itni saari narazgi aur mukhalfat bardaasht karny ke liye.* (p.17)

· When Saba opposed Arfeen's parents', Arfeen asked her to change her decision as women are thought to be weak and have no courage and nerves to face hardships and resistance, so it will be better for Saba to change her decision than to face its consequences.

3) *"kia ammi ko pata tha ke wo jahan mujhy bhaj rahi hain wahan Arfeen Abbas ka beta bhi hoga aur wahan koi dosri aurat bhi nahi hogi aur ghar ka mulaizm mujhy us ke sath akaila dekh kar kuch bhi samajh sakta hai."*(p.26)

· When Sara was alone in the study and Haider came, she thought that if any servant saw both of them together alone in the study then he might think about them doing something morally or socially unacceptable. She wondered whether her mother knew that she was sending Sara to a house without a female.

4) *Haider mery bary me izzat sy kesy soch sakta hai, jab wo janta hai keh us ka baap kisi zamany me meri maa ko pasand karta tha aur ab bhi karta hai aur ab us aurat ki beti aik bojh ban kar un ke ghar aa gae hai.* (p.31)

- When Haider insisted Arfeen accept the idea of Sara in meeting her mother's relative, she thought how can she be respectable to Haider when he knows that Sara is Saba's daughter whom Arfeen liked. And now she has come to live with them as an unwanted burden.

5) *Us ny khush gawar hairat sy uthy huye kaha tha, pehli bar aisa hua tha ke taai ammi ny itni apnaiyat sy bat ki thi, warna to hamesha laan taan hi karti rehti thi.* (p.31)

- As mother-in-law is thought to be cruel and intimidating, so when Saba's mother-in-law asked her to do something in a pleasant mood, Saba was surprised and couldn't believe that the woman who always abused her, can talk to her in a lovely way.

6) *Chand mint mazed darwaza bajany ke bawajood jab koi upper nahi aaya tou yakdum wo bhi hawaas baakhta ho gae thi. Dono ko is nazuk surat-e-hal ka ahsaas tha jis ka wo samna kar rhy thy.* (p.32)

- Arfeen's mother locked Saba and Aadil in Arfeen's room and told people that Aadil and Saba had an affair and she caught them red-handed in Arfeen's room. Saba, being positive, kept knocking on the door. But when both of them heard people screaming and talking in disgust and anger, they both understood what was happening and was going to happen. Their being alone in the room can mean that something was going on between them and this was enough to blemish their characters.

7) *Han aay ga Arfeen, zaroor aay ga tumhary mun par thookny, talaaq ke kaqaz tumhary mun par marny. Saba tu tou mery ghar ke liye saanp sy bhi barh kar zehreeli saabit hui hai.* (p.40)

- When Saba was accused and beaten, she returned to her house, thinking that Arfeen would believe her. But her mother said that Arfeen will come to divorce her. A male doesn't marry a female that has been accused of being characterless. He will ask for her proof of innocence as she would be unable to prove herself, he will ultimately divorce her.

8) *Bhai main to mard hun. mujhy to kamana hai ta keh ghar chala sakun* (p.22)

- Here the term 'mard' used by Arfeen exhibits the society's normative expectations from the male to earn livelihood for his family. Here in the same context, it reflects Arfeen's responsibilities to earn money for his family and also it explains his reason for going for higher studies.

9) *Pooray khaandan ki nazreen jis par lagi hui the usy pasand aae bhi to baqoul-e taee ami aik ruswa-e-zamana larki* (p.22)

- Saba's family doesn't allow daughters for higher studies, but Saba stood against them, so she was thought to be the cause of humiliation for the family. When Arfeen showed his interest to marry Saba, the whole family was shocked that the most eligible bachelor of the family had chosen such a female who has been an insult to their family in the whole society.

10) *Unhen yaqeen ho gya tha keh Saba ka dimagh kharab ho chukka hai warna itny achy rishty par khuda ka shukar karny kay bajaye shartain na rakhti* (p.23)

- When Saba's mother asked her about the marriage proposal from Arfeen, she told her mother that she will accept his proposal only if Arfeen will allow her for higher studies. Her mother thought that maybe Saba has gone mad and rather than thanking her God for such an appropriate proposal, she is talking about her conditions.

11) *Taaya jab usy university me daakhla leny sy nahin rouk saky tou unho ny shart aaid kar di keh wo burqa oordh kar university jaya kary kiun ke wo un k khandan ki bahu hai aur wo yeh bardasht nahi kar saky keh wo is trah bey hayaoon ki tarah mun kholy larkon ke sath parhti rahy.* (p.23)

- When her paternal uncle could not stop Saba from higher studies, he imposed a condition on her that she can go but she has to do 'parda'. He said that his self-respect cannot allow her to go bare

face like a shameless female, in front of male students as she is now his daughter-in-law.

12) *Is ki ammi bhi isi ki tarah hun ge warna abbo jesy shaks ko mohobat jesa roog kesy ho sakta hai. Magar kia sirf achi shakal ki wajah sy papa un ki mohobat me giraftar ho gay thy?* (p.24)

- When Haider focused on Sara's beautiful facial features, he thought that her mother must also be attractive, that's why his cold and emotionless father fell in love. He also thought that beauty is not everything a man needs. So what was special about Saba as beauty alone cannot let his father fall for Saba.

13) *Saba baaz dafa tum mujhy both embarrass kar deti ho. Us rooz Arfeen ka mood khaasa kharaab tha.* (p.26)

- When Arfeen came to meet Saba in university, he asked her to lie to his mother about his coming to university. But she told the truth. So Arfeen said that she was the cause of his insult and embarrassment in front of his parents. Females are a reason for male embarrassment on account of not doing what they had been asked by men to do.

14) *"Theek hai taai ammi! Main dekh aati hun" us ny taaby daari sy kaha tha aur upper chali gae* (p.31)

- In a Pakistani family, the mother-in-law can be rude and cruel, but the daughter-in-law is always expected to abide by her orders. In the above line from the text, when Saba's mother-in-law asks her to do something, she doesn't argue and does as being told to.

15) *Aawara!, churail! Harafa! Main ny tumhy yahan bister dekhny ke liye bhaija tha? Mera dimagh kharab hai? Main yahan Arfeen ke kamry me kis ke liye bister lagwaon ge? Be ghairat! Be hayya! Tumhy sharam nahi aae mery bety k kamry me mun kala karty huye?* (p.35)

- When Arfeen's mother trapped Saba and Aadil, Aadil shouted at her aunt and left, but Saba was there and nothing was said about the Aadil, only Saba was tortured with words as shown above. In Pakistani society, if a female is accused of having an affair, she will be tortured, beaten, and even murdered but this is only for females, not for both genders. It is only females who are led to bear the consequences of any of such acts.

When one thing is described in terms of another thing, it is called metaphor. Metaphors emphasize stereotypical knowledge in a very conventional way. Urdu has a lot of stereotypes that are specifically attached to females though males and females both go through the same scenario as shown in the text.

1) *Saba tu tou mery ghar ke liye saanp sy bhi barh kar zehreeli saabit hui hai.* (p.40)

Here Saba is described as a "Saanp" i-e snake. This meant that Saba has done such a sin which seems like a blemish for her family.

The sexist element present in the humor is not easy to locate, as it is concealed by the play of words and the reader may be unable to detect it. The words are used as garb to cover up the sexist element, thus the readers take part in the humor without knowing it. Moreover, when the jokes are considered within a patriarchal society, it is assumed that the female is unable to tell jokes. Females are the victims of the jokes. Urdu has jokes and humor directed toward females in clear or hidden words but there are very few such examples in the text, as the story is almost melancholy, as follows:

1) *Arfeen: wesy kia hai Saba! Agar tum parda kar lo. khamkha sab ko naraz kia hua hy tum ny.phir kuch mah hi ki tou baat hai, phir France aa kar tum chahy jesy raho rehna, chaho to skirt pehn'na, chaho to trousers mujhy koi aitraz nahi ho ga*"(p.17)

- Here Saba is the target of Arfeen's humor that she should live in Pakistan according to his family but when she will go to France with him, she can live as per her wishes. She can wear skirts or trousers, he will not object. Here, it is confirmed that females become the target of sexist and wry humor while males are the sole creator of such narratives and jokes.

Halliday (1971, quoted in Mills, 1995) explains transitivity as a set of choices through which a speaker expresses their experience of the external world and their consciousness of the internal world. These choices are expressed with the processes and their participants and circumstances.

Three types of processes: Material, Mental and Relational, explain the process observed. The material process is viewed to be happening in the external world, the mental process to be taking place in the mind while the relational process seems to be showing the relation between two objects. Transitivity explains which actions are performed, how they are performed, who carried out that action, and to whom it is directed.

The choices made on a syntactic level explain the character. The type of processes associated with female characters elaborates on whether they are an active or passive participant. This female behavior can be shown in different contexts as given below:

- 1) *Arfeen: wesey kia hai Saba! Agar tum parda kar lo. khamkha sab ko naraz kia hua hy tum ny.* (p.17)
 - Arfeen is forcing Saba to change her decision and must accept his decision.
- 2) *Arfeen: main sirf tumhari aasani ke liye keh raha hun. Both hosly ki zarorat hoti hai itni saari narazgi aur mukhalfat bardaasht karny ke liye.* (p.17)
 - Here again, Arfeen is trying to convince Saba that she should change her decision for her convenience. There is a vivid portrayal of Saba as a weak participant to the extent that even Arfeen also didn't consider her to be strong enough to endure the opposition of the whole family.
- 3) *Unho ny us ke sar par jooty marny ka sisila jarri rakha. Us ny aakhri bar sar utha kar door bramdon me khary logon ko dekha tha phir us ny apny ghuthno ke gird bazu lapait kar sar chupa lia tha.* (p.17)
 - These lines also exhibit Arfeen's father as an active agent and Saba a passive recipient. Except for two processes; one that she raised her head to see everyone and then second she laid her head again.
- 4) *Taya abba us par jooty barsa rahy thy, wo kisi harkat, kisi shor ke baghair khaamoshi sy pit rhi thi.* (p.37)
 - Here Saba is again the passive recipient by not responding at all.

Every society has a set of codes of life for males and females which allows some values and imposes some restrictions. However, some beliefs are only applicable to females of the society. Though these beliefs are imposed upon females, females themselves take an active part in accepting and rejecting them. Some norms and values are still present in societies because females don't protest against them and thus propagate them by accepting them.

- 1) *Ghar me koi bhi is bat ko pasand nhi kary ga aur khud tumhary abbo bhi. Phir tumhy parh kar karna bhi kia hy? Us ki ami ny usy samjhany ki koshish ki thi.* (p.21)
 - Most conservative families do not allow their daughters to study after matriculation, so Saba's mother tried to convince her to forget her desire for higher studies and accept elders' decisions regarding her life.
- 2) *Is trah bojh ban kar rehna us ke liye yakdum dushwaar ho gya tha. Kisi ko bhi khaam kha ki zimma dari aur kharch acha nhi lagta* (p.30)
 - When Sara came to live in Arfeen's house, she thought of herself as a burden on Arfeen and his son Haider, so she tried to find a job so she could support herself. In the society depicted in the novel, females are thought to be a burden on a family but at the same time, they are also not allowed to earn money hence restraining them within the periphery of homes.
- 3) *Main ny paida hoty hi tera gala kiun nahi ghoot dia tha* (p.40)
 - Females are thought to be a burden and threat to males' respect in society. When Saba was accused of having an affair with her husband's cousin, her mother said that it would have been better if she had buried Saba alive at the time of her birth.

Discourse Level

Discoursel analyses text beyond the word and sentence in both form and function. Character imagery is conveyed through discourse. Readers interpret certain information in a certain way that creates stereotypes

about male and female characters. Moosavinia and Yousefi (2018), in a Butlerian analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* explain how subjects are informed by normative discourses and how any disconnect old norms can cause a sense of confusion and loss of identity. Their analysis reinforces the power of discourses in the construction of a gendered subject.

In Meri Zaat Zarra-E-Benishan, a female is characterized by her physical features while a male's character is deliberately constructed on the parameters of his status, intelligence, valor, and power.

1) *Pachas pachpan saal ka aik daraz gad aadmi three piece suit me us k samny maujood tha* (p.12)

Arfeen is described as a strong man of good height and mature age, present in front of Sara wearing an expensive three-piece suit.

2) *Na mehsoos tour par usy ahsas hua tha keh us ke chehry ke naqoosh both dilkash thy. Khas tour par daraz palkon wali aankhen.* (p.24)

After seeing Sara closely, Haider considered her to be beautiful and having attractive facial features, especially her eyes with long lashes.

3) *Zard rangat, siyah halkon me dhansi hui aankhen aur ubhri hui hadiyoun wala wo chehra Saba ka chehra nhi ho sakta tha magar wo tha.* (p.58)

Though here, Saba's dreadful condition is described but again in association to her physical features.

The female body is often fragmented into parts and not described as a whole. The female body is divested (deprived of having a whole), then described as objects. However, male characters are not represented in this way. Female fragmentation is always present in text with male focalization.

1) *Na mehsoos tour par usy ahsas hua tha keh us ke chehry ke naqoosh both dilkash thy. Khas tour par daraz palkon wali aankhen.* (p.24)

Here Haider described what he found attractive in Sara in terms of her parts.

2) *Wo kisi malkoti husn ki maalik na thi phir bhi koi both ajeeb, both khaas cheez thi us ke chehry me, magar kahan? Ye wo bta nahi sakta tha. "shayad Aankhon me ya shayad muskurahat me lekin Saba kuch hai zaroor tum me jis ki main wazahat nhi kar sakta.* (p.15)

Arfeen described to Saba that there is something in her face that is important, not describing the whole face and that importance is only because of that particular "thing" which can be either her eyes or smile.

3) *Zard rangat, siyah halkon me dhansi hui aankhen aur ubhri hui hadiyoun wala wo chehra Saba ka chehra nhi ho sakta tha magar wo tha.* (p.58)

Here again, Saba is described by Arfeen in terms of her facial features, not as a whole.

Narratology explains the point of view of the narrator and explains their position with respect to the narrative. There are two types of focalization: external focalization is close to the narrator and internal focalization is close to characters, where the story is presented through the characters' perspective. If the focalization remains permanent throughout the story, then it is fixed. It is termed variable if it shifts between the two characters while it is multiple if it shifts among many characters.

Here the focalization is multiple and both external and internal, as the story is narrated by four main characters of the story: Arfeen, Saba, Sara, and Haider.

According to Mills (1995), schemata represent the set of organization of ideas and thoughts that work together to produce an extensive array of texts that present different visions of males and females. The schemata shown in the text are as follows:

1) *aur agar yeh koi badtameezi karta to main kia karti?" wo behad fikarmand thi* (p.26)

A female being alone with a male is not considered appropriate in Pakistani society. So Sara is nervous that if Haider does anything she will be unable to defend herself.

2) *"kia ammi ko pata tha ke wo jahan mujhy bhaj rahi hain wahan Arfeen Abbas ka beta bhi hoga aur wahan koi dosri aursat bhi nahi hogi aur ghar ka mulaizm mujhy us ke sath akaila dekh kar kuch bhi samajh sakta hai.* (p.26)

It is not appropriate for females to live in a house of a male relative especially when there is no other

woman.

Conclusion

In the present study, the novel *Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan* is analyzed from a feminist stylistic perspective. The text is analyzed qualitatively and interpretively at the three distinct levels of word, sentence, and discourse. The gender-discriminatory messages are subtly enmeshed linguistically in the text. The use of generic nouns, naming, and semantic derogation of women is shown by the writer at the word level and how the dictionaries and institutions of that particular language and society promote and elaborate the negativity associated with females.

The writer's style seems to be influenced by societal conventions and also by the gendered construction of both males and females. The real picture of females facing problems and issues, and coping with these issues, and their survival in a male-dominated society seems to be hinged on the already constructed notions of how women in society ought to behave. The writer has depicted females to be dependent and subordinate to males. This behavior is also reflected in their language and their modes of communication, and ways they live out their lives which are by and large the societal standards.

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