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Gender Resistance: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's 'A Pair of Jeans & Other Stories'

ABSTRACT

This research aims at critically examining the theoretical notion of gender resistance in Qaisra Shahraz (2013)'s 'A Pair of Jeans & Other Stories' to explore the dynamic and complex nature of gender representation in all of its intricacies within the context of Pakistani patriarchal society. Therefore, the primary focus of the research is to analyze whether selected short stories of Qaisra Shahraz reproduce or challenge traditional and stereotypical notion of femininity. This research paper, further, exclusively focuses on the female characters as depicted in the short stories to investigate the ways through which females resist the patriarchal assumptions embedded in hegemonic gender ideology to redefine their positions and/or to empower themselves. The data for this research is purposefully selected from the key epistemological site of short fiction which is not only the reflection of real life but also critically important in exploring the issues which have social and cultural relevance and gender is the most important of them. The theoretical and methodological approach of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2005) is used to analyze the data for its potential strength in decoding and deciphering gendered discourses since it entails the theoretical and methodological insights from two key fields to the study of gender i.e. feminism and critical discourse analysis. On the basis of conclusion drawn from the data analysis, the research reveals that Qaisra Shahraz's short stories do not reproduce traditional and stereotypical notion of femininity and her female characters often contest and challenge the patriarchal assumptions embedded in hegemonic gender ideology to carve out new identities for them. In the light of conclusions drawn, it is safe to assert that Qaisra Shahraz's selected short fiction is predominantly feminist in nature.

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Introduction

Pakistan is a traditional patriarchal society where complex and dynamic process of gender socialisation is achieved through the transmission of social and cultural values in both overt and covert ways through different cultural products and institutions of socialisation. Men and women are not born either masculine or feminine in nature but the society and its dominant discourses, in all of their abstract and material manifestations, shape and influence their perceptions, enabling them to exhibit standardized gender behaviour. Bem (1993) elaborates this point further by arguing that 'hidden assumptions about sex and gender remain embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches' (p.2). Thus, enabling men and women to perceive 'gendering' to be 'common sensical' and 'natural' and hence an irrevocable element of their existence as Lorber (1997) asserts:

Women and men are socially differentiated in order to justify treating them unequally. Thus, although gender is intertwined with other unequal statuses, remedying the gendered part of these structures of inequality may be the most difficult, because gendering is so pervasive. Indeed, it is this pervasiveness that leads so many people to believe that gendering is biological, and therefore "natural." (p.29)

Though, gender socialisation is highly pervasive, potent and powerful but at the same time, the 'fluid' and 'ongoing' nature of gender opens up the critical space for 'subverting' the 'script' and challenging the established order which 'advantages' men as a social group and 'marginalizes' women on the whole. Sunderland (2004), in the context of drawing differences between gender and sex, makes an observation of vital importance in this regard:

Gender thus contrasts with the biological essentialism of the term *sex*, and was an important concept for feminism as *learning* entails tendencies and variation rather than absolutes. More importantly, it shifted the focus from a grim determinism to the possibilities of unlearning and relearning, resistance to the existing order, and change, on both an individual and social level. (p.14, original Italics added)

The key focus of Sunderland (2004)'s observation is the possibility of 'unlearning' and 'relearning' of the gender 'script' leading to gender resistance and subversion of the existing hegemonic gender ideology. This

research article, therefore, focuses primarily on the notion of gender resistance and attempts to expand research in the field both theoretically as well as methodologically. The article seeks to critically analyze the discourse of Qaisra Shahraz's short stories to find out whether it presents stereotypical gender image of the female figure or does it provide critical space for 'unlearning' the societal 'schemata' of ideal feminine behaviour within the socio cultural context of Pakistan. The article, further, focuses on the evidence of gender resistance in the selected short stories and more exclusively it investigates that how do women resist the assumptions embedded in hegemonic gender ideology to redefine their positions and / or to empower themselves. Pakistani short fiction in English is selected for the sake of critical study to seek answers of the research questions as it is the most suitable epistemological site, for being the reflection of real life, to explore the issues which have social and cultural relevance and gender is one of them. Another significant defining feature of Pakistani short story in English is scarcity of research as compared to Pakistani novel in English which has received much scholarly attention and critical acclaim at national as well as international level, see for example (Waterman, 2015; Chaudary, 2013; Khan, 2013), however, short story received virtually little or no attention at all as Shamsie (2010) argues:

The focus of this international attention has been the Pakistani English novel while the Pakistani short story has been drowned under the collective term 'fiction' although it has had many practitioners since Partition. (p.135)

Therefore, this article is an attempt to contribute to existing field of inquiry on Pakistani short story in English with respect to the theoretical notion of gender resistance. For this purpose short stories produced by Qaisra Shahraz are selected who is an internationally acclaimed writer of great repute. She has received much scholarly attention as a mainstream writer of Pakistani origin. The fiction created by this prolific writer has received much critical reception for an unparalleled quality of her creative ability. Shahraz uses the elements of nostalgia of the homeland and her diasporic identity to depict both cultures and 'confrontation between old and new, male and female, east and the west' (Shaw, 2005: 3). Her first collection of stories 'A Pair of Jeans & Other Stories (2013)' contains many prize winning stories and the title story has been included in the syllabus of some western universities. Most of the stories of this collection are set within the socio cultural context of Pakistan and highlight issues of feminist concern. Therefore, her work is marked by a strong sense of feminist consciousness, she usually presents the theme of feminism within 'the experience of migration, settlement, racism and ethnic identity in a hostile society' (Hussain, 2005: 132). The following table gives the detail of all eight stories

published in her first collection and selected as a sample for this research article.

A Pair of Jeans and other Stories (2013) Qaisra Shahraz		
S. No.	Title	Pages
1	Zemindar's Wife	16
2	Malay Host	08
3	A Pair of Jeans	11
4	Perchanvah	11
5	The Escape	11
6	The Elopement	06
7	The City Dwellers	05
8	The Discovery	05

Socio Cultural Context of the Study

Pakistan is a traditional patriarchal society which exhibits a marked preference for norms and values associated with supremacist androcentric ideologies. The social structure is not only stratified by socioeconomic class, caste and ethnicity but by gender as well. The gender ideology is used not only to justify unequal treatment of men and women but also to determine roles and privileges of both the sexes (Ullah, 2013). Men and women are socially expected to perform their roles and responsibilities in accordance with societal schemata of ideal masculine and feminine behaviour. Women are required to perform household chores while men are mostly the bread winners and work in public sphere. However, slowly and gradually these boundaries are being blurred as a significant number of women are shouldering responsibilities in different walks of life. Thus, women perform diverse roles ranging from performing household chores to managing affairs as ministers in the federal cabinet of Pakistan.

Despite of the diversity of roles performed by women, property and other material resources are mostly allocated in the favour of men. The education of girls is not given as much importance as that of boys especially in rural areas (Raza, 2015). The birth of a female child is not celebrated as much as that of a male child. A male child is considered to be a 'social capital' whereas a female child is perceived to be a 'burden'. Thus, these are not only cultural practices but also 'internalization of patriarchy by women themselves' which prescribe and legitimize different positions for men and women in the society (Ullah, 2013:277).

No other cultural product depicts socio cultural aspects of our society in its miniature as does the short fiction for being the reflection of real life. The contemporary female writers like Qaisra Shahraz critique and challenge institutionalized discourses which result in gender discriminatory

practices. Therefore, a feminist critique of her short stories enables the researcher to explore the representation of female figure in relation to the society in which she is projected. The primary concern of female fiction writers, as Pandey (2003) asserts, is the critical scrutiny of cultural prescriptions which disempower women:

The fictional experience of characters, the rational, intuitional or imaginative capacity of an author, the experience implicit in language of structure that interrogates the cultural prescriptions, that subordinate and trivialize women and treat them as inferiors are the primary concerns of female fiction writers from feminist perspective. (p. 1)

Though, Pakistani short story in English is still an emerging field, it carries much significance since it opens literary space for a wider English speaking world for its consumption and critique. Therefore, it is significant to scrutinize its discourse to unmask gendered social practices pertaining to hegemonic gender ideology.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Within the broader field of discourse analysis, the sub field of feminist CDA (Lazar, 2005) is employed both as theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of gender resistance in the selected short stories. Feminist CDA, with its focus on social emancipation of gender, is a bonding of feminism with critical discourse analysis and aims to 'advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements'(Lazar, 2007: 141). For feminist CDA, 'the focus is on how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are (re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in texts and talk' (Lazar, 2005:11). The aim of feminist CDA, as described by Lazar (2007), is therefore:

...to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities. Such an interest is not merely an academic de-construction of texts and talk for its own sake, but comes from an acknowledgement that the issues dealt with (in view of affecting social change) have material and phenomenological consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities. (p.142)

Thus, the primary and central concern of the analysts working within the field of feminist CDA lies with critiquing gendered discourses which sustain and reinforce a patriarchal social order – relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, marginalize and disempower women as a social group. Feminist CDA, therefore, aims at critiquing gender based patriarchal ideology which positions women in the periphery and men in the centre of the power hierarchy (Lazar, 2005). Therefore, Lazar (2007) rightly claims that the work undertaken by critical academic feminists can be termed as academic activism — raising critical awareness through research and teaching — of which feminist CDA constitutes a form of analytical activism, through its theorization and analysis of gendered discourse practices.

We have used the term ‘discourse’ as a key concept in this research paper which has been subjected to a proliferated number of usages in various contexts. However, this research study utilizes the term discourse as it is theorized by Stephens (1992) since it deals with the same genre of literary discourse. He argues, ‘The discourse of a narrative fiction yields up both a story and significance. Ideology maybe inscribed within both. On the one hand, the significance deduced from a text— its theme, moral, insight into behaviour, and so on— is never without an ideological dimension or connotation. On the other hand, and less overtly, ideology is implicit in the way the story an audience derives from a text exists as an isomorph of the events in the actual world (p. 2)’. Thus, the discourse of a narrative not only constructs but also reflects social reality. The constitutive property of discourse impacts readers’ perception of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Thus, the use of story as an agent of socialisation is a conscious and deliberate process, therefore, ‘fiction must be regarded as a special site for ideological effect, with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes’ (Stephens, 1992:3).

Although much of CDA research, motivated by its emancipatory goal, has significantly focused on ‘serious’ political and media discourses of critical importance, little attention has been paid to the discourse of fiction, because ‘unlike a newspaper editorial, which clearly expresses a particular political perspective, a fictional text cannot be assumed to have an ‘axe to grind’, and certainly there is no ‘mechanical’ way of recognizing any such ‘axe’ (Sunderland, 2004:143). However, such texts are no less important for critical scrutiny (Toolan, 1997), ‘precisely because they do not invite serious attention, are fleeting, and yet are everywhere in modern, urban societies. From a critical perspective, fiction offers a productive site for the study of cultural politics and relations of power and ideology as they reflect the cultural processes and practices of the society’ (Sunderland, 2004:143). Thus, the genre of stories, being the mirror of the society in which it is produced, serves as a suitable epistemological site, of critical importance,

to analyze its discourse to gain insights pertaining to theoretical notion of gender resistance.

Methodology

The sampling framework was based on principled identification of short story writers. The rationale involved selection of mainstream female author, particularly diasporic, who at least published a single collection of short stories and the relative literary merit of her stories which was determined through the critical reflections of Shamsie (2017) who is a pioneering and leading authority on Pakistani literature in English. On the basis of the methodological and analytical insights derived from (Creswell 2003, 2009; Sunderland, 2004), the following procedural steps were rigorously followed in the process of data collection and analysis.

- i. The data was organized and prepared for analysis and interpretation, this involved converting the text of stories into Word file and storing electronic copy for quick reference. The text of the electronic copy was thrice compared to the original text in paperback form in order to ensure that there was no discrepancy between the typed and original text. After a through proof reading, a final E copy of the data was saved.
- ii. The data was carefully and thoroughly read to gain a general sense and impression of the text of the stories and to reflect on its overall meaning.
- iii. A detailed data analysis was carried out with a coding process. Coding is the process of organizing the material into 'chunks' before bringing meaning to those 'chunks' (Rossman & Rallis, 2003:171). It involved identifying and marking related utterances or sentences into categories and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based on the theme reflected by that particular chunk.
- iv. The coding process involved systematic addition, deletion, and modification of overlapping categories rigorously to obtain a fully saturated list to a point when no further categories emerged naturally. The process was repeated to attain an exhaustive and mutually exclusive list of sub categories too.
- v. After coding, data was analyzed on the basis of theoretical assumptions of Feminist CDA concerning the issues of gender resistance and its evidence in the discourse of the short stories.
- vi. Every story was analyzed at least thrice very carefully by focusing on the voices of narrator/narrators as well as characters either their thought or voice represented in the text with a special attention paid to every stretch of talk based on a single utterance or complete sentences in the light of insights drawn from Sunderland (2004)'s

analytical framework employed to investigate gendered discourses in American award winning fiction through the lenses of CDA. The researcher also focused on Bakhtin (1981)'s idea of polyphony which stands for multiplicity of voices and perspective which can be instrumental in identifying and exposing complex patterns of gender representation. Thus, patterns of gender resistance were closely coded and decoded to develop an in depth understanding.

- vii. The study involved both denotative and connotative analysis in line with Baxter (2002:11)'s view, she argues that discourse analysis is conducted on two levels, namely that of denotative analysis, which makes close and detailed reference to the evidence, but which is a form of interpretation involving a selection of foci in which certain aspects are highlighted; and connotative analysis, which attempts to weave possible perspectives relating to the material together in relation to gender representation. In some instances the two levels are linked in the analysis process.
- viii. As a final step, data was interpreted to gain meanings in larger socio cultural context of Pakistani society to draw inferences and conclusions related to the patterns of gender resistance.

The analytical framework developed to examine and investigate the critical notion of gender resistance was conceptually informed and theoretical grounded in Sunderland (2004)'s empirical work on gender related to a number of fruitful epistemological sites of vital importance. Besides Sunderland (2004)'s theorization of 'ongoing' and 'fluid' nature of gender, the critical insights drawn from Baxter (2003)'s work based on the notion of simultaneous discourses of competing and oppositional nature, enabling the females to adopt multiple positions in gender based power hierarchy were primarily instrumental in identifying and investigating the multiple ways through which women contest and challenge the hegemonic assumptions embedded in patriarchal gender ideology to redefine their positions and / or empower themselves.

Findings and Discussion

The discourse of short stories reveals that latent and manifest practices of androcentric ideologies often lead to the awakening of feminist consciousness in the women which is instrumental in enabling them to challenge and contest the unjustifiable gendered norms, values and practices in which they are perpetually trapped for centuries. Gender resistance, hence, stands for challenging, contesting, demystifying and dismantling assumptions embedded in patriarchal social order and grounded in hegemonic gender ideology, through thoughts, feelings,

emotions, words, gestures or actions, by the women to redefine their positions and / or empower themselves. Based on the empirical evidence of gender resistance found in the discourse of short stories, it can be argued that Shahraz (2013)'s female characters often denounce stereotypical gender norms to reclaim their silenced voices. They hardly follow prescriptive norms of ideal feminine behaviour and adopt multiple strategies to redefine their positions. The following section provides empirical evidence of gender resistance in the stories.

Shaking Patriarchal Social Order

Patriarchy, by definition, exhibits androcentrism. Lindsey (2011) believes that patriarchy seems to be an irrevocable and inescapable fact of our existence. The discursive construction and reconstruction of patriarchal philosophy grips the collective psyche of the women in 'conditioning' them to adhere to its norms. Deconstructing this grand narrative requires not only the critique of discourses which establish it as an inevitable, inescapable and indispensable facet of the social life, but also challenging and contesting its fundamental assumptions leading to female empowerment.

The discourse of short stories reveals that patriarchy bestows on men the fundamental right of household control. This may involve taking charge of household not only as a functional and structural unit but also the power and authority to take important decisions. The female resistance of a patriarchal culture often involves challenging and contesting a man's inherent claim to gain household control. For instance, Shahraz (2013)'s 'Zemindar's Wife' features such a struggle between the Zemindar, the landlord, and his wife Noor. There is a constant friction between the two to gain the household control. Noor, empowered by her strong socio economic background, voices her opinion in every important issue of the household. She is determined to restrict her husband from spoiling the land of villagers in his evil pursuit of maximizing his wealth. She is presented as a strong and morally conscious female figure who would not yield to her husband's unquestionable authority in the household matters. The towering Zemindar discards the idea of using violence to wield control on her, as he realizes, 'She wouldn't be bullied by him - he knew her well. She would have no second thoughts on leaving him' (p.28). Zemindar who has been mesmerized by her beauty and elegance cannot reconcile the fact that his wife can threaten his very existence and authority which patriarchy bestows on him, 'What was he going to do? Could he cope with a wife like Noor, who threatened his social and patriarchal order?' (p. 28). He experiences intense emotional disturbance when he realizes:

Above all, that of his wife's capacity to undermine his authority and to usurp his role: the master, the *Zemindar*, of the village.

He struggled with the concept again. Who was the master in his marriage? Who was in control, he or she? By her action, her *juruth*, in doing what she had done, she posed a direct threat to him as a man, as a husband and as a *Zemindar*. (Shahraz, 2013, p.26-27)

Patriarchy exerts strong control in the women's lives not only within the socio cultural context of Pakistan but also in the lives of the women who have migrated to the west. Miriam in Shahraz (2013)'s 'A Pair of Jeans' is one such instance who belongs to a Pakistani immigrant family in UK. She becomes a victim of the 'rule of the father' owing to her dress code. Being the family head, her father in law exerts full control in his son's life affairs and by extension in Miriam's life too, for being his future daughter in law. Miriam's father in law finally rejects her before her wedding. However, Miriam does not accept his decision as a powerless subject to face disgrace and humiliation of rejection; rather she undermines her father in law's authority and control by devising a resistance strategy, 'They can't do this to me!' her mind screamed. She didn't know whether Farook knew about this matter, but she was going to make sure that he definitely did' (p. 49). Through her decision, she asserts agency and control on important matters of her life and tends to weaken patriarchal hold.

Though narratives presented in the short stories reflect marked diversity in the depiction of females, owing to different socio cultural contexts but they are all subjected to the same rules of patriarchy. For instance, Aziza in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Malay House' though is not of Pakistani origin, yet her fate is no different than that of a Pakistani woman which is determined by their identical biology. Her life is made miserable by her brother after the death of their parents but she is presented as a rebellious spirit who does not yield to his authority and openly shows her displeasure and anger at her brother's decision of opening their family house for the tourists to generate money. She often confronts him and asserts her voice:

To hell with them! I have said goodbyes to thousands already - what difference will it make today if I don't. Anyway, I'll do it later and in style! Give me the key, and get them out of here! Or you will regret it!" the voice chilling. (Shahraz, 2013, p.36)

The ultimatum in her reply explicitly conveys the idea that she is not a subaltern who cannot speak for herself. She finally rescues herself and her mentally retard husband from the evil hold of her brother. The discourse of short stories not only presents women as victims of patriarchy but also depicts them as the common ploy for a thriving patriarchy. They, consciously or unconsciously, not only train their daughters to accept

patriarchy as an absolute reality and an irresistible force of their existence, but also prepare them to conform to its norms. On the parallel terms, they socialize their sons to perceive patriarchy as an enabling force and shun any possibility aiming at challenging and threatening its hold, hence depriving them of their supremacy. Thus, the discourse of Shahraz (2013)'s selected short stories not only presents women as victims of patriarchal social order, but also as a ploy to reinforce and strengthen its grip. Nevertheless, the women very often challenge patriarchal assumptions to redefine their positions on gender based power hierarchy.

Experiencing Intellectual Awakening

The process of gender socialisation in Pakistani society is characterized by three essential features; it is potent, persuasive and powerful in such a way that gender appears to be both 'common sensical' and 'natural'. Cameron (2001)'s idea of naturalized discourse is crucially important in this regard; it is used not only to justify female subordination, but their inability to break free from the oppressive confines as well. This kind of female intellectual colonization is reflective of Gramsci (1971)'s critically acclaimed notion of 'manufacture of consent' which has a functional relevance in winning and legitimizing women's consent leading to hegemonic gender ideology. However, despite of all these constraining elements, female figures often experience intellectual awakening which makes them conscious of their subservient positions and unjustifiable treatment. For instance, Shahraz (2013)'s 'A Pair of Jeans' becomes a metaphor for intellectual awakening, 'From her wardrobe, she pulled off a blue crepe shalwar kameez suit from a hangar. As she put it on, her rebellious spirit reared its head again. "They are only clothes!" her mind hissed in anger' (p.39-40). She cannot tolerate the fact that she is victimized on the basis of her dress code. Thus, gender resistance through intellectual awakening is an enabling force for the women not only to redefine their gender identity but also to redirect the course of life for them. For instance, Rubiya in Shahraz (2013)'s 'The Elopement' is trapped in a romantic heterosexual relationship and elopes with the man but soon she realizes that this relationship is inherently discriminatory in nature:

Damn the man! Damn him! her mind cursed. She would never be the same again. She was a fool. Thankfully she made her exit. Her head held high... (p.86)

Rubiya realizes that the society would never pardon her transgression being a woman; however the man can be very easily spared of his sinful deed. Shahraz (2013) very artistically depicts reality of the societal attitude to such an issue in 'The Discovery' in general and Rubiya's husband's reaction on

the discovery of her sinful past deed in particular. This story is a sequel of Shahraz (2013)'s 'The Elopement' and now Rubiya faces the consequences of her past transgression. She strives hard to justify her position to her husband but in vain. He 'yells' at her and 'barks' at her, and stays out of the home as late as he wants to, without any remorse and guilt. In a state of utter despair and misery, the memory of Nora Helmer in Ibsen's 'The Doll's House' flashes in her mind. This serves to be a moment of quietly unfolding epiphany and leads to her intellectual awakening:

She wasn't born to be locked up in a marriage where she danced to her husband's tune... She was not sure what she was going to do, but she knew one thing — she was not going to spend this night in this house...Strangely, the fogginess she earlier experienced disappeared. (p.99-100)

Thus, intellectual awakening often enables the women not only to realize their victimhood status in the gender based power hierarchy but also influences them to question and challenge androcentric assumptions embedded in patriarchal ideology to redefine their gender identities.

Distancing Emotionally & Silently

Feminist resistance to dismantle hegemonic gender ideology often takes the form of 'silence', both as a sign of weakness as well as of empowerment within the particular socio economic context of Pakistani society as is depicted in the discourse of the short stories. When the victim is utterly powerless and cannot retaliate because of her extreme vulnerable position, silence serves to be the only resisting strategy. It, very often, represents a denial of emotional intimacy. Thus, the wives who are trapped in an oppressive matrimonial relationship often emotionally withdraw themselves from their husbands; which is the most common form of resistance offered by women in Pakistani patriarchal society (Chaudary, 2013). However, this form of resistance is highly critiqued by feminist scholars as it appears to be a mere continuation in submission. This situation is best explained by Jia (2003) thus:

South Asian women seem to continue being submissive, even against their interests, continuing to obey rather than defy...Their submission becomes a habit for many, a way of life, the line of least resistance, requiring little thought and little mental struggle. It is promoted as a virtue, a state of being aspired to, the mark or badge of a dutiful and desirable daughter/wife/daughter-in-law. (p.376)

Jia (2003)'s critical reflections gain significance in the situations where a matrimonial relationship is essentially based on asymmetrical power relationships. On the contrary, Shahraz (2013)'s female characters are bold and daring souls who do not yield to societal 'schemata' of ideal feminine behaviour. Therefore, silence is essentially empowering for them. For instance, when Noor in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Zemindar's Wife' returns the deeds to the villagers without her husband's permission, she is not afraid of the idea that he might use violence as a corrective strategy. She remains silent and registers her protest. Her husband, on the other hand, becomes restless as he is unable to decipher her intentions. Similarly, Rubiya in 'The Discovery' initially tries to convince her husband of her chastity but then she realizes that she is a sinful woman in her husband's discourse, so she is forced to remain silent. Her situation is a manifestation of Cameron (1990)'s argument who claims that there are certain factors which prevent women from speaking:

Even where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked or ignored.
(Cameron, 1990, p.4)

Thus, emotional detachment and silence can be both enabling as well as a constraining element depending upon the unique survival conditions of the women.

Breaking Stereotypes

Gendered stereotypes stand for the societal shared expectations of the appropriate behaviour of men and women in a particular society, thus they operate at the broader macro level of the society and determine the standard gender roles and behaviour (Eagly, 1987). Gender role stereotypes are considered to be normative in nature; thus they tend to express attitudinal, emotional, and behavioural norms that are consistent with people's expectations of their and others' masculinity or femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These stereotypes impose subtle social and cultural constraints on both men and women; nevertheless, the women do strive to break the stereotypes to redefine their positions in the patriarchal social order.

The discourse of short stories provides ample evidence of resistance of this kind, women break stereotypes to either eliminate oppressive conditions and/ or empower themselves. Zeinab bibi in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Perchanvah' breaks a stereotype of appropriate feminine behaviour which requires females not to discuss sensitive issues in the company of men

specially in a rural community but 'She felt no shame in talking about miscarriages, a taboo subject like sex and pregnancy, while in the presence of men' (Shahraz, p. 63). Zeinab Bibi's resistance is unique in the sense that it is enabling in dismantling societal discourses which are highly discriminatory for the women.

Aziza in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Malay Host' is also a brave and daring soul who performs her role as a wife in sharp contrast to societal expectations of appropriate feminine behaviour. She is a liberator, who rescues her husband, a mentally retard, who has been locked up in a small room for the last 30 years by her brother. In the socially established gender schemata, the serotypes related to men are that of saviours and liberators but Aziz blurs these stereotypical boundaries and reverses the situation in her favour. Thus, by breaking this stereotype she not only redefines her gender image from a defenseless creature to the one who protects and saves her husband. She tells her husband "Ibrahim, my darling we are free. I won't let anyone lock you up ever again" (p. 39). Her resistance to stereotypical gender image of a weaker sex brings a marked transformation not only in the reality of her existence but also that of her husband. Noor in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Zemindar Wife' also breaks the stereotype of a dutiful wife and remains conscientious in family matters. Miriam in Shahraz (2013)'s 'A Pair of Jeans' is not afraid to violate stereotypically prescriptive norms of letting her parents discuss the marriage breakup issue with her in laws:

"I am sorry, Miriam, I didn't mean that. It's just that I thought that instead of you contacting Farook, it should be us, your parents, doing it in the first place – that is the seemly thing to do." "Oh Mother! There you go on again about 'seemly' things. There is nothing 'unseemly' about me contacting my own fiancé." (p.51)

Thus, by breaking stereotypes commonly associated with femininity, women tend to act against the societal norms of appropriate gender behaviour. In most of the cases, resistance of this kind is essentially empowering in nature.

Reacting Violently

Viewing violence as essentially 'male derived', Dworkin (1976) emphasizes that the resistance to it must itself be non violent. However, women's revolutionary refusal to be a victim is not always congruent with Dworkin's philosophy depending upon the nature of their oppression. Selected short stories provide instances where women employ force and violence to repudiate their 'programmed' and 'conditioned' submissive behaviours and

aim at dismantling hegemonic oppressive gender relationships. For example, Rubiya in Shahraz (2013)'s 'The Discovery' is bound to leave her home as she is fully determined not to endure her husband's discursive and coercive oppression at any cost: However, when she actually crosses the threshold, her mind is overpowered by a number of grave consequences of her act:

Setting up a home by herself would create another murmur in her community. She'd already lost everything, this action of hers in leaving her home and living by herself wouldn't cost her much. She braced herself for her parents' reaction when they found out she was abandoning her home, her husband and her marriage. Bitterness seeped through her. She didn't care a dime for what they thought. (p.99-100)

Her violent resistance conveys a strong message that she is determined not to subject herself to further humiliation and disgrace as well as oppressive survival conditions. Aziza in Shahraz (2013)'s 'Malay Host' is a victim of no different fate than that of Rubiya. Her brother inflicts worst kind of emotional and psychological violence on her. He deprives her not only of her due share in her father's inheritance but also denies her identity. He gets her married to an intellectually challenged man just to save his property. She is often seen wiping her wet cheeks with the end of her shawl. In a fit of anger and grief, she sets the house on fire:

"Come and take a last look at your precious show house, Abdul Hamat!" she jeered in return. "What are you saying, you mad woman?" Body shaking with hysteria, Aziza pointed to the house. Abdul Hamat scrambled down, two steps at a time. "You mad woman!" He cried peering at the flames at the sides of the house. His worst fear realized. She had once threatened. Today she had done it! (p.37-38)

In a fit of desperation, Aziza burns Abdul Hamat's empire into ashes and is labelled as a mad woman by her brother but he himself is responsible for her madness. Cooper (1978) asserts, 'one does not go mad but is driven mad by others' (p. 51). Aziza is driven into insanity by her own brother, so he deserves to face the consequences of her madness:

Enraged Aziza got up and dashed to Abdul Hamat, poking him hard on the chest. "You have robbed me of my home, my youth, my freedom - my life in fact - made us prisoners of your greed and tyranny. See!" She held up the palm of her right hand to show a raw blister "I burnt it with this". (Shahraz, 2013, p.38)

Her violent resistance transforms her from a powerless woman to a comparatively powerful one. Thus, she successfully redefines her position from a submissive creature to a bold and daring soul who changes course of destiny not only for herself but for her but for her handicapped husband too.

Conclusion

Shahraz (2013)'s selected short stories reflect a considerable departure from the traditional and stereotypical representation of female gender image. Though, she depicts her female characters to be constrained by norms and practices of a traditional societal structure grounded in hegemonic gender ideology, nevertheless, her female characters strive hard to liberate themselves from these confines to redefine their positions and reclaim their silenced voices. They experience psychological, emotional and physical suffering which, very often, leads to awakening of a feminist consciousness in them which is enabling in 'unlearning' the societal schemata of ideal feminine behaviour and resistance of socio cultural assumptions embedded in hegemonic gender ideology. However, gender resistance is not an easy option to be exercised and it may bring grave consequences since it is perceived to be a threat to supremacist androcentric ideology. Nevertheless, women frequently utilize this option to assert agency and control on their bodies and to challenge hegemonic gender assumptions grounded in patriarchal gender ideology and are successful in their quest of redefining their identities and in achieving the status of emancipation and empowerment.

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