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Feminine Sex Role and Gender Masculine Role in *the Pearl That Broke its Shell*: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate feminist concept of sex role and gender masculine gender role in Nadia Hashmi's novel *the pearl that broke its shell* through the lens of critical discourse analysis. This study explores how gender roles are constructed in discourse structures reinforce existing social realities, perpetuating gender inequalities and discrimination. Addressing social issues such as socially constructed gender roles in the discourses of novel's major characters is an attempt to raise awareness and expose gender discrimination and inequities. The study is a qualitative exploration; therefore, passages have been taken from the discourses of major characters from the novel concerning gender roles. These selected passages were analysed textually through the lens of Lazar's (2005) feminist critical discourse analysis to uncover the gender inequalities through socially given gender roles to the major characters in the novel. The study revealed Hashmi's novel, *the Pearl That Broke Its Shell* intricately delineates different gender roles ascribed to the major characters in the novel with femininity and masculinity delineated along the axis of biological sex. These roles, deeply entrenched within the Afghan sociocultural framework, find articulation through the discourses of the novel's protagonists, reflecting the structural underpinnings of gendered expectations.

Introduction

Critical discourse analysis aims to unpack socially constructed realities through language use. Recently Many studies have been conducted to examine gender inequalities in text and talk and the researchers have raised voiced against these social injustices by using language. This research work intends to critically analyse the discourse structures of Nadia Hashmi's novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* to examine gender-related issues. Critical discourse analysis is used as a research tool to probe feminine sex role and masculine gender roles in the discourse structures of the novel. The study is conducted in the context of the *Bacha Posh* tradition which has been practised in Afghanistan for centuries. The *Bacha Posh* is an old custom in Afghanistan that has prevailed for many centuries. According to this custom, girls are dressed as boys. It happens when a girl is born, and their parents decide that their daughter will change first their appearance, then her name, and finally identity. Untimely, she becomes a son in the eyes of every member of the family (Manoori, 2013; Gul et al., 2022 and Khan et al., 2025). According to the custom, a family without a son can make one of the girls a boy, a *Bacha Posh*. After she grows older, the family makes another *Bacha Posh*, and then finally, the family will have good luck, and the next baby that comes into the family will be a son (Hashmi, 2016 and Ishtiaq et al., 2022).

Research Objectives

The following are the main objectives of the current study:

1. To explore gender attribution assigned to different genders in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.
2. To examine the causes and effects of socially prescribed gender roles to the major characters in the novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes of female sex roles and masculine gender roles depicted in the discourse structures in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*?
2. How the socially prescribed roles affect the lives of major characters after their transformations from one gender to another?

Literature Review

Sex refers to the biological difference between males and females, while gender is the social, cultural, and psychological construction of these biological differences (McElhinny, 2003). Similarly, Coates (2013) states that sex is biological, while gender is a social construction based on biological sex. According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003), "gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something we do, something we perform" (10). They further explain how we do things and how we get gender identity. What we perform as boys and girls at an early age in life will be a part of our lives when we grow. They claim that it is a society that fixes certain attributes on males and females. What they can do and what they cannot do according to their sex. "Society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments" (p.10).

Holmes (2009) describes the apparent distinction between gender and sex based on biology or the body. Then, sex refers to whether a person is male or female, and this dictation is made based on the body they have. In contrast, gender is different from sex based on practices that are attributed to males or females by society that generally make them masculine or feminine. Crawford (1995) adds that almost every aspect of languages, such as pronunciation, stylistics, syntax, and vocabulary, is based on sex differences. Accordingly, Lindemann 1997; Afaq et al., 2023 and Habib et al., 2024) see gender as a sociological notion. She expounds that women and men are social phenomena rather than putting them in a natural category. Ginet (2011) views sex as reserved for the bodily/biological division of beings as male or female, while gender is sociocultural practices, ideologies, norms, and conventions around the biological division. She continues that the term gender refers to social, cultural, and psychological phenomena linked to sex. In a similar vein, Giddens (1989) defines sex and gender. He describes sex as an anatomical or biological difference between women and men, while the term gender he sees as psychological, cultural, and social differences between females and males. Butler sees gender in the form of performativity.

According to Butler (1990), bodies are gendered through continuous practices. In her famous publication *Gender Troubles* (1990), she sees gender as performativity. She means that bodies become gendered through consistent performance of gender. Wienclaw (2011) differentiates between sex and gender as gender is the psychological, cultural, behavioural, and social characteristics of being male or female. Gender is defined by one's gender roles and gender identity.

Research Method

The current study follows a qualitative research paradigm to analyse the selected extracts from the novels *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. According to Wodak & Meyer (2015) and Gu et al., 2023(b), critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. This research descriptively

analyses the implicit ideological assumption that works behind gender representation, identity, and gender roles. The analysis has been carried out under the framework Lazar's (2007) model of FCDA. The sources of collection for the current study are primary in nature; the research collected words, phrases, and sentences from the selected novels.

Lazar's approach offers a better methodological procedure for feminist critical discourse analysis. Her approach is the extension of critical discourse analysis, but it explicitly addresses gender-related issues in conversation, speech, and talk. The current research also aims to uncover socially prescribed gender feminine sex role and gender masculine roles in the discourse structures of *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. Thus, her approach offers the tools to discover such imbalance in gender representation and socially and culturally given gender roles. Therefore, the research found the Lazar approach suitable to conduct this study. This approach to CDA provides five principles(praxis) that make it easy for a researcher to systematically analyse discourse by labelling words, phrases, and sentences and then analyse such linguistic structures accordingly(Gul et al.,2023(a)).

Discussion

The subsequent analysis of the following passages is based on feminine sex roles and gender masculine roles. Lazar's version of FCDA was taken as a theoretical consideration to analyse the discourse structures of the novel. Lazar's FCDA consists of the following five principles/praxis:

- *The feminist analytical resistance.*
- *Gender as an ideological structure.*
- *The Complexity of gender and power relations.*
- *Discourse in the (de) construction of gender*
- *Critical reflexivity as proxies*

To analyse selected words/phrases and passages from the discourse structures of the novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Lazar's first, third, and fifth principles, *The feminist analytical resistance*, *gender as an ideological structure*, and *critical reflexivity as praxis*, were employed as a theory and practice to answer the research questions of the current study.

Interpretation and Explanation of the Selected Extracts

- i. "But Arif-Jan, she could do things. She could go to the store. She could walk her sisters to school." (Chapter 3)

The interaction between Arif Jan and Khala Shaima, line 1, shows feminine and masculine gender roles in the Afghan social structure. The discourse structures unveil and identify males and females are with different roles in society. These roles are assigned to them by the social conventions of which they are part. They have their own boundaries according to their given gender role. When Khala Shaima talks to Arif Jan about the transformation of Rahima, she also mentions her new identity and role according to the masculine gender. In line 1, it signals how her role changes with the change of her transformation. Khala Shaima, the discourse producer who uses modal auxiliary verbs, could repeatedly reinforce the possibility of doing things with Rahima if she becomes a *Bacha Posh*, Rahim. She says she could do things. She could go to the store. She could walk her sisters to school. This implies that what, being a girl, she could not do, she could do as a boy. On the other hand, we can assume from her discourse that going to the store, walking with sisters, and taking them to school is the role of boys. These roles are well-defined by social structures. Interestingly, her sex does not change, only her gender changes. We can assume that social structures' roles are well-defined, and no one can push away these social roles.

- ii. "We could change your clothes and we'll give you a new name. You'll be able to run to the store any time we need anything. You could go to school without worrying about the boys bothering you. You

could play games. How does that sound?” (Chapter 3)

The dialogue between mother and daughter, Raisa, and Rahima line 2, alludes to the different roles of boys and girls and how their identity shifts with the change of merely their appearances, i.e., from female to male and male to female. According to Lorber (1994), whose theoretical consideration is one of the key notions of this study, explains the process of becoming gender. She says the earliest tendering process includes choosing a name and selecting clothes for the newborn baby—the dialogues between Raisa and her daughter Rahima show the same process of becoming gender. The family is suffering from not having a son in the family. Thus, they transform their youngest daughter, Rahima, from a girl to a boy. She says to her daughter first, we will change your dress, followed by your name. It means she is going to wear a boy's dress and will be named Rahim instead of Rahima. The modal auxiliary verb *could* indicate the possibility of doing something. It implies that the possibility of wearing a boy's suit is tied to having a boy's identity. Even though if your sex is feminine, your appearance is of a boy, you can wear a boy's dress. De Beauvoir (1949) comments that clothing paradoxically hides the sex but displays gender. The same is the case with Rahima that her identity and privileges are tied to gender identity, not her sex (see *The Second Sex* by De Beauvoir 1949).

iii. *It sounded like a dream to me! I thought of the neighbours' sons. Jameel. Faheem. Bashir. My eyes widened at the thought of being able to kick a ball around in the street as they did. (Chapter 3)*

In line 3 of the passage, Rahim imagines the boys and the change in his life after becoming a *Bacha Posh*. Rahim, the discourse producer, visualizes his life and says, “*It sounded like a dream to me! I thought of the neighbors' sons. Jameel. Faheem. Bashir. My eyes widened at the thought of being able to kick a ball around in the street as they did*” His discourse describes that the world of being a boy is much more fascinating and more joyful than the world of a girl. On the other hand, we can infer from his discourse that kicking a ball is an act of boys, not girls. He is part of a social structure where kicking a ball is associated with boys only. After becoming *Bacha Posh*, his role also changed. This implies that the change of role is not dependent on the change of sex but on the change of gender, which is hidden in clothing, naming, and behaviour.

iv. *I looked down and saw my knobby knees through the pantaloons. I folded my arms across my chest and cocked my head, as I'd seen my cousin Siddiq does so many times. I kicked my foot, pretending there was a ball in front of me. Was that it? Was I a boy already? (Chapter 5).*

From line 4 of the passage, it is evident that gender is a social process, and it is practised in society according to established cultural norms. By the time Rahima's identity is transformed, her role as the feminine is also transformed into a masculine gender. He starts to behave like a boy. He folds his arms and tilts his head the way boys do. When he says that he has seen his cousin Siddiq that he did so many times what he is trying now, indicates that the things which are associated with boys or girls are learning in a particular cultural setting. It seems nothing changed in Rahim's body; what changed is his social status. Rahim imagines a ball in front of him, and he is kicking the ball. The androcentric and cultural stereotyping are associated with boys and girls. The discourse of Rahim conveys that distinct roles are assigned to them by social norms that what they can do and what they cannot. Furthermore, we can infer that the move from one gender to the other changes not only their roles but also their discourse structures. It is noticeable from the discourse structure of Rahim. When his role being a girl is altered into a boy, his discourse pattern also changes. The above passage states that gender is not formed naturally but is associated with our activities and performance. What we perform in our daily lives defines our gender. What Rahima was repeatedly doing in her early childhood had made her a girl, but now her practices are being changed, such as wearing clothing, changing of name, her dining manners, and the sports she plays.

v. *I quickly counted out the bills, took my spoils, and hurried back home to show Madar-Jan. My walk turned to a jog as I realized I didn't have to be demure and proper. I tested an old man walking by. I looked directly at him, meeting his squinted eyes, and seeing that he didn't react to my forwardness. Thrilled, I started to run faster. No one gave me a second glance. My legs felt liberated as I ran*

through the streets without my knees slapping against my skirt and without worrying about chastising eyes. I was a young man, and it was in my nature to run through the streets. (Chapter 7)

The understudy passage 5 is about the change of role of Rahim from Rahima. This change has given me a new spirit and joy in the life of Rahima. She started to behave according to the settled norms for boys in society. The way men talk, move and act. Nothing changed in the body of Rahima but what changed is her gender role. This is what Butler called gender performance. It means that gender is not something natural, but what we perform makes us male or female. The same case is with Rahima. When she was performing one kind of activity, she was labelled as a girl, but when she started to act differently, she was labelled as a boy. This is an event from the course of her activity when she is at a shop and buying some foodstuff. When he was coming back home, she noticed in herself that the walk had changed into jogging.

The narrator Rahima describes her feelings and experiences being a girl in the world of boys. She says, “*My walk turned to a jog as I realized I didn’t have to be demure and proper.*”

Her discourse implies that the changes in her gender also changed her role in society. Her walk changed to a jog implies that the role of the male gender has given her confidence not to walk but to jog. Jogging is an act that is associated with boys, not with girls. If you are a boy, you can jog. The adjectives *demure and proper* in her discourse assume that to be demure is the act of a girl, not a boy, and it is a girl who needs to be proper in her walking. Men do not need to be careful how they walk and need not be reserved like women. She narrates that she learnt this from a man who was walking by her side. She says, “*I tested an old man walking by.*” It means walking like men and women is not something natural, but it is learnt in society. We observe how males and females walk, talk, and behave, and then we follow these features according to the gender category we belong to. It is apparent from her discourse structure that males and females are represented as a cross-cultural binary opposition. They have been given their own roles in a social structure. The girls need to be proper, while the boys need not to be proper in their walking. Similarly, the girls need to be demure while the boys need not be coy. These are different performances and different roles assigned to boys and girls, and they are required to follow these norms, which are the product of a social process.

Conclusion

The study aimed to inquire about gender roles and how different gender roles lead to different discourse structures and social responsibilities. For this purpose, the study raised research questions to investigate how the move from masculine gender roles and vice versa affect the discourse structures of major characters in the novels. The study also observed that gender roles are socially and culturally motivated. In novel, the major character Rahima was transformed into boys, and her discourse structures, social role, and social responsibilities also changed. It was discovered that these gender roles are not fixed but rather fluid. Before the transformation, these characters could not do or were not allowed to do what boys could, but after they were changed into boys they were spotted with different roles and different discourse structures. Thus, it was concluded that the social and cultural norms have attributed and fixed some features with the male and female gender. These features would be taken as fixed if after transformation the major characters behaved, acted, and used the same discourse structures which they used before they became boys.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can also be conducted to explore the left-over extracts related to gender issues or the concept of Bach Posh and its effects on the lives of women in Afghan society. Likewise, other studies can also examine the condition of Afghan women in Afghan social structures and how they are treated as second handed citizen in Afghanistan. In addition to that they can also explore the women voice and how they are suppressed through socially and culturally intertwined discourse structures. There are several other

methodological approaches exist in the field of CDA. For example, one can apply the toolkits given by Poul Gee or the New tools given by Theo van Leeuwen to analyse the discourse from the perspectives of critical discourse analysis

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