

Identification of Gendered Discourses in a Fictional Text with a special focus on Gender Construal in Our Lady of Alice Bhatti

*Faheem Arshad

**Dr. Muhammad Uzair

Abstract

This research paper attempts to study the construal of gender by identifying different gendered discourses in the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The present study draws on the interpretative framework of Sunderland (2004) for the identification of gendered discourses permeating a fictional text. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammad Hanif is a fascinating work of fiction that narrates the story of a Christian nurse and her tumultuous and impoverished journey from a janitor's daughter to a married woman, assuming healing powers to cure diseased people in a Christian Hospital of Karachi, until her life is cut short by none other than her own husband. The present study aims to identify myriad of gendered discourses by taking into account the linguistic traces, through a systematic and principled analysis of selected extracts. This paper primarily seeks to reveal the subtle and implicit workings of discursive means, reflected and constituted, in myriad of gendered discourses by carrying out a feminist critical discourse analysis for better understanding of varied forms of patriarchal practices and structures, aimed at subjugating and oppressing women. The findings indicate that by identifying multitude of dominant and contesting discourses with a critical focus on the selected extracts, the meticulous construal of gender in the fictional narrative can be analysed in the different overriding and contesting discourses of the novel, to reveal the prevalence of patriarchal dominance and the resistant feminist struggle, respectively.

Keywords: Gender, Gendered discourses, Linguistic analysis, discursive means, Feminist critical discourse analysis, Dominant discourses, Contesting discourses

I. Introduction

Discourse analysis views language as a constitutive system that forms part of a broader network linked with thoughts, experience, culture and society. Therefore, it is essential to look beyond features of language like; syntax, phonology and grammar and to take into account more socially based view of language (Matheson, 2005, p. 3).

My analysis is predisposed to an extent, although not entirely, by this conception of discourse. It is particularly relevant to highlight the idea that construal of gender as woman and man is constrained by the ways in which we can think about or talk about the femininity and masculinity, respectively. It is highly pertinent to clarify here that my contention is not premised on the principle that women and men can't really challenge or alternative/progressive ideas about gender cannot be construed, rather, constitution of gender is always done within the bounds of socio-cultural practices, prevailing in a society. For example, ideas about masculinity and femininity are always grounded in the biological and social knowledge about gender,

* Department of English, University of Sargodha, Sargodha

** Director Academics, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

established in a society. Moreover, because femininity is quite often associated with powerlessness and underprivileged as well as equated with marginalization and oppression, in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, hence, it will be worth revealing to analyse the subtle and pernicious workings of language to construct gender in myriad of gendered discourses, permeating the fictional text. My primary focus is not directed only to take account of the language used by specific characters (females or males) or narrator's voice, rather the language used about women and men, who are discursively constructed in varied discourses as gendered beings.

Gender, maintained Weatherall (2002), has now been conceptualized and understood as a social category, whereby, essentialist ideas about gender have been denounced and replaced by social constructionism. As gender is now taken up as a product and effect of discourse rather than an inherent entity (p.76). Green defined realistic fiction as 'Literature that is based on a true story...yet it has a running theme that could technically be true and one day could happen.' (qtd. in Sunderland 52)

Discourse approach is helpful in revealing the complex and subtle ways to study the representation, construction and contestation of gender identities in/through language. (Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002)

This study sets out to present a feminist critical discourse analysis of the ways in which being woman and man is constituted through fictional texts. The primary data in the research comprises of gendered discourses extracted from the selected text, analysed using wide range of linguistic tools, most notably certain features of SFG and some of the aspects of van Leeuwen's Social Actor Network (2008). Gender relations of power and gender ideology are key theoretical concepts. By drawing on transitivity analysis and some aspects of van Leeuwen's model, I am able to explore how different characters (females and males) are discursively constructed in the gendered discourses; moreover, the identification of gendered discourses through linguistic traces has also been done by drawing on the interpretive framework of Sunderland (2004).

The analysis is carried out to investigate two major concerns: firstly, the identification of gendered discourses in the novel and secondly, to trace out the evidence of pervading dominant and alternative discourses in construing stereotypical and progressive gendered subjects. I fundamentally study how 'gendered beings or subject positioning' of women and men characters that are being drawn out and portrayed in fictional representations are based on traditional notions or stereotypes prevailing in the society, about females and males, respectively. Though, I shall demonstrate that those representations are deeply ingrained into socio-cultural practices, which construct women differently and quite often render them powerless and silent in the fictional world as well, yet, there are also possibilities of those discourses which portray women progressively.

A fictional text, though by the most banal definitions and understandings, is an imaginative and unreal work of a writer, yet, it is an undeniable fact that it is very much ingrained into the socio-cultural practices of the society it represents. Realistic fictional narrative incorporates real events and real characters in a believable manner to reflect and represent the real life. The fictional writer constructs characters,

situations, and tries to represent real life issues. In this novel, the central character of Alice Bhatti seems to be dominating the overall narration of the novel and has been construed in the myriad of gendered discourses of the text, with a feminist perspective. This paper, therefore, explores the construal of Alice's character in multiple gendered discourses in the backdrop of the feminist critical discourse analysis to analyse her gender construction. The novel has received global acclaimed and critical attention of researchers (Tickell, 2016). Most of the focus has been tilted towards the narrative style and stylistic features of the novel. Therefore, this paper, seeks to draw attention to the unexplored feature of this novel, i.e. construal of gender.

To address and deal with the issue of the manifestation of different ways of deploying gendered discourses in the novel, I draw upon Sunderland's insightful and principled approach of interpretive identification of myriad of gendered discourses in any text (Sunderland 149). This flexible but informed uptake to the identification of varied gendered discourses stems from the necessity that numerous characters populate a work of fiction, particularly the novel. Additionally, a fictional narrative is quite often replete with contradictions and competing discourses due to the prevalence of an inherent conflict within and among different characters, during the progression of story and the development of plot (Sunderland 149).

1. Gendered discourses

While enumerating the relevance of critical discourse analysis in critiquing the children's fiction, Sunderland (2004, p. 146) stated that a realist fiction corresponds and conforms to the contemporary social and discursive practices, with women and men, boys and girls involved in traditionally gendered practices. She highlighted the presence of assorted gendered discourses, representing gender differences and discourses of patriarchy, inter alia; she also noted the presence of alternative and subversive practices, which might be incorporated in the fictional narrative to account for the prevalence of feminist discourses. She suggested that varied discourses might permeate a fictional text, reflecting the nebulous form of fictional discourses. Her suggestions and insights are relevant to the present study, though her focus pertains to the analysis of children's fiction. Following Sunderland (2004), in this paper, the researcher identified and analysed myriad of gendered discourses in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* to see the interdiscursive workings of the varied gendered discourses pervading the novel. The present study is informed by feminist theories and approaches to take into account the discursive practices of the selected novel, for the identification of varied dominant and alternative discourses, reflecting the traditional and feminist discourses, respectively.

1.1 Traditionally gendered discourse

At this juncture it is appropriate to expound on the traditional and feminist discourses. Traditional discourses could be defined as those discourses which undertake to draw upon conventional and taken for granted as well as essentialist notions regarding gender. To put it simply, in traditionally gendered discourses, women and men are shown to be engaged in those practices which are patriarchal and suppressive for women. To make out an extended interdiscursive outlook of the selected novel, I paid close attention to the linguistic traces of varied traditionally

gendered discourses.

1.2 Feminist discourses

What is a feminist discourse? Sunderland (2004) defined feminist discourses in three different but related ways. Firstly; she notes that these are such discourses which manifest struggle against patriarchal practices; secondly, she asserts that these practices may be criticized in terms of their presentation, and lastly, an individual girl or woman may be represented in a specifically progressive or liberal way (p. 154). Keeping in view these ramifications of feminist discourses, this study also seeks to find out the evidence of feminist discourses in the selected novel, if any?

Feminist CDA is interdisciplinary in its methods and approaches for analysis, due to the intricate and multifaceted interfaces between gender, power, ideology and discourse (Lazar, 2007, p. 13). Feminist CDA seeks to reveal the subtle and intricate ideological workings and power relations by analysing not only the explicit instances of meanings expressed through written and spoken language but also focusing on implicit, covert and less obvious instances. Lazar (2007) maintains that an important goal for feminist CDA is to undertake contingent analyses of the oppression of women (p. 9).

II. Methodology

To address and deal with the issue of the manifestation of different ways of deploying gendered discourses in the novel, I draw upon Sunderland's thorough and principled approach of interpretive identification of myriad of gendered discourses from any text (Sunderland, 2004). This flexible but informed uptake for the identification of varied gendered discourses stems from the necessity that numerous characters populate a work of fiction, particularly the novel. Additionally, a fictional narrative is quite often replete with contradictions and competing discourses due to the prevalence of an inherent conflict within and among different characters, in the course of plot and story development (Sunderland, 2004, p. 149). Following Sunderland (2004), the identification of gendered discourses in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* was done by noting down the linguistic traces of each type of discourses. In addition to that those broad sets of gendered discourses were further categorized, and named into subsets of discourses, i.e. 1) Traditionally gendered discourses, 2) Feminist discourses, corresponding to the related broadly identified gendered discourses, for a detailed feminist critical discourse analysis.

Sunderland (2004, p. 143-144) has highlighted some of the constraints and issues in the application of CDA on fiction, particularly restricting her framework to analyse children's literature (both fiction and non-fiction), but her insights could be applied to adult fiction as well. Moreover, it is significant to point out that only the related intricacies have been detailed here. Firstly, there is the absence of a single 'point of view' and multiple voices assumed by different characters in the narration, as different characters may focalize at different instances in the story, thus, making it cumbersome for the analyst to account for the varied and fluctuating focalizations. Secondly, she drags attention to the occurrences of satire, irony and humour in a fictional text, as it is almost commonplace in fiction to incorporate these literary features in the fictional narrative. Therefore, it becomes hard to understand and

interpret any piece of fiction by ignoring these features. To address this issue, following Sunderland's interpretative analytical framework, the present study has dealt with this issue of multiplicity of voices by identifying multiple discourses, to be analysed in the backdrop of feminist critical discourse analysis, using the useful analytical and theoretical tool of interdiscursivity.

III. Literature review

This review of literature critically sheds light on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings which provide relevant background to the present study. It also creates the desired space where critical discourse analysis has informed and inspired various critical analyses. It is noted that though a large body of works undertakes to focus on gender representation in media, particularly newspapers, Textbooks and non-Pakistani English fiction, yet the present study is confined to a single fictional narrative, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* for analysing gender by identifying varied gendered discourses from the selected novel.

In this section, I undertake to critically review the related literature as it would situate this study into a growing body of work. It is worthwhile to outline the works that have previously been carried out to explore gender construction and representation in the backdrop of discourse and gender. Moreover, it is noted that Pakistani fiction has gained less critical attention and only few reviews and commentaries can be found (Ahmed, 2009). Below, I very briefly outline some of the relevant studies which have been done so far.

As noted by Sunderland, Mary Talbot critically analysed popular light romance stories by focusing on the lexical items for investigating different ways of representing gender differences (Sunderland, 2004). In another study titled "*Critical Discourse Analysis of Women Language at the Lexical Level in Sense and Sensibility*", Chen Hua (2013) examined the common sense assumptions about gender that underlie the use of language in *Sense and Sensibility* in British society by applying Critical Discourse analysis. The study not only documented the salience of gender as a social category in the novel but also illustrated the inequalities in the assumptions about women and men embedded in the linguistic practices of the female and male characters. By focusing on the lexical level in the backdrop of CDA, the study revealed that, though, women language in the novel showed similar results as found by other researches, yet, other aspects of British society like, discrimination and prejudices based on social status could also be exposed.

A Feminist Reading of Fitzgerald's Winter Dreams by Zhang and Cui (2014) was an interesting feminist study which aimed to expose misogyny in the short story. The study noted the transformation of a rebellious young girl, Judy, into a modest and "angel in the house", to expose the working of dominant patriarchal ideology. The study showed that how marriage, circumstances and subordinated position of women worked collectively to suppress and dominate women in a patriarchal society.

There have been extensive studies carried out on newspapers to investigate the representation of gender, as newspapers are laden with abundant sources of data for language and gender study. It has been noted by many exploratory works on newspaper, with particular focus on the inter-relationship between gender and

language, that sexist and stereotypical instances permeate gender representation in normative and traditional ways. However, there is a tangible rise in the more progressive and non-sexist representation of women, to advance the interests of women in the contemporary media (Sunderland 2004).

Shahid Siddiqui's phenomenal and ground-breaking book *Language, Gender, and Power: The Politics of Representation and Hegemony in South Asia*, published in 2014, undertakes to investigate the interrelatedness and impact of power, gender and language. In his interdisciplinary approach, he sought to identify the linkages and confluences of these diverse but extremely relevant aspects of Pakistani society for creating spaces for alternative ways to change the gender perception and prejudices entrenched deeply in social practices, through change in language use (Siddiqui, 2014, p. xvii). To trace the social, cultural and historical interfaces between language use and gender, he suggests that if gender is a social construct, then there are certain social institutions like, 'family, school, religion, and judiciary, etc.', that collectively contribute in this work of socialization (p. 30). Millet in this context argued that "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (as cited in Siddiqui, p. 30-31) He also maintains that it is the society that creates rigid boundaries around the notion of gender and categorizes people into female and male. He maintains that the politics of categorization serves the interest of the powerful (p. 31). He also argues that these differences and categorizations into female-male are often exaggerated as 'reflected in Gray's book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*' (p. 38). He states that categorization of people is not harmful and problematic unless one is considered good and other as bad, as such a labeling accords dominance to the powerful and marginalize the other less powerful groups (p. 32). In recounting the detailed spheres and social structures which sustain the stereotypical and biased views about women, he highlighted the discriminatory practices in media, education and literature, where female representation is premised against the male-norms. He noted that the attributes, terms, roles, expectations and opportunities are asymmetrical in female-male representation (p. 35).

He also stated that varied forms of discourses perpetuate and construct the stereotypes regarding the gendered notions of a society (Siddiqui, 2014, p. 35). While tracing the differential preferences pertaining to females and males, he views economic factor as one of the major reasons for prioritizing men and discriminating women. According to Siddiqui, in South Asian countries, particularly in Pakistan, as majority of the population lead impoverished lives, hence, preference is given to sons (males) over daughters (females) due to financial prospects and interests. These economic reasons run deeper into the societal practices, and are greatly reflected in the customs of dowry for girls, mothers in marginalized roles at homes, different financial statuses of females and males (p. 47).

Caroline Rosenthal (2003) by drawing on feminists and cultural studies theories explored the correlation between narrative and gender formation. By taking into account the narrative and linguistic structures, she attempted to reveal the multiple possibilities of unrepresented female identities. The particular study

undertook a deconstructive approach to identify distinct feminist perspective which could potentially create alternative gender identities in the selected texts. She also recounted the subversive narrative frames which distorted the familiar narrative frames. The study undertook to examine the correlation between gender and narrative to show “how authors dismantle stereotypical representations of women as well as underlying gender codes through unruly narratives” (p. 19). By paying close attention to “different tales of gender”, the study sought to bring forth the alternative possibilities for gender performances as opposed to familiar and natural stories of gender. The study was enlightening in the sense that by looking at the narrative strategies informed by feminist theories, the study revealed that the instable notions of gender could be taken into account by carrying out a deconstructive analysis. The study also showed that by employing different tales of gender, the authors made different realities possible and the study surmised that “...texts become meaningful only through the act of reading; it is up to us, the readers, to imagine different stories from the texts” (p. 158).

IV. Objective of the study

Critical discussion of constructions of gender in fiction has been limited to content analyses or noting down the gender differences as discussed in the literature review. This study sets out to interpretively identify gendered discourses from the selected text and present a critical discourse analytical perspective by focusing on certain extracts to investigate the gender construal in the fictional text. One reason for choosing this text is that it represents gender in the social, cultural and ideological milieu of Pakistan and in this way we can have an enlightening insight to expand our understanding of gender and its representation in Pakistani fiction in English.

V. Analysis and Discussion

It is pertinent to mention here that ten extracts have been identified and then analysed in this study for examining the construal of gender in the selected novel. Initially, traditionally gendered discourses have been analysed, followed by the feminist discourses.

1. Traditionally gendered discourses identified and critically analysed.

Extract 1

Woman as trivial and desperate being discourse

“Alice Bhatti looks at a lizard on the wall, desperately willing to move, as if its movement will affect the movement of her stars” (p. 6).

Alice is represented as a desperate and anxious candidate during her interview for nursing. Here the mental process “*look*” refers to her mental state which conveys her emptiness and trivial stature as she relates herself with “*a lizard on the wall*”. She has been positioned in relation to a lizard and her destiny is connected with that of the lizard. This hyperbolic parallelism that has been drawn between Alice’s aspirations for the prospective job also constructs her as a helpless being compared with a lizard. She attaches the success of her interview with that of the “*movement of her stars*”. Her destiny hinges on the movement of a lizard. So, from the very outset, Alice has been represented as a struggling girl, who is striving to overcome her poverty.

Extract 2

Woman as subservient discourse (Patriarchal Discourse)

“I am surprised that you are trying to hide basic information. Your full name is Alice Joseph Bhatti. Are you ashamed of your father’s name?” (p. 8)

Alice is ridiculed and berated for concealing her middle name “Joseph”. She is criticized for skipping her middle name, which is her father name. This criticism reflects that she is being castigated for not using a male reference with her name. It also shows that a male reference is an essential benchmark for a woman to get entry into the social world as she is being labeled as a discreditable entity for not using her middle name. Patriarchy can be associated with this remark as shamefulness is branded with Alice’s avoidance of the use of male name as her reference.

Extract 3

(Woman as small and diminutive being)

“A strange croak comes out of her mouth parched throat, a voice that surprises her, the voice of a baby frog complaining about being too small for this world.” (p. 10)

In this passage, Alice has been assimilated with a frog as her voice is equated with that of a “baby frog”. She has been associated with a baby frog, which is “too small for this world”. Once again, she is represented as a trivial and meaningless entity in this world. This parallelism is drawn to signify her confusion and perplexity. Her complaining voice reflects her dwarfed position in the grand world. She has been *physically identified* as a baby frog. This physical identification (Van Leeuwen, 2008), constructs Alice as a diminutive being, who is too small to be acknowledged and recognized in this world.

Extract 4

(Female as an object discourse)

Her dupatta flares in a gust of wind and the faces of the three people sitting in front of her blur into a crowd, a crowd that is headed for a pre-planned lynching somewhere else but decides to first warm up on a stray-dog. (p. 10-11)

Here, Alice is once again physically identified as a stray dog which is being chased by a mob and the mob is going to execute her for pleasure. The interviewers are constructed as a mob that is all set and bent upon killing Alice. She is being followed by a group of hunters. Alice is equated with a “stray dog”. She has been constructed in a disparaging and belittling manner in this discourse.

Extract 5

(Male gaze woman body discourse)

“Postnatal care?’ His eyes are level with Alice Bhatti’s breasts. ‘Inverted nipples. How do you deal with them? Have you any personal experience to share?’ Ortho sir rolls his tongue around his gums as if there might be nipples stuck between his teeth.” (p. 14)

Context: Alice taking her interview for nursing and Ortho sir elicit some information about her nursing experience.

In this passage, Ortho sir is engaged in staring at Alice's breasts and here the discourse of male gaze and woman's body is constructed. Moreover, Alice is represented in terms of her breasts, i.e. somatization. (Van Leeuwen, 2008). She is subject to lustful male gaze of Ortho Sir, who is constructed as a lascivious male through mentioning of his facial expressions of rolling his tongue around his gums. So, through this discourse, Alice is passivated in terms of her physical identification, whereas Ortho sir is activated. So, this discourse depicts female objectification and exploitation by male.

Extract 6

(Woman as victim and men as aggressors discourse)

“Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom are all part of Alice Bhatti’s daily existence.” (p. 14)

The phrases used in this passage represent Alice Bhatti's exploited and molested daily life. All these acts of physical contacts by unspecified actors reveal the recurrence of male lust and objectivation of Alice. The use of *“Existence”* instead of *life*, to refer to Alice's daily routine also reflects the worthlessness of Alice's life as she is exposed to repetitive acts of harassment. She has to face many challenges in her routine life ranging between *“lewd gestures and uninvited hands on her bottom”*. All these acts render Alice a vulnerable and exploited being, which is entangled in the web of overarching male suppression.

Extract 7

(Male as physically strong and powerful being discourse)

“With his walrus moustache and sunken eyes he could pass a high-school headmaster, but with three stars on the shoulder of his black cotton shirt, his low-slung police belt and an ancient Beretta in his side holster, nobody is likely to mistake him for anyone except the head of the G Squad trying to finish his shift and go home.” (p. 16-17)

(Representation of Inspector Malangi)

In this passage, Inspector Malangi has been represented in terms of his unique physical characteristics, i.e. **“physical identification”**. *“Walrus moustache and sunken eyes”*, construct him as a domineering and tough guy having physical vigour and strength. He is also represented in terms of reference to varied objects which he carries with him; i.e. *“three stars on the shoulder”, low-slung police belt”, and “an ancient Beretta”* all are instances of “instrumentalization” (van Leeuwen, 2008). Through the physical identification and instrumentalization, Inspector Malangi is constructed in this discourse as a strong and overpowering male, who is appropriately equipped to pass into the role of *“the head of the G Squad”*.

Extract 8

(Discourse of women as victim and male as aggressor)

“Alice Bhatti has read many stories about women being hacked and burnt or simply disappearing in the corridors of the Sacred, and now Sister Hina Alvi has told her that she should consider everything in this place normal.” (p. 52)

In this discourse, women are represented in terms of Material processes, i.e. **“hacked, burnt, disappearing”**. They are passivated (Van Leeuwen, 2008) and

physically identified in this discourse. Alice's fears and apprehensions are conveyed in the backdrop of those cryptic and horrifying stories occurring in the Sacred (Hospital). Through this discourse, the general predicament and treatment of women in Pakistan has been shown in a rhetorical way. The last sentence also ironically conveys the uncongenial and deleterious environment that prevails in the hospitals as Alice is being informed by Sister Hina Alvi that she should take such instances as normal.

Extract 9

(Women as possession discourse)

“She has been sent for us,’ the man with the turquoise handkerchief shouts at Teddy. They all huddle behind her. ‘You can’t take her away. She’ll be sent back. You’ll see that she’ll come back for us.’” (p. 52-53)

In this traditional discourse of woman as possession, Alice has been represented as passivated, i.e. **“been sent for us”**, whereas, all men are activated. They all crowd together behind her and also claim Alice to be their property or some asset. Moreover, in this discourse, woman is represented in the traditional role of a caretaker, nurturer, and supporter of men.

Extract 10

(Male female difference discourse)

“...if a man goes nine seconds without thinking about a woman, chances are that he is not really a man. Teddy claimed he saw it on TV.” (p. 57)

Traditional discourse of female-male difference is constructed in this remark by Teddy about women and men relationship. Masculinity is determined by man's capacity to think or inhibit thinking about women. Manhood is being constructed in this stereotypical discourse in the backdrop of man's resilience to withstand the temptation of women. A **“real man”** thinks about women.

2). Feminist discourses identified and analysed

Extract 1

(Alternative discourse: Representation of Alice)

“Noor knows that Alice is the kind of person who’ll return a favour by saying fuck you too. He also knows that her fatal flaw is not her family background, but her total inability to say simple things like ‘excuse me’ and ‘thank you’.” (p. 32)

In this passage, Noor describes his perception about Alice. Alice has been categorized into a **“kind”**, who rely on offensive statements and slangs, i.e. **“saying fuck you too”** traditionally associated with male talk. She has been referred to and **“apprised”**, as she is evaluated negatively for her **“fatal flaw”** and **“total inability”** to apologize. She also fails to show gratitude in return of favours given to her. In this discourse Alice has been constructed as a subversive woman who questions and deviates from set social standards and stereotypes. She is being denounced for her lack of proper social skills which are needed to grant entry into the social world. She has been alternatively construed as a misfit and delinquent person in this discourse. She has also been passivated in this discourse.

Extract 2

(Alternative and subversive discourse: representation of Sister Hina Alvi)

“Alice notices that Sister Hina Alvi never offers anyone else one of her paans. She might spend the whole day surrounded by patients and doctors but she is solitary in her pleasures, always glowing with some personal insight, content in a world that makes sense only to her and happy in the knowledge that she doesn’t need any validation from anyone.” (p. 42)

In this alternative discourse, Sister Hina Alvi has been represented in terms of her unique characteristics, i.e. “**solitary** in her pleasures” and “**glowing** with some personal insight”, “**content** in a world that makes her happy”. In all these adjectives she is realized linguistically in terms of her distinct traits which qualify her as an independent and free soul. She is constructed as a self centered and hedonistic woman who lives freely without any external binding or constraint. Hina Alvi prefers a secluded and contented life; indifferent to external affects and interventions. Through this discourse she has been portrayed as an inward looking woman who rejects outward influences and “**validation**”. So, these unique physical identifications accord her self reliance and contentment in her own right.

Extract 3

Alternative discourse: Representation of Alice when she faces her trial in the court of law.

Context: Joseph’s views about Alice

“When Joseph Bhatti sees Alice at her bail hearing in the session court, he sees something of himself in her. Alice Bhatti carries her handcuffs lightly, as if she is wearing glass bangles. She treats the policewomen as if they were her personal bodyguards.” (p. 69)

In this alternative discourse Alice has been represented in terms of reference to her “**handcuffs**” which she is wearing at the time of her trial. Her handcuffs are assimilated with “**glass bangles**”. It shows that she is poised as an intrepid and carefree woman who has no fears. Alice has been constructed as an iconic figure and an outlaw, who is least concerned about her trial. Alice is constructed as a hero of a movie and person of paramount agency and control. Material verbs like “**carries**”, “**wearing**” and “**treats**” accord her agency in this discourse.

Extract 4

Representation of a judge who adjudicates over Alice’s case: (Alternative discourse). Alice’s focalization

“... she looks at the judge as if to say, how can a man so fat, so ugly, wearing such a dandruff-covered black robe sit in judgment on her?” (p. 69)

Alice is activated in this passage by the mental process of “**looks**”, whereas, the judge is passivated. The judge, who conducts Alice’s trial, is represented through physical identification, i.e. “**fat**”, “**ugly**” and “**dandruff-covered black robe**”, in this discourse. This interrogative perspective of Alice renders the judge as a despicable and condemnable person. It also reveals Alice’s contemptuous and rebellious nature. So, her display of ingratitude in this discourse; not only establishes Alice’s hatred for the judge but also her antagonism towards the legal system of Pakistan, as the judge is the symbol of law and legal system of Pakistan. Hence, it can be said that Alice asserts herself in this discourse by questioning the

legality of her trial by degrading the judge and his attire. Moreover, the black robe worn by the judge also symbolically signifies the evilness and partiality of the judicial system of Pakistan.

Extract 5

Alternative discourse: Alice's reaction after the judgment. (female agency and dissent).

"Alice does turn around, but only to stare at the judge, then she spits on the floor of the court and rushes out, two fat policewomen trying to keep pace with her." (p. 72)

Context: Alice is sentenced for 18 months imprisonment for bashing a doctor.

Alice is activated in this passage with the use of material and behavioral processes like, **"does turn around"**, **"spits"**, **"rushes out"** and **"stare"**, respectively. Her staring at the judge and spitting on the floor construct her as a defiant and arrogant woman, who abhors the legal proceeding and judicial system. Her irreverence displayed in this passage is aimed at flouting and undermining the transparency of the judgment. So, she is been constructed alternatively as a rebellious and assertive woman in this discourse.

Extract 6

Alternative discourse:

Context: Alice showing her anger over the foundling recovered from the drain by her father, Joseph Bhatti.

"Alice pushes her plate aside. She feels she is still in the Bortsal, taking bullshit because she has to, but knowing when to stop. 'Sign of what? I think it's a sign that there is no place a woman can go and deliver a baby, that there is no place for her even when her water is breaking. It's a sign that human life can be flushed down the toilet. It's a sign that nobody gives a fuck about signs.' (p. 73)

Alice is activated in this passage as material verb **"push"** and behavioral verb **"feel"** are used to establish her agency. Alice denounces his father's contention that the recovery of a foundling from the drain is a *sign*. Subsequently, she bursts up into a flurry of rebellious canter and curses those patriarchal constraints and malpractices which render women helpless and victim of infanticide and exploitation. She questions the repressive practice of denying women their due and equitable rights in the Pakistani society. As she has been recently out of prison after completing her sentence in Borstal Jail, her frustration and agony on this discovery is reflected through her use of fuck word for signs as claimed by her father.

Extract 7

(Discourse of care and nurturing. Traditional discourse of female's etiquette and social normalcy).

Alternative discourse regarding nursing profession, reference to role model of Fatima Jinnah.

'Have you read her letters to her brother?' Sister Hina Alvi asks her and continues without waiting for an answer. 'Did you know that Fatima was a dentist, a trained dentist? But she sacrificed her whole life for this country. And how do we remember her? As an old spinster. Someone gives you their whole life and what do you call them: mother of the nation. Now if her brother is the father of the nation, how can

she be the mother of the nation? They could have called her sister of the nation, but no. Because then people might have mistaken her for a nurse, one of us. (p. 80)

In this passage, Sister Hina Alvi talks about Fatima Jinnah and her acknowledgement by the people. She relates Fatima Jinnah with nursing profession. By drawing a comparison between Fatima Jinnah as sister of the nation and a sister as nurse, she tries to strike a semblance of comparison between the irreverence and ingratitude of the people for both. In this passage, the general treatment of women in Pakistan is abominated for being male oriented and prejudiced towards women in general and the nursing profession in particular. Moreover, the ill treatment of nursing profession is reflected in this discourse through scathing criticism and contempt for societal stereotyping and generalization. By mentioning the historical and nationally acclaimed figure of Fatima Jinnah, Sister Hina Alvi acridly criticizes the patriarchal dominance in the Pakistani society. In this way she reveals the general degradation that is associated with the nursing profession.

Extract 8

(Feminist discourse: Alice accepting the challenges in her line of duty)

“Life has taught Alice Bhatti that every little step forward in life is preceded by a ritual humiliation. Every little happiness asks for a down payment. Too many humiliations and a journey that goes in circles means that her fate is permanently in the red. She accepts that role. ‘I’ll do my best.’” (p. 82)

Although, in this passage, Alice is passivated in relation to certain misgivings of life, yet, she has been given the sociological agency. She has been linguistically realized by her use of material processes, i.e. **“accepts”** and **“do”**, which reflects her resoluteness and forbearance in the face of accumulated **“humiliations”**. She sets herself off on a tumultuous and challenging journey which is ridden with humiliations and great costs. In this discourse, Alice is represented as a fighter who accepts the fight against all odds and adversaries. She resolves and asserts herself to withstand all humiliations that may come into her line of duty.

Extract 9

(Alternative discourse: female resistance and male exploitation)

“In that instant she can feel Junior’s gaze piercing through to her cleavage. She hands him the card in turn he picks up a thousand- rupee note from the table and waves it in front of her. ‘Here, you have won.’

Alice doesn’t mind accepting little gifts from her patients and their carers, but nobody has ever offered her a thousand-rupee. ‘I am not allowed to play cards while on duty,’ she says, and turns to go back to her seat. Then she looks back and says, ‘But thank you.’ She doesn’t want to offend them.” (p. 87)

In this passage, Alice is entangled in an uninvited harassment by one of the minor characters, Junior. Junior’s mother had been hospitalized for some time and Alice was assigned the VIP ward. Junior initiates the excesses by first casting a lecherous look over Alice’s body, then, he proceeds to offer her a thousand-rupee note in return of some physical favours. But, Alice is adamant to receive any such monetary favor in exchange of physical advances. She also rejects his advances and politely denies his demands. In this passage, Alice’s resistance to male dominance and exploitation is reflected through Alice’s refusal of male’s advances. Moreover,

she is shown to be turning down the offer and maintaining her self-respect and professional prestige.

Extract 10

(Alternative discourse: Alice admonishing Teddy Butt)

“That little gun doesn’t scare me. Your tears don’t fool me. You think that a woman, any woman who wears a uniform is just waiting for you to show up and she will take it off. I wish you had just walked in and had the guts to tell me you want me to take this off. We could have had a conversation about that. At the end of which I would have told you what I am telling you now: fuck off and never show me your face again.” (p. 103)

In this passage, Alice is activated and an agency is accorded to her in this representation by her condemnation and forceful statements directed to Teddy. When Teddy proposes her and teases her with his persistent intrusion into her domain, she bursts up and scolds him for his advances. In this discourse, Alice is constructed as an assertive and arrogant woman who rejects the offensive and pretentious posture of Teddy. She admonishes Teddy for bothering her. Once again, with the use of slangs and gross statements, the resistant and powerful features of her personality are revealed to us.

VI. Conclusion

I have endeavored to reveal that the gendered discourses evident in fiction may be of more concern and revealing to the critical analysts than the mere distribution of female and male characters and what they do. I have also attempted to identify gendered discourses in fictional texts to suggest that multivocality is a common feature of these texts and can be a useful epistemological site for a feminist analysis.

If fictional texts are gendered in any way, where men and women are being advantaged and disadvantaged respectively in varied gendered discourses, this must be reflected and constructed in varied gendered discourses of the selected novels. Therefore, an examination of such discourses has not only revealed the gender construal but also helped to understand the gendered discourses that reify and construct gender in myriad of ways.

In the above qualitative and interpretive analysis of the selected extracts from the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, in terms of identified gendered discourses; namely, 1) Traditionally gendered discourses and 2) Feminist discourses, this study has endeavored to explore the construal of gender in a fictional narrative, in the backdrop of feminist critical discourse analysis. The choice of interdiscursive analysis as the focus of the present study was accentuated by the following considerations: firstly, though interdiscursivity is an essential analytical aspect in modern discursive approaches yet it has lacked proper attention in linguistic study. It is hoped that present study would provide impetus to further researches on gender through this perspective. Secondly, the study of gender from interdiscursive approach would contribute to the growing body of studies on gender at theoretical and practical levels. Lastly, a preliminary review of the related literature revealed that no systematic and investigative analysis of gender in the Pakistani fiction from the perspective of interdiscursivity has ever been carried out at such an exhaustive

extent with a qualitative perspective. It is an attempt to establish that study of gender construal from an interdiscursive approach can to a certain degree, add to the proper linguistic study of gender in Pakistani fiction in English. The qualitative analysis of fiction is characteristically applied to certain extracts rather than the whole works. A qualitative approach requires an in-depth study of the selected extracts, with aims to interpret, explain and describe the data rather than counting the linguistic features or content for frequency checks. The principle of selection is based on two broader discursive perspectives: traditional gendered discourses and feminist discourses. These extracts have been culled out for carrying out a critical discourse analytical standpoints in the feminist backdrop.

From a critical feminist perspective, the construal of gender as a social practice raises some questions for consideration. Do the representations of males and females, in keeping with social changes; promise an equal status for men and women in different domains of life? Or do the representations continue to sustain, through subtle and apparently innocuous ways, gender discrimination and inequality?

These are analysed here in terms of two apparently competing gendered discourses, namely the traditional gendered discourse(s) and the alternative/progressive gendered discourses, respectively. It is found that the presence of contesting discourses, while imbuing contemporary social changes and contestations in gender relations, also contributes to the reenactment and reification of the hegemonic patriarchal gender order to fit in with the changing times.

Gender construction in the selected texts is located within particular gendered discourses. The two discourses, which operate within an 'order of discourse' (Fairclough, 1992), in the field of gender relations, were a dominant discourse of traditional gendered discourse and a competing discourse of progressive gendered discourse. Conservative/traditional discourse maintained gender polarity whereas egalitarian/progressive discourse envisaged gender parity and contestation in all aspects of public and private life.

Historically, women have been one of the most repressed and deprived subgroups in society and incidents of violence and prejudice as well as negative portrayals of women persist even in technological advanced countries of the world. These realities underpin the prevalence and continuity of those discourses which either restrict or bar women from achieving an equitable status in societies. If gender is seen as a social and cultural product, which is accomplished in and through discourse(s), then, it is revealing to consider how fictional writers represent and construe femininities and masculinities in their writings.

The study of the representation and construction of gender in Pakistani fiction in English revealed that femininity and masculinity are still by and large informed by the discourses and representations that draw on what could be considered as 'traditional' images of Pakistani women and men. In their varied guises, patriarchal forces deeply embedded in the social practices determine the ways and means of femininity and masculinity.

It is maintained by the researcher that the extracts selected for analysis in this study are not representative of the complete work of fiction rather they testify to the existence of competing and contradictory discourses within a single work and

such discourses are of interest to the analysts. As stated by Sunderland (2004) 'A single episode or instance, in a work of fiction, depicting a progressive and non-traditional view about femininity cannot establish it a feminist work, neither can it be evaluated for its construal or representation of gender in total on the basis of a single chapter. Though, that single episode might be of some interest for the analyst' (p. 42).

Though, writers have actively been engaged in projecting women's cause and issues in the last many years, yet, they have not been successful in changing the dominant ideas and discourses about women. The way femininity is represented in Pakistani fiction in English signifies that how difficult it is to imagine alternative ways to construe gender in existing patriarchal social structures of society. These constraints stem in part from the position that Pakistani fiction writers have taken within the domains of culture and society. Undeniably, the fictional writers are faced with hegemonic patriarchal tendencies and practices for producing certain feminine qualities in their writings for achieving acceptance and credence. Among writers both inside and outside Pakistan, writing about Pakistani society, there has been a penchant to conform to the prevalent patriarchal outlook of the Pakistani society.

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