



RESEARCH PAPER

Evolution and Narrative Shifting: A Study of Contemporary Fiction by Pakistani Female English Novelists

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolution of themes and narrative techniques in the works of Pakistani female writers of English novels belonging to different literary generations. Under the postcolonial and feminist parameters, it explores how the socio-cultural, postcolonial and sociolinguistic aspects bring about a change in the selection of subjects and narrative formation. The study makes attempt to find out the contrasts and similarities found in the thematic interests of previous writers, like Bapsi Sidhwa and Sara Suleri in contrast to the contemporary voices like Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan. The qualitative textual analysis of the data is carried on for an analysis of the case study of representative novels to examine the deviations in the representation of character, the narrative voice and linguistic idioms. The findings of the present research show a shift in the themes represented in the earlier fiction, focusing on themes like national identity, women and gender oppression to those of globalization, diaspora and self-realization in the contemporary fiction. Linguistic hybridization and narrative innovativeness characterize the contemporary novels as part of the changing cultural identities. The present study concludes that the Pakistani female writers of novels in English have substantially altered the term English Novel through the evolving genres of narration where gender, language and identity confront and/are negotiated locally and internationally which is ultimately contributing to the larger discourse of postcolonial feminist literature. The study may be used as a foundation to further inquire the topic selection by female novelists in this digital age.

KEYWORDS Topic Evolution, Narrative Shifting, Contemporary Fiction, Pakistani, Females, English Novelists

Introduction

The development of fictional writing in South Asia in English is one of the prominent aspects of literary modernity in the area of its post-colonial development as a special post-colonial voice which embodies a negotiation between indigenous and autumnal traditions and the local and the global traditions. In this zone, the work done by female novelists from Pakistan in English has been highly important to any noticeable representation of gender, identity and nation. Since the 1980s, when female novelists like Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and the others have been attempting to represent the experience of women within the context of actual sociocultural and sociopolitical realities, it has been possible to turn fiction writing into a mode of resistance, introspection and transformation (Chambers 2011; Malik et al. 2023). The works produced under this impulse not only represent the changing space occupied by women in Pakistani society but accommodate themselves with changing realities of language, migration, religion and post-colonial dislocation and exile: the phenomenon which represents a dialogue between tradition and modernity. The work of these early Pakistani female novelists like Sidhwa and Suleri operates within the

paradigms of identity and colonial memory and the subjugation of gender within the context of the national equation of post-Partition Pakistan (Chawla & Yasmeen 2022).

Changing political paradigms in Pakistan from colonial subjugation to globalization and digital modernity have conditioned the ways in which women understand and define identity, independence and belongingness. Feminist critics such as Showalter (1981) and Spivak (1988) have pointed out that women's writing serves as both a mirror and a diagnosis against the social system while postcolonial critics like Bhabha (1994) and Ashcroft et al. (2002) show that hybridized cultural identities rearrange meanings of selfness and nation. In this circumstance, Pakistani female novelists work out their position within the intersecting set of relations of sex, class, language, and diasporic identification. Most of the criticism has been directed at representation of gender issues (Mehmood, 2019) which ignores the vital interrelationship of the sociolinguistic and thematic organic growth. Little has been commented upon the effective influence of the sociocultural factors of globalization, urbanization and altered codes of morality on the affective narrative strategies employed by Pakistani Women's English fiction (Ahmed et al., 2022). The present research intends to conduct research into how sociocultural, postcolonial and linguistic factors give rise to the growth of topics and works of narratives undertaken by Pakistani female writers of the English novelists in diverse generations. This research sets out to investigate the role of the socio-cultural, post-colonial and sociolinguistic environments in the differences with regards to topic shifts and narrative shifts that characterize the writings of contemporary Pakistani female novelists' writing in English. It also aims to study these topic preoccupations in the works of earlier writers, such as Sidhwa and Suleri in comparison to those of later writers such as Shamsie and Khan. In this context, the study utilizes a postcolonial female perspective and discourse analysis to assess the changes in narrative as both a linguistic and ideological process. (Fairclough, 1995; Ashcroft et al, 2002).

In addition, the study's methodology is qualitative textual analysis including a comparison of the representative fiction of two generations of female novelists. By grounding the study on the study of narrative shifts, the study aims to investigate the ways that narrative increasingly employs certain artistic techniques, character development, language choice and topics of concern which correspond to the greater social changes. As Ijaz et al., (2023) have pointed out: "Story-telling and language performance should not be assessed as neutral phenomena: the very forms of narrative and language work themselves are creative deconstructions of the meanings, identity, and ideologies."

Thus, the Pakistani women's English narrative is examined as related to a change from describing the collective trauma of a nation to seeking to illustrate and provide individual agency as a solution to this. Through the analysis of the changing nature of topic and shifts in narrative form, the research has contributed to the current postcolonial and feminist literary studies. It is hoped to show that the Pakistani female novelists are capable of creating long works of fiction that illustrate the agency to be found in creatively changing their realities through innovative narrative forms. The findings of this study may be applied to extend the criticism of the literature of South Asian women writers by investigating the ways that the innovative aspect of narrative form is changed in correlation to a changing of emotions in cultural awareness. In conclusion, it is sought to show that the Pakistani female English fiction constitutes a current creative discourse which is in the process of recreating new definitions of identity, gender and belonging in an ever-changing world.

Literature Review

Postcolonial Identity and Subjectivity

Belongingness and displacement in the frameworks of postcolonialism have been a concern of Pakistani novelists from long ago. It is pithily said by Ahmed et al., (2022) that postcolonial identity in woman's fiction exists in the conflict between modernity and the original culture, while Hussain et al. (2023) have confirmed that the diaspora in Pakistani authorship female deals with the identity of the globalized world with the means of narrative hybridity. These critiques suggest that the question of identity is still in the center of women fiction from Pakistan while postcolonial anxiety changes to more alternate themes of transnational subjectivity.

Feminist Expression and Gender Representation

Feminist issues play an important part in the fiction written in Pakistan in English. Malik et al. (2023) trace the historical development of the literature written by women in Pakistan through Showalter's (1981) three stages of feminine, feminist and female expression treads from silence to protest and lastly to creative independence. Mehmood (2019) has also identified that the modern women novelists express those silent experiences through female characters who are opposed to the patriarchic control. This has transformed (Chawla and Yasmeen (2022) women from passive symbols to active agents of protest and empowerment. Moreover, Ahmad et al. (2023) point out that the modern writers like Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan blur the difference between the personal and the political and women are presented as interpreters of both i.e. of the domestic and the Universal realities. Thematically, these writers deal with marriage, education, sexuality, mobility etc. the contested lands in which women pursue freedom through innovation in narration.

Evolution in Narrative Techniques and Thematic Changes

The development of narrative techniques in Pakistani female fiction corresponds with the socio-political development in the country itself. Chambers (2011) marks a change from nationalistic and historical narratives of the early writers (Sidhwa, Suleri) to ones of an introspective nature with cosmopolitan resonance in the works of Shamsie and Khan. Ijaz et al. (2023) appear to make use of a corpus stylistic mode of study in which the linguistic and stylistic changes produced in the contemporary fiction represented here are indicative of the complexity of post-modern identity and subjectivity. Malik et al. (2023) points out that intertextuality and metafiction are common modes of representation among the new writers which is indicative of the passing from the realistic to an experiment in narrative modes. Mehmood (2019) contends that women's fiction has now progressed from the literature of protest to that of psychological depth and literature of aesthetic self-expression. Chawla and Yasmeen (2022) have pointed out that the changes in forwarding themes are not merely thematic in essence but structural, indicating that the women writers now have control of the narrative of "voice" and discourse agency in the way narrative is structured in their fiction.

Sociolinguistic and Language Perspectives

Language use in the novels of women writers from Pakistan is an area of resistance and negotiation. Ijaz et al. (2023) have indicated that code-mixing, bilingual prose and vernacular idioms have increasingly influenced recent novels, indicating a

decolonization of literary English. Malik et al., (2023) have suggested that female novelists have favored local idioms, cultural metaphors and domestic registers, creating what Spivak (1988) has termed a “strategic essentialism” whereby subaltern voices are reclaimed. Similarly, Mehmood (2019) indicates that linguistic variation and metaphorical layering indicate the internal struggle of women, living in patriarchal conditions. Ahmed et al. (2022) have indicated that sociolinguistic changes such as urban bilingualism and social class differences in speech patterns have impacted on the stylistic identity of Pakistani fiction. These changes are consistent with Fairclough’s (1995) concept of language as a social practice in which discourse is dictated by ideological position and social hierarchies. There exists a great deal of literature concerning Pakistani female novelists writing in English. But the gaps in this field still exist. The concepts of feminism and postcoloniality have received much attention, comparative social linguistic variation and the evolution of theme has receive comparatively little attention. Finally narrative structure, especially variation in the perspective of the tale-teller, manipulation of time and voice variation has not been explored to any significant extent as a tendency of socio-cultural evolution.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study has employed a qualitative research design specifically a comparative thematic analysis on the evolution of themes, topics and narrative structures in Pakistani women writers’ English fiction. The qualitative paradigm employed allows for an in-depth exploration of literary texts, enabling the researcher to discover the meanings, contexts and ideological implications of the material which go beyond the mere textual (surface) linguistic structures. As argued by Creswell (2018), the qualitative paradigm will advocate the structure development of certain narratives and their themes. Therefore, a methodology of interpretation is used to convey that meaning is constructed culturally, socially, politically and linguistically depending on the contexts (Bryman, 2016). Such an approach underpins the reality of shifting of narratives and topics of Pakistani female novelists over time

Theoretical Framework

Sociolinguistic Attitude Theory by Garrett’s (2010) has been adopted in the present study, which enables a contextual understanding of the ways in which the social attitudes, values and ideologies influence the structure of language and narrative. Garrett’s model is divided into three strands, cognitive, affect and behavioral with each element working on a level of structurization, determining how the attitudes in question influence the discourse. Garrett’s theoretical approach provides a more equipped model for interpreting the ways in which the female Pakistani writers’ attitudes towards cultural identity, gender and the use of language express themselves through their narrative constructs.

Data of the study has been collected from eight novels of the famous Pakistani women writers in English.

Earlier phase (1980s–1990s):

Ice-Candy-Man (Bapsi Sidhwa, 1988)

Meatless Days (Sara Suleri, 1989)

Kartography (Kamila Shamsie, 2002)

Recent phase (2008–2020):

The Shadow of the Crescent Moon (Fatima Bhutto, 2013)
The Diary of a Social Butterfly (Moni Mohsin, 2008)
Thinner Than Skin (Uzma Aslam Khan, 2012)
The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch (Sanam Maher, 2018)
The Runaways (Fatima Bhutto, 2018)

The novels have been selected by the purposive sampling (nonprobability classification which is legal or informative for qualitative literary interpretation (Palinkas et al., 2015)). The criteria for selection of novels were: (1) the writers belonged to the well reputed Pakistani women writers of English. (2) they represented different time job starting with previous generation of writers and generation of modern writers. (3) the novels were treated with different themes such as sociocultural or gender issues. In this way, the comparison of evolution of themes and mutation of narration quality be made on the part of ancient and modern writers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was based on a prose reading of the same type along with textual notes written down on the perpetual subjects, metaphors of the language or their discourse and linguistic qualities or structures solidly written down in literature. The procedure of investigation for a fresh theme or subject was followed with respect to Braun and Clarke (2006) in the following stages or gradations:

- Familiarization with the texts
- Generation of initial codes
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing a narrative report

Each theme of study was accomplished with respect to the knowledge of the investigators and sociocultural features which suggested the general characteristics or features of the theme. There was an emphasis in the analysis work of the subject with respect to the mutation of the subjects (continuously new themes to work out on), or Mutation of Narration (occurring with respect to the Mutation of structure, vision, formation and Subject in becoming more informatory or disclosing). During the course of the study and evolution, the researchers are advised to remember the side to which each is honed to in relation with each and which must mean that the features or had various evidences found in a book or a work and drawing from the ancient texts providing no sympathy for readers nor should those whose merits are well known not mention the insistence on the interpretative quality of their own work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results and Discussion

A comparative review of thematic material has revealed a distinct shift in major preoccupations from themes such as identity, migration and colonial aftermath in earlier works of the novelists to the autonomy and agency of women with urban and global changes in settings as well. The topics of earlier novelists were related to partition, diaspora and conflict. However, in contemporary works the topics have been shifted towards changes in social and cultural, community and contexts recollections to personal consciousness. Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than Skin* indicate an engagement with environmental crises, migrancies, social change, digital

connectivity and global concerns. In these presentations, the writers achieve a stylistic and thematic evolution where the feminine voice is at once local and cosmopolitan, transgressing cultural boundaries of national identity to become vehicles for social critique on consumerism, violence and changing morals. It indicates that topic evolution presents analogy of effect of transformation of sociocultural landscape of Pakistan through such imperatives as urbanization, shifting configurations of class and global exposure.

Sociocultural Influences on Topic Evolution

The sociocultural context is also an important dimension of narrative focus. The earlier period (1980s and 1990s) denotes a time of political instability and Islamization policies and thus a relegation of the female to public roles circumscribed by the demands of silence, repression and resistance but at the same time revealing the double face of oppression towards women and the nation of fragmented experiences which these female novelists delineate in retrospect through symbolic narrative (RLS pp 938-940). The woman characters of Sidhwa ferry have navigated the patriarchal power of contemporary experience-glowing in the birth of history and sociocultural reality while relegated to the realm of silence.

Moreover, the same split occurs post-2000, but then women have been figured out in the more plural, cosmopolitan popular hybrid identities. The advent of world media, global publishing and a readership transcending national boundaries has enlarged the extent and content of Pakistani English fiction. For example, writers like Moni Mohsin through her employment of satire in *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* foregrounds urban elite and consumer cultures and linguistic hybridity, thus depicts a change from the allegorical political to that of sociolinguistic parody. This shift from structural representatives to a predominantly cultural representative milieu demonstrates markedly the nature of conditions operating so as to diversify the nature of trends in the primary field of narrative interest but also those of vision and ideas overtly stated. The facility with which the bending machine adapts itself to new forms may also be noted-which signally demonstrates the expansion of public opinion and the number of women and women's participation in the media and the knowledge fields and the ends of them narratively expressed diverging from those of survival and power to humor and self-assertion and the satire of both process and product of social human hypocrisy. Garrett's sociolinguistic perception explicates the process of change entailed since there are a means of signifying through language the changing of attitudes to it and identity with it. With the growth in language stratification, arising through the reality of Pakistani nationality, English has become an aspired to and entire code language in which the maintenance of expressed human power is simultaneously lessened, the female writers have employed it with a marked intent to signify furthering of power relations.

Ideological and Postcolonial Evolution in Narrative Structure

A close reading of the narrative structure yields an important ideological evolution. The earlier novelists employ historical and realist modes based on the colonial past and nationalist reconstruction. Such novels are of a linear narrative structure that is often focused on Partition, exile and cultural loss i.e. expressing what Trivedi (2007) calls "the mourning of modernity" in post-colonial fiction. The emerging novelist tends to experiment with fragmented time-structures, multiple narrators and metafictional modes, pointing, too, to contemporary dislocation. Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* and Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God* represent a postmodern

sensibility, whereby the narrative fragmentation itself mirrors that of the fractured identity of the characters. The transfer of collective history to individual subjectivity shows the shift of the state of colonial anxiety to the state of existential angst. This development is parallel to the shift in postcolonial literature towards global literature i.e. the shift toward the nation towards the self and the tradition towards the movement. Also, postcoloniality can be observed by the manner in which the female novelists challenge the masculine authorship in their national narratives. The previous female voice is usually expressed through the ordeal of woman herself whose agency is entrenched in the family and religion. But the modern authors perform the polyphonic voices and ironized distance to give themselves a right of narration authoritatively. Thus, the thematic structure is also the shift of story, which is a marker of the change of representational dependence to the authorial autonomy.

Choice and Sociolinguistic Representation of language

Pakistani female fiction does not merely use language as a medium of communication, but rather a value marker of identity and ideology. The older writers were more subservient to the norms of Standard British English, of which they had been conditioned and to the employment of a high prestige variety of English. But the more recent authors are indulging in a kind of strategic code-mixing or lexical indigenization, feeding Urdu and vernacular terms in so as to increase the sense of authenticity, and attempt to destabilize linguistic prestige. For example, the quotidian humor of Mohsin's works and the transnational style of Bhutto are representative of the sociolinguistic situation in Pakistan in which English is dynamically interacting with the indigenous languages. The change in style indicates that the earlier system of imitation has now been replaced by invention and indicates the way in which the female voice adapts English to a local form of expression. Following the Garrett's model of attitude (2010) has indicated that these linguistic choices suggest a positive re-evaluation of hybridization and local expressions where English is concerned, whereby English is viewed as a vehicle of cultural identity rather than a sign of colonial allegiance. The sociolinguistic changes in authorial representations also express the change in readership and publishing practice. The cosmopolitan nature of Pakistani English literature is now thought suitable for worldwide readership and the new authors consciously mediate between accessibility and authenticity where Western literary conventions need to be balanced with local ones. This has led to a globalized narrative style which is at the same time universal and culturally specific expressing what has been termed a duality of consciousness amongst the Pakistani female writers of the twenty-first century.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative thematic analysis suggests three main axes of change. 1. From Nation to Self: Early novels focus on collective self-identity and national crises; recent ones on personal morality, emotional self-agency and urban self-hood. 2. From Disempowerment to Self-Empowerment: The early indigenous texts portray women as victims of historical and patriarchal circumstance; the later texts portray them as creators of new social realities, negotiating love, politics and professional success. 3. From Colonial Past to Global Present: The early fiction engages in dialogue with the colonial past and its vestigial effects; the later fiction with the effects of globalization, terrorism, migration and the social media and altering the meaning of "Pakistani experience" in a globalized age. This comparative paradigm suggests that the evolution of themes is not merely chronological but ideological. It reflects the gradual and internal de-colonization of Pakistani women's fiction, from writing back to writing forward. Therefore, the narrative shifts are both thematic and epistemic: they characterize the changing

perceptions of what it is to be a woman, a Pakistani and an English language writer in a rapidly changing socio-cultural milieu.

Intersection of Gender, Culture and Narrative Agency

Contemporary female novelists do not reconstitute the meaning of gender as a stable category but as a social construction that is fluid, influenced by ethnicity, social class, geography and globalization. The heroines they create must negotiate the conflict between family obligation and self fulfilment resulting in an evolving gender identity. The stories before this had expressed gender in binary oppositional terms, liberated versus traditional, modern versus conservative gender perception whereas the recent narratives encompass the intersections of class with the urban spaces of human experiences. For instance, Sanam Maher's, *The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch* invert the concept of 'female shame' into a discursive meaning of electronic resistance through her narrative of how print and electronic media alters the meanings of the narratives of gender. The emphasis on online identity, visibility and violence in her work illustrates that the narrative shift takes place at other places of representation in life now as opposed to only in narrative forms. This change in the mode of representation is indicative of the movements in the sociolinguistic structure of the voices of the women of Pakistan, from the private to the social public, from silence to enunciation, from representation of their narrative politics to the politics of agency through their narrative voices. The linguistic attitude that is inherent in these narratives and exists in current change indicates faith in the local modes of expression that present themselves and declare not only the growth and reality of Pakistani English as a literary way of writing but also as a proper and substantial, expressive and fluid medium of writing.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate a concern in topic and an evolution in narrative practice through two generations of female English Pakistani novelists. Many previous novelists like Sara Sulehri and Bapsi Sidhwa adopted the themes of displacement, exile, gendered inequalities and traumas related to partition of Pakistan in 1947. According to Ashcroft et al., (2002), their topics were related to oppression, anxieties, realism and patriarchal norms. But the contemporary writers e.g. Uzma Aslam Khan, Fatima Bhutto and Moni Mohsin have shifted their topics and narratives to globalized and modern discourses. According to Bhabha (1994), it is a shift from nationalism to trans-nationalism showing subjectivity. Code switching, hybridity of regional and official languages is one of the reasons of this narrative shift which express the faith in their sociolinguistic competence and ownership of the language used (ii). This trend operates in parallel with a more widespread cultural shift in Pakistan, where the English language itself becomes both a medium of empowerment and cultural negotiation.

In summary, the study concludes that both the topics under discussion and the change in narrative strategies adopted illustrate a move away from collective memory as a source of identity to a series of individual identities and from a colonial inheritance to world-wide self-expression. thereby illustrating how Pakistani female authors are able to articulate a new literary voice which embraces both gendered experiences, linguistic hybridity and global concerns.

The previous generation of authors e.g. Sidhwa and Suleri were expressing and debating the post-colonial dilemma of identity through motifs of displacement, marginalization by gender and cultural recovery whereas the contemporary writers e.g.

Fatima Bhutto, Uzma Aslam Khan and Moni Mohsin are discussing the issues of modernity, the digital era and intersectionality within gender-based politics, and as such portray women as active and not passive observers. This change in the literacy themes is also accompanied by the language with attitudinal change towards hybridization and localization of the English language whereby writers actively engage in code-mixing, and the incorporation of embedded cultural terms which they believe enforces their identity and credence to ownership of the English language (Garrett 2010). This sort of linguistic experimentation demonstrates the re-definition of the English language from a tool of oppression to one of resistance and definitions and artistic constructions of form. In the end, the thematic evolution from narratives founded on shared trauma and national identity to those of self-agency and individuality signify the eventual growth of the identifiable corpus of Pakistani female writing in English into the global identity of artistic creation but within a localized context where the cultural differentiation of themes and styles can continue to explore the convoluted relationships of gender, language and identity in a rapidly changing world.

Recommendations

This study further concludes that the evolution of the topics and the emergence of new narrative strategies among female novelists in English in Pakistan indicates not only a wider sociocultural transformation but a more general post-colonial and linguistic transformation in contemporary Pakistan. In future, the comparative analysis of earlier writers and recent ones at regional and global level can demonstrate the transition from narratives responding to shared trauma and national identity to those of self-agency, individuality and global perception.

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