

Exploring Linguistic Anti-Feminism in Selected Short Stories of Danyial Mueenuddin

Said Hussain Shah¹, Naji Ullah Khan² and Esraa Abd Elnaser Mohamed Hassan³

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between language and gender in Danyial Mueenuddin's selected short stories from his collection, In Other Rooms, Other Wonders. Employing Sara Mills' (2008) model of overt and indirect anti-feminism, a qualitative textual analysis was conducted on four stories: "Saleema," "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," "About a Burning Girl," and "Provide, Provide." The findings reveal persistent instances of linguistic anti-feminism. Overt anti-feminism manifests through derivational nouns (e.g., sweepress, shepherdess) and insulting swear words (e.g., slut), which explicitly demean female characters. Indirect anti-feminism is conveyed through metaphors (e.g., plaything, black mangoes) and irony, which subtly reinforce gender stereotypes and objectify women. The analysis concludes that Mueenuddin's linguistic choices, while reflective of his patriarchal settings, perpetuate gender inequalities by marginalising and belittling women. This research underscores the significance of critical language awareness in challenging and transforming ingrained societal attitudes toward gender in literature.

Keywords: Anti-Feminism, Overt Anti-Feminism, Indirect Anti-Feminism, Gender, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Language is a system of communication utilised by humans to convey meaning, thoughts, ideas, and emotions. It is a structured, symbolic system that allows individuals to express themselves and interact with one another. Language consists of diverse components, encompassing phonetics and phonology for sounds, morphology for the creation of words, semantics for the interpretation of word meanings, syntax for organising sentence structure, and pragmatics for understanding language use within specific contexts.

Language and linguistics are intricately interconnected. Linguistics is the scientific study of language (Yule, 2016). The subject matter of linguistics is language since it is a faculty of all human beings. One level at which language is studied is discourse. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is a specific manner of constructing a particular social practice or domain. Discourse analysis is a powerful tool for understanding how language is used in communication. It can be divided into four main categories: critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and narrative analysis.

¹ English Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu University of Technology, China. Email: hussainkhan5828@gmail.com

² MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Lahore Leads University. Email: najiullahkhan771@gmail.com

³ English Language and Literature, School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu University of Technology, China. Email: hs5932457@gmail.com



Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is part of an emancipatory critical social science aimed at promoting a fair social structure by means of scrutinising discourse. An offshoot of CDA is Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which combines Critical Discourse Analysis with feminist studies to uncover the intricate, and sometimes implicit, ways in which gendered assumptions and dominant power dynamics are created, sustained, discussed, and contested across various contexts and communities (Lazar, 2007).

Although language is a means of communication among people, it sometimes reflects unjustified gender bias against a group or an individual, usually women but sometimes men. Gender-biased language is inherently discriminatory, suggesting that one gender is superior to another. Anti-feminism refers to a belief that one gender holds greater value than another. It imposes restrictions on the behaviours and roles considered appropriate for men, women, boys, and girls.

Linguistic anti-feminism involves exploring the relationship between language and gender. Language serves both as a means of communication and as a tool for understanding the world we live in. Catalán (2009) stated that language plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of society, organising their knowledge, acquiring new information, and assimilating the social norms and patterns of the community. Language expresses consciousness, mirrors culture, and influences socialisation. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of transforming language from traditional usage to a more inclusive, gender-sensitive form.

Statement of the Problem

Despite progress toward gender equality, literature still reinforces gender biases and stereotypes through language. This study examines gender-biased language in Danyial Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009), focusing on four stories: "Saleema," "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," "About a Burning Girl," and "Provide, Provide." By analysing language choices, narrative techniques, and character portrayals, the research explores how linguistic anti-feminism reflects and perpetuates societal gender inequalities, shaping the ideological perspectives of both writers and readers.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the categories of anti-feminism in the selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin.
2. To identify gender biased language in Danyial Mueenuddin's short stories.

Research Questions

1. What are The categories of anti-feminism used in the selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin?
2. How is gender-biased language portrayed in the selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin?

Significance of Research

This research on linguistic anti-feminism in Danyial Mueenuddin's short stories contributes to understanding how language in literature can reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. Analysing gendered language and narrative patterns reveals how linguistic choices shape perceptions of gender and influence societal attitudes. The study also provides readers with a critical awareness of how language can sustain or resist gender inequality, promoting more inclusive and equitable literary representation.

Research Methodology

This research employs Sara Mills' (2008) model of overt and indirect anti-feminism to analyse Danyial Mueenuddin's short stories from *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). According to Mills, overt anti-feminism refers to explicit linguistic expressions that convey discriminatory attitudes toward women, presenting them as inferior to men. Such instances can be identified through linguistic markers or presuppositions and include generic nouns and pronouns, derivational forms, non-parallel terms, and anti-feminist usage in proverbs and swear words. In contrast, indirect anti-feminism is more subtle and often veiled through humour, irony, and metaphor. This form of anti-feminism is more complex to detect because it is masked by seemingly harmless expressions that normalise prejudice and gender bias while evading accountability. Gender-biased jokes and ironic remarks, for instance, enable speakers or writers to convey discriminatory ideas about women without openly endorsing them.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between language and gender in literary discourse. Noh et al. (2022) argued that the language used in everyday communication often unconsciously perpetuates gender discrimination. Their study on *Mrs Dalloway* applied Sara Mills' framework to analyse how linguistic features reflect gender bias. Through critical discourse analysis, they identified four forms of overt anti-feminism—naming, dictionary usage, generic pronouns and nouns, and non-parallel terms—and two types of covert anti-feminism, including presuppositions and metaphors. Similarly, Almas and Akhtar (2019) analysed Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* and concluded that its patriarchal social setting reinforces women's subaltern status and loss of agency. Drawing upon Spivak's theory, they demonstrated how women are constructed as "the Other" within a master–slave discourse, reflecting male dominance and control over resources. Shiekh et al. (2019) also found that male Pakistani writers tend to employ more gender-biased language than female writers when portraying female characters. Their study revealed that men's choice of generic pronouns, nouns, semantic derogation, and naming processes reflects deep-rooted linguistic anti-feminism.

The present study holds importance because literature not only mirrors life but also shapes cultural and social values. Analysing linguistic anti-feminism in literary works allows researchers to identify patterns of gender bias and examine how language sustains inequality. Such research also provides a foundation for challenging gender stereotypes and promoting feminist literary criticism. Despite the relevance of Mills' theoretical model, no study has yet applied it to Mueenuddin's selected short stories. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring overt and indirect anti-feminism in his depiction of gendered realities.

A qualitative research method was employed, using textual analysis as the primary analytical approach. The population for this study consists of eight short stories in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*: "Nawabdin Electrician," "Saleema," "Provide, Provide," "About a Burning Girl," "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," "Our Lady of Paris," "Lily," and "A Spoiled Man." From these, four stories—"Saleema," "About a Burning Girl," "Provide, Provide," and "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders"—were selected through purposive sampling, as they contain clear instances of linguistic anti-feminism. The data were collected through detailed textual reading, focusing on words, phrases, and sentences that reflected gender bias according to Sara Mills' categories of overt and indirect anti-feminism. The analysis aimed to identify the linguistic patterns through which gender inequality is represented, reinforced, or challenged in Mueenuddin's fiction.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Sara Mills' (2008) model of overt and indirect anti-feminism, which provides a robust framework for analysing sexism in language. According to Mills, overt anti-

feminism consists of explicit linguistic expressions that convey discriminatory attitudes toward women, presenting them as inferior to men. This form is identifiable through direct linguistic markers such as generic nouns and pronouns (e.g., using "mankind" to represent all humans), derivational forms that mark female counterparts (e.g., actress from actor), non-parallel terms (e.g., bachelor vs. spinster), and anti-feminist usage in proverbs and swear words.

In contrast, indirect anti-feminism is more subtle and often veiled through humour, irony, and metaphor. This form is more complex to detect because it is masked by seemingly harmless expressions that normalise prejudice and gender bias while evading Accountability. For instance, gender-biased jokes and ironic remarks enable speakers or writers to convey discriminatory ideas about women without openly endorsing them. Mills' model is particularly effective for literary analysis as it allows for the excavation of both blatant and deeply embedded ideological assumptions about gender within a text.

Data Analysis

By applying this research technique, the researcher has closely analysed the text and assembled data that best support the answers to the research questions. This data analysis examines the presence of linguistic anti-feminism in selected short stories written by Danyial Mueenuddin, applying Sara Mills' model of overt and indirect anti-feminism (2008). Linguistic anti-feminism refers to the use of language that perpetuates gender stereotypes, reinforces gender inequalities, or excludes or marginalises individuals based on their gender. The analysis aims to identify instances of linguistic anti-feminism in Mueenuddin's selected short stories. For that purpose, researchers have undertaken a noteworthy task by formulating tables to identify and analyse cases of gender-biased language in selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin. This initiative highlights their dedication to promoting inclusivity and raising awareness about gender biases in literary works. Researchers have prepared separate tables to identify both overt and covert instances of gender-biased language in each of the selected short stories by Danyal Mueenuddin. This part of the article on data analysis is divided into two sections. The first section presents the data in tabular form, drawn from the texts of selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin, and the second section discusses and explains the collected data and the study's findings.

According to Sara Mills' theory (2009), there are two types of anti-feminism. The first one is overt anti-feminism, which includes generic nouns, generic pronouns, derivational nouns, and swear words. The second one is indirect anti-feminism, which uses similes, metaphors, and irony. The data, which has been collected according to the above theory, is given below:

Table 1: Derivational nouns	
Names of Short Stories	Derivational Nouns from Male Characters
<i>Saleema</i>	<i>Sweepress</i>
<i>In Other Rooms, Other Wonders</i>	<i>Mistress, Actress, Sweepress</i>
<i>About a Burning Girl</i>	<i>Sweepress</i>
<i>Provide, Provide</i>	<i>Sweepress, Shepherdess</i>

A derivational noun is a noun formed from another word through a process called derivation, which involves adding a suffix or altering the word in some way to create a new word with a different grammatical category.

Item No. 1: Explanation

"Mistress" is a derivational noun because it is derived from the word "master" by adding the suffix "-ess." So, the noun "mistress" is a gender gender-biased term derived from the male noun master.

Item No. 2: Explanation

Shepherdess is a term used by Danyial Mueenuddin, which is a derivational noun because it is derived from the male noun "shepherd" by adding "-ess" to it.

Item No. 3: Explanation

The noun actress is derivational because the word "actress" is derived from the male noun "actor" by adding the "-ess" suffix to it.

Item No. 4: Explanation

The noun sweepress is also derivational because it is derived from the male noun "sweeper" by adding the "-ess" suffix to it.

Table 2: Insult Terms

S. No	Insult Expressions
1	<i>Blackmailers and bootleggers (Jhulan clan)</i>
2	<i>Her mother slept around for money and favors</i>
3	<i>She slept with Hassan, the cook</i>
4	<i>Hassan had got everything from her, as always, she had given it too soon</i>
5	<i>She had opened her legs for the cook</i>
6	<i>Slut</i>
7	<i>He would sweeten up and try to fuck her now and then</i>
8	<i>Saleema counted for nothing</i>

Item No. 1: Explanation

Danyial Mueenuddin introduces 'Saleema' by saying that she belongs to Jhulan clan. The members of the clan are referred to as blackmailers and bootleggers. These are insult terms for the Jhulan clan, which means that they were deceivers and smugglers of Alcohol.

Item No. 2: Explanation

The writer has described the father of 'Saleema' to be a heroin addict, which is clearly a derogatory term. Similarly, her mother has been depicted as a prostitute, that is, she sleeps with people for monetary gains and favors.

Item No. 3: Explanation

Danyial Mueenuddin says about Saleema that her husband knew that she had slept with Hassan, the cook. It clearly shows that Saleema has had illicit affairs with Hassan, the cook.

Item No. 4: Explanation

The writer says that 'Saleema' looks young even at the age of twenty-four. The hardships she faced in life have not effaced her charm and beauty. But unfortunately, the cook Hassan took advantage of her kindness, and she had always given him everything he wanted, perhaps too readily. The cook, Hassan, exploits her sexually.

Item No. 5: Explanation

Hassan, the cook, has been described as abusing Saleema sexually. He would involve himself in sexual intercourse with Saleema. It is yet another insulting term that has been used for Saleema, the poor maidservant in the mansion.

Item No. 6: Explanation

The writer calls the sweepers of the K.K. Harouni mansion a slut. It is explicitly a derogatory term for the woman who cleans or sweeps the mansion.

Item No. 7: Explanation

Hassan, the cook, has been described as abusing Saleema sexually. He would involve himself in sexual intercourse with Saleema. It is yet another insulting term that has been used for Saleema, the poor maidservant in the mansion.

Item No. 8: Explanation

The writer has used another derogatory term for Saleema by considering her a 'nothing'. It means that Saleema held no significance or importance in that mansion.

Table 3: Similes/Metaphors

S. No	Similes / Metaphors
1	<i>At fourteen, she became the plaything of a small landowner's son</i>
2	<i>Ask for it, my duckling</i>
3	<i>Give us some of that blank mango. It is a new variety</i>
4	<i>You can wipe your dipstick after checking the oil</i>
5	<i>Her husband is on drugs, that dried-up stick who picked her out of the village</i>
6	<i>You are the strange one, following this old man around like a little sheep</i>
7	<i>His face looked like a broken steel lantern</i>

Item No. 1: Explanation

The writer uses a metaphor for Saleema, calling her a 'plaything'. In the short story, the term "plaything" is used metaphorically to describe Saleema's experience with the son of the small landowner. A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unrelated things, highlighting their similarities to create a vivid, expressive description. In this case, calling Saleema a "plaything" suggests that she was like an object or a toy for the pleasure and amusement of the small landowner's son. By employing this metaphor, the author evokes a sense of powerlessness, vulnerability, and objectification that Saleema experienced in her relationship with the small landowner's son. It helps to emphasise the unjust and dehumanising nature of their interaction, painting a vivid picture of the oppressive circumstances Saleema found herself in at a young age.

Item No. 2: Explanation

Hassan, the cook, calls Saleema his duckling, which means a young duck. He has compared Saleema to a 'duckling'. A duckling is a baby duck that usually learn to swim by following their mother to a body of water. Saleema has also been following Rafik like a young dick. Hassan tells Saleema in the morning to take tea because he wants her fat and plump, the way young ducks eat food and grow.

Item No. 3: Explanation

One of the drivers mentions Saleema's bosom, by referring to her bosom as 'black mango', when Saleema is walking in front of the drivers' room in K.K. Harouni's mansion. So, the metaphor of black mango has been used for Saleema's breasts, which carry negative connotations. The driver continues to say that Saleema's bosom is as smooth as an 'ice cream'. Moreover, the driver comments that his mouth has become dry, by seeing the black mangoes (her bosom).

Item No. 4: Explanation

It is yet another metaphor that carries gender-biased connotations to demean Saleema. The male reproductive organ of one of the drivers has been compared with a 'dipstick', and Saleema's genitalia have been described as receiving that dipstick (male reproductive organ). The whole sentence means that after having sexual intercourse with Saleema, one can wipe its dipstick _a term referring to male genitalia.

Item No. 5: Explanation

Saleema uses a metaphor for her bedridden husband by calling him a 'dried-up stick'. She compares her husband to a withered stick. He has become weak due to his illness.

Item No. 6: Explanation

Through Rafik's mouth, the writer uses an insulting term for Saleema. Rafik tells Saleema why she has been following him like 'a little sheep' even though he has become old now. Rafik calls Saleema a little sheep, while he considers himself an old shepherd. It also shows that Saleema is at Rafik's disposal and that he can direct her wherever he wants. Rafik also comments that it is strange that Saleema is following him because most of the shepherds are young boys.

Item No. 7: Explanation

The author uses two similes to describe Saleema's husband's physical appearance. The first simile, "his face looked like a broken steel lantern," compares the thinness of Saleema's husband's face to a fractured steel lantern. The word "broken" implies that his face is not intact or complete, much like a damaged lantern. The use of "steel lantern" suggests a cold, rigid material, emphasising the lack of vitality in his appearance. The simile helps convey the idea that his face is gaunt and emaciated. On the other hand, the simile "a gash of mouth and skin stretched over wires" emphasises the extreme thinness of Saleema's husband's face. The comparison to "skin stretched over wires" suggests a taut, skeletal appearance, with the facial features barely covered by a thin layer of skin. This simile creates a vivid image of the fragility and hollowness of his facial structure.

Table 4: Ironies in the Short Story "Saleema"

S. No	Ironical Expressions
1	<i>I need to fatten you up. I like them plump. She responds, "Do not talk that way; I came from a respectable family."</i>
2	<i>What should I stuff that rounded little belly with today?</i>
3	<i>Who picked her out of the village, when she thought he was saving her</i>
4	<i>This is a strange kind of cooking for an old man</i>
5	<i>She missed one period, then a second, but said nothing to Rafik</i>

Item No. 1: Explanation

Hassan, the cook, playfully comments on Saleema's appetite by suggesting that he wants to fatten her up because he likes them plump. As he has been involved in sexual affairs with Saleema, he teases her by saying that she needs to eat more because he likes her to become plump and fatten up. However, Saleema responds by asserting her respectable family background and objects to his comment. Again, it is ironic that the writer has stated at the start of the story that the members of the Jhulan clan are blackmailers and bootleggers, while here Saleema claims she belongs to a respectable family. Despite Saleema's claim of coming from a "respectable family," she is dependent on Hassan and the rest of the household to cater to her needs.

Item No. 2: Explanation

By using the phrase "stuff that rounded little belly," Hassan dismisses Saleema's claim to respectability and focuses solely on her physical appearance. This creates a sense of irony as Hassan's response contradicts the idea of treating Saleema with respect and dignity.

Item No. 3: Explanation

The irony lies in Saleema's earlier belief that her husband was saving her, juxtaposed with her present state of despair and loneliness. Initially, she had thought that her husband's decision to carry her out of the village was a fortunate event that would lead to a better life. However, the reality is different, as she now sees herself as alone and dealing with the struggles of her husband's drug addiction. The irony is in the unexpected turn of events from her initial expectations. These lines also suggest that her husband has become weak, depleted, and lacking vitality. This contrasts with the idea that he initially appeared to be a saviour figure to Saleema when he chose her, only to prove, at the end, to be at other people's mercy.

Item No. 4: Explanation

The writer uses yet another ironic remark to create humour. Rafik, the valet, one evening urged his master to give Saleema a place in the kitchen, saying that she was helpful there. His masters accept her solicitation by allowing Saleema to work in the house as a maidservant. Rafik, the valet, starts abusing Saleema sexually. The writer wonders at this and says that it is a strange kind of cooking for an older man.

Item No. 5: Explanation

The writer says that Saleema missed one period, then another. Here, the writer says one thing, but he means another. It is an ironic remark because the writer actually wants to convey that she has become pregnant.

Results and Discussion

The researchers have used Sara Mills' theory of overt and indirect anti-feminism to analyse four selected short stories by Danyial Mueenuddin. The research findings reveal two types of overt anti-feminism (derivational nouns and swear or insult terms) and two types of indirect anti-feminism (irony/humour and similes/metaphors) within the texts. The specific findings can be summarised as follows:

1) Overt anti-feminism

a) *Derivational Nouns*: The research found instances where nouns were derived from masculine gendered terms. This usage reinforces gender stereotypes and contributes to the marginalisation of women. The analysis shows that the derivational nouns found in the selected short stories have been derived from the male terms by the addition of the suffix "-ess". For example, the word "actress" is derived from "actor" by adding the "-ess" suffix.

b) *Swear Terms*: Swear words are linguistic expressions that are considered taboo, offensive, or vulgar within a particular culture or society. These words often involve strong language that may be considered blasphemous, sexually explicit, or otherwise disrespectful. Swear words often convey emotional intensity and are used to express anger, frustration, or to emphasise. They are generally considered inappropriate in formal settings or polite conversation and can vary significantly across languages and cultures. It is important to note that the acceptability and offensiveness of specific words may vary based on social context, cultural norms, and personal beliefs. The analysis identified instances where overtly gender biased language was used, including the use of swear terms that derogatorily target women and sometimes men. The selected short stories from the Collection "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" by Danyial Mueenuddin contain numerous instances of derogatory terms and expressions, which demonstrate gender-biased language. The instances of swear/insult terms are 'whore', 'bitch', 'plaything' and 'witch'.

2) Indirect anti-feminism

a) *Similes/Metaphors*: The findings revealed the presence of similes/metaphors that indirectly perpetuated gender biased ideologies or reinforced gender stereotypes. Metaphorical language can subtly shape readers' perceptions, and when used in a gender biased context, it contributes to the normalisation of gender biases and inequality. The analysis of the present study shows that there are many instances of similes and metaphors used as derogatory terms for women or body parts of women. For example, 'plaything' has been used for Saleema and 'Black mangoes' have been used for her breasts.

b) *Ironies Irony*: When employed in a gender biased manner, can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and undermine efforts towards gender equality. In selected short stories, such ironies are employed in ways that create harmful effects and lead to anti-feminism. The current study has found many examples of irony used to insult women.

Theoretical reasoning The findings of this study support the view presented by feminist discourse theorists that language is a central tool through which gendered power relations are created, maintained, and justified. Sara Mills' (2008) model of overt and indirect anti-feminism helps explain how Mueenuddin's stories subtly normalise patriarchal values. The overt anti-feminism found in the form of gender-marked nouns and derogatory labels reflects cultural assumptions that position women as socially inferior and morally questionable. Meanwhile, the indirect forms, such as metaphors comparing women to objects and an ironic narrative tone, operate at a more implicit level, shaping readers' perceptions of women without openly expressing bias. These linguistic choices frame women as economically dependent, emotionally vulnerable, and socially disposable, which aligns with patriarchal ideology. Thus, the language in the stories does not merely describe gender inequality; it actively reproduces it. The narratives contribute to a worldview in which male authority appears natural and unquestioned, while women's limited agency is portrayed as expected and ordinary. Recognising these patterns highlights how literature can reinforce social hierarchies even when it appears to tell a story.

Findings

The present study examines the types of overt and indirect anti-feminism in the selected short stories of Danyial Mueenuddin. The researcher has used qualitative textual analysis to analyse the selected short stories. The data obtained has been analysed at the word, phrase, and sentence levels according to Sara Mills' model of Overt and Indirect anti-feminism. The study has found anti-feminism in the form of derivational nouns, swear words, irony, similes, and metaphors.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Danyial Mueenuddin's selected short stories contain words, phrases, and sentences that covertly discriminate against both genders. The analysis reveals that the author employs similes, metaphors, and irony to construct characters and advance the narrative, often embedding subtle elements of linguistic anti-feminism. Several instances demonstrate how figurative language is used in a derogatory manner toward women and men, particularly through references to physical features. For instance, the term "*plaything*" is used to demean Saleema, while the expression "*black mangoes*" is applied to her breasts, objectifying her and reinforcing gendered stereotypes. These findings suggest that Mueenuddin's linguistic choices reflect underlying cultural and societal attitudes toward gender roles and identities.

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