

Representation and Negotiation of Masculinities in South Asian English Fiction: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study traces the representation and negotiation of masculinities in Shamsie's Home Fire. The analysis and discussion are based, on the one hand, on the deconstruction of Connell's (1995) models of hegemonic masculinities in the novel and, on the other hand, on the exploration of alternative reshaping and more dialogical models of masculinities as stated in the theory of performativity by Judith Butler (1990, 1999) and represented in the selected fiction. For the data analysis, theoretical insights were taken from the feminist critical discourse analysis. The findings of the study reveal that individuals acknowledge themselves either as masculine or feminine referring to their gender identity. Sociologists intend to refer to gender as an essential status because it is widely recognized as a significant factor in determining identity, involvement in institutions, socialization, and opportunities in life. The negotiation of masculinities is suggested to make society more humane and balanced where individuals express their potential and personality according to their own choices.

Keywords: Negotiation of Masculinities, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Gendered Identities.

Introduction

Within Southeast Asian societies, particularly in South Asian cultures, the expression 'Be a man!' is an often-heard statement that is typically misunderstood as a personal criticism by most males from childhood to maturity (Wagner, 2023; Yacoob, 2024). The present research may provide a precise theoretical definition of a man, providing a precise theoretical definition of masculinity that defines an individual's transition into adulthood. What is a proper code of conduct for males, and why do they adhere to it? Never before has it been so straightforward to address some quietly presented problems that have been shaped by a patriarchal society. For many years, scholars and researchers from several fields, such as psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, gender studies, and specifically masculinity studies, have been discussing these issues (Bruvoll, 2024). However, it is argued that even though discussions on masculinity have been important in several fields for over four decades, the contributions of literary studies to this topic in South Asia have surprisingly devoted less attention to defining the concept of masculinity.

The concepts of femininity and the oppression of women in numerous nations were a significant concern for feminist authors and intellectuals during the initial phase of the movement. Due to the

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minimal perspective that was employed to examine males, masculinities have conventionally been regarded as unchallenging and easily understood stereotypically. Recent research, however, is illustrating that gender and sexuality have meanings and functions in society that are continuously evolving and surpassing traditional boundaries. This study aims to examine and elucidate these meanings and roles, with the main goal being to do this. Moreover, the present research can be classified as an interdisciplinary investigation as it aims to incorporate theories and research findings from diverse fields such as social anthropology, cultural studies, clinical psychology, literary criticism, and specifically gender studies and men's studies. To comprehend the intricate and diverse nature of masculinities in South Asian societies, particularly as portrayed by Pakistani writer Kamila Shamsi.

Problem Statement

The field of masculinity in novel writing examines how conventional and changing notions of masculinity impact literary works' creation, understanding, and reception. In literature, masculinity explores the intricate interplay between societal expectations, gender conventions, and individual experiences (Negi, 2024). The research explores issues such as male characteristics, notions of masculinity, and cultural and religious perspectives on gender. There is a correlation between the cultural context, the representation of masculinity, women's viewpoints, and the familial upbringing concerning the environment. Individuals are typically responsible for developing, modifying, and implementing understandings of masculinity achieved through social interaction.

Purpose of the Study

Focusing on South Asian masculinities as they are portrayed and represented, particularly in texts written by South Asian women writers, the primary objective of this research is to carry out a comprehensive analysis of selected English fiction to investigate and comprehend the representation of manhood on a contemporary literary canvas. In addition, the scope of the study is restricted to female author, and a purposive sampling method is utilized to collect a representative sample from Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How have the portrayals of masculinities in South Asian English Fiction concerning social class, gender, and ethnic dynamics been depicted in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*?
2. How do gendered identities in literary texts affect men's roles, masculine bodies, and ideas of masculinity?

Literature Review

Masculinity

Based on the research conducted by Connor et al. (2021), Hussein (2005), Lawson (2020), and Paechter (2006), masculinity refers to the set of behaviors, languages, and practices that are typically attributed to males and are culturally perceived as distinct from femininity. Specific cultural and organizational entities demonstrate distinct behaviors, languages, and practices (Connor et al., 2021). Thus, masculinity can be advantageous as it enables males to discern specific meanings, but it can also be detrimental as it fails to conform to the notion of the 'Other' (Feminine) (Wilson et al., 2022). This information is sourced from Wilson et al., 2022. Biological predispositions and genetic coding are not the exclusive factors contributing to masculinity and

male behavior. Gender is a topic that is often discussed in many civilizations, but it is important to note that the idea of 'masculinity' is not universally recognized in every country (Lu et al., 2022). The contemporary usage of the phrase is predicated on the premise that an individual's behaviors directly influence their character. Additional behaviors, such as exhibiting peaceful and conciliatory traits instead of dominant ones, lacking the ability to kick a football, and showing minimal interest in sexual conquest, indicate the behaviors that an individual lacking male quality might demonstrate. To hold this perspective, believing in humans' unique qualities and ability to take action is crucial. Individualism, which emerged in early modern Europe in conjunction with the expansion of colonial empires and the establishment of capitalist economic systems, serves as the fundamental basis upon which it is constructed. Thus, it is based on the concept of individualism. Furthermore, the concept is intricately linked to the encompassing natural environment. When comparing the notion of "femininity" to the concept of "masculinity," only the latter can be acknowledged as significant. A civilization cannot possess a notion of masculinity that aligns with the understanding prevalent in present-day European and American culture (Connell, 2001). This is because such a group does not perceive women and men as diametrically opposed character archetypes. It is crucial to consider distinctive historical characteristics and transformations to elucidate the social construction of masculinity, its diverse manifestations and experiences, and the presence of change and its potential (Alsop et al., 2002).

Socio-Cultural Construction of Masculinities

Texts explore various reoccurring themes such as gender conflicts, dynamics, the construction of daily masculinity, economic and institutional frameworks, and inequities in masculinity (Connell, 2001; Haywood et al., 2003; Rumens, 2013; Tomson & Messerschmidt, 2024). For instance, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) analyzed how financial and political factors have influenced the predominantly masculine domain of professional ice hockey. The importance of the institutional, social and cultural setting further exemplifies the existence of conspicuous masculinity.

Masculinity and Gender Construction

From this perspective, the labels 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' refer to traits culturally assigned to men and women (Beynon, 2002). In literature, the genesis of masculinity can be traced back to epic poetry, such as the Iliad (Graziosi & Haubold, 2003), which exalted male protagonists' formidable, valiant, and virtuous attributes. The notion of masculinity in literature developed parallel with cultural, social, and political changes. The influence of masculinity has long impacted the writing field, notably in the realm of novels (Ferris, 2019). Throughout history, the representation of masculinity in the genre of novel writing has evolved, leading to both advantageous and detrimental consequences. This article explores the causes and implications of the subject matter. Male protagonists with heroic qualities are a widely favored characteristic in traditional literature (Daly, 1993; Tichler, 2015). The brave and determined characters serve as a source of inspiration for readers and actively contribute to the promotion of resilience and fortitude. Several fictional works have explored males' psychological and emotional conditions (Rakhimovna, 2023). Through this writing, readers cultivate empathy and gain comprehension of masculinity. Some literary works have characters who possess qualities such as integrity, empathy, and compassion (Black & Barnes, 2021). These figures exemplify a positive and robust form of masculinity. In some parts of Asia, numerous literary works perpetuate toxic masculinity by the portrayal of emotionally inhibited, domineering, and belligerent characters.

Research Methodology

The researcher aims to analyze the fictional text using a qualitative paradigm or research design to comprehend the detailed descriptions of the phenomena, particularly within the framework of the feminist methodological process. Moreover, the research explains feminist linguistic analysis by examining gender studies and the development of masculinities. Additionally, it explores the complexities of gender and sex within a specific context connected to South Asia's socio-cultural viewpoint. The study systematically examines communication difficulties, focusing on a phenomenon's interpretive significance, particularly in the context of explanations using a qualitative research approach. A qualitative inquiry will be conducted to analyze the descriptions of characters' communication, a complex phenomenon. This analysis utilized content analysis techniques.

The current research design aims to examine the feminist linguistic analysis of South Asian literature within the socio-cultural setting of South Asians, using content analysis of texts from novels published in that specific cultural and social environment. Considering the aims of the study, the present inquiry seems to follow a deductive approach. Subsequently, the research concerns of the present study were tackled by employing the directed (deductive) qualitative content analysis (QCA), which provided a deeper understanding of the written content of fictional novels from the socio-cultural standpoint of Asia, with a specific focus on Pakistan,

Data Analysis

Kamila Shamsie depicts gender exploitation in her work *Home Fire* through the character of Eamonn, who is the son of Karamat, a British woman who was born in Pakistan. Eamonn comes upon Aneeka, who, following the passing of her parents, is currently residing in London at the residence of her aunt. During the course of her brother's pursuit to join a militant group in Syria, a person named Farooq was responsible for his death. Ahead of the murder of her brother, she is making an effort to get him back to England in a secure manner.

Therefore, in order for her to be able to seek assistance from Eamonn, she pushes him to develop feelings of attraction for her. On the other hand, Eamonn is unaware of the plans that she is making right now. Eamonn is travelling, so she joins him on a train and moves along with him. She does this by getting on there. In light of the fact that she has developed feelings for him, she makes a request that he accompany her to his home; "when he finally turned to face forward, a woman standing farther along the mostly empty carriage came over and sat next to him. Do you live alone? Aneeka said. Yes. Take me there" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 51).

For the purpose of taking advantage of her helplessness, Eamonn offers her sexual favors, and he accepts them. The two of them engage in sexual activity on a regular basis while saying that they love one other. Upon learning that Aneeka is seeking assistance from Eamonn in order to guarantee the return of her brother Parvaiz, Eamonn becomes irritated. This is due to the fact that he has a strong desire to never be recognized as a genuine Pakistani Muslim. Karamat, his father, is a powerful political figure in the British Parliament who appears to be opposed to the dual citizenship policy that Pakistanis are allowed to practice. In the event of a crisis, he does not offer help to any Pakistani Muslim. As soon as Eamonn learns the truth about his relationship with Aneeka, he is filled with loathing and makes every effort to avoid assisting her through the situation. The first thing that Aneeka does is talk about her family history, which includes her father being a fighter who is a Jihadi Muslim. After that, she reveals the actual issue that is happening and explains why she is going to contact Eamonn. She admits the truth, which is that her brother Parvaiz has also joined a jihadi group in Syria, but she wants her to guard him and

bring him back. "He wants to come back home, she said. Well, he can fuck off and stay in the desert he chose, can't he? Please, Eamonn" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 73).

After hearing the story, Eamonn is left feeling astonished and shocked because he is now aware of what is taking place on Aneeka's behalf. Within the rooms, he reacts in a chilly manner and hits the things around him. He sustains an injury to one of his fingers, which causes blood to trickle down them.

His thumb bit into the corrugated edge of the bottle cap, deep enough to draw blood. Why did you get into the tube with the home secretary's son that day? She took his hand and placed his thumb in her mouth, drawing his blood into her. He pulled away with a No (Shamsie, 2017, p. 73).

The blood is put into Aneeka's mouth, and she makes an effort to comfort him, despite the fact that he appears to be in a hostile mood. However, he first apologizes. He was aware that the matter was far too complicated to be resolved in such a superficial manner. In the lines that have been presented thus far, it is evident that Aneeka and Eamonn have engaged in sexual behaviour on numerous occasions. In spite of the fact that Aneeka appears to be interested in Eamonn, she has a significant goal following it. In spite of the fact that she is aware of the prestige and influence that Eamonn and his other family members possess, she is also conscious of the implications that will result from the actions that she has been taking at Eamonn's accommodation. Eamonn, on the other side, is also abusing her rights as a woman in the same reckless manner. In light of the fact that he is a political person and a holder of an English green card, he makes the most of the circumstance and takes pleasure in the time he spends with her. After spending his youth in Western countries, he developed this behaviour as a result of his exposure to the environment there. The several instances in which he demonstrates his superiority over her.

It has also been seen that women are discriminated against in the matter of gender roles, which are influenced by the beliefs that are established on a social level. This is something that has been observed in the novel *Home Fire* written by Kamila Shamsie. By soliciting the assistance of Eamonn, whose father is the Home Secretary in the British Parliament, Aneeka, who is the sister of Isma and Parvaiz, makes a sacrifice of her chastity for the sake of her brother, Parvaiz. It is for the purpose of preserving her brother's life that she develops a sexual relationship with Eamonn. As soon as Eamonn learns the truth about her motivation, he appears to be upset. In a voice so low he could barely hear it she said, "I got into the tube because I thought the home secretary's son could help my brother come home and avoid charges" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 73).

Man is regarded as a powerful and strong character in social life; he is able to find solutions to difficult problems that women are typically unable to handle. It is a manifestation of the gender role in the formation of beliefs to seek assistance from men in everyday life. In order to fulfil his position as a man, a man must be able to face the problems that come with living in a society that adheres to the values that are established by the dominant gender. The challenges that he must overcome in order to mature into a man are never a concern for him. In the same book, *Home Fire*, Isma is experiencing discomfort and coldness throughout her body as a result of the chilly weather. On the other hand, her brother Parvaiz appears to be enjoying the weather despite the fact that it is extremely cold.

Parvaiz, a boy never seen without his headphones and a mic, would have lain out here for as long as the song continued, the wet of snow seeping through his clothes, the thud of hail beating down on him, uncaring of anything except capturing something previously unheard, eyes hazy with pleasure (Shamsie, 2017, p.9).

In a similar vein, the majority of the characters of Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* exhibit prejudice toward different genders. In her narration, she describes a few instances in which women appear to be suffering since they are powerless in their lives.

Two of Aneeka and Isma's siblings, along with their brother Parvaiz, are siblings. Both of their parents passed away while they were young. They are attempting to look forward to the greatest possible future while residing in London, England. She stays in London at her aunt's house while Isma moves to the United States to pursue her doctoral degree. In spite of the fact that his sisters were aware of his relocation, their brother Parvaiz has relocated to a different location. The relationship between Aneeka and her brother, Parvaiz, is considerably closer than that of her sister, Isma, and she shares everything with him. Following her arrival in the United States, Isma begins to experience anxiety for her brother, who had not been in contact with her for more than a month. She gets in touch with Aneeka and inquires about Parvaiz, but Aneeka responds in a violent manner, stating things like; "are we really not going to talk about the fact that Parvaiz has reappeared on Skype? "If we talk about him, we will argue. I don't want to argue right now" (Shamsie, 2017, p.20).

Because of the fact that Aneeka and Parvaiz are twins who have a profound understanding of one another, Aneeka has a stronger attachment to Parvaiz than she does to Isma. When it comes to their situations, they are completely honest and transparent with one another, without any reluctance whatsoever. From the time they were children, they have been connected in the sense that they have remained joined together no matter where they moved. Aneeka appears to have a highly possessive attitude toward their bond as twins, and she does not want anybody else to discuss her brother Parvaiz and their relationship. Because of this, she experiences a sense of partiality whenever Isma inquires about the status of her brother and his location.

There is a representation of gender roles in the selected text, which demonstrates how gender-related bias has been portrayed in the work. It would appear that Shamsie is successful in depicting contemporary men and women who are participating in diverse roles within society without resorting to provocative tactics. Every character in her book behaves in a manner that is consistent with their unique personality characteristics and the situations in which they find themselves. She has not shown women as being victims against their will or as being overburdened with the chores and responsibilities that they are expected to fulfil. She has been able to maintain a tremendous balance between male and female characters. On the other hand, she has shown a modest amount of partiality toward a very small number of characters. She has presented the individuals who, according to their nature, continue to behave differently in response to a variety of circumstances. In the novel *Home Fire*, written by Shamsie, the author illustrates the emotional role that women play in a culture that appears to be in opposition to their norms, conventions, and traditions. Eamonn, the son of Karamat, a prominent figure who represents the Muslim population in London, appears to be attracting the attention of Isma, who is now attending a university in the United States. It would appear that she is able to keep her feelings under control and exhibit her mannerisms to Eamonn during their initial encounter. At the same time that they are spending some time together at a restaurant, she is feeling an attraction to her from the inside.

In the first few days she had thought he might suggest they do something to get her past elevenses—a movie, a meal, another walk—but she now understood that she was just part of the way he divided up his days, which had structure in place of content (Shamsie, 2017, p.24).

And in a similar manner, her sister Aneeka is involved in the personality of the same individual. As far as she was aware, Eamonn's father held the position of home secretary for the state. In the event that Eamonn leaves her aunt's house, she follows him on a train and pursues him. Also, she boards the train while concealing her identity at first, and then she discloses her true identity to him in a subtle way by saying that she is a passenger; "do you live alone? Aneeka said. Yes. Take me there. After the boldness of that line, she barely spoke all the way from Preston Road to Notting Hill" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 51).

Despite this, he lends his support to Aneeka, Parvaiz's sister, in her efforts to get her brother's body back to England following the protest that Aneeka staged. Eamonn encourages his father, Karamat, to fulfill the significant position that he plays because it is his responsibility to assist Pakistanis. On the other hand, Karamat is subject to some limitations imposed by his respective department in his capacity as a home secretary;

A government that sends its citizens to some other country when they act in ways we do not like. Doesn't that say we can't deal with our own problems? And stopping a family from burying its own—that never looks good (Shamsie, 2017, p.172).

Karamat initially disregards and refuses to assist his son Eamonn in taking the deceased body back to London; nevertheless, in the end, he gives his son his word that he will follow through with the task. They take a considerable amount of time to discuss the burial of Parvaiz's remains after he has passed away. Eamonn does not respond or express his feelings while he listens to his father's heated argument. He does not speak up or take part in the discussion. To put an end to the conversation, as per his father's wishes, Eamonn says; "I think we're done here, Father." (Shamsie, 2017, p. 173)

The above discussion manifests that Eamonn hides his emotions for Aneeka, her beloved, and proceeds further so he can help her. In a society like this one, every male gender is expected to solve the issues with wit, patience, and emotionlessly, so he does. Weeping or mourning over any crisis cannot be considered a man's manhood or masculinity.

In a similar manner, the novel *Home Fire* exposes the genuine nature of the characters Isma and Aneeka, who are representative of the Pakistani Muslim society and culture. In the course of her time spent with Eamonn, the son of Karamat, Isma has gained the ability to conduct herself appropriately when interacting with men without fear of being misled. Karamat's techniques and policies are difficult to comprehend and readily analyze, and both of these topics are discussed. Regarding Karamat, Isma is aware of the constraints she faces due to the fact that she is a member of the Muslim society and culture. During the conversation about Eamonn's father acknowledging his privileges, she maintains a cautious stance. "Not even your father?" She sat down on one of the high stools next to the kitchen counter, looking at him very seriously" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 60). Similarly, Eamonn stays within his zone and listens to the discussion regarding his father the entire time. Specifically, Isma is concerned about the role that Karamat plays in discriminating against Pakistanis and members of the Muslim community. During elections, he promises the Pakistani population that he will provide them with every type of help, but in reality, he does not. Even though Eamonn is aware of the reality of his father's nature and the role he is playing, he nevertheless exhibits some degree of support for his father. However, this support is not entirely straightforward. Additionally, Eamonn expresses his disapproval of the actions that Muslims, particularly Pakistanis, have been taking within the state of Britain. Cautiously, he responds to the allegations that Isma has brought forth. "Especially not him. He says you are what you make of yourself. He raised and lowered his shoulders. Unless you are his son. Then he indulges you even if you don't make anything of yourself" (Shamsie, 2017, p.60).

Conclusion

To conclude the discussion of this study, it is analyzed that, although she lives in western culture, Aneeka continues to uphold the womanliness ingrained in Eastern culture. While she is on the road, she does not openly communicate her thoughts to him, and she only reveals her true feelings to him after she arrives at the apartment. In that location, she presents Eamonn with her entire being, including her body and her soul, and he takes it with some reluctance. The body language and gestures of a woman of Eastern culture give the impression that she is emotionless, and she demonstrates this emotionlessness. Aneeka is also aware that she is subject to some constraints that are imposed upon her. Initially, she tends to conceal her feelings; however, once she has gained knowledge of Eamonn, she reveals herself by declaring her love for him.

In addition, the novel *Home Fire* by Shamsie illustrates how the masculinity of a man plays a significant part in the formation of the concept of the male gender role. Karamat, who works as a home secretary in the United States, is Eamonn's mother. Karamat himself is the representative of the Muslim community, particularly Pakistanis, inside the realm of power that he possesses. Even though his son Eamonn is concerned, it appears that he is interested in several other activities, including romantic and sexual relationships. He has developed feelings for a Pakistani girl named Aneeka, who resides in London and is looking for assistance in bringing his brother Parvaiz back from Syria, where forces are holding him. Eamonn takes advantage of Aneeka's feelings of isolation and helplessness when she approaches him for assistance locating his brother and ensuring his safety. Unfortunately, a member of Jehadi's group manages to shoot Parvaiz. Since Karamat is considered a terrorist who has connections with Syrian Jehadi groups, he decides to transport his dead body to Pakistan so that it can be buried there.

Although previous research in the area of masculinities has offered valuable insights into the construction of masculinity in South Asian literature, the present study introduced novel perspectives that enhance our understanding of these dynamic processes. This theory specifically emphasizes the interconnectedness of masculinity, elucidating how the interaction of social class, gender, ethnicity, and cultural identity collectively shape the development of masculinity. Consequently, it addressed several deficiencies that were evident in previous research, which tended to analyze these groups independently.

Specifically, Bose (2009) and Chowdhury (2014) examined the relationships between socioeconomic class and masculinity. However, they fail to consider how cultural and ethnic factors contribute to the complexity of these associations. The present analysis of *Home Fire* enriched these discussions by illustrating that class-based masculinities are intricately connected to cultural concerns about modernity, Westernization, and identity. Considering this new knowledge, our understanding of how masculinity is negotiated in the broader sociopolitical framework of postcolonial South Asia has been much improved.

The present examination of the novel *Home Fire* indicated that the connections between gender and masculinity are especially intricate in diaspora settings, where conventional masculine identities are continuously being redefined across cultural, national, and ideological borders. The present study diverged from prior research undertaken by Kumar (2019) and Ali (2018), which examined the convergences of gender and masculinity. This finding added to the growing academic literature on diaspora masculinity and opens up new opportunities for studying how masculine identities are developed in transnational settings.

Moreover, the present study is built upon the research conducted by Lahiri (2001), Sunder Rajan (1993), and Singh (2022) by examining the interconnections between gender, ethnicity, and caste dynamics in the production of diverse forms of masculinity in South Asian literature. The analysis

of *Home Fire* revealed that caste-based oppression could marginalize some modes of masculinity. However, it also has the capacity to foster subversive identities that challenge the existing social order.

The fundamental units on which social hierarchy is constructed. This conclusion presents a more dynamic analysis of masculinity in South Asian literature, indicating that it is a flexible and disputed concept shaped by several interconnected components.

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