

Feminist Dimensions and Linguistic Expressions: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Sara Suleri's Selected Work

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ABSTRACT

Style always suggests the stance of the writer who embodies his or her thoughts idiosyncratically. Suleri is no exception in this respect as she has wielded the gendered-based linguistic peculiarities to manifest conceptual one. She has achieved unification of the form and content in her fiction.

INTRODUCTION

The study aims at the analysis and interpretation of the selected fictive works, *The Property of Woman* by Sara Suleri from the feminist stylistics perspective considering the stylistic elements and the gender-based debates located in the texts. The researcher focused on the stylistic and linguistic features of her writing to study and manifest the apparent and the latent feminist dimensions in the selected texts through the empirical analysis.

Language, in the postmodern era, is not merely a medium of communication rather it has obtained a multifold role ranging from the projection of culture and gender politics to the distortion and construction of reality. Since Suleri is an expatriate writer from Pakistan living in America as marginalized female and exiled foreigner, the issue of language becomes more complex for the proper understanding of her works. The research tried to explain her works by means of interpretation of the peculiar linguistic strategies and constructions used by her to express her intensive exilic anguish and female marginalization.

In the same way, femininity is no more a mere biological issue instead it has gained the form of a social construction stereotyped by patriarchal patterns of society. The modern woman has been, and postmodern is, struggling against the lopsided texture of the society where female is considered to be someone less than male. Feminism is, in its simplest form, a resistance against the marginalization of the females in all spheres of life. Suleri's works are expression of her staunch belief in the feminist cause and she appears to a hidebound feminist raising her voice against the all-pervasive malpractices vis-à-vis females.

Summarily, the minute textual analysis of Suleri's selected works from the feminist stylistic perspective brought forth the inherent meanings of the texts and put an augmentative impact upon the understanding of the student of literary and linguistic studies, especially the students of Pakistani literature in English.

Sara Suleri is a renowned Pakistani expatriate writer of fictive and non-fictive texts. She is a feminist writer having an elegant and peculiar writing style. Her feminist stance has been embodied in her works and manifested through the idiosyncratic linguistic expressions. So, her masterpieces are the result of the exquisite fusion of her feminist propensity and stylistic excellence. Her works have won wide acclaim and popularity but, unfortunately, there is paucity of critical material on her writings. This study attempts to provide her readers with an authentic and rigorous critique of the famous literary figure of the contemporary world

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The feminist paradigm of thought, a key framework among the poststructuralist paradigms, is used as the conceptual framework for the execution of the research. But the focus is more on the linguistic aspects of the feminism and less on its social one. In the twentieth century, the feminist canon led by Virginia Woolf (1929) claimed the feminist version of language based on sexist assumptions. They endeavored to form the female version of the language suitable for communication among them, a kind of in-group linguistic system. Because they felt that language, like other spheres of human society, is governed by males. For example the use of the generic noun “mankind” to describes all human beings. This perspective is taken as the foundation for the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The selected texts is taken and critically examined under the lens of feminist stylistics. There are many versions of stylistics: formal stylistics, functional stylistics, corpus stylistics, affective stylistics, cognitive stylistics, and feminist stylistics. This study uses the approach of feminist stylistics as research method for the analysis of the selected texts.

For this purpose, Sara Mills’s model (1995) of feminist stylistic analyses is followed. In pursuance of the methodological design outlined by her, the selected texts is scrutinized on the following three levels:

i. Word level:

On this level the vocabulary items are analysed from the feminist perspective. It is observed whether the writer is using those words associated specifically with females. For example, kitchen vocabulary, knitting vocabulary, sex-specific pronoun use etc.

ii. Phrase/sentence level:

On the second level, the scope of analysis is enlarged to cover phrases and sentences. Here it is observed whether the writer trying to expose the negative connotation associated with language or rebut the pre-suppositions and interferences of the ready-made phrases. For example, when encouraging a person it is said, “be a man and face the calamities with courage”.

iii. Discourse level:

At this level the focus is on large-scale structures of discourse. The content is seen “as something which is the negotiation of textual elements and codes and forces outside the text which influence both the way that the text is constructed and the way we decipher what is written.”(Mills, 1995, p.123)

WORD LEVEL

Women, generally, use more adjectives in their conversation and writings. Excessive use of adjectives is a feminist characteristic. Sara Suleri uses adjectives in her, “The Property Of Woman” beyond normal rate. In the following table adjectives are given which Sara used in her said short story.

Evanescent	Deep	Quick	Enchanted	Musical	Wonderful
Gleaming	Predominating	Ancient	Ruined	Walled	Crazy
Lean faced	Wheaten skin	Tree lined	Narrow	Sunny	Blue(eyes)

Sick-bed	Veracity	Terrifying	Wintry	Fresh	Eldest
Autumnal	Glamorous	Charmed	Thin	Reluctant	Quite
Astonishing	Faultless	Incessant	Burnt	Steamy	Wet
Blond	Obsolete	Mourning	Sardonic	Cool	Bare
Imperious	Twisted	Sundry	Intrusive	Dimming	Grim

Rising intonation on declaratives characterize women’s speech. In the short story, we can note rising intonation eg.

“Rains will wash away?”

Women use intensifiers in their speech and there are a bundle of intensifiers used in the short story. Eg.

“They came just before the rains”

“Eardrum was hammering so loudly to the rhythm of the heat that no one really stopped to notice what the cicada chorus came to add”

The above underlined words, ‘so’ and ‘just’ are intensifiers which make a speech linguistically peculiar for women.

Women use ‘super polite’ forms in their speech i.e. indirect requests.

“I know I am illiterate, but have you ever read lines?”

After asking this indirect question HALIMA explains it that she wants to know from writer that has she ever seen the lines written on the body of the man whose name she must not say.

Women use emphatic stress, which make their speech different from man.

“Exactly as simple as the sun”

“His bones consist of sunlight”

These are the examples of emphatic stress used in the story, ‘The Property of Women’

SENTENCE LEVEL

The women speech is peculiar at word level as well as at sentence and discourse level. The sentences women use are seldom used by men. For example women, while speaking, use interrogative sentences which, sometimes, feel unnecessary. In the said short story Sara Suleri uses a lot of interrogative sentences.

“But that day the woman was not interested in my train of thought, seeking me out with urgent intention in order to ask, “Bibi, what have done?” “What have I done, Halima?” Her face made an effort before she can reply, “Do I have to see that horse in your room every day?” “Why not?”

It is obvious from the passage, taken from the short story, that Suleri used interrogative sentences in a large extent.

Similarly women speech can also be make peculiar on the grounds of usage of ‘tag questions’. The writer uses tag questions in her writing which make it feministic. For example:

“-LAHORE HAS FALLEN- when its residents were forced to wonder, had we? And if so, into what?”

“But then no more metaphors, alright?”

The above tag questions make Suleri’s style of writing feministic. She uses tag questions in her writings generally and in the story specifically which affirms her peculiar writing style.

DISCOURSE LEVEL

The title “The Property of Women” itself suggest the style of writer that it feminist writer. The writer introduces here an imaginary character, PatherNadi. PatherNadi is a man with some extra qualities. He has sunlight in his bones. Such imaginary and ideal qualities bearing character portrayal shows the writer’s love for man which is a women character. Similarly she uses adjectives like glamorous and charm for another man. Which make clear that she has love for an ideal man. Throughout the short story either there is stream of consciousness of a female character or the dialogue between two female characters, the narrator and Halima. Which shows the narrative to be purely feminist one on discorsal level.

CONCLUSION

After the minute textual analysis of Suleri’s selected work from Millsian feminist discorsal perspective the fact has become clear that her fiction is an acute manifestation of her feminist propensity. Her style is representative of stance. Summarily, she achieved the unity of form and content in her fiction where feminism is reflected not only in theme also through her stylistic devices.

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