



Promotion of Women: A Feminist Reinterpretation of Shahraz's Perchanvah

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Abstract

In this research, I tried to find out the theoretical perspective of feminism which is the promotion of women in Shahraz's selected short story with the help of De Beauvoir's framework and to explore gender representation within the context of Pakistani social structure. The basic focus is an effort to analyze whether the story's protagonists resist the existing social order and prove their existence as educated, potent, independent, and competent persons. Therefore, this paper basically focuses on the female character's depiction that how they take bold steps in androcentric structural norms which are strongly rooted in the social setup and redefine their positions as educated, upgraded, and enlightened ones. The material of the research for this paper is taken from short fiction and the selected story is not only helpful to explore the reflection of life but also explores the issues which have social and cultural relevance in which women's promotion is the most important. In light of the conclusion drawn it is safe to assert that Shahraz's selected short story *Perchanvah* is feminist and her protagonists are not stereotypical traditional women.

Keywords: Women's Promotion, Gender Representation, Androcentric, Structural Norms, Cultural Relevance, Stereotype.

Introduction

Feminism in the context of the promotion of women refers to an intense awareness of identity with the help of education and enlightenment. It is based on the realization of the subjection of women. Pakistan is a traditional androcentric society where gender socialization is achieved through the transmission of social and cultural values. Lerner (1989) expounds that these are men who hold actual power in all important institutions in the existing society and women are deprived of such opportunity to access power so it's visible that they are either completely powerless or entirely deprived of their basic rights along with resources and influence. It is the social structure that promotes the domination of men and prevents the promotion of women. These social values are the true mechanisms of power often subtle, complex but irrevocable. Schott (2004), Thorgeirsdottir (2004), and Witt



(2004) write that prominent philosophers like Plato, Aristotle along with Rousseau, Kant, etc. seem to agree on the common concept of the present age that women lack deliberation as well as self-determination. This is verified by Deal and Beal (2004), Driscoll and Krook (2012), and Volpp (2001) as they describe that the identities of males and females seem as philosophically as well as culturally decided as masculinity or femininity. These are our day-to-day life routines and social practices which make people perceive gender as commonsensical and natural.

The socialization of gender pervasiveness remains dominant from time immemorial and powerful men keep marginalizing women. They never try to promote women in any field of life and keep them backstage. The male-dominated social structure deprives them of all basic needs of growth such as education and as a result, the women remain benighted. Karve (1972) delineates that woman comes under all types of property rules as she is considered to be a man's property. Gradually we observe that people start realizing this discrimination and start highlighting it. Life and nature have the principle and essence of change. In this world, nothing remains stagnant and if does, gets rotten and ultimately finished. Change is the spice of life as well as the law of nature. Gradually with the passage of time history observes that people living within male-dominated structures start reacting against this unfair behavior.

Society is made of a set structure, a product of a process of transmission of social and cultural values in both covert and overt ways. It is done through different cultural products and institutions of socialization. We observe the socialization of gender inequality as strong and powerful but at the same time, nature is opening up the space for challenging the existing order where women have always been kept dependent, inferior souls. Oakley (1972) expounds that it's not actually sex but rather gender which is really important. One finds sex as biological while gender is socially constructed. Reiner (2008) puts in words that Marx believes in any person's existence as an individual simultaneously as a social being. All these factors made it a little easy for the promotion of women as normal human beings with no disability visible or invisible.

This paper, therefore, focuses primarily on the idea of the promotion of women which is a kind of rebellion against the androcentric culture and society with the help of awareness and education. In this regard, I will try to analyze Shahraz's short story *Perchanvah* in the light of the framework taken from De Beauvoir and try to observe either her female characters show the realization of Wollstonecraft's idea of making an effort of revolution to regain the status of a normal human being. The ideal feminist behavior is by showing the space of Sunderland (2004) *unlearning* the existing social order and promoting their sex with *relearning* as unyoked, emancipated, and enlightened persons.

Pakistani short fiction in English is selected for the reason as it seems the most suitable to seek the answers to the required study. The story is not only the true reflection of life but also explores the social and cultural relevance

and the promotion of women is the most important one. Pitts (2010) seems to describe gender subjectivities linked to the bodies, with connected realities of race, gender as well as power. Shahraz has achieved an unparalleled appreciation worldwide for lime lighting woman's condition in a patriarchal society. Her first collection of short stories, *A pair of jeans and other stories* (2013) contain many prize-winning stories. Most of the stories are written in the social-cultural context of Pakistan, the story selected for this paper is particularly from Pakistani cultural background.

Literature Review

Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Ussher (2005) relates that we observe passionate female critical literature portrays the second lowly of women in the present social set up as subjective, weak, usable, mad, dependent, fearful, showpiece, maiden, melancholic, and thus submissive. When we try to find out traces of the history we find that in 3rd century BCE Roman women filled the Capitoline Hill and blocked every entrance while resisting against the law of limiting woman's use of expensive goods. That rebellion has been exceptional as for most of the recorded history only isolated voices speak out against the inferior status of woman. The old classic books have the idea of the problem is woman's inequality in society and its proposed solutions. De Beauvoir (1953) challenges the notion that women exist only to please men and proposes equal opportunity for women in education, work, and politics. Woolf (1929) vividly portrays the unequal treatment to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood. Code (2000) delineates that Wollstonecraft argues that females can have equal rights in all fields of life if they are provided with the education as same like men.

Feminism, the promotion of women stands for challenging and contesting the male dominating social order to show and redefine the position of women through thoughts, words, gestures or actions by getting education and spreading awareness as do the characters in the selected short story. Jagger and Rosenberg (1984) explain patriarchy as a kind of relationship between the sexes depending on material ground which appears as hierarchical, established on the ground of independence along with harmony among men which actually capacitate them for dominating women. Hartmann (1981) further observes the connection between male dominance and capitalism and argues that patriarchy connects all men irrespective of their class. All these factors made it little easy for the promotion of woman as normal human beings. Literature represents life and its norms as Bryman (1988) explains it as understanding actions along with their meanings in their specific social context. In the selected short story we come across the main female protagonist, Salma in *Perchanvah* is presented as strong promoters of women.

Andleeb and Khan (2020) discuss this story from perspective of observing women specifically in the light of cultural domain and describe them from postcolonial thought of othering in the ideological identities of women.

This research focuses the promotion of women. This practice automatically enables them to realize their condition and challenge unjustified gender norms and values. Although we find this feminist movement still going on and expanding to the new horizons universally but this paper is an effort to focus on De Beauvoir as critic of feminist movement, a promoter of the equality of women in already social and cultural mind set of androcentric system. We find all such traits in Shahraz's stories' characters who come up as educated and enlightened souls who refuse to accept superstitious beliefs along with artificial male dominance by proving women as inferior to males. They openly criticize and condemn conventional image emerge as sensible and competent human beings. Her female characters show a variety of ways of rejection of traditional cultural norms and use multiple strategies to promote themselves and redefine their position.

Methodology and Framework

The research needs an organized pattern for analyzing the text in collaboration with the critical theory selected for the research. Anderson (1988) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) delineate that one finds there are different disagreements between critical theory methods and constructivism still both are termed as qualitative or interpretive. Hirshman and Hollbrook (1992a, 1992b) and Mick (1986) relate that one finds qualitative techniques seem concerned with textual or literary kind of representation of this world with its focus on analysis for interpreting texts using different kinds of analytical techniques. Iqbal (2022) expounds that lexical choice always have some necessary reason which can be observed in the background of Shahraz's story. The methodology selected for this particular research is qualitative, which is the analysis of the text of the selected short story in the light of feminism, promotion of women with the help of educational enlightenment.

The main objective of the study is that the fiction of the female writers in Pakistan projects the promotion of women. The main antagonist is mostly society, culture, and mind set. The framework is taken from De Beauvoir (1953) *The second sex*.

So as to assert herself against the given that she endures in revolt, so as to create a world other than the one in which she cannot succeed in reaching herself, she needs to express herself.(p.836)

The research focuses on how do female writers project the promotion of women struggling for their rights.

Research Questions

1. How do culture and its practices facilitate the negation of promotion of women?
2. What are the circumstances under which the women revolt against subjugation?
3. Why do the women need to promote themselves with the help of educational enlightenment in a patriarchal society in *Perchanvah*?
4. How do Shahraz's female protagonists refute superstitious cultural norms and come up as enlightened souls for the promotion of women?

Textual Analysis of *Perchanvah*

In Pakistani society, we have to deal with intellectual colonization and really need to work very hard for the promotion of women, their rights to get an education, and prove their equality with their enlightened selves. In the existing system one really finds it almost impossible as women are considered inferior to men as Cobuild (2010) relates it to something which is less important in comparison to the other. Lerner (1989) further explains that patriarchy is not a single event rather it's a complete procedure that continues for 2500 years (3100 BC to 600 BC) while there have been a lot of elements and forces which seem responsible for establishing male dominance as we observe it today. People need to understand the strategy of producing the manufacturing of consent and come out of it.

The selected short story is reflecting the need of taking women as normal human beings as men. They are educated and enlightened souls. They are not ready to accept any kind of discriminatory behavior. We find Pakistani female writers contributing in this regard. Salma in *Perchanvah* is a true manifestation of it when she says that she is *tainted* and *hurt* over people's reaction towards her miscarriages. She is an educated woman and can realize how she is properly getting colonized as Faiza after listening to her concern and getting agreed to her replies. Salam explains her feelings about being a sensible person. She promotes the suppressed women in society by giving vent to her feelings to her friend by declaring those ideas as *superstitions*. Shahraz portrays her female characters as persons with gray matter. They are modern women with education, enlightenment and who believe in proving themselves.

Salma is a struggling soul against ignorance. She is an educated woman who is stressing the need to shun away superstitions. In *Perchanvah* we find the majority of the women in the story flowing along with ignorance and superstitions as Kaniz Bibi, Faiza's mother-in-law. She is a blind follower of her *Pir* as someone who *tutored* her on every matter.

Kaniz Bibi forbids Faiza to see her best friend Salma who has miscarried three times. Faiza feels *guilty* while Salma thinks of her as a *criminal*. In the story we find women struggling and fighting with the help of enlightenment of education. Rockler (2006) illustrates individualism as some belief in which an individual has his own primary and distinctive reality while society appears as secondary. They are trying to come out of preconceived ignorance and inferiority. *Perchanvah's* Salma is pointed out as an evil spirit as Kaniz says about Salma's *charail* and *witch*. We find Salma surrounded by bad images. The writer depicts satirically how society is negating women and she herself is getting the tool of the defamation of her sex.

Salma's mother shows the empowerment of women. She does not feel reluctant to talk in public both male and female about taboos like sex and pregnancy. She projects clearly that women of today are not the ignorant ones

directed anywhere by any fake *pir* degrading women by declaring them *evil* and *namous*. She informs that things happen scientifically and always have some natural reason and logic behind them. She is rather bold enough to ridicule the old traditional ignorant ways of life. She further explains that she is sensible enough to differentiate between right and wrong. The writer clearly rejects the concept of a woman as an inferior being. Birket Bibi, the midwife of the village is another example of an enlightened woman. She is the one who recommends Salma to go to the city and see a good doctor after her third miscarriage. Salma obeys her and gets the treatment with a strong hope of getting normal soon. Zainab bibi reacts strongly when Kaniz wants to stop her while talking. When Faiza refuses an inquiry about falling she bravely says that she is a *coward* and *liar*. She refuses to be a stereotypical traditional woman and challenges the strong pillars of a rotten structure. Salma's and her mother's enlightenment show them as transformed ones, the true promoters of women.

Conclusion

The discourse of the short story shows that the practice of highlighting androcentric ideologies often leads to the awakening of feminist consciousness. Millett (1977) delineates that we observe that men mostly seem capable of securing the apparent consent of all those women who they dominate. Shahraz's selected short story proves to be the direct medium of promotion of women with the help of educated and enlightened females who refuse to follow blindly superstitions spread by male superiority with the help of *pir*. We find her female characters rejecting the intellectual colonization and manufacture of consent derived from the social order. Her female protagonists seem to make hectic efforts to liberate themselves from the social confinements and redefine their positions with their enlightened souls. They undergo physical, psychological, and emotional sufferings which ultimately lead them to the awakening of the female consciousness. They go through the process of unlearning the social structure and then relearning. Pomeroy et al. (2004) express that the focus is actually on female strength in place of their subjugation. However, the effort of bringing a change in the set structure is not easy, yet Shahraz's female characters seem successful in the quest of redefining their identities and in achieving an upgraded status.

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