

**RESEARCH PAPER****Linguistic Construction of Women: A Feminist Stylistic Study of
Aysha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields*****¹Abdul Shakoor, ²Muhammad Ajmal* and ³Shaista Ghazanfar**

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Corresponding Author muhammad.ajmal@saus.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

The study aims at investigating how stylistic features and linguistic choices contribute to the representation of women in the narrative. The present study highlights the issues of gender based discrimination and violence by analyzing *Beyond the Fields* by Ayesha Baqir through feminist stylistic perspective. It is a gripping tale of quest for justice, in which Zara, the narrator of the novel, embarks on a perilous journey to rescue her twin sister. This research is designed to analyze her struggle under the theoretical framework of Sara Mills' (1995). The study also delves into the utilization of linguistic devices, exploring how they either challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes. The findings of the study reveal the intersection of these choices with broader sociocultural and feminist discourses. Through feminist stylistics, the dimensions of gender representation are interrogated, contributing to the ongoing conversation about the role language plays in perpetuating or subverting gender norms.

Keywords: *Beyond the Fields*, Feminism, Gender, Narrative, Stylistics**Introduction**

The linguistic study of the numerous elements that make up a writer's literary style is known as stylistics. As an alternative, linguistic devices are nevertheless evaluated in terms of literature but throughout the past few decades, there has been a consistent change in the emphasis placed on the awareness of variables because of the significant contributions of many stylistic schools of thought. In this regard, for instance, Fish (1981), a proponent of affective stylistics, notes that the development of stylistics was urged by a response to the subjectivity and fuzziness of literary studies.

The main theoretical pillars of feminist criticism are enumerated by Wales (1997) who explores the understanding of literature (mainly composed by men) with the help the experience of its reading as women, and questions the commonly perceived objectivity or universality of the given written discourse. Another, she questions the entire procedures for the evaluation which has built a canon of literary works. Another analysis of the (sometimes misogynistic) representations of women in the literary works herself, she says as she wraps up this list. The impactful psychoanalytical theory of Freud has a strong phallogocentric bias, which has been exposed by the writing of Cixous (1975) and other French critics. Several other feminist critics have also pointed out this strong patriarchal bias.

Aysha Baqir, born and raised in Pakistan, graduated in international relations from Mount Holyoke College in the US. She returned to Pakistan after discovering a love for development during her stay in college. She quickly came to realization that the poor required access to socially connecting networks and financial resources in order to speak up for social justice, so she made the decision to get her MBA. Aysha Baqir mainly focuses

on gender related issues and traumatic experience a woman has to face in deteriorating socio economic background.

By studying the work of Aysha Baqir, any reader can feel the painful situation in rural spheres. It points out the issues of love, hate, sexual assault, molestation and despondency using different linguistic devices. It also highlights struggle, hope and self-empowerment. Aysha deals with many important themes like representation of women, feminism, violation of women rights, anxiety, sexual trauma, friendship, productivity and a patriarchal society ,this book is a source of inspiration as well as motivation for young women. Such themes connect her writings closely to the connected to feminist literary movement. She presents a struggling and pitiable image of a woman and efforts to construct a recognizable and respectable identity for her in a patriarchal society.

In consideration of Feminist Stylistics, Mills (1995) put forwards her thoughts that the words and phrases in a text are connected with the concept of ideas. Mills (1995) proposed the idea that discourse analysis can be based on gender discrimination. She also states that gender ideology is carried out in different characters employed in different texts. Writers can claim with the conviction that are concerned with various social problems in their nations, referring especially to what should be feminist thematic issues This research focuses on the relationship between feminism and language used Aysha Baqir's novel 'Beyond the fields'

Literature Review

Stylistics, which is regarded as impartial by nature as contrasted to other branches connected to the analysis of literary works, is a good example of a systematic, coherent, ordered, contextual, corrigible, and informed analysis of linguistics. Under the umbrella of stylistics, linguistics and literary works are connected to one another. Context, purpose, author, and period are the four aspects that identified as having different effects on language. In order to extend its scope to non-literary texts, such as television reports, ads, newspaper reports, religion, and political speeches, it studies several language approaches (Semino & Culpeper, 2011). In particular, stylistics is a field of study that focuses on texts and analyzes them for literary purposes (Burke, 2017).

Wales (2014) claims that stylistics is a method which is used to study different aspects of language and style. In the 20th century, stylistics, as an academic discipline, broadened its application, and it is closely tied to rhetoric. It is occasionally mixed up with other concepts like critical stylistics, literary stylistics, and linguistic stylistics. In contrast to critical stylistics, which refers to critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics and tends to concentrate on the critical approaches of the literary piece of text, linguistic stylistics focuses on the polishing of linguistic devices. Literary stylistics' primary concern is the subject matter of literary texts. Sociolinguistics, another significant approach to stylistics with an emphasis on the language of social groups employed by various writers in their fields of interest, is likewise connected to stylistics (Wales, 2014).

Similarly, Mills (1995) distinguishes between the ancient and modern times, and she views language as a tool to disclose the realities of modern life. Communities' cultural values in earlier times, but in modern times, it is a means of showing "struggle." By elevating voices that are nourished from a social and political standpoint, language is conveyed by means of that "struggle" (Mills S., 2008). Feminists are in favor of the use of crude language in literature as a means of achieving liberation. Obscene language is employed by certain feminists to expound on the strength of female characters, which ends in their humiliation. Although female writers don't specifically engage in harsh language, they do so in public settings as a tool for empowerment (Laugesen, 2019).

The idea that language itself is not sexist but that sexism is created through language use is accepted by feminists. Contrary to their opposite gender, men are respected in society. In the body of literature currently in existence, sexist rhetoric portrays males as superior and dominant, and women as inferior and subservient. The linguistic design depicted ladies who were only beginning to develop self-esteem in the civilization that is patriarchal (Ohaeto & Ikemelu, 2021).

Women's qualities are influenced by society and cultural factors rather than their birth. By interfering, they become women. De Beauvoir distinguished between gender and sex by asserting that gender equality is something that is gradually attained. By putting a line between themselves and men, women were able to gain equality. Up until the beginning of the third wave of feminism, the second wave of feminism persisted.

Feminist literary criticism also raises awareness of gender issues that are strongly connected to literary works. The notion that literary criticism is solely concerned with the works of women is refuted; rather, it extends beyond this presumption to include writings about women, of women, and men and women, as well as writings about women's bodies, brains, and thoughts. The idea that women can do a variety of activities in the literary arts and that they can read, produce, analyze, and interpret a variety of literary works as women is strengthened by feminist literary criticism (Arizah, 2019).

Despite being known as feminist analysis, which is done to assess text at the literary and linguistic levels, Mills (1995) demonstrated that the interpretation of the term "feminist stylistics" is complex and that different interpretations have been drawn from it. Alternative representations of gender catch people's attention when feminist stylistics are used. Language is the primary element of feminist analysis and also a force to be aware of the world; Mills' (1995) lexicon draws a clear distinction between the description of the text and the reader's mind when they read the text. Mills (1995) uses the language analysis toolset to describe the oppressiveness of gender. Feminist stylistics, according to Mills (1995), strives to dispel unfounded assumptions in conventional stylistics. The variety of feminist stylistics defines the distinctions between the literary works produced from various perspectives by varying modifying variables in European civilizations by men and women. The gender of certain crucial passages in the text highlights those passages in a way that draws attention to the judgment of the text made using common sense. Feminist stylistics specifically addresses gender concerns. Books about gender issues also incorporated scenes regarding romance, sexism, and specific language used for male and female characters. Similarly, it includes the elements that directly relate to representations of gender in terms of focalization, metaphor, and narrative use (Mills, 1995).

Fairclough (1989) described two objectives in *Language and Power*, that are theoretical and practical, the first one is attributed to serve the maintenance of power relations in language to contribute the development of powerful social associations and the second one is ascribed to enhance the ability of self-consciousness forgetting emancipation from domination over people focusing on discourse and social practices (Fairclough, 1989). The influence of feminists on the revival of language was observed in the *Man-Made Language* by Dale Spender (1985) to justify the notion that men symbolize women, but some feminists are meddling with the process of language by producing new linguistic forms (Spender,1985).

Aysha Baqir

Aysha Baqir, raised in Pakistan, earned her degree in international relations from Mount Holyoke College in the US. She returned to Pakistan after discovering a love for development during her stay in college. She rapidly realized that the poor required access to networks and financial resources in order to speak up for social justice, so she made the decision to get her MBA. She established a trailblazing non-profit economic development

organization in 1998 with the goal of reducing poverty by giving girls and women access to company development and market-focused trainings. She developed a passion for economic development during her time in college, and when she returned to Pakistan, she realized that the underprivileged required access to economic networks and resources before they could demand social justice. She interacts frequently with girls and women during her stay in the villages, and as a result, her appreciation and regard for their resilience, fortitude, and sense of humor during difficult times increased significantly. With so little, they accomplished such incredible things. In her debut book *Beyond the Fields*, the characters reject the roles that have been assigned to them and are instead driven to persist and realize their goals. She is presently drafting her second book.

Beyond the Fields

The rape of a fifteen-year-old girl in a remote Pakistani town inspires the twin sister of the victim to embark on a perilous search for justice in the powerful story of resilience and recovering honour known as *Beyond the Fields*. *Beyond the Fields*, which is set in the early 1980s amid a backdrop of social unrest, political upheaval and martial law, closely examines the hopes and anxieties of Pakistani women. It is a contemporary account of social oppression and in justice Zara and Tara, twins raised in a distant Pakistani village among the fields of wheat and cotton, born to a poor, landless farmer during the monsoon season. Tara is taken from the fields and raped during an afternoon of activities. After her parents accept an unexpected marriage proposal for their "dishonored" daughter, everything seems to be resolved. But when a newspaper clipping surfaces that cast doubt on the union, the nightmare returns for Zara, who is determined to save her twin, sets out on a perilous journey for justice while facing cultural upholders of propriety and navigating the unknown perils of an urban environment. Since many years ago, gender prejudice and stereotypes have harmed women. They are battling for the feminism movement's worldwide acceptance of their deserving identity. The goal of the current study is to draw attention to this problem through a stylistic analysis of Aysha Baqir's book *Beyond the Fields*.

Material and Methods

A qualitative research design is employed in this analysis. Additionally, textual and thematic analysis is used to analyze the text of the novel *Beyond the Fields* by Aysha Baqir. Zara's elevated thoughts enable them to raise in a patriarchal society as strong people. She attempts to remove the concept of 'other' associated with women for centuries and replace it with 'equal' in the man-made society. Qualitative data gathered in the form of words, nouns, pronouns, naming, ready-made phrases, metaphors, characterization, and focalization, extracted from the novel named *Beyond the Fields* by Aysha Baqir originally published in 2022 which is the primary source of data collection along with the theoretical framework of Feminist Stylistics by Sara Mills (1995), to explore the traits of novel at the word, phrase\sentence and discourse level. The novel *Beyond the Fields* consists of 293 pages, having more than eight thousand lines which are divided into four books named, Journey, Bahawalpur, Lahore and Home. Secondary sources are also used to support the information about theories presented in chapter two for the data analysis, including books, journal articles, thesis, book reviews and interviews from websites on the internet. The researcher used himself as the main instrument to collect data for qualitative research by reading relevant material extensively and observing themes of it with vigilance to inspire women to get represented and empowered in society.

The researchers adopted the theoretical framework of Feminist Stylistics proposed by Sara Mills (1995). This framework analyzes part 1 named Bahawalpur of *Beyond the Fields* at three distinctive levels, the first is to analyze the text at the word level, in which individual words are analyzed to deal with gender-specific terms, and the second is to analyze text at the phrase\sentence level to evaluate the usage of sexist language in the

literary texts and the third and last level is to analyze text by discussing different features of discourse.

Results and Discussion

The present part aims to achieve the desired findings of the research', which include identifying the lexical patterns related to gender and the sentence structures used to represent women. In *Beyond the Fields*, Aysha Baqir uses many dialogues to depict Tara's life's path of hardship in order to reveal the development and potential of the self. She got her novel *Beyond the Fields* in 2019 and painted the cover page of the book with watercolor and brush markers. Regarding the writing style of *Beyond the Fields*, she employed feminist-based language to expose the unfair justification of social standards.

Bahawalpur

Bahawalpur', the second book in *Beyond the Fields*, portrays the feelings of love, loss, emotions, and violence. It consists of twenty-two chapters, and this part of the story concentrates on the value and relationship with family, especially the siblings. Baqir's presentation of Tara's victimization conveys anguish, resulting in heartbreaks. Life scuffles with agonies when someone near is left alone in the miseries of the world. Aysha highlights the role of time in establishing a sense of depression and anxiety. Feeling pressure due to a limitation of time is a human instinct through which the mind and heart pause to feel about things in good order.

Analysis of 'Bahawalpur at the Word Level

As mentioned earlier, the word level analyzes the text of the second half of the novel *Beyond the Fields* has the following six phases.

Generic Pronouns

The conventional way of thinking about the generic pronoun 'he' is that it is used for both male and female genders, but in the modern understanding, the pronoun 'he' is used from the masculine perspective. It is possible to note that the narrator also starts the chapter 05 with the word 'I' which implies the presence of her character to recount her life tale. The use of the first-person pronoun 'I' at the beginning of practically every coversation improves the beauty of the novel *Beyond the Fields*, which reveals that she is portrayed on every page of this collection that revolves around her existence.

Throughout this chapter, the pronouns 'he' and 'one' are not used generically but designated for invisible male character. As the book 'Bahawalpur' unfolds, it becomes evident to the reader that the pronoun 'he' is used to depict the terrible attributes of the person as a predator to snare naive girls as the author herself. "I looked down. 'Tiaz' was Amma's favourite word for me" (Aysha, 2019, p. 35). The above lines show that I is followed by the generic word Amma that is traditionally used to refer to such a mother who is very strict and conservative.

The Analysis of 'Bahawalpur' at Phrase/ Sentence Level

The following four points make up the analysis of Chapter Heart's text at the phrase-sentence level:

Ready-made Phrases

Ready-made idioms and proverbs have two meanings: the obvious meaning and the hidden meaning. The second type of meaning conveys messages that establish sexism in

language use and contextual information is used in proverbial messages to provide a detailed description of predetermined phrases. For instance, "Unmarried girls didn't own land or property in our village. Sons inherited all of it. They carried the family name" (Aysha, 2019, p. 46).

As was already mentioned, Baqir's novel *Beyond the Fields* (2019) has drawn harsh criticism from critics for using the plainest possible language. Aysha also describes how her ideology is perceived in the simplest and most straightforward terms possible. In the book titled "Bahawalpur," she discusses "love for oneself," which is one of the themes of *Beyond the Fields*. In the first illustration, a woman is described as loving herself above all else, which is negatively described to illustrate the sexual impact of language on female authors.

The next example is explained in more detail: after winning a woman, Tara's love and attention, the man abandoned her after accomplishing his objective of occupying a woman, and she subsequently became useless to him. Men naturally chase after things that are outside of their comfort zone. Men work harder every day to achieve these goals, and when they do, they are rewarded with them.

However, this causes the thing they worked so hard to acquire to lose its appeal to them after they have acquired it. This further demonstrates the fact that man is a gritty creature; after gratifying one desire, he begins to chase after other impossible goals in an effort to appease his inner self.

Metaphors

According to Mills (1995), a metaphor is a combination of ideas with two distinct words that at least ostensibly make sense to be related to one another. Aysha demonstrates her thinking in the following lines, "Amma had forbidden us to look in the mirror. She said it was Haram" (Aysha, 2019, p.40). In this case "Mirror" is metaphorically used to all the taboos associated with females and the thing they are irrationally forbidden to do.

According to Mills, who claims that language acquisition or usage is considered a fundamental element of our thinking. In the first instance, the narrator demonstrates the difference between the two, but metaphorical elements demonstrate that both are meaningful. It is a lovely example of how a woman and taboos can coexist. The author compares the female body to wickedness in the following example, which falls under the feminist concept. Female hands are unable to touch the mirror because it is so immoral. In order to enhance the quality of character in her body and to fulfill her desires, Aysha uses metaphors to describe this metaphor.

Jokes and Humor

When discussing jokes and humor, it is determined that whenever a humorous statement is made, women are the target of that joke and that such statements are always constructed by the wit of the other people around, demonstrating that women have no respectable place in a society where the patriarchy is dominant. She is just one of subject of being absurd, funny, and constantly making fun of them. As a result of the following issues that women have faced for centuries in Pakistani society. (Aysha, 2019) speaks out against the unequal treatment saying, "'Once more.'" Pushing loose strands of hair behind my ears, I reached out again. "Phitteh muh," I cursed as dust stung my eyes. Summer storms were fast and dark, like Amma's' (p. 31).

When Aysha talks about the charm of things presented in this mortal world in the lines above, she hides misogynist approach behind humor. She also identifies a woman when she is out of reach of a man who pursued her in an effort to catch her attention. However, after receiving her love and affection, her beauty lost its allure for men, and he left

her after manipulating her emotions, demonstrating that women have no higher place in society than that of being a tool for men to use in their pleasure.

In Feminist Stylistics, Mills (1995) explains how women use humor to appeal to men. Aysha employs a similar technique and makes use of humor to obliquely assess the moral character of men. This illustration shows how Aysha disagrees with the patriarchal notion that women are doomed to be cursed. This conception demonstrates that women lack the ability to take steps to lead peaceful lives and cannot survive without be ridiculed.

Analysis of 'Bahawalpur' at Discourse Level

The following points provide a detailed description of the second book analysis at the discourse level

Character/Role

Only the reader plays a significant role in supporting the writer's proposed descriptions of the characters in characterization and role-playing. The reader decodes the text provided in the literary genre using stereotypes to represent the ideological understanding of the men's and women's characters. Male and female characters are portrayed in literary works in different ways. Aysha describes her characters in the novel using the characterization standards outlined by Mills (1995) in *Feminist Stylistics*. The in depth study of the second book shows that male characters are portrayed as strong and active, as opposed to female characters, who are portrayed as helpless and under the control of male characters. This notion that society's strong men believe that women's lives revolve around men's lives is supported by the first example. Without the moral, material, and spiritual support of men, women are powerless.

"Come closer, you two', said Abba. He grasped our hands. She is yours"(Aysha, 2019, p. 46). They, Tara and Zara, try to limit themselves to the 'world' created by the rationality of their father in order to keep themselves as inmates who sleep, wake up, eat, and dress in accordance with the desires and wishes of men because they are unable to realize the goals of their lives.

With the use of the first-person narration 'I' that the narrator of the novel *Beyond the Fields* uses for herself, the aforementioned lines demonstrate how the story is focalized a female character. The first person narrator demonstrates how the female gaze describes the male characters because the narrator identified the 'men' in her life who played a role in the sexual abuse she suffered.

The aforementioned examples show that a man's attempts to make women's lives so "small" that they cannot breathe or survive have a much greater impact on the life of the female character in the novel than does the psychology of the female, which demonstrates that she is unable to look for a good man who will protect her from the beasts of the world in the form of men. Her determination to be with "someone" who supports her and helps her through the challenging circumstances she encounters solely in the patriarchal world where men have ultimate power is highlighted by the story's use of fixed variables and temporal factors.

The author talks about the "butterflies" in the following example. It has been discovered that butterflies have a delicate and beautiful nature; sensitivity is also linked to frailty. Man has an innate desire for lovely things. They attempt to seduce women with the aid of delicate and lovely natural objects in order to satiate their desires. Women are easily tricked by men because they are sensitive and constantly concerned with delicate issues. In the company of women, they experience comfort and solace as their intense cravings are

satisfied. As a unit in their loving and adoring relationship, they constructed their desires and carried them out.

Fragmentation

Feminist Stylistics by Mills (1995) argues that women's body parts are symbols of beauty as they are connected to a variety of things and further develop their characteristics when connected to natural objects like roses for lips and clouds for hair. Contrarily, feminists contend that male characters don't share the same connection to the natural world because women are the symbols of beauty and strength while men are the opposite, as evidenced by the representation of women in South Asian literary works like *Beyond the Fields*. Zara, for example, describes herself as, "My arms tingled as if brushed by spiky grass, and a rush of heat swelled my cheeks, remembering Muhammad Ali's fight chant" (Aysha, 2019, p. p.43). The female focus in these lines describes anatomical observations about the female body parts. Since a female author, Aysha describes various body parts of her own. There are a lot of divisions involving women. While "his heavy" is used three times to describe the male fragmentation

"His head, his tongue, and your fingers; the author, a woman, attempts to portray the fragmentation from a female perspective while using sexist language to describe it. All of these anatomical references demonstrate how the author, in contrast to the male characters in this book, portrays South Asian female characters as strong, persuasive, active, and energetic.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the narrator has used numerous pronouns instead of the names of characters. The narrator of the novel does not mention the names of some characters in *Beyond the Fields* but describes their life stories by pointing them out through pronouns associated with those characters. The narrator describes the South Asian women's characters as strong as men, such as she has given the attributes of 'warrior' and 'hero' to the females in the novel which are the qualities of men but here the narrator gives these attributes to the female characters to show that they are mentally and physically strong like male characters, to whom she gives the titles of demons, rascals and monsters which negatively depicts the power of men over women in the society. The narrator also uses the nouns 'clown' and 'fool' for men to describe their voracious nature to chase the beauty of women. Aysha, through this novel, has represented the women of South Asian countries as marked and men as unmarked form. It is said that being a Pakistani female writer, Aysha represents the real picture of a rural Pakistani women who can walk without the sticks given by men to prove their existence as respectable human beings in society despite all the odds.

This study shows that women are not born weak and subordinate but it was men who suppressed them from their birth and put this thing into their minds that they are the property of men and have to spend their lives according to the set conventions of the patriarchal society. This research is helpful for future researchers who want to do their research in the field of stylistics and applied linguistics along with feministic analysis which has an emerging scope in the 21st century. As women's population is roughly equal to that of men, then the writings of women should be appreciated and analyzed in the new researches because it is observed that men's writings are mostly in the favor of men and they represent women as a thing to be used for the satisfaction of their needs, but female writers represent women as important as men based on equality

The study brings forward the need to do further analysis of Pakistani novels written by female as well as male authors, who represent women as equal to men. This research will contribute to the new researches being conducted in the field of feminist stylistic to analyze

such type of female characters who were or had been the victim of sexual abuse but despite that they made themselves strong enough to face the bitter realities of life with great courage. Gender equality may be shaped through social justice between both the genders, and this may result in the empowerment and independence of women. To cut the long short, fair distribution of power and decision making is the core of the socio-economic stability of women.

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