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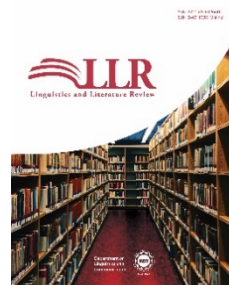
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Pakistani Women Writings in English: A Study of Women's Expression and Literary Traditions

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the Pakistani women writers and their contribution to Pakistani literature in English. Furthermore, this study focuses on the developmental outcomes of female writings in English by highlighting the 'women's expression' and literary traditions of Pakistani women writers. In order to have a discernible view, Elaine Showalter's methodology was used to categorize the development of women's writing into three major phases: the feminine, the feminist, and the female. Thus, the findings of the current study revealed that though women were marginalized and subjugated before colonization but after colonization, they claimed their identities by celebrating their 'women's expression' and literary style. Additionally, Pakistani women writers have set a feminine tradition, peculiar in its internalized consciousness, characteristics, and thematic features. Feminism is found to be one of the influencing factors in Pakistani women writings because it popularly focuses on the experiences, narrative techniques, and commonalities of women's struggle. The current study also depicted that women's writing expression is markedly different from that of men. It further, inculcated that women writers are considered to be more sensitive and emotional that is why their writings tend to be more melodramatic and autobiographical. Hence, women writers are true representation of their gendered community and mostly their writings portray female characters and their issues in the domestic and public sphere which ironically highlight women subjugation in a patriarchal society. Hence, the paper investigates women's role, position, and degree of influence in literary field from a feminist perspective.

Keywords: feminism, gender roles, literary traditions, Pakistani English fiction, women's writing, women expression

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Introduction

Pakistani literature in English is considered to be a part of postcolonial genre. It emerged after the British colonized the sub-continent. This legacy of colonization continued and became evident in writings when the native authors started to amalgamate English with their native Urdu language. The only language which was left behind by the colonizers was the English language (Hashmi, [1990](#)). Today there are more people who can speak English in sub-continent than the United Kingdom. English as an international language has gained more importance after the British colonization. Although, before colonization generally in South Asia particularly Muslim societies were starkly patriarchal. Therefore, women's subjugation was the norm and their gender role confined them only to household chores, rather than giving them their own literary stance. Concerning it, Quaid-e-Azam emphasized education and participation of women in national development (Bhattacharya, [2014](#)). But, unfortunately his lessons were soon forgotten by the nation. Since then, women have been grappling to become equal members of the society. But this half of the population has not remained passive in these times. Though scarce, but we still see their contributions and achievements in various fields. Similarly, there are multiple Pakistani women who write fiction in English. Despite all these impediments they continue to rise along with their male counterparts.

Muslim women started writing in English even before the independence in the areas that are part of Pakistan today. After independence we witness a number of women writing in English starting from Mumtaz Shahnawaz in 1950s. This slow and gradual development of women's writing in English, both in prose and poetry, continued with changing social and political atmosphere of country. But with the dawn of 21st century, there was a sudden surge in women's writing. Women, both living in Pakistan and abroad, came with brilliant works of fiction that were recognized and praised across the world. As a result Pakistani literature in English was granted a status of independent literary tradition by western academia (Chambers, [2018](#)). In this entire period, Pakistani women's writers drew influence from social, political, and domestic happenings. They especially highlighted the struggle and suffering of women in a patriarchal society.

Elaine Showalter, the founder of the Gynocentric School of criticism, has focused on women writers and their writings. Her keen interest was specifically, in literature written by women, its history, themes, and

structure. Showalter's (1977) formulated opinion about women identity, struggle, and subjectivity that could be helpful in this regard to study the trail of Pakistani women writings in English. To study the 'Englishness' of Pakistani women writers this study discusses the gradual development of Pakistani women writings in English which emphasized on the socio-political background, Pakistani women writers, and their works. Therefore, this study employs Showalter's model of Gynocentric criticism to understand the evolution of female language, popular trends in women writings, and their literary creativity. Furthermore, the current study also discusses the characteristics and literary traditions of Pakistani women writings depicting 'self' and 'world' in English.

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To study how Pakistani women writings in English emerged and evolved?
- 2) To study the dominant trends and attributes of Pakistani women writings especially in English?

Theoretical Framework

The current study employs Elaine Showalter's feminist theoretical framework to study the women's expression and literary traditions in Pakistani women writings. Showalter is one of the famous American feminist critics of 20th century. Her well-known book, *Literature of their own: British Women novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is the foundation of her feminist criticism. The book is a critical commentary on the lives and works of British women writers. As stated "This book is an attempt to fill in the terrain between literary landmarks and to construct a more reliable map from which to explore the achievements of English women novelists" (Showalter, 1977, p. 03). She talks about the evolution, literary tradition, and the various phases of development of women's literature.

According to Showalter, women's writing does not reach the point at which we see it today in the twinkling of eye but rather, through long evolutionary process. The study of that evolutionary process of women's writing helps in simplifying the historical complexities and decoding the trends and impetuses behind the evolution. Showalter (1977) asserted, women literatures from different languages which can be studied through

three major phases. The first and primary phase is feminine where women writers imitate and internalize the values of dominant culture. According to Showalter feminine is the phase of callow style and naïve themes. Women's writing is in the earlier stages here therefore can't be differentiated from men's writing. Furthermore, Showalter stated that writing of this phase surrenders to the dominant trends and women writers seem frail. Thus, the feminine phase is marked by imitation not originality.

The second is the feminist phase of advocacy and protest. Feminist phase forced women to convert ways to dramatize the inner life, and led to fiction that is intense, compact, symbolic, and profound" (Showalter, [1977](#), p. 27). Woman writers started advocating rights in the fiction and protested against patriarchy. It is the phase of awakening of women writers. It is the phase of war on both the fronts as women not only challenge patriarchy but also literary authority of colonizer. The women writers find their novels different from the tradition of western literature that had up till then been their model (Lisa, [2002](#)). The third is the female phase of identity and self-discovery. The female is the phase of turning inward and addressing women's identity. Writing in female phase is refined, original and motivated for the cause of women's liberation. Furthermore, Showalter expressed, these three phases that can overlap and appear in the works of a single author (Showalter, [1977](#)). As she categorized earlier works of George Eliot in female phase and later works in feminine phase. Therefore, these phases are neither rigid nor necessary chronological in order.

The current paper explores the chronological history of Pakistani women writings in English which are studied using feminine literary canon, the feminist, and the female perspective. Hence, the characteristic features and writers' attitude belonging to different historical periods are examined in parallel to the attributes of the feminine, the feminist, and the female phases as explained by Showalter. Women writers and their works are then classified under several phases. Thus, the current research employs Showalter's theoretical concepts to study literary development of Pakistani women writings in English.

Data Analysis

From Shahnawaz to Shah: Evolution of Pakistani Women's Writings in English

Pakistan being a part of former British colony had remained under its influence, and that is still strongly felt in different fields. Edwards (2008) called Pakistani fiction in English a product of postcolonial tradition. Therefore, we trace the origin of Pakistani literature in English, particularly from women writers, to pre-partition era and after independence struggles of women. As discussed earlier, the conditions of Muslim women were very pathetic before partition and independence. They remained “other” at the hands of their own men and the colonizers. They were “doubly colonized” (Mohanty, 2003) and their debilitating conditions did not allow them to do something extraordinary. Thus, English literature in subcontinent was exclusively pioneered by men (Shamsie, 2011). Ruquia Sakhawat Hussain—an upper class Bengali Muslim, being an exception. Her only notable work is a utopian short story *Sultana's Dream* in 1905. Hussain's story is funny and fascinating account of Muslim woman's life in subcontinent.

Near 1947, women started participating in politics of Muslim League. Fatima Jinnah, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, and Salma Tassaduque Hussain were among those who raised their voice for women and against the colonial rule. The independence of Pakistan presented a ray of hope, as it was considered a new beginning where women would make a fresh start. Immediately after independence, Mumtaz Shahnawaz published her wonderful novel *Heart Divided* in 1957. It is possibly the very first novel in partition literature. Her politically charged writings and exuberant style paved the way for other women in the country. Shamsie (2005) praised Shahnawaz “permeated by a strong consciousness of herself as an educated Muslim woman and political activist, welding both the personal and the public” (p. 11). Besides Shahnawaz, Elsa Qazi, German-born lady, who later converted and migrated to Pakistan is also among the pioneering women writers of English fiction. She was a versatile writer with drama, poetry, short stories, translations, and novels to her credit. She published her first long novel *Old English Garden Symphony: A Novel with Twelve Themes Exposition, Development and Recapitulation* in 1952. Her another novel *Civilization through Ages* published in 1988, is the story of transmigrating beard. The novel is historical in its account where evolution of human civilization is discussed with especial emphasis on Muslim

history. Her collection of short stories titled *Flower Fairy Stories* published in 1992, and *Wisdom in Verse*, a collection of poems was published in 1975. Unfortunately, Qazi couldn't find publishers in her lifetime and most of her works were published posthumously.

Around 1950's along with Shah Nawaz and Qazi, Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah was writing English fiction. The pioneer of women journalistic writing in Pakistan, she wrote a travelogue *Sixty Days in America* in 1956. Besides, she produced anthology of short stories entitled *The Young Bride and Other Stories* in 1958. Her short story "*The Bull and She devil*" is most notable as it talked about social pressures on men and women for conforming to patriarchal gender roles and false habitus that is constructed by gender dichotomy. She did not only write but ran a literary magazine named *Woman's World* to encourage young women writers by providing them a platform.

Unfortunately, this brilliant beginning was disturbed and the chain was broken in late 1950's and 60's. Social turmoil, surge in political uncertainty and exacerbating violence capped women. Military dictatorship of Ayub Khan followed by Yahya's aggravated the conditions. Furthermore, fall of Dhaka, Bhutto's tumultuous regime, culminating in Zia's military coup spoiled the atmosphere. All the hopes for women died down with implementation of Hudood Ordinance and strict blasphemy laws during Zia regime (Haqqani, [2016](#)). There was no silver lining for the writers especially women in those turbulent times. The neighborhood- India- in the same period was developed and was being recognized because of the emerging English women writers. Lisa ([2002](#)) argued that, in Indian literature of English language, women made themselves heard in 1960's and 1970's in the light of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai.

In these turbulent times when conditions were not conducive for women at home, there emerged a voice from diaspora writers for instance-Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi writer of Pakistani origin. Rahman ([2015](#)) considered her first bona fide woman writer of Pakistan. He also praised Sidhwa as the first Pakistani woman English writer to get international recognition. When Sidhwa was writing, there were barely any women writer of English fiction in Pakistan (Shamsie, [2017](#)). Starting from her first novel *The Crow Eaters* in 1979, *The Pakistani Bride* in 1983, *Ice Candy Man* in 1988, *American Brat* in 1993, and *Water*, 2006, she has written wonderful works for last four decades. In her novels, plot revolves around weak and suppressed

women of the society yet, they resist patriarchy and struggle for their identity. Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*, *Ice Candy Man*, and *Water* talk about issues of marriage, female sexual objectivity, and victimization at the hands of patriarchal society. In *American Brat* her focus shifts towards identity crisis and cultural clash that Pakistani diaspora experience in the west. Besides novels of highest note, Sidhwa also produced non-fiction under the title *City of Sin and Splendor: Writings on Lahore* in 2005.

In poetry, during 1970's Maki Kureishi was writing creditable English poems. One of the earliest and prominent Pakistani poets of English, her poems were published collectively with other male authors in a book titled *Wordfall: three Pakistani poets, Taufiq Rafat, Maki Kureishi, Kaleem Omar* in 1975. She continued writing till her last days, but unfortunately her poems were only posthumously published under the title *The Far Thing* in 1997.

Except Sidhwa and Kureishi, we don't find any woman writer of note in 1970's and 80's. This long silence on the account of women was finally broken with the return of democracy. Benazir Bhutto became the first women prime minister of Pakistan in 1988 and consequently Pakistan witnessed outpouring of feminist thought in the country. Second wave of feminism that emerged during 1970's in the western world, made its appearance in Pakistan during 1980's (Kanwal & Aslam, 2018). Furthermore, Pakistanis travelling to west inspired by the freedom of women, began to demand same in their country (Mumtaz et al., 2003). Women writers took advantage of these conducive conditions and made most of it. With this, there started a relentless era of women's writing in Pakistan.

It began with Sara Suleri- Pakistani American writer- who published her autobiographical memoir *Meatless Days* in 1989. The book is a critique of women's subordinated position in Pakistani society. Tharoor (2008) comments, "I would like to include Suleri's *Meatless Days* in the list of finest books, but alas it isn't fiction". Later she produced other non-fictional works as well. While Suleri was writing in diaspora, Tehmina Durrani in Pakistan published her politically autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord* in 1991. The novel hatched controversy in Pakistani politics as it unveiled the dark side of the personal life of chief minister Punjab- Ghulam Mustafa Khar. Shamsie (2017) calls *My Feudal Lord* an instant overnight sensation and hottest book. Durrani, after exposing politicians, turned to another

powerful fraction of society. Her second novel *Blasphemy* (1998) brought to light the hidden lives of spiritual Muslim leaders and clergy. After a long gap of fifteen years, Durrani made her presence felt with her third novel *Happy Things in Sorrow Times* (2013). The novel is an account of young Afghan girl living in rural Sindh in the backdrop of 9/11.

Pakistan Academy of Letters published collection of short stories by women writers *So That You Can Know Me* in 1994. Simultaneously, Muneeza Shamsie became the first Pakistani women and only second to Tariq Rahman to write criticism of Pakistani literature in English. Her first book *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English* (1997) includes criticism on the works of well-known Pakistani authors of English living in both Pakistan and diaspora. In English poetry, Moniza Alvi is among the most prominent names, still a strong woman voice in diaspora. She is the author of at least five collections of poetry including *Country at My Shoulder* (1993) and the recent *Homesick for the Earth* (2011).

With the advent of 21st century, we witness prodigious amount of Pakistani fiction in English. It was the time when it gained recognition and approval throughout the world (Cilano, [2013](#)). Young and energetic women writers with their intensive command over English language emanated in numbers. Moreover, rise of electronic and social media, easy availability of reading material and increase in literacy added to their importance. Women started writing, more openly and boldly, slamming the conventional image of woman's inferiority. In the words of Shamsie ([2017](#)) Pakistani Literature in English became its own.

In this fearless generation, Kamila Shamsie, daughter of well-known literary critic Muneeza Shamsie, is most celebrated writer. Her success at the very young age in literary world made her win many international awards. Shamsie started her literary career with the publication of *In the City by Sea* in 1998. The novel is about an 11 year old boy Hassan and his plight in the unstable political conditions due to military interference. Her second novel *Salt and Saffron* (2000) depicts the social and economic division in the country. As the title suggests salt represents poor while saffron, the rich. Her most illustrious novel, *Brunt Shadows* (2009), broadens the horizon and refers to world politics between World War II and 9/11. The novel depicts the tri-continental journey of Hiroko Tanaka, in the wake of Nagasaki bombing. She experiences heart-wrenching events in her

journey such as partition of India, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and war on terror. After this magnum opus, she has published *A God in Every Stone* (2014) and *Home Fire* (2017). Thus, after coming out with seven ingenious novels in short span, it could be expected that there is much more to come from Shamsie in future. Besides younger Shamsie, Qaisra Shahraz in her late forties published her first novel. She is now the author of many short stories and three brilliant novels namely *The Holy Woman* (2002), *Typhoon* (2007), and *Revolt* (2013). Shahraz's writing, unlike Shamsie, is non-political. Chaudhary (2013) argued that Shahraz differs from other Pakistani writers in her selection and treatment of subject matter. Her writing mostly focused on oppression and victimization of women in Pakistan and diaspora due to patriarchal societal norms.

While, Shahraz and Shamsie were writing fiction in diaspora, Uzma Aslam Khan and Bina Shah were contributing notable fictional works at home. Khan started her writing career with novel *The Story of Noble Rot* in 2001. Bina Shah also published her first novel *Where They Dream in Blue* in the same year. Khan's second novel *Trespassing* (2003) is about international political scenario in the wake of Gulf War. The novel is a critique on the west's interference in the internal matters of countries. In the succeeding year Shah also published her second novel *The 786 Cybercafé*. The novel is based on the story of man who arrives in Karachi in the search of employment. Interestingly, the novel lacks female characters and is based on theory of social Darwinism. Khan's third and most lauded novel *The Geometry of God* (2008) is the story of young Amal and her grandfather Zahoor in the wake of Afghan Jihad and Zia's Islamization. It depicts the clash between progressive and orthodox Muslims. Besides, Khan is also the author of *Thinner than Skin* (2012) and *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* (2019). On the other hand, Shah's third novel *Slum Child* came out in 2010 and then her most celebrated work *Season for Martyrs* in 2014. *Season for Martyrs* is the story of a young Sindhi journalist Ali Sikandar's identity crisis in the backdrop of Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan after long exile. Shah has beautifully blended history with fiction, personal with political, mythical with real, and characters connected with broader themes of martyrdom and honour. Hence, Shah's novels are comparatively historical than political and are based in Karachi. Along with Khan and Shah, there are preponderance of young women voices in fiction such as Fatima Bhutto, Rafia Zakaria, Sabyn Javeri, Moni Mohsin, Nafisa Haji, and Saba Imtiaz.

Novel writing is on its zenith, but at the same time women's contribution in the field of short story writing cannot be taken for granted. Bina Shah started her writing career with a book of short stories titled *Animal Medicine* in 2001. In 2005, a landmark was reached when Muneeza Shamsie edited and compiled a collection of short stories entitled *The World Changed: Contemporary Short Stories by Pakistani Women*. In 2007, Bina Shah published her second book of short stories, *Blessings and Other Stories*. Hence, novel can be dominant form of expression for women writers but certainly it is not the only one.

During this period the emergence of many young women are witnessed as poets. Pakistani feminine poetry underwent renaissance with the dawn of new millennium as women's poetry illuminated new experiences (Mansoor, 2012). Ilona Yusuf's is a prominent name second to Maki Kureishi. Yusuf published collection of poems titled *Picture This* in 2001. Her poetry presented the consciousness of being women in a patriarchal society. In Mansoor's words, Yusuf's poetry "does away with laws of language and seem no beginning or end to the quandary of existence" (2012, p, 33). Along with Yusuf, Soofia Ishaque, Shadab Zeest Hashmi, Shahbano Bilgirami, and Shabnam Riaz with her poetry collection *The Whispering Wind* (2005) are contributing to genre. Thus, future of English poetry seems safe in the young hands of these women.

The Feminine, The Feminist, and The Female

In Pakistani English literature the feminine phase can be traced to pre and immediate post-independence years. Showalter (1977) described this as a phase of imitation and internalization. Women who started their career in united India were writing under the influence of British colonizers. They had no ideal of their own to follow, so imitation of British writers was imperative. It was the time of incorporating alienated British values and language into native culture. Furthermore, feminist thought had not made it to the subcontinent, hence there was no or little struggle against the deep-rooted patriarchal norms. In the works of earlier women writers like Ruquia Sakhawat Hussain, Mumtaz Shahnawaz, and Elsa Qazi protagonists are mostly male. Ahmed (2009) endorsed this view saying that earlier Pakistani writing in English talked more about women than their problems. Even if there are women characters, they are ideal, who endlessly suffered but never complained. Therefore, it rarely raised women's issues by challenging patriarchy. Thus, for women writers it was the phase of internalizing two

dominant cultures, one of men (patriarchy) and other of masters (colonialism).

The feminist phase of women's writing started when Sidhwa's works appeared in the mainstream. This was the revival phase for the advocacy and rights of women (Showalter, [1977](#)). In this phase the insistence of women writers was on the demonstration against existing system of values and dominant patriarchal order of a society. They would demand for equal rights by challenging covert authorities and power structures. It is the phase of war on both the fronts as women will not only challenge patriarchy but also literary authority of colonizer. The women writers find their novels different from the tradition of western literature that had up till then been their model (Lisa, [2002](#)). Particularly, for postcolonial nations it is the phase of literary independence when they no more rely on western writers. Sidhwa defied traditional roles and created women protagonists. The characters of Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride*, Lenny and Ayah in *Ice Candy Man*, Feroza in *American Brat*, and Chuiya in *Water* illustrated the patriarchal expectations from a women. Her female protagonists endure subjugation and marginalization at the hands of patriarchy and often lose battles but continue their struggle and never surrender. Feminist phase is the time of struggle between tradition and modernity (Showalter, [1977](#)). That is what depicted in the works of Sidhwa. Her female protagonists tend to move towards modernity e.g. Feroza by travelling to America for higher studies and deciding to marry American boy against the wishes of her family. Feminist phase of passive protest and preparation is very narrow. We have only Sidhwa among women who was writing in 70's and 80's. However, there had been an unexpected instantaneous mushrooming of women's writing in and after 90's. This phase of growth is categorized as the female phase.

The female phase of women's writing began during 1990's with undaunted writing of Tehmina Durrani. Female phase is about self-discovery and clinching feminist identity (Showalter, [1977](#)). The writings of women in this phase are open and introspective with straightforward answers to the women problems. The dominant culture does not shape women's writing any more. Showalter argued that it is not men but the societal norms, customs, and expectations that are considered hindrance for women in achieving their rights. Therefore, their struggle is against the prevalent social order. Durrani in *My Feudal Lord* and *Blasphemy* blames

the political and religious orders respectively for the injustice against women. Similar to feminist phase, here women endure injustice but their struggle is perpetual and at last, unlike the feminist phase, they are on the winning side. Similar attributes can be found in the works of Qaisra Shahraz, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Bina Shah. Moreover, these authors depicted female characters who were in the quest of self-identity. They no longer associated themselves with their male relatives for identifying themselves, as Hiroka Tanaka in *Brunt Shadows*, Amal in *The Geometry of God* and Naghmana in *Typhoon*. Furthermore, women writers in this phase were both from diaspora and home, all of them equally were well-educated in elite schools. With their command over the English idiom, authors in female phase are notably bolder and experimental in both form and content of their works. Thus, their writing expression depicted the evolution of women writings and emerging trends of Pakistani writings in English.

So, this classification of Pakistani women's writing into three phases aids to the understanding of gradual development and major trends in women's writing. But still the division is not fix as there are some characters in the works of Sidhwa that can be categorized under female phase and in Shamsie and Shah's works that are befitted to feminist phase. These exceptions are ignored and general results are considered for the analysis of Pakistani Women writers However, the general results of development in women writings cannot be necessarily be divided into the chronological order but Pakistani women writings in these concerned phases are in line with respect to the expression and sequence of period.

Characteristic Features of Pakistani Women's Writing in English

Women writers have set a feminine tradition, peculiar in its consciousness, characters, and themes. Pakistani feminist fiction is molded by multiple intersecting factors that are not only biological but psychological, linguistic, and most importantly cultural (Chaudary, [2013](#)). Pakistani women's writing represents the conditions of women in society as it is one of the major voices of women rights and identity. Women writers share their own and other women's experiences in a patriarchal society through their creative expression. Nkealah ([2009](#)) pointed out how Muslim women have chosen the medium of writing to share their experiences: "woman's fiction captures their strength and weaknesses, explores the challenges they face in society, articulate problems they encounter in the

area of marriage, childrearing and employment, it also reveals their strategies of survival in difficult circumstances” (p. 28). Chaudhary (2013) endorsed it by stating women writers across the cultures in Pakistan have created a literary tradition where they enable themselves to speak of their experience and question the roles imposed on them.

Most of the Pakistani women follow this tradition, as in most of Sidhwa’s novels the protagonists are women. Her magnum opus *Ice Candy Man* is an account of partition from the point of view of a girl Lenny. The narrative is focused on the trauma that women, especially Ayah Shanta, went through during the division of the subcontinent. Her *American Brat* is the story of Feroza and the crises she faced due to Zia’s extremist regime and her consequent migration to America. Similarly, *Water* brings forth the suffering of the widows and their status in India. Similarly, Shahraz’ novels are centered on women and their issues. *Holy Woman* and *Typhoon* presented a critique on the social, cultural, and domestic problems faced by women. Shahraz also addressed the issues of diasporic women, who are usually less talked about. Kamila Shamsie too, though to a lesser extent, but still followed the same dominant tradition of representing women characters and their plight. In her most prominent novel, *Brunt Shadows* through Hiroko’s story Shamsie described how a woman’s body, as well as her life, is scarred amidst the wars fought by men (Chaudhary, 2013). So, Shamsie’s canvas is broader as she goes beyond geographical boundaries to shift her focus on international politics and impact of it upon the lives of women. Therefore, the major purpose of women’s writing was to awake women and free them from patriarchal values by giving them voice. According to Lisa (2002), South Asian women have developed a literary tradition that paid attention to women problems in public and private sphere. Women’s alienation left mark on their writing and makes it the story of women’s experience in patriarchal society. Their works address, explore, and devise solutions to women’s problems through medium of literature. Women’s writing is women’s fighting for honesty, equality, and freedom (Narasimhaiah & Srinath, 1986). Thereupon, Pakistani English fiction by women gives ample opportunities to explore the struggle of female characters living under patriarchy.

Besides, discussing women characters and their struggle in male dominated society, women writers used characters and themes from their immediate surrounding. Pakistani women admit using the situation they

know best, and is immediately around them (Chaudhary, 2013). They don't have to go far away in the search of themes and characters, as they are very sensitive to the things happening around them. The perceived inborn traits of women, like being receptive, malleable, and reflective aids them to feel the situation and then bring it forth on the piece of paper. Mumtaz & Shaheed (1987) indicated that women's writing can be better grasped by studying the diverse range of forces, i.e. political, cultural, historical, religious, and their interplay with them. Pakistani women writing is sometimes a reflection of political other times of domestic and social conditions. By representing immediate surroundings, the women writers give personal touch to their works. Therefore, it is very interesting to note that most of the women's fiction is replete with autobiographical elements.

Beginning from Sidhwa, her most of the novels are autobiographical. Her protagonists are mostly Parsi like herself e.g. Fareedon, Lenny, and Feroza. The circumstances which Lenny witnessed and narrated in *Ice Candy Man* are a reflection of Sidhwa's childhood experiences. Similarly, her novel *American Brat* is delineation of Parsi girl Feroza's migration and it symbolizes Sidhwa's own migration to America. In this regard, Singh (2005) considered female characters of Sidhwa exhibiting characteristics of her real life. Similarly, Shahraz, being a diaspora writer, focused on the plight of women in Pakistani migrant communities. Her character Zari Bano and Naghmana in *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon* respectively, represented Shahraz herself as a character. Both like Shahraz are from upper class, modern, educated and urbane. Uzma Aslam Khan, on the other hand, was a child during Zia's marshal law years when extremism was on the rise in the wake of Afghan Jihad. She came up against that brouhaha and inked those experiences resulting in her *The Geometry of God*. Similarly, Bina Shah being a Karachite, brought out her experience of the megacity in fiction. All her novels are set in Karachi and mostly her protagonists are Sindhi like her for instance, Ali Sikandar in *Season for Martyrs*.

Furthermore, women writers exposed female sexuality at multiple levels in their fiction. This includes subjects that were generally repressed, tabooed, and less talked about in Pakistani society. Patriarchal expectations not only formulated the policies but also structured the false habitus and expected gendered roles for women. Women faced severe repercussions in case of violation of prescribed values and customs. However, women now are challenging these perceptions at different levels.

Karim (2019) maintained that female body is at the thematic epicenter of Pakistani English fiction: “There are ways in which female bodies are talked about, classified, disciplined, invaded, destroyed, altered, decorated, and pleased in our fiction” (p. 27). Since autonomy over their bodies is a key concern of feminism, women writers depicted their struggle for assertion over their bodies. In *Ice Candy Man* (1988), Sidhwa focused on the forced marriage of Ayah Shanta, above all rape as tool in warfare. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa meticulously narrated Zaitoon’s knowledge of her body. She is expected to give birth to a male child in order to escape the torture.

Shahraz’ writing is not much different concerning portrayal of woman’s body and sexuality. Her writing challenged the culturally constructed norms that work to objectify women’s bodies as a symbol of male’s honor. In *The Holy Woman*, Zari Bano enters into perplexing association with her own body when she is denied to have marriage and coerced to become ‘holy woman’ by remaining virgin. In *Typhoon*, Kaneez is conscious of her body and is repentant of being raped. She baths all the time so as to become pure by washing out that shame. Shahraz depicts how beauty can be burden for a woman, when her character Naghmana is labelled man-eater because of her charming looks. Her another character Jamila is embarrassed over her bulging body after pregnancy. Thus, Shahraz delineates women characters in her writing that are humiliated owing to their bodies.

Therefore, it can be said that Pakistani women’s writing in English demonstrates female body and sexuality at its core. It represented how women construct, maintain or destroy their position in the society with their body. Furthermore, breaking the stereotypes of shame and modesty, women writers have treated taboo subjects very boldly to unveil the struggle of women.

Moreover, South Asian feminist fiction with its use of hyperbole, exaggeration, and conceits is dramatic (Mohanty, 2003). Pakistani women’s writing is no exception as writers mostly overemphasized themes and stories and make them sensational. Waterman (2015) aptly titled Pakistani women’s writing as melodramatic. Western audience might be fascinated by such exaggerated negativity in fiction but it provoked indignation and anger in local readers. One can ferret out the causes behind this exaggeration in women’s writing. It might be sensitive and receptive nature of women that they perceive danger more than its degree. Secondly, it might be

deliberate so as to gain more sympathy and readership in west. As English fiction is western reader's window to Pakistan (Chambers, 2018). Thirdly, western audience having particular construction of third world, prefer reading kitschy stories about it. Pakistani women writers being apprised of it exploit this market.

Lastly, women writers use literary strategies of deconstruction, subversion, and reconstruction. As we discussed earlier, women from this part of world have been colonized and this position provided impetus behind usage of such literary strategies. Women are stereotypically portrayed in literature as weak, irrational, and submissive (Tanvir & Amir, 2018). Now Pakistani women writers place strong, daring, and audacious female characters parallel to stereotypical and traditional characters. As Showalter (1977) argued that repression of women forced them to find innovative ways to dramatize life and led to fiction that is intense, symbolic, and profound. Pakistani women writers, in this regard, challenged misleading representation and oppression through innovative literary strategies such as deconstruction. These writers wanted to create a world where their roles are supplanted and their responsibilities are altered (Chowdhury, 1998). Women writers through their fiction subverted gendered roles in their support. True meaning of their works is subversive and buried deep beyond the shallow words. Sidhwa's women characters like Godmother in *Ice Candy Man* and Shakuntala in *The Water*, Amal in *The Geometry of God*, Hiroko Tanaka in *Brunt Shadows*, and Raheela in Bina Shah's short story *Optimist* are women characters with subverted roles. Through their writings women break literal confinement of female characters and dramatized them in a state of resistance and defiance. Thus, creating self-reliant and courageous characters through subversion and deconstruction women writers followed the dominant trend of challenging male-dominant structures.

Conclusion

Pakistani Anglophone writers continue making literary contributions in the field of Pakistani English Literature. This research gave insight into the English fiction writing of women who originate from or belong to Pakistan. Though slow and late to rise but it has gained pace to compete with its counterpart, the man's writing. The current study discussed that Pakistani women set off their writing career in English language even before independence and that process continued in bits and pieces after the

independence until 1990's when it rose to the occasion, flabbergasting the literary academia. Now, there is no looking back for women writers as their curve is on the rise with winning national and international approval and recognition. The application of Showalter's framework and categorizing it into three phases proved that women's literature is in evolutionary process of development. With time, amelioration and refinement was noticed in their writings.

Furthermore, the current study aims to discuss the characteristic features of women's writing. It is very feministic in its content. It can be described as writing by women about women and their roles in the national issues and beyond. Being part of similar literary tradition, we still find women's writing notably different form that of man's. Influences and Impulses behind writing English fiction are unique for them. Women used immediate surrounding for setting of novels and borrowing characters, resulting in fiction that was more autobiographical. Unlike women who were expected to be weak and shy in the Pakistani patriarchal society, unexpectedly, their writing and characters often resisted women subjugation and represented women's agency or their struggles. These female writers used literary strategies of subversion, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Hence, many novels by women writers realistically talked about gender issues, women's sexuality, and female bodies. This is how women's writing questioned and challenged the culturally constructed norms of purity and chastity of women. To conclude, Pakistani women's writing has attained the momentum needed but there are multiple challenges as the society is patriarchal at its core. But given the vibrancy and dynamism of these writers one must feel optimistic about Pakistani women's writing in English.

Limitations of Study

The article begins with a brief discussion on gradual development of Pakistani women's writing in English with emphasis on background, writers, and their works. The heading 'from Shahnawaz to Shah' is symbolic and doesn't mean exact beginning and end. Furthermore, the current study used Showalter's model to understand the evolution of and popular trends in women's writing. Pakistani fiction in English can't be considered as a single homogenous entity. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on the evolution and characteristic features of Pakistani literature in English only written by the women writers. Women writers who live in diaspora or were not born in Pakistan but claim Pakistani identity are the

subjects of the current study. Furthermore, the sample of study is limited to only internationally acclaimed women writers having books of fiction, criticism or poetry collections in their credit.

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