

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLE: A FEMINIST NARRATOLOGICAL READING OF UNMARRIAGEABLE PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN PAKISTAN BY SONIAH KAMAL

*Maria Batool<sup>1</sup>, Hafsa Noor<sup>2</sup>, Huma Attaullah<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Teaching Associate International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>2,3</sup> Visiting Lecturer International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [maria.batool@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:maria.batool@iiu.edu.pk)

**Maria Batool, Hafsa Noor, Huma Attaullah. New Wine In Old Bottle: A Feminist Narratological Reading Of Unmarriageable Pride And Prejudice In Pakistan By Soniah Kamal -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 19(4), 1505-1513. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Gender Performativity, Women Text, Structural Narratology, Female Representation**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to explicate the narratological features of *Unmarriageable Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan* by Soniah Kamal. By engaging narratological concepts and its reconstruction in a literary text, it features the concepts of Franz K. Stanzel, Susan Lanser and Mieke Bal to theorize the feminists underpinnings of the selected text. This paper discusses the ways through which the narratives by women benefit from narratology and how far narratology is strategic in understanding feminist criticism and the experiences of women's texts. With that, it also accentuates Lanser's argument that in order to justify the canonical writings, the writers have to be mindful of gender prejudices and be inclusive of writings by female authors. At the same time, female authors while contesting the gender prejudice of male authors ought to avoid the essential gender notions. This paper examines how narrative structures our perception of both cultural artifacts and the world around us. It is significant to understand a narrative since our ordering of time and space in narrative forms constitutes the stories and expression of our experiences that influence our perception and performance.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Narrative has permeated our lives through different sources i.e. "newspaper, reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions" (Kenan 1). In this way, narrative can be real or unrealistic, verbal or nonverbal, literary or non-literary, fictional and non-

fictional. It is, therefore, observed that narratives eliminate the borderline of fiction and nonfiction by composing the fiction through reality and allowing multiple perspectives through it. According to the different narrative theorists, narratology is divided into different strands. The first strand takes narrative as the sequence of events; the second strand sees it as a discourse and the final sees narrative as an artifact whose meanings are interpreted by the receiver (Kaur 32). This paper will divide the narratological understanding of the selected text on two levels i.e. structural and thematic.

This paper is based on the narratological adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in *Unmarriageable Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan*. By using the concepts of temporality, focalization and voice, this paper highlights similarities and differences in narrative structure across different texts, produced at different times and across the contextual differences of ethnicity, historical background and culture. Diaspora writer Soniah Kamal has worked from spaces of marginality, but as bell hooks (1989) suggests, the space of marginality is a space of “radical openness” which allows for greater challenge of the master narratives that we have been forced to learn and to speak through (19). Through this challenge and openness, the process of adaptation emerges where the writers from diverse backgrounds embody what Linda Hutcheon has described as ‘a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing’ (Hutcheon 139). In *Unmarriageable*, although Soniah Kamal has drawn a parallel engagement with the plot of *Pride & Prejudice* yet she has taken flight from the space of marginality to forge a minor narrative against the master narrative.

### ***Re-vision of Pride & Prejudice in the Structural Narratology of Unmarriageable***

One of the essential distinction that narratology has drawn from structuralism is between story and discourse. The story is the action of characters in certain places at certain time, however the discourse involves the complex encoding in a story depending upon vocabulary, syntax, the presentation of time and space, the order of presentation, how the narrating voice is to be oriented towards what is narrated and towards the implied audience and how character point of view is constructed. In differentiating the discourse, Stephen suggests it is the ‘how’ of a narrative whereas the story has characters, setting and the sequence of events which is also inferred from those words (52). Keeping in view foregoing understanding of discourse and story, the selected text narrates a story which is contextualized in Pakistan with the additional use of native words, cross references of local idioms and language expression, the names of places, cuisine and people. As soon as the reader delves into the book, the book offers the appropriation of Austen’s famous statement the ‘universally acknowledged truth’ that embodies the nature of ‘master narratives’ to replicate the idea of an all-encompassing nature of narratives. Each variation on a text in this way “provides instant immersion, because the recipient has spared the cognitive effort of building a world and its inhabitants from a largely blank slate. The world is already in place when the recipient takes his or her first steps in it, once again” (qtd. in Leavonworth 93). In this way, the opening lines of the selected text capture the essence of original master piece

*Pride & Prejudice* by presenting a “new batch of Year 10s were starting *Pride and Prejudice*, and their first homework had been to rewrite the opening sentence of Jane Austen’s novel” (Kamal 10) which signifies a correlation between master narrative and local narrative. With this sentence, Kamal has portended the historical reference of her text. This reference towards a historical master-narrative is illustrated on both verbal and semiotic level. The analogy is shaped through selection, combination, perspectivization, and interpretation by the agency producing and mediating the text i.e. the author (narrator’s voice) or sometimes through the characters (focalizer’s perspective). For instance, the names of the characters in the selected novel also sound familiar to Austen’s fans when the writer select some specific traits of the novel and combines them in her own maneuver, “Mr Barkat ‘Bark’ Binat and Mrs Khushboo ‘Pinkie’ Binat and their five daughters – Jenazba, Alysba, Marizba, Qittyara, and Lady – move from big-city Lahore to backwater Dilipabad” (Kamal 10). The converting and transmuting of a story into a discourse is mediation in the broader sense. This story is the manifestation of an ideological practice which is part of every culture as Muhammad, R. et al. (2020) have elucidated that different intended meanings are sometimes loaded in the statements of language that might have some intentions about culture. Nawaz, S. et al. (2020) have also suggested to adopt the tone of native speakers in the use of correct stress patterns in the perspectives of culture. Dr. Jabeen Bhutto and Muhammad Ramzan (2021), have also expressed that powerful people use language for collusive and pacifier stance in the exploitation of ideology which is helpful for the persuasion and domination of culture.

The assumption of dualism within every text is integral in narratology that on one hand we have story and on the other is a plot. As Barthes also suggested “narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (qtd. in Kaur 36). While differentiating the two, Barry explains that “the story is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the plot is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognize as a narrative” (223). The *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal exemplifies what is known as editing, repackaging, reordering the famous *Pride and Prejudice* by rewriting the story in a new context and the rephrasing her famous statement “*a truth universally acknowledged that a single woman in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a husband!*” (12). In her retelling of this statement, her narrative not only intersects the historical affair of matrimony across time and geography but it also translates the reverberation of socio-cultural prejudices and predispositions.

In understanding the development of the story, sequence plays a significant role. A literary work embodies language in the process which is ultimately signifying the time. All the representations are discussed with reference to time. The selected story also embeds time in its narration, “Pinkie Binat made sure her daughters knew where they came from. The British, during their reign over an undivided subcontinent, doled out small plots to day labourers as incentive to turn them into farmers, who, later, would be called agriculturists and feudal lords, which is what the Binat forefathers ultimately became” (Kamal 20). Sequences of events also contribute in making sense of the work.

The story is an extraction from the novel not available directly to the readers. It is inferred and understood from the reading of the text which entails reconstruction of the chronological sequence and temporal order of events in a similar story strands through semiotic representations (Stephens 52). These semiotic media helps to draw meanings from the texts based on textual signs, figures, images, characters and actors. Herman believes that the understanding and meaning of the text are dependent on one's understanding of not only the text but also the embedded signs. Through the detailed textual description of "the girls at their wooden desks, their winter uniforms impeccably washed and pressed by *dhobis* and maids, their long braids (for good girls did not get a boyish cut like Alys's)" the writer is helping the reader to develop a context of the story and relate to its spatial existence (Kamal 10). The potential of meaning-making is not simply a matter of written text and given signs but also depends on the thematic understanding of the text which depends upon the reader's contextual engagement. Herman suggests on one hand, a reader structures a mental model from the narrative's depiction of time and space, participants' interaction and through an overall configuration which is the narratological rudiment of a text (331). On the other hand, readers also inhabit a context of interpretation based on analogous models of the world they are part of and familiar with. 'Meaning' lies in the interchange (Stephens 53).

The debates in Classical narratological frameworks demonstrate a need to include the readers and contexts of interpretation to find out how consciousness is structured in stories and stories reinforce subjectivities and cultural practices. The understanding of these moves however entails the distinction between story, discourse and meaning, narrative point of view, narrative voice focalization and organization. These concepts are essential for analyzing a story and interpreting the discourse that is preempt of the text. Through this discussion, it becomes clear that narratology has drawn a significant distinction between story and discourse from structuralism whereby former is understood through what characters do with or each other in a certain place or time. On the hand, discourse involves a complex process of words on the pages that help us to understand the characters, setting and sequence of events that are inferred from those words (Stephens 52).

Chatman introduced two- level model to explore the relationship between "what is told and how it is told". He identifies them as story and discourse respectively. For him, the story and discourse are the ingredients of a narrative. Story is about what is told and discourse involves how the story is told. With the help of the selected text, the discourse that "marriage is a cornerstone of our culture" is manifested in a story that involves sequence, characters and places (Kamal 14). Campbell suggests that "Rhetoric is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end. The four ends of discourse are to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passion, and influence the will" (Rhodes 6). This paper centers the discussion upon the narrative techniques applied by Kamal in her text *Unmarriageable*.

### *Thematic Narratology in Unmarriageable Pride & Prejudice in Pakistan*

The gender discourse is considered hugely biased and as Virginia Woolf complained a “man's sentence ... unsuited for a woman's use” (73). For women's fiction to have a future, Woolf speculates, “the book has somehow to be adapted to the [female] body” (74). Women writers need to devise new literary forms, “for it is the [women writing] which is still denied outlet” (73-74). Gender /power relations are encoded in a narrative form on three levels; fabula, story and text which can be decoded with the help of feminist narratology. The female hitch at the level of fabula implies a patriarchal overwriting; a male subject with the female object is symbolic of patriarchal gender conformity and marking the lack of female protagonists. At a story level, the same is done through the events where an external focalizer or character focalizer experiences those events of fabula. Finally, in a text, a narrative agent can comment, describe, argue or render ironic. Based on this discussion, a text is the body of knowledge whereby the processes of narration determine the power of focalization or focalizer “within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition” (Knutson 12). The mediation comprises forms, and means of constructing and communicating a story in discourse. Therefore it involves selection, ordering, and segmentation of story world elements, their transmission through a presenter (narrator's voice) their presentation from a particular standpoint (point of view) (Huhn 2).

To pose the question of gender in binary terms, de Lauretis's critique of patriarchy keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself. In delineating the patterns of gender discrimination, Julia Kristeva's condemnation of male/female gender as “metaphysical” lies behind most contemporary critiques of feminist essentialism. It accentuates that women overcome impediments to creativity otherwise they will fall in the same pattern as men were following. For Woolf, androgyny is not “a flight from fixed gender identities, but recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature” (07). This criticism cannot be regarded as a ban on the representation of binary gender. However, the restriction is put in place as not to discredit other impressions of gender difference. Keeping in view this understanding of gender experiences, the writers ought to incorporate the diversity of gender representations. Through her story, Kamal allows her females to navigate their identities as “[t]he British School Group was founded twenty years ago by Begum Beena dey Bagh ... Twelve years ago, Naheed, a well-heeled Dilipabadi housewife, decided to put to use a vacant property belonging to her” (15). With this the writer has not confined women to restrictive roles of patriarchy rather allows them to expand the canvas of female performativity.

In the writing of both *Pride & Prejudice* and *Unmarriageable*, the authors have exemplified a double strategy of contesting the binary gender essentialism and also to reclaim the hero/subject position for women. In *Unmarriageable*, Kamal designates the prominent position to her female protagonist and begins the narration with her. “Alysba Binat began working at age twenty as the English literature teacher at the British school ... and here she was, ten years later, thirty years old, and still in the job she'd grown to love despite its challenges (Kamal 10). In this case, women are the heroes of

their own stories and can be seen mediating between gender opposition and gender assertion. Feminist writers have noted that a patriarchal hero is singular and the narration is focused on his function in the narrative whereas the feminine narratives talk about the collective transformation. As it can be observed in Kamal's depiction of Mrs. Binat as a mother who is desperate to get her daughters married yet her behavior is not presented as insane and irrational. In comparison with Mr. Binat, Mrs. Binat offers more sense and sensibility towards her daughters and their future life. Her attitude reflects more authority and responsibility in family affairs as compare to her husband. 'I'm sure Alys and everyone else knows everything better than you do,' Mrs Binat said. 'But you are their father, and instead of worrying whether the succulents are thriving and the ficus is blooming, I need you to take an active interest in your daughters' futures' ” (Kamal 24). Here the idea to “keep women down, silenced, and powerless” has been challenged and through the female characters feminine voice has been articulated.

The narrative is a wide-ranging activity which is bound with the act of narration and the figure of a narrator. In this way, whatever is narrated by a narrator is a narration. The question is what does a narrator narrate? Genette draws a distinction between narration (the narrative act of the narrator), discourse (narrative as text or utterance) and *histoire* (the story the narrator tells in his/her narrative). The story is then that which the narrative discourse reports, represents or signifies. These distinctions enable us, for example, to account for the fact that the same story can be presented in various guises. For instance, the story of matrimonial affair narrated by Jane Austen in 18<sup>th</sup> century is different on many levels from the *Unmarriageable*, which is the adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*. The theme and subject matter although remains closely related yet the story has its own signifiers and linguistic features that provide it an innovative touch. Moreover, there are numerous textual or narrative manifestations of master narratives in the different sequences of events and character constellations, that is to say, in the different plots that constitute the level of the fictional worlds in the many *Pride & Prejudice* narratives.

The style in a narrative is as Erasmus suggests what clothes are to the body (07). The style can enhance the value and beauty of the text. This value is added in any narrative sometimes with the choice of words where Kamal's use of local phrases with English translation gives an interesting combo of both native and foreign taste at the same time, “every *aira gaira nathu khaira* – every Tom, Dick, and Harry (40), *Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai* – ‘What Lies Behind Your Blouse’ (41), “Who cared *log kya kahenge* – what people said” (42). According to Corbett, this is the “art that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience” (Kaur 39). By merging both local and global languages, the writer engages the writer with his creativity.

David Herman uses the term ‘Postclassical narratology’ to describe the field of narrative theory and analysis. In his use of this term, he develops a critical relationship towards the earlier classical models. The theorist of narratology believed a text to be multi perspective, challenging and augmenting them in a

variety of interdisciplinary ways. Amongst all of them, feminism is used as to energize this field (Herman 1049). Although feminism and narratology cannot be really said to share the intersection in history yet there have been a few gestures of synthesis. With this I force an intersection of two lines drawn on different planes; the one scientific, subjective and non-ideological and the other impressionistic, evaluative and critical (Lanser 610). There are three crucial issues on which feminism and narratology differ, “the role of gender in the construction of narrative theory, the status of narrative as mimesis or semiosis, and the importance of context for determining meaning in narrative” (612).

The point of contention between narratology and feminism is that no work in the field of literature has taken gender into account. Brooks’ critiqued narratology and challenged the existing body of narrative theory for its biasness on the interconnected grounds of corpus and criteria. She also questioned the nature of narratological insights and understanding of the narrative with reference to the universal understands. She further objects to the idea that no work in the field of literature has taken gender into account or questioned the canon for its male dominance (343). She also pointed out that this gender bias went unacknowledged in the work of narrative theorists such as Propp, Greimas, Iser, Genette, Barthes and Todorov who she cited as ‘evident examples of the ways in which the masculine text stands for the universal text’ (343). Lanser’s imperative to address this situation was to extend the corpus of texts studied to include those written by women (342-345), proposing that the analysis of this would form the basis from which the existing narrative theory could be tested and potentially ‘change substantially’ (344).

To understand this difference in narrative written by male and female in *Unmarriageable*, it is observed that the writer has chosen a female protagonist who is the eldest of her four sisters and she is presented as an English literature teacher, an independent woman (both financially and mentally) to mark female agency. Mrs. Binat and all her daughters are portrayed to be independent women having their own preferences for their life. Kamal hit the mark by projecting a feminine autonomy and capturing the spirit of the characters, while at the same time adding something new by highlighting the conventions of marriage and gender norms of Pakistani culture through the lens of the original. The Alysba Bennet character, Alys, is strident in her feminism, a well-read woman whose interest lies in reading “Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Austen, the Brontës, Dickens, George Eliot, Mary Shelley, Thackeray, Hardy, Maugham, Elizabeth Gaskell, Tolstoy, Orwell, Bertrand Russell, Wilde, Woolf, Wodehouse, Shakespeare” (Kamal 19). She is also presented fighting for many traditional social problems for instance, raising consciousness in her female students regarding marriage and motivating them to study. Through this navigation of female autonomy and agency, the writer shapes the narrative around feminist subject.

With such writings, Lanser proposes the basis of feminist narratology typical of feminist criticism with the desire to regain the absent corpus of literature by women into the canon. Nevertheless, this focus on difference as demonstrated

through the writing of women might now be seen as problematic. First, there is a predisposition to conflate the narrator with the author. Despite Lanser's expressed suggestion that the revision of narratology include examining 'women as both producers and interpreters of texts' (343) because if it is based on the represented gender of a narrative participant (such as the narrator), then this might mean that the so-called women's writing could be authored by a man. On the other hand, if only women can author 'women's writing', then this implies that gender is biologically determined rather than socially constructed an assumption that might be critiqued on essentialist grounds.

## REFERENCES

- Austen, Jane ([1813] 2006), *Pride and Prejudice*, Pat Rogers (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bal, Mieke. (1990). The point of Narratology. *Poetics Today*, 11 (4): 727–753.
- . (1997). *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edition. Toronto, Buffalo, /London: University of Toronto Press.
- . (1999). Close reading today: From narratology to cultural analysis. In W. Grünzweig and A. Solbach (eds.) *Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*, pp. 19–40. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- . (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.'* London: Routledge.
- Dr. Jabeen Bhutto, and Muhammad Ramzan. (2021) "ENGLISH: Verses of Quran, Gender Issues, Feminine Injustice, and Media Transmission - CDA of Pakistani Press Reports". *Rahatulquloob* 5 (2), 111-26. <https://doi.org/10.51411/rahat.5.2.2021/316>. URL: <http://rahatulquloob.com/index.php/rahat/article/view/316>
- Harding, S. and Norberg, K. 2002. New contexts, new issues. *Signs*, 27 (4): 943–946.
- E. M. Halliday. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Jun., 1960, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jun., 1960), pp. 65-71: University of California Press. URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2932835>
- Herman, David. 1994. "Hypothetical Focalization." *Narrative* 2, 230–53. Jahn, Manfred (1999). "More Aspects of Focalisation: Refinements and Applications." *GRAAT* 21, 85–110.
- Nünning, Ansgar. 2001. "On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts." W. van Peer & S. Chatman (eds). *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*. Albany: SUNY Press, 207–23.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 2006. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge.
- Kamal, Soniah. 2019. *UNMARRIAGEABLE Pride and Prejudice in Pakistan*. Ballantine Books.
- Keymer, Thomas. Narrative. Leavenworth, Maria Lindgren. A Truth Universally Acknowledged? *Pride and Prejudice and Mind-Reading Fans. Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, *Transmedial Worlds in Convergent Media Culture* (Winter 2015), pp. 93-110. University of Nebraska Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/storyworlds.7.2.0093> Accessed: 26-06-2016 16:57 UTC.



- Muhammad, R. et al. (2020), Comparative Pragmatic Study of Print media discourse in Balochistan newspapers headlines, *Al-Burz*, Volume 12, Issue 01
- Nawaz, S. et al. (2020), A Study On Urdu Speakers' Use of English Stress Patterns: Phonological Variation from Native Speakers, *Elementary Education Online*, 2020; Vol 19 (Issue 4): pp. 6215-6235  
<http://ilkogretim-online.org> doi: 10.17051/ilkonline.2020.04.765028
- Rimmon-Kennan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction. IJ: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Methuen, 1983.
- Ronen, Ruth (1994). *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure (1991). *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Schor, Naomi. *Breaking the Chaitl: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.