



"DAMNED, DOOMED, DROWNED: A STYLISTIC GENDERED ANALYSIS OF DURRANI'S BLASPHEMY"

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Abstract

*This research paper investigates gendered representations in Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy* through the lens of Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics, focusing specifically on the analysis of gender roles. By employing Mills' model, the study scrutinizes how linguistic choices and narrative structures construct and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies within the text. The research identifies and examines key thematic patterns including the portrayal of women as inferior beings, men as masters, women confined to the roles of housewives and maids, and the imposition of cultural and religious obligations upon women. The analysis reveals how Durrani's narrative exposes the mechanisms of gendered oppression, highlighting the ways in which language functions as a powerful tool in reinforcing social hierarchies and gender-based subjugation. Moreover, the study underscores the novel's critique of socio-religious institutions that sustain and legitimize male dominance and female marginalization. This research contributes to feminist literary discourse by demonstrating how stylistic choices in *Blasphemy* articulate resistance against patriarchal norms while simultaneously depicting the pervasive control exerted over women's identities and bodies. The findings aim to deepen the understanding of feminist stylistics as a critical approach for unveiling gender bias in literary texts, particularly within the context of South Asian patriarchal societies.*

Keywords: Tehmina Durrani, *Blasphemy*, Feminist Stylistics, Gender Roles, Sara Mills, Patriarchy, Pakistani Literature

2 Introduction

The Pakistani literary landscape has witnessed significant contributions from female writers who have courageously unveiled the complex realities of gender, power, and social oppression. Among these voices, Tehmina Durrani stands out for her bold critique of patriarchal norms and religious exploitation, particularly through her novel *Blasphemy*. Published in 1998, *Blasphemy* provides a harrowing depiction of the physical, psychological, and spiritual subjugation of women within the confines of a highly patriarchal and religiously manipulated society. As a text deeply embedded in cultural and socio-religious contexts, it offers fertile ground for feminist analysis that probes not only thematic content but also the stylistic and linguistic mechanisms through which gendered power dynamics are articulated.

While critical scholarship on *Blasphemy* has largely focused on its thematic portrayal of female oppression, fewer studies have applied rigorous stylistic frameworks to interrogate how language itself constructs and reinforces patriarchal ideologies in the text. Feminist Stylistics, as developed by Sara Mills, offers a valuable methodological lens for such inquiry. Mills emphasizes that linguistic structures and narrative strategies are not neutral but are often imbued with gendered

biases that shape readers' perceptions of male and female characters. This theoretical framework enables a deeper exploration of how textual choices contribute to the portrayal of gender roles and the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance.

This study employs Mills' Feminist Stylistics to examine the representation of gender roles in *Blasphemy*. Specifically, it investigates recurring themes such as the depiction of women as inferior beings, men as masters, the confinement of women to domestic roles like housewives and maids, and the burden of cultural and religious obligations imposed upon women. Through a close textual analysis, the research seeks to uncover how linguistic patterns, narrative voice, and lexical choices in *Blasphemy* serve to expose, critique, or, at times, inadvertently reinforce the structures of patriarchy. The approach underscores the significance of stylistic choices in shaping gendered meanings and in influencing readers' ideological positioning toward the issues depicted.

By situating *Blasphemy* within the paradigm of Feminist Stylistics, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on gender and literature in South Asia. It highlights how stylistic analysis not only reveals the oppressive realities women face but also exposes the subtle workings of language as a vehicle of both subjugation and resistance. The study aspires to fill a critical gap in literary scholarship on Durrani's work by demonstrating that stylistic elements are as crucial as thematic concerns in understanding the complexities of gender representation. Ultimately, this research aims to expand the methodological toolkit available for feminist literary criticism, offering insights relevant to scholars, students, and advocates of gender justice in Pakistani society and beyond.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* employ linguistic and stylistic choices, as defined by Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics, to construct and portray gender roles?
2. In what ways does *Blasphemy* reflect and critique patriarchal ideologies through its representation of themes such as women's inferiority, male dominance, domestic roles for women, and cultural and religious obligations

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the linguistic and stylistic features in *Blasphemy* using Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics framework to uncover how gender roles are constructed and reinforced in the text.
2. To examine how the novel critiques patriarchal structures and exposes the socio-cultural and religious factors contributing to women's oppression in Pakistani society.

1.5 Significance

This study holds significant scholarly and social value as it bridges the gap between literary analysis and feminist linguistic criticism in the context of Pakistani literature. While *Blasphemy*



has been widely acknowledged for its thematic exposure of women's oppression, relatively few studies have examined how its linguistic and stylistic features contribute to constructing and challenging patriarchal ideologies. By applying Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how language functions as both a vehicle of subjugation and a tool of resistance in Durrani's narrative. Moreover, the study contributes to feminist literary discourse by highlighting the importance of stylistic analysis in uncovering gender bias within texts, thereby expanding the methodological approaches available to scholars of South Asian literature. It offers insights into how stylistic choices shape readers' perceptions of gender roles, power dynamics, and socio-religious structures. Beyond its academic contribution, the research bears socio-cultural significance by drawing attention to the pervasive patriarchal structures embedded in language and narrative. It seeks to inspire critical awareness among readers, educators, and policymakers regarding the subtle ways in which literature can perpetuate or challenge oppressive gender norms. Ultimately, this study aspires to empower further research and discourse around gender, language, and literature in Pakistan, fostering a deeper understanding of how literary texts can influence social attitudes and contribute to the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

1.6 Delimitation

This study is delimited to the analysis of Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy* and does not extend to her other literary works or writings. The research focuses specifically on the exploration of gender roles within the novel, analyzed through the framework of Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics. It examines selected linguistic and stylistic features relevant to the portrayal of themes such as women as inferior beings, men as masters, women as housewives and maids, and cultural and religious obligations imposed on women. Furthermore, the study confines itself to textual analysis and does not incorporate empirical methods such as reader-response surveys or interviews with the author or readers. The socio-cultural context considered is limited to Pakistani society as depicted in *Blasphemy*, without comparative analysis involving other cultural or regional contexts.

Lastly, the scope of this research does not include an in-depth examination of broader feminist theories beyond Sara Mills' framework, nor does it analyze the reception of the novel in media or popular discourse. These areas remain outside the current study's boundaries and could serve as avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

Durrani's *Blasphemy* has attracted significant scholarly attention for its candid portrayal of gender oppression within a religious and cultural framework. Jabeen and Sultana (2021) examine how the novel foregrounds the physical and psychological abuse endured by women, highlighting the author's critique of religious hypocrisy and feudal patriarchy. Their study emphasizes how *Blasphemy* serves as a powerful narrative challenging the silence surrounding violence against women in Pakistani society, positioning the novel as an essential text for feminist discourse in South Asian literature.



Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics (1995) has provided an influential methodological framework for exploring the ways language constructs and reinforces gender roles. Mills argues that linguistic structures are far from neutral, instead reflecting and perpetuating social ideologies that shape perceptions of women and men. Her analytical approach has inspired numerous studies examining how stylistic choices in texts contribute to patriarchal narratives or subvert them, making it a pertinent tool for analyzing *Blasphemy*.

Chahat et al (2025) investigates the stylistic depiction of gender roles in *Blasphemy*, focusing on linguistic choices that portray women's subjugation and the normalization of male dominance. Your analysis highlights how specific narrative strategies expose the hidden dimensions of patriarchal control, thereby contributing to feminist literary scholarship by combining stylistic analysis with socio-cultural critique. This study establishes a critical foundation for further stylistic examination of Durrani's work.

Similarly, Chahat et al (2025) explores religious discourse in *Blasphemy*, emphasizing how religious terminology and textual references serve both as instruments of oppression and as rhetorical devices to critique patriarchal authority. This paper underscores the dual role of religious language in perpetuating and simultaneously questioning gender hierarchies, offering significant insights into the intersection of language, gender, and religion in Pakistani literature.

Finally, Rukhsana and Saleem (2022) analyze gender constructs in contemporary Pakistani fiction, arguing that female writers like Durrani utilize narrative techniques to challenge the traditional portrayal of women as submissive and voiceless. They assert that novels such as *Blasphemy* not only expose social injustices but also redefine female identity through linguistic and narrative innovation. Their findings support the significance of stylistic analysis in revealing how language contributes to the reconfiguration of gender identities in literature.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate the critical importance of examining both thematic content and linguistic strategies in understanding how texts like *Blasphemy* engage with and critique patriarchal systems. This research builds upon these scholarly contributions by employing Mills' Feminist Stylistics to conduct a detailed exploration of gender roles in Durrani's novel, aiming to deepen the discourse on how stylistic features function as tools of ideological resistance.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, employing textual analysis to examine gender roles in Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy*. The study is interpretive in nature, aiming to analyze linguistic and stylistic features to uncover the representation and construction of gender within the text. The approach is rooted in feminist literary criticism, with a specific focus on stylistic analysis, to explore how language contributes to the perpetuation or subversion of patriarchal ideologies.

3.1 Tools for Data Collection

The primary tool for data collection in this research is **close reading and textual analysis**. Passages from *Blasphemy* are systematically selected and analyzed for stylistic features, including word choice, narrative voice, sentence structure, metaphors, and other linguistic devices relevant to gender representation. Notes and excerpts are coded thematically, focusing on how language constructs roles such as women as inferior beings, men as masters, women as housewives and maids, and cultural and religious obligations imposed on women. No external surveys, interviews, or empirical data collection instruments are utilized, as the study is confined to textual analysis.

3.2 Sample

The **sample** for this study consists solely of Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy*. The entire text serves as the primary data set, from which significant excerpts are purposefully selected for analysis based on their relevance to gender roles and stylistic features. The sample does not include any of Durrani's other works or external materials. Specific passages are chosen to reflect thematic concerns such as gendered oppression, patriarchal dominance, and religiously justified subjugation of women.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is **Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics**. Mills (1995) argues that language is inherently gendered and that stylistic choices within texts play a crucial role in constructing ideological positions regarding gender. Her model enables the analysis of how linguistic and stylistic features reflect, reinforce, or challenge patriarchal structures. Feminist Stylistics focuses on examining aspects such as sentence structure, transitivity choices, naming practices, metaphors, and narrative voice to reveal underlying gender biases. This framework is particularly appropriate for *Blasphemy*, as the novel's narrative intricately intertwines language with social, cultural, and religious forces to portray gender oppression. Through Mills' lens, this study seeks to uncover the ideological work performed by stylistic features in Durrani's text, contributing to a deeper understanding of feminist literary discourse in South Asian literature.

4.1 Gender Roles

The society expects both men and women to perform activities. In line with the patriarchal traditions, the society has isolated all functions of both the genders. Patriarchal laws state that house chores are the responsibility of women and males work to earn living. Everything which is done in the house including cooking, cleaning and rearing children is termed as a housewives work. In any case, right when she is pictured as a working woman, it is possible to look at her in several specific groups of occupations, including an air or bus hostess, and office secretary or a teacher. The useful jobs are, however, taken up by males.

4.1.1 Women as Inferior Beings

On the first page of the book, Heer discusses the patterns of making and being of men and women in the male-dominated society that is very patriarchal. She asserts that the maids in the haveli were in a state of disbelief weeping over the death of their favorite Pir Sain until the time men arrived when the females fled out of the house (Durrani, 1998, p.01). The women convened

in the room of Pir Sain to mourn his death and have the last glimpse of his dead body. But when men entered the chamber of the Pir Sain all the women rose in haste. The performance of gender roles is shown by the fact that when the men entered the room the women immediately left. The women in the family are supposed to vacate the space when men come in as a sign of respect. Women are not regarded as entitled to be around the men since men are the masters of the family.

In his life time the four mighty brothers of the Pir Sain never came to his haveli. Pir Sain would not go to the haveli, unless he summoned them; and his brothers would on no account come to see him there. Never having entered the bedroom of Pir Sain, they simply went there immediately and filed inside: "I would hide my face and vanish out of sight" (Durrani, 1998, p.01). Heer needed to cover her face before the in-laws and walk out of the room should they get into the presence of Pir Sain. It shows even the wives of these men were not good enough to hear what they were saying. Women were not permitted in men meetings.

After the death of the Pir Sain, women in the family cried over the eldest son Rajaji. The maids of the haveli mourned the loss of their employer and happily took as their new boss his son. When a man dies, the women in the family see themselves as orphan and abandoned because it is what the society wants them to think: your father left. We are made orphans and strandings (Durrani, 1998, p. 02). Women are not usually regarded as the heirs of the assets within their father whether it complies with the law of any relevance to the nation or even the constitution. Women are also never seen as heirs of their families.

The place and respect of the woman is given by the husband in the Eastern culture. A wealthy woman means the wife is wealthy and mighty when the husband is wealthy. A widow loses all her social standings and respects when her husband dies. And in this sort of misogynist society, Heer was lamented by her mother, because her daughter turned into a widow: "My daughter has become a widow in her young years." Maa cried, that her child had died in her life (Durrani, 1998, p.07). All creatures, no matter how powerful and fearless, are bound to die. Pir Sain actually was frightened. All the ladies at the haveli would be restlessly anxious even after head of the sound of the footsteps of Pir Sain. However, now he was killed.

Heer experienced lots of suffering and misfortune. Any violence and injustice that a wife may undergo. And she did all that by herself, without any grumbling or speaking. I preached to myself, just like a hot green chilli; sharp, sharper, and then away, because society has not got the time when a woman is screaming. Try it. I said to myself, "feel it" (Durrani, 1998, p.08). Women have all fears that should be accepted according to the idea of Eastern culture. They are supposed to accept all and complain about nothing and demonstrate no guilt and sufferings.

4.1.2 Men as Masters

When Pir Sain dies, just like it is the norm all the relatives come to the house where he stays after he died. So also did the brothers of the Pir Sain. They suddenly visit the room of the Pir Sain to find out whether their older brother, the heir to their line of saints is dead or is a rumour out there only: "I froze; their portentous presence made me feel as though, they were going to

figure significantly in my life" (Durrani, 1998, p.02). Male relatives are reported to be the ones to define the fate of the female members. This has also worked in the life of Heer. She was also obliged to serve her husband until he died. Society requires women to be submissive to their males and this made her in-laws now have authority to determine her destiny.

She even recalls the times when her mother cooks them food and then her father buys some meat. Given that all mothers have to cook to the family, the family would eat on a dinner cooked by Ma (Durrani, 1998, p. 20). Heer recollected situations in her childhood. She was not having a lot of material things, but all reason to consider herself as having all the reason to be happy when her father was alive.

Describing it in a letter to Heer, she remembered that she would cry and beg Allah in solitude, when Baba would beat her mother. Ma did not express her discontentment with the outburst of her husband in the society, with the exception of Allah. Heer was forced to know what kind of problems her mother was experiencing. As no wife can ever get away with her husband: Ma would straightway jump in defense of own husband with a bunch of dozen excuses.. Ma, social: pressures, financial: concerns, job aggravation and not understanding." Nevertheless, Ma always prayed before Allah so that he could subdue his anger (Durrani, 1998, p. 30). One of the most terrible types of mistreatments that a wife can undergo is physical violence. Almost every other day of the life of a wife, she has to cope with it. During the initial week of her wedding Heer was beaten physically in the presence of all the Ladies of the Haveli. She reached the conclusion that it is not something new and one should get through.

On a visit by the in-laws of Heer in the haveli they advised Rajaji to send his mother to the jail and to declare his mother mad. They also threatened to act against Rajaji in case he would not act according to their advice. They believed that it was the direction that is going to rescue them the location and the image of the haveli. They were ready to kill Heer or do any other extreme action against her to save their fake face: "They visited my son to incarcerate me and pronounce me insane" (Durrani, 1998, p.195). Heer grew in rebellion towards the impersonation of the Pir Sain. She was called an insane and cursing woman.

4.1.3 Women as Housewives

Heer knew it now because her husband had died. It now needs to serve to a different master who happens to be her son. The Eastern culture gives a female the responsibility of providing services to the male counterparts of the family, be it the husband, father, brother or son. She is forced to obey men at all ages of life: "I was appalled to hear that he would soon be managing my life like the way he managed the life of his father" (Durrani, 1998, p. 02). Individuals were coming in and giving Heer and her family condolence over the demise of her husband. The wife will have to be with the dead body of her husband. She sat by the dead body of her husband when her son gave her the command to leave the room.

Heer explains the same circle of lives of the Eastern women. The family had old maids who helped her give birth to children. This was because they believed it is the role of women to give birth to male children hence: "Some helped me give birth to my children" (Durrani, 1998, p.02). In Eastern family women are supposed to have children and serve their husbands in all possible

ways. The wives of the affluent couples are left to manage the house and give birth. Nevertheless, women are being overworked even in low income families.

The story of Heer tells us all about the life of all the women in Eastern society. At teenage, Heer was married, had six children, and was a grandmother at a very early age of the thirties. The birth of successive children in the same year with minimal form of medical attention is unhealthy to the mothers. This is how society has preprogrammed women to live like that and even when they grow old and appear to be older: "Before me, the mirror transformed the thirty-eight years of my life." I had six children (three sons and three daughters). His son was still born. One of them was a young man and he died. When I was thirty three years old, I got three married daughters who made me a grandma. On page 04 Durrani (1998)

Women are supposed to give birth to children of their husbands. At a tender age, women look old because of absence of maternity services and the necessary drugs.

Heer narrates the significance of her husband by explicating how those who followed him kissed his hands and feet and perceived it as a blessing. When he was still alive he received a kiss and his dead body was restored. The screams were so loud such that it was like the women had lost God: "I recalled him majestically walking in through the door every morning like a king" (Durrani, 1998, p.05). The husbands are regarded as kings in the Eastern culture. Women have to be sacrosanct and unbelievably obedient to their men.

As the mother of Heer points out, people do not respect her as they used to do when her husband was alive. Her mother was invariably sensitive and became over sensitive because of her tendency to overanalyse. To be a widow and a mother of so many girls is a very hard task and heavy on a women back: You are getting out of hand. When I call I don t worry you. Does it mean that you do not respect me as you used to when your father was alive and I am a widow? In terms of status, Ma was paranoid (Durrani, 1998, p.12). what happens to a lady who becomes a widow in the Eastern culture. She gets rid of social respect and her own place.

She knew her mother did not have to take care of dowry of her younger sisters anymore. This was one of the reasons her mother arranged Pir Sain to give her away in marriage, and some others because: "I whispered to the Ma, thou will not need to supe out my sisters in dowry" (Durrani, 1998, p.18). And at the last Heer had been married to a rich man, Pir Sain. An expensive wedding sent her off as a wedded wife. Her sisters especially were lucky to become the wives of 4 rich house hold.

It was not my dreams which stopped impounded by these limits. I would change my name to that of a husband and I would be the mistress of my house. That, among my people, was more precious in a woman than any other thing they could do. All the girls want to be educated well and lead a good life in future, but in Pakistani culture, that is not so. This is because a Pakistani culture maintains that a girl is at her 右 learning place at home but at her proper place in the house of the husband. Despite length itself, a woman must strive to woo her husband and in-laws

irrespective of the caste. A female is supposed to make her marriage life a priority and sacrifice all her ambitions.

Having her husband and in-laws should be a dream of a girl. A wife is expected to change into the name of her husband, maintain the homestead and give birth to children. The ultimate act that any housewife can accomplish is to be perfect in all she is doing around the house: "Serve your father well and you would have imbibed the good breeding." You must become subordinate to the will of your husband. Don't put yourself into a position of apologising or coming up with explanations. This appeared simple to follow and I delivered my promise of not breaking her. Durrani (1998) page 20

A good daughter is one that obeys the family. All parents aspire their daughters to be great wives and daughters. The night before her wedding, all mothers advise their daughters to follow them by order of their husbands and their in-laws to show parents that they are great parents. By offending her in-laws, by pleasing her in-laws she would be letting her mother down, with this lesson Ma also guided Heer to become the best and most ambitious bride to her husband and in-laws and never to lose their face. Ma informed her that the only thing that a poor bride can present to the wedding is her good character, so she should never be given a chance to complain to her husband and in-laws. The task that Heer was assigned was to be happy and to keep the slightest chance of happiness stay alive as a part of his family.

All the mother-in-laws expect that the daughter-in-law will continue with their family tradition. In order to expand their posterity and offspring to the Haveli, Amma Sain wanted Heer to give birth to seven sons: "Allah will give you seven sons" (Durrani, 1998, p.25). It was the first time Heer entered her house as a bride. She was introduced to everybody in the Haveli. Her husband, Pir Sain had told her to put her hand on the feet of his mother. Through her mother-in-law, Heer was lucky to get many sons.

Her vision of marriage was an undesirable bargain to which she was sacrificed to a man just as a goat is sacrificed to a god. The deal had no escape and that would consume her whole life: "I had been offered to a divinity on earth." The contract had taken away my life, which was ensuring standards set by the society and that of the family. It was its morning which had coincided with our first night (Durrani, 1998, p. 26). Marriage is a social compact in the Eastern culture. It means that a woman will cater to her husband and family till end of her life. A woman is made to be governed by the socially set out conditions of the contract.

A bride has to uphold her physical and cosmetic attributes. She is compelled to have makeup on her face and be ready to be taken by her husband no matter how satisfied she is. A wife needs to look as a bride each day in the eyes of her husband in case she should make him fall in love, and that is why she cries and dresses and paints to come out as a bride once again (Durrani, 1998, p. 27). A marriage is supposed to be a joyous and mutual consensus between man and woman. This is always so in the eastern society.

Pir Sain wanted his wife to act and do what he had told all the time unquestioningly. He would tell her wife what to do on everything including eating and sharing a bed with him. That is what the society said and Heer was obliged to follow the protocol because a woman was expected to wash her hands prior to taking food. He bowed his head and said, very quietly, "Come inside"

and I did (Durrani, 1998, p. 28). The wives are supposed to be obedient morally and hygienically clean. Obedience is also one of the main attributes that the husband and in-laws of the bride seek.

One of her cousins would question her on whether or not she was satisfied after marriage. Heer acted like laughing and that she was satisfied with her marriage. Although her life was thrown into the spin after marriage, she did it all for her mother: "You look so happy, Heer, my smile dropped away." I feigned interest and even laughed shallowly then put it back to please Ma (Durrani, 1998, p. 29). A wife should look happy to keep the honour of the family intact in the society. When the welfare of a bride is deprived to her, she needs to act so that she is happy despite not being happy.

Spouse of Heer was a social celebrity who received a lot of guests on a day-to-day basis. Each would be served breakfast depending on its value: the author was charged with the responsibility of overseeing as to who got what during khaas breakfast, when privileged guests got five or ten trays of breakfast (Durrani, 1998, p. 33). Young married wife is always enthusiastic about gaining the love of her in-laws to the shortest period of time. On her first marriage night, it is a tradition that the next morning should come, one in Eastern culture will take charge of her house duties.

Heer wanted to visit his mom. The patient was told that she may not step outside the house without the permission of her husband. Moreover, her family members cannot even visit her without the permission of Pir Sain who says, "Your husband will make her know when to visit her" (Durrani, 1998, p. 34). Since, the fate of the woman is predetermined by the will of her man. A wife should check with the husband even in circumstances where she requires to visit her father.

The Eastern culture has a very fixed concept of reward and punishment. Haveli of Pir Sain was the best example of it. Mother-in-law of Heer would tell Heer that she is aware of everything that went wrong and she has to decide what shall be the kind of punishment. Moreover, all the serious faults were raised to Pir Sain to punish him badly: "My shortcomings were all serious" (Durrani, 1998, p.37). Heer made all the errors serious, however. Being a husband, the husband is responsible in disciplining his wife. A wife can be beaten up by her husband as much as he feels like it.

A wife has to do her household chores even though she hates it. That is the only choice that wives have to follow which is to complete their domestic tasks. Her story as narrated in the book by Heer is a testimony of the suffering she had to put up with after getting married. A woman is proud of her monitoring duties although she is over worked. Exactly the same happened to Heer: "I despised the supervisory duty" (Durrani, 1998, p. 39). Heer got married into the family where ladies were not supposed to rest.

Heer's mother-in-law divulges the key to managing a husband. She teaches her how to be seductive. Making her husband happy in bed is a duty for a wife. if a woman manages to exert influence over her husband's bodily emotions. She can do everything for her husband and make him fall in love with her. However, if a woman is unable to woo her husband, she forfeits both her marriage and peace: "A wife can use her control over her husband's bed on anybody." All

women are aware that sex is the only thing that can hold a guy, yet the majority of them are unable to do so (Durrani, 1998, p.41). The social link of marriage necessitates effort on both sides. Of all the relationships, the one between a husband and wife is the most exquisite. But only if there is a fight on both sides. It turns into the worst relationship ever.

4.2.1 Women as Maids

Heer is about the story of the widow and her two daughters. But when she was a widow her in-laws usurped her property. She was left without a place to stay and no other alternative, thus she got refuge in the haveli of Pir Sain. The society does not expect women to own businesses of their own and live alone in a house. To be able to find peace, a woman must have her man alive. She feels wretched and homeless as never before after losing her husband: "Widow with her two daughters who have stayed at the haveli with their mother" (Durrani, 1998, p.03). Although a person could have many children, a widow in the eastern society is not supposed to go and live alone.

The maids felt depressed because their lord was dead and they wondered what would become of them. So their lives and future hang in the balance; and they flew to Heer with questions as to how their life would be bereft of their lord. Durrani (1998), p.3. Even the girls themselves are concerned of the death of their lords. This is due to the fact that they will not have anywhere to go in case there is loss of life and consequently they will descend into poverty.

The maids did not have a future since they had lived all their lives working in the haveli. They are now reduced to side their new boss and ask him to retain them as maids. In similar spirit, the widow took refuge in the haveli of Pir Sain and nursed him till his demise. She started influencing Heer to hire them to work at the haveli even after their owner died yet they had no other place to go. The maid described above as claiming that the widow fell at her feet and asked not to be left (Durrani 1998) depicts the role of maids in the society of its ladies when their lord dies. The maids of the haveli knew what was to happen to them. They knew that they would now be serving another master and so they would have another source of difficulties in the remaining years of their lives.

Yathimri is given the post of personal attendant to the Pir Sain at the age of eleven. When Pir Sain was killed she lost her father again as she was so much attached to him. She must not, however, sob louder, because maids are not to be, in the departing of their master, more taken than his relations will be. Bad rumour would otherwise be that it was not the business of maidservants to cry louder than the family (Durrani, 1998, p.06). At the age of three Yathimri was brought to the haveli of the Pir Sain. Ever since, she has grown up under the roof of the haveli in the presence of Pir Sain. This was Pir Sain, who saved her and was her guardian.

Cheel could frequently be observed in accomplishing her mission of spying Heer. Heer found it difficult to understand how Cheel has continued to perform her tasks after the demise of Pir Sain: "But to whom now that the master was dead" (Durrani, 1998, p.06). The Pir Sain assigned to

each of the maids the haveli an individual job and each maid was supposed to do it with perfection.

Ma slapped Nanni on the face in the kitchen because she made no attempt to drain away extra oil of the samosas. Ma worried so much worrying about the preparation of the tea trolley since she could not pass this (Durrani, 1998, p.15). In a patriarchal culture, women are supposed to be ideal cooks and they will face harsh physical punishment in case they do anything wrong. after Pir Sain finds his family back home. Younger sister Nanni gets spanked badly by Ma because she had not managed to remove excess oil out of the fast food product called samosas. Ma was so much anxious, that she also scolded Heer younger sister Chitki when she spilt milk in the kitchen, which Ma had done by herself.

Amma Sain sent me to keep in the kitchen, till breakfast was brought. When I was young my training consisted initially of supervising the khaas breakfast plates of five or ten honored visitors. Durrani (1998), p-32 A woman in Eastern civilisation is never in a position to be free of the father, brother, husband and son. When she is a daughter, she is supposed to be humble and obedient to her father. As a sister, she should be obedient to the brother. When she gets married, she owes everything to her husband and as a mother, she is to love and take care of her children by sacrificing everything to them.

Because of how Heer married Pir Sain, she was now obliged to wake up early and prepare a big breakfast, coupled with multiple breakfasts of different people. The society expects a woman to be in the kitchen until the time of serving breakfast.

Her Amma Sain teaches Heer to be a good homemaker. Not only is the status of a woman always subject to a man but also it is questionable as well. Her father followed by husband and then her son. The second stage that Heer was under during that time explains that the son of a woman replaces his father the moment she is widowed. You will be in charge now and I will follow (Durrani, 1998, p. 32). Women are supposed to do housework in Eastern society. When she is young she has to look after the whole household. She goes on to be a supervisor as she grows old.

She could not even see sun. She also had to rush out of the bed in the morning and rush to the kitchen in order to have breakfast. She would go out of the kitchen when dinner was over and the time came to bring Pir Sain up to bed. She knew that she could never be free, but even a prisoner hopes that one day he/she will not be prisoner. Her lasting upgrade was to knead a tonne of dough to make tomorrow breakfast. Was this going to be perpetual? This has all been lasting (Durrani, 1998, p. 34). Marriage was an awful experience to Heer. It was more like a marriage and not so much like a wedding. Working in the kitchen was more than she could cope with and this demanded her to work until sunset.

Heer narrates the story of a maid Kaali at Haveli. She is said to have died in child birth because of the pain and deteriorating health issues. The society views women as to be mothers and carers. Due to their functions, women are the custodians of heaven and home. The fact that Kaali died

because he experienced the discomfort and missed the care of the mother demonstrates the burden that women have to bear in order to play their roles as follows: she died during childbirth, as she entered into labour (Durrani, 1998, p.55). The mother is the best friend of a child. Men can never think of how painful the process of delivering a child is to a mother. Quite a number of women die during childbirth because of pain.

4.2.2 Cultural and Religious Obligations on Women

Eastern women know how to mourn the death of a person well. The ability of Eastern women to perform dirge is unsurpassed. The more women weep the more it is believed that they were distressed by the demise of the deceased person. Durrani (1998) on p.03 says that the rhythm of their laments resembled a dirge which climaxed with Amma Sain. They do this because this is what the society requires of women. Women did weep, weep, mourn, and did pay condolences to the female members of the family.

Women and men have different responsibilities assigned to them by society in all situations including funerals, weddings among other functions. At that time in her school years, Heer was told to go with a burqa and wear a veil so as to preserve purdah. Women who have to wear a burqa in places other than their homes have to look out of the veil to see anything: My eyes stared through the translucent mesh of a burqa (Durrani, 1998, p.10). The rules of pardah are also quite harsh to women in the Pakistani society. A girl is normally told to maintain purdah when she reaches puberty. Nevertheless, in other societies, such as the Pushtoons and rural society living in Pakistan, a girl will be required to maintain the purdah at the age of six.

The society has set moral expectations that have been very rigid and high among women. Any woman has to follow it or face a bad image. This is also the case of Heer. Her friend Chandi asks her whether she liked her brother. Although Heer knew very well that she loved the brother of Chandi, she could never reveal the same to Chandi. When the girl in Pakistani culture makes such claims, "I make myself look bad when someone overhears you" (Durrani, 1998, p.10), she is looked upon as doing something unethical. Women have to be subjected to strict purdah. Not only does it cover their physical looks but their personality also.

The living standards of the people below the poverty line are explicated in the neighbourhood in which Heer and her family lived in a small, claustrophobic apartment. Each society has its gender roles which are particular to both male and female. The same case too happened in Heer in her slummy area. When in the streets, children were playing whereas women were washing beans, peas, and pulses to prepare food. In the Pakistani culture and especially in the rural side, women are to be householders and take care of the family: cleaning lentils and shelling peas (Durrani, 1998, p.11).

Her statement would follow a format where she blames the female gender as curse by saying, We women are said to be the curse- a warning against all forms of dishonor that may afflict our coming generations due to the hazardous behavior of the female species (Durrani, 1998, p.12). Girls of teenage age in the Pakistani culture are expected to be model daughters by submitting to



the family authority, preserving their virginity and ready to be offended with a marriage offer at any time whether they like the arranged person or not. Then, she is bound to serve her husband and in-laws until death in all situations without any objection and mother of Heer insisted the same on him.

This was put to rest. Ma had chosen who I would be the remaining part of my life. Wear some equipment and take away that sulky face. Ma told me, "It will make you appear old." Ma continued to say, "They will not turn you and us on unless you are beautiful looking" (Durrani, 1998, p.14).

As it can be seen, parents rule when it comes to marriage in the Eastern homes. No girl is allowed to marry in love, otherwise, she will be executed. Her ambitious mother wanted to marry her teen-aged girl to a handsome, forty-four-year-old, married twice, Pir Sain. Since Ma believed that she would be in a good position socially after her daughter got married into a rich family, she could manage to have appropriate offers in her brother and other daughters. To achieve this, Ma would not afford to do anything wrong that could destroy marriage of her daughter to Pir Sain.

Heer details how the haveli was strict in terms of the purdah practices. Even the voices, shadows, pictures of unknown men were the things that their women could not even watch and listen to them. Strangers to the haveli, the unidentified men found it virtually impossible to get inside the haveli or to sight the women living in there. Nonetheless, men were free to decide the breed of their pets and which animal they wanted to reproduce with "it was forbidden to represent men, their voices and their shadows." There was even a prohibition to their names (Durrani, 1998, p.118). The extreme purdah is twice upon the women in Eastern culture. not only in religious beliefs but also the culture they inhabit. when the men of the culture are not interested in keeping purdah of their eyes. That female child which is in a male is not allowed to do anything beyond their house.

A woman has to hide the fact concerning her past in order to preserve her status in society. The widow had children yet she was not a real widow. Her experience with rapes in the prison of the ladies who saved her and bound her led to giving birth to the children she raised. To avoid the social disgrace, the widow would disguise as being married to another widow. She can lay claim to a little dignity and self-respect and the girls, by saying; "Then why do you call yourself a widow when you were never married?" Surprised, I told her. She replied with a smile, it is respectable (Durrani, 1998, p.138). Heer in narrating about the widow. Widow was a servant in the haveli of Pir Sain. The story of her life was the story of pain. The lady duped her and the widow informed her about this. The women supposed to save the life of the widow shackled her and used her as a prostitute.

After the death of his father, Pir Sain the eighth, the eldest son of Heer, Rajaji, took his father place of power. He oppressed women, acted like a tyrant in the same manner as his father. He said in a loud voice that he managed everybody in his haveli. He even ignored his mother when he warned the maid that no woman can be put in a position of authority. He is the one with the highest authority there even more than his mother: "I am the highest authority here." He beat the

frightened maid and he said, no woman and at least not my mother should forget that I know everything (Durrani 1998, p. 191). The absence of control of the women in the Pakistani rural society at home is well known. To explain this problem, Heer elaborates on the events as her son Rajaji caught her secret live-in maid red-handed, and punished her after catching her.

The implications of gender roles in *Blasphemy* (1998), by Tehmina Durrani, as analyzed through Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), are pivotal in understanding how societal power structures are sustained and challenged through language. Gender roles in the novel are constructed to reflect the entrenched patriarchal norms that dictate women's subjugation and men's dominance within both domestic and religious spheres. These roles, reinforced through linguistic patterns, character interactions, and narrative framing, expose how societal expectations confine women to positions of servitude, obedience, and silence. At the same time, the novel critiques these rigid roles by depicting moments of resistance and resilience, where female characters disrupt these assigned identities, challenging the ideological systems that perpetuate inequality. The analysis of gender roles reveals the underlying power imbalances and cultural conditioning that shape individual behaviors and societal perceptions, providing a framework for deconstructing patriarchal ideologies. This has broader implications for feminist scholarship, as it emphasizes the importance of analyzing gendered language to uncover the subtle mechanisms through which oppression is perpetuated and resisted.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* through Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics framework uncovers significant patterns in the linguistic and stylistic representation of gender roles. The study finds that the novel persistently depicts **women as inferior beings**, often characterized through lexical choices that emphasize weakness, silence, and subordination. Women are frequently positioned as objects rather than subjects, with language diminishing their agency and individuality.

Men, conversely, are consistently portrayed as **masters** wielding authority, both through physical dominance and religious justification. Commanding imperatives, authoritative narrative voice, and the strategic use of religious vocabulary reinforce male power and depict patriarchal control as both culturally and spiritually sanctioned.

The narrative also confines women to roles as **housewives and maids**, reflected in repeated references to domestic duties, servitude, and private spaces. These roles are linguistically reinforced through diminutive naming practices and metaphors of burden and sacrifice, highlighting the reduction of women's identities to household functions.

Additionally, the study finds that **cultural and religious obligations** are prominent tools of female subjugation in the text. However, Durrani simultaneously employs stylistic strategies such as irony, repetition, and juxtaposition to critique these oppressive structures. Through these

devices, the novel exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies inherent in patriarchal religious discourse, offering both a stark portrayal of gendered violence and a narrative of resistance.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani is more than just a story of personal and social trauma but also a sophisticated linguistic critique of patriarchy. Through the application of Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics, it becomes clear that the novel's stylistic features are deeply intertwined with its thematic content, serving both to depict and to challenge oppressive gender dynamics. Durrani's strategic use of language reveals how patriarchal ideologies are embedded in discourse, shaping perceptions of gender roles and legitimizing the marginalization of women.

The research highlights that stylistic choices—such as narrative voice, lexical selection, and metaphorical language—are crucial tools in constructing gendered identities and power relations. *Blasphemy* emerges as a powerful text that not only documents the suffering inflicted upon women but also actively interrogates the linguistic mechanisms sustaining patriarchal control.

By uncovering these stylistic patterns, the study contributes to feminist literary scholarship and underscores the importance of linguistic analysis in understanding gender representation in literature. It calls for continued exploration of feminist stylistics as a valuable approach for analyzing South Asian texts and for challenging the cultural narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. Ultimately, this research affirms the potential of literature—and its language—to expose injustice and inspire social change.

6. References

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