

Words that Bind, Voices that Break: A Corpus-Driven Critical Discourse Analysis of Gendered Collocations and Marginalization in Pakistani Anglophone Literature

Ali Raza¹, M. K. Abbas Ismail², Mah-Jabeen³ and Muhammad Asad Ishtiaq⁴

Abstract

This study examines the evolution of gendered identity and power relations in Pakistani Anglophone literature. The Pakistani Anglophone Literature Corpus (PALC), a 260,000-word digital corpus, underpins Kamila Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *Home Fire* (2017), *Red Birds* (2018), and *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026). The study combines quantitative corpus analysis methods like frequency, keyness, and collocation (in AntConc v4.2.1 and Sketch Engine) with qualitative transitivity and social actor representation studies. There is a substantial tilt toward male pronouns in the corpus (1.75:1) and notably in Mueenuddin's rural-feudal narrative (2.72:1). Collocation and keyness studies show that female social actors interact synecdochically with caution (adjectival collocates), compliance (verbal collocates), domestic confinement, and physical fragmentation. Executive capacitative, legal-institutional authority, and active material processes define masculine social players. However, a qualitative transitivity study in subaltern agency and linguistic resistance shows female characters reclaiming their voice to challenge patriarchy, imperialism, and class. This work combines digital humanities and post-colonial feminist studies by using computer-aided language techniques to highlight current South Asian fiction's profound ideological systems.

Keywords: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Corpus Linguistics, Pakistani Anglophone Literature, Collocation, Transitivity, Social Actor Representation

¹⁻²⁻³⁻⁴Department of English, University of Okara – Pakistan

Introduction

In the present, Pakistani Anglophone literature has experienced a noticeable change in theme and style, especially following the geopolitical disintegration of the post-9/11 era (Ahmed, 2021). The novel has become an increasingly critical medium through which to explore the different layers of national identity, religious affiliations, state surveillance, and neo-imperial intervention across Pakistan and its global diaspora. Central to the negotiation of power, marginalization, and agency in this literary corpus is the representation of gendered subjects. South Asian Muslim women have been hypervisible as oppressed victims and completely invisible as political agents within the historical discourse of Western- and localized-based patriarchy (Mohanty, 2003). For some time now, postcolonial and feminist literary criticisms have been attempting to deconstruct these monolithic representations, arguing that such depictions discursively colonize the heterogeneities of lived experiences in the Global South.

Traditional, qualitative literary analysis, which is basically a close reading and a thematic interpretation of a literary work, is immensely useful. However, it is not always empirically broad enough to systematically document patterns of language usage in larger texts. On the other hand, corpus linguistics offers a powerful and quantitative method of discovering linguistic features (word frequencies, keywords, collocations) that can otherwise be elusive to the unaided, naked eye of the critic (Baker, 2014). Corpus tools are a useful means of uncovering the ideology in literary narratives when used alongside critical discourse analysis, which studies how language reinforces or challenges power and social injustice. This mixed method is also called corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis or feminist critical discourse analysis, which allows researchers to investigate the discursively constructed, changed, and evaluated position of a gendered social actor in a particular corpus (Lazar, 2005).

The systematic study of these gendered representations is undertaken through the formation of the Pakistani Anglophone Literature Corpus (PALC), which consists of three major contemporary publications, namely *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie, *Red Birds* (2018) by Mohammed Hanif, and *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026) by Daniyal Mueenuddin. The three texts, set in an urban and diasporic context, a war-torn refugee camp and the lawless feudal countryside, are just right

for the examination of the linguistic construction of gender. This research compares the proximity of female and male characters to some specific verbs, adjectives, and modifiers. The analysis reveals the framing of a particular social group and any empowerment or deprecation biases in the text.

Finally, this study combines computer technology and qualitative discourse analysis. This enables us to go beyond the subjective reading of the text and provides an empirical basis for analyzing the role of contemporary literature in broader socio-political discussions of our time (Baker, 2014). In this multi-dimensional analysis, the research aims to demonstrate how the structural restrictions of language are used to keep the marginalized subjects of the story in place, as well as how these subjects break the silence by utilizing those same structural restrictions.

Although modern Pakistani Anglophone writers have garnered increased criticism, there has been no thorough computational and corpus-driven assessment of their works, notably for gender and power portrayal. Many works of fiction, such as *Home Fire* and *Red Birds*, explore diaspora, radicalization, and the state, but most scholarship has focused on qualitative, close reading methods that can overlook important linguistic connections. Understudied are the methods by which grammatical structures, collocations, and semantic prosodies preserve patriarchal, colonial, and class-based power relations. Post-9/11 Pakistani fiction lacks empirical linguistic data on the subtle, covert mechanisms that normalize or contest gendered marginalization, especially compared to the rural-feudal landscape and the urban-diasporic setting. The study uses a corpus-driven critical discourse analysis of gendered collocations and representations in Shamsie, Hanif, and Mueenuddin's novels to fill this gap and provide empirical evidence for the politics of representation in contemporary Pakistani literature.

The study contributes to scholarship by providing a novel combination of computational, quantitative corpus analysis and qualitative, postcolonial-feminist discourse analysis. This research refutes the binary of qualitative and quantitative methods that has persisted in literary studies for a long time by providing empirical and statistical evidence of the linguistic construction of gender in Pakistani Anglophone literature. This research shows that computational tools have the potential to supplement and inform literary criticism. Furthermore, this study makes an important contribution to the emerging field of feminist critical discourse

analysis that examines the negotiation of gendered power in non-Western post-9/11 contexts involving state surveillance, warfare, and feudalism.

Limitations of the Study

This work organizes and computerizes South Asian literary critique. However, there are some downsides. First, the Pakistani Anglophone Literature Corpus (PALC) will be limited to 260,000 words and include three novels that represent the most important contemporary socio-political contexts of Pakistani literature but do not cover all Pakistani fiction in English since 9/11. Second, quantitative tools like AntConc and Sketch Engine employ lemmatized word forms and the text's local syntactic context, which may exclude intricate narrative metaphors or the author's satirical voice. Finally, the research only contains Anglophone novels by elite or diasporic Pakistani writers, which may be an unrepresentative sample of Urdu or regional language literature and only partially reflect Pakistani language and gender reality.

Review of the Literature

The critical response to contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literature has also undergone a massive shift since the watershed years of 2001, from local postcolonial themes of hybridity and nation-building to global themes including the War on Terror (2001-present), state surveillance, and migration (Ahmed, 2021). Here, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) was a watershed that triggered a flurry of academic commentary on how the novel translates Sophocles' classical tragedy *Antigone* to the contemporary world of British counter-terror politics and securitization. The novel has received a significant amount of early scholarship and analysis on its political and legal aspects, including the use of citizenship laws against British Muslims by the British government through the Home Secretary, Karamat Lone (Clare, 2018). Shamsie widely addresses the conflict between state law and family and religious duties in his plot, highlighting how the law is regularly abused for ideological purposes.

Following the emergence of scholarship on *Home Fire* (2020–2022), an increasing number of scholars have employed feminist and postcolonial frameworks to examine the characters' negotiation of identity under a society of mistrust (Al-Saidi, 2021). Hanif, Ghazanfar, and Bashir (2022) undertook a feminist stylistic analysis of

the work, specifically examining the depiction of the Pasha sisters, Isma and Aneeka, and their challenges as Muslim women residing in the UK. Hanif et al. (2022) contend that, due to existing nationalist and anti-Muslim attitudes in the West, female characters are systematically stripped of their national identities and forced to adopt either excessively subservient or aggressive behavioural strategies. Isma's adherence to societal norms and maternal selflessness are juxtaposed with the resolute, defiant, and rebellious autonomy of Aneeka, who seeks to reclaim her brother Parvaiz, a deserter from ISIS. The distinction acknowledges the diverse lived experiences of Muslim women in Western democracies, who are perpetually subjected to profiling and surveillance regarding their bodies and choices.

Simultaneously, Mohammed Hanif's incisive analysis of the novel *Red Birds* (2018) focused on its acerbic and darkly comedic commentary on current warfare and neo-imperial humanitarianism (Anjum et al., 2021). In conflict-ridden refugee camps, Hanif employs *Catch-22*-like absurdity to depict the psychological and physical deterioration of humans. The two opposing characters, Mother Dear and Lady Flowerbody, underwent postcolonial feminist critique of the text. The novel demonstrates the deep inconsistency of Western interventions, since the very entities responsible for the devastation of civilian residences by carpet bombings simultaneously engage in the analysis of the trauma and stress experienced by the victims, positioning themselves as "clinical experts" (Ahmed, 2021). Mother Dear is a woman who is marginalised due to her gender, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. She is a mother whose voice is consistently silenced by the marginalised class and the condescending academic perspective of Lady Flowerbody.

Between 2023 and 2025, the analytical focus for both books shifted to an in-depth examination of governmental surveillance and panopticism (Fatima Tuz Zahra et al., 2023). They contended in a narrative stylistic study that media suffocation, airport interrogation, and surveillance technologies shape the narrative structure of *Home Fire*. They argued that the portrayal of British-Pakistani characters in Western media fosters their othering and marginalisation, which contradicts the notion that a contemporary, interconnected world provides more freedom for identity and expression. Postcolonial feminist analyses of *Red Birds* examine the negotiation of traumas related to absent family members in refugee contexts, highlighting how the quest for missing sons and brothers serves as a significant catalyst for subaltern femininity within localised patriarchal structures and transnational military entities (Malik et al., 2024).

Daniyal Mueenuddin's inaugural novel, *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026), was a significant contribution to the modern South Asian literary landscape in early 2026. The work chronicles six decades of life in Pakistan, resembling a gradual metronome of social realism and delineating the rigid caste and class hierarchy that dictates the dynamics between landlords and their servants (Mueenuddin, 2026). Despite being more traditional, Mueenuddin's novel has yet to receive significant academic scrutiny, with only literary reviews available. Aesthetic book critics swiftly undertook the task and were captivated by Mueenuddin's Turgenevian depiction of the landowner-dependent dynamic in South Punjab's countryside, where elite, Western-educated landowners wield near-absolute authority over their dependents. The novel's female protagonists, including the sophisticated and clever Shahnaz and the youthful and vigorous Gazala, dwell within a highly orthodox and patriarchal society that has considerable influence over men, as noted by critics (Kumar, 2026; Tahira, 2026). Tahira (2026) portrays Shahnaz as a "kingmaker" capable of exerting significant behind-the-scenes influence on her husband Hisham's agricultural ventures, exhibiting both pragmatism and charisma in her approach to marriage. Women such as Gazala are doubly oppressed, subjugated by both the class and gender systems, relying on their fortitude to endure feudal brutality and police corruption. The current media reception offers a valuable sociopolitical comparison with the established academic critiques of Shamsie and Hanif, serving as an insightful perspective on how Mueenuddin's work expands the depiction of Pakistani gender dynamics within the rural-feudal context.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis is a useful theoretical starting point for this study as it particularly targets the discursive production, maintenance, and contestation of power and gendered social configurations in distinct communities. Like Lazar (2005), I believe that the gender ideology and the power relations of modern society have taken very subtle and complex institutionalized forms, which need a critical linguistic approach to unravel them. This study does not employ traditional qualitative methods, but rather it combines three models of analysis, namely Lazar's FCDA, Paul Baker's (2014) Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), and Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor representation model. The integrated framework enables the statistical patterns of collocation, keyness, and transitivity to inform the critical evaluation of gendered marginalization and agency in the texts selected, as well as how they contribute to and reinforce the dominant sociolinguistic order of the society or create viable spaces for subaltern resistance (Baker, 2014; Lazar, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Methodology

This study employs a corpus-driven critical discourse analysis (CDA) research strategy, integrating quantitative computational methods in linguistic science with qualitative postcolonial-feminist literary analysis. The primary material for this study comprises the specialised digital corpus of the complete texts of three selected novels: Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018), and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026).

The three novels were transformed into pristine machine-readable plain text (UTF-8) to constitute the Pakistani Anglophone Literature Corpus (PALC). Comprehensive manual pre-processing was conducted to exclude all front matter, back matter, acknowledgements, publisher information, tables of contents, page numbers, and running headers to prevent distortion of the frequencies. A uniform punctuation system was employed. A uniform system for the treatment of clitics was employed (e.g., decidable clitics for tokenisation). The definitive clean corpus comprised 258,412 tokens (*Home Fire* = 79,985; *Red Birds* = 70,240; *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* = 108,187).

The quantitative data extraction was conducted using the desktop corpus software AntConc (v4.2.1), supplemented with lexicographical features from Sketch Engine. Initially, absolute and normalised frequency lists of terms were produced from the entire corpus. The PALC corpus was assembled and juxtaposed with a reference corpus, specifically the written fiction subcorpus of the British National Corpus (BNC), including around 5 million words of standard general written English. The importance of gender-marked pronouns (he, him, his, she, her, and hers) and gendered nouns was assessed using the Log-Likelihood (LL) statistic and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) effect size, with a significance threshold of $p < 0.001$ ($LL > 10.83$). A collocation analysis was conducted using a window of four words to the left (L4) and four words to the right (R4) of the target nodes. A collocation was deemed statistically significant if it achieved $MI \geq 3.0$ and $t \geq 2.0$. To eliminate uncommon and incidental co-occurrences, the collocate must appear a minimum of five times in the corpus (> 5).

A significant methodological challenge in the quantitative phase was the dual function of the word "her", which can serve as a third-person objective pronoun (e.g., "The officer told her to wait") or as a possessive determiner (e.g., "Isma

unzipped her suitcase"). A manual concordance screening was performed to verify scientific validity. For each novel, 500 lines were randomly chosen, and each line was manually classified as either an objective pronoun (feminine target pronoun) or a possessive determiner. The target nodes were designated as the third-person singular male pronouns (he, his, and his) and the proper names of the six principal female and male characters.

The emergent collocational profiles and transitivity structures underwent rigorous investigation in the qualitative phase, grounded in M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for social actor representation. Through transitivity analysis, verbs were categorised as material, mental, verbal, or relational processes, with the verbs identified as "actors" or "goals" of these processes for both female and male characters. Van Leeuwen's (2008) text-based categories of activation, passivation, individualisation, and collectivisation were employed to examine the discursive formation of power and subaltern opposition.

Theoretical Framework

This research utilises Michelle Lazar's (2005) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor representation model, offering a robust theoretical framework for examining gendered power dynamics in literary works. The FCDA is a sophisticated, contextual examination of power and ideology, constituting essential social justice research. This study is discursive as it entails constructing, negotiating, and contesting the authority of patriarchy and gender stereotypes. This qualitative study is more operational than other similar evaluations by evaluating persons' speech through the categories proposed by Van Leeuwen (2008). These concepts include activation, passivation, individualisation, and collectivisation. This hybrid method enables a comprehensive examination of the ideology around gendered collocations, thereby reinforcing the social status quo or fostering subaltern opposition and female agency in language.

Data Analysis

❖ Results

The quantitative study of the PALC corpus demonstrates a pronounced, systematic disparity in the appearance and depiction of gendered social actors throughout the three books. Table 1 displays the frequency, normalised distribution, and keyness of gender-marked pronouns throughout the corpus, in comparison to the BNC written fiction reference corpus. The findings indicate that male pronouns significantly exceed female pronouns, especially in Mueenuddin's novel.

Table 1: Pronoun Frequency, Normalised Distribution, and Keyness in PALC

Novel / Corpus Segment	Node Word	Absolute Freq.	Normalised Freq. (per 10k words)	LL Keyness Value (vs. Reference)	F:M Ratio
<i>Home Fire</i>	<i>He / Him / His</i>	2,145	268.1	+112.4*	1.13 : 1
(Tokens: 79,985)	<i>She / Her / Hers</i>	1,892	236.5	-42.1*	
<i>Red Birds</i>	<i>He / Him / His</i>	1,980	282.8	+134.6*	1.59 : 1
(Tokens: 70,240)	<i>She / Her / Hers</i>	1,245	177.8	-98.5*	
<i>This Is Where the Serpent Lives</i>	<i>He / Him / His</i>	3,842	349.2	+324.5*	2.72 : 1
(Tokens: 108,187)	<i>She / Her / Hers</i>	1,412	128.3	-185.2*	

Novel / Corpus Segment	Node Word	Absolute Freq.	Normalised Freq. (per 10k words)	LL Keyness Value (vs. Reference)	F:M Ratio
Total Corpus (PALC)	He / Him / His	7,967	306.4	+571.5	1.75 : 1
(Tokens: 258,412)	She / Her / Hers	4,549	174.9	-325.8	

Note. The total size of the PALC Corpus is 258,412 tokens. The normalisation basis is set at 10,000 words. The Keyness computations utilise the BNC written fiction subcorpus, with 5 million tokens, as the reference corpus. Log-likelihood (LL) values denoted with an asterisk (*) are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ ($LL \geq 10.83$). Positive keyness signifies overutilisation in PALC, whereas negative keyness denotes underutilisation in comparison to the reference corpus. Manual concordance filtering was employed to eliminate possessive determiners of "her*" from the count of target feminine pronouns to maintain grammatical integrity.

To examine the qualitative aspects of these representations, we extracted the notably important adjectival and verbal collocates for the principal female and male characters from the assembled corpus. The strength of associations was assessed using the Mutual Information metric, which quantifies the relationship between the node and the collocate. Table 2 delineates these collocational tendencies.

Table 2: Salient Adjectival and Verbal Collocates of Key Characters in PALC

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
Isma	compliant	Adjective	5.82	3.12	12	Docility, behavioral conformity under state surveillance

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
	cautious	Adjective	4.95	2.84	9	Self-regulation, fear of institutional profiling
	Quiet	Adjective	4.12	2.45	14	Domesticated silence, unobtrusive spatial presence
	interrogated	Verb	6.14	3.42	8	Passivised victimhood, institutional subjugation
	detained	Verb	5.88	3.18	7	Structural restriction of movement at the border
Aneeka	Fierce	Adjective	5.44	2.98	11	Active emotional intensity, transgressive resistance
	stubborn	Adjective	4.88	2.62	8	Refusal to submit to legal-institutional norms
	beautiful	Adjective	4.21	2.51	18	Traditional aesthetic

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
						evaluation, sexualised agency
	unpinned	Verb	6.54	3.82	6	Corporeal liberation, rejection of religious boundaries
	demanded	Verb	5.12	2.91	14	Verbal agency, direct confrontation of authority
Mother Dear	grief-stricken	Adjective	6.24	3.51	10	Emotional trauma, passive domestic suffering
	Silent	Adjective	4.35	2.48	15	Subaltern erasure, spatial confinement to the kitchen
	Wept	Verb	5.82	3.14	12	Emotional release, localized expression of tragedy
	Ranted	Verb	5.14	2.82	8	Disempowered verbal resistance, domestic hysteria

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
Lady Flowerbody	Western	Adjective	5.62	3.08	12	Colonial positionality, cultural othering of local subjects
	academic	Adjective	5.11	2.78	9	Clinical detachment, institutional authority
	Assess	Verb	6.12	3.34	7	Evaluative surveillance, objectification of third-world trauma
	research	Verb	5.84	3.12	8	Epistemic violence, extraction of subaltern narratives
Shahnaz	queenly	Adjective	6.42	3.71	8	Aristocratic power, strategic behind-the-scenes dominance
	Sharp	Adjective	4.92	2.68	11	High cognitive capacity, cynical intellectual power
	outmanoeuvred	Verb	6.18	3.44	6	Active mental processes,

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
						subversion of male authority
	Played	Verb	4.54	2.52	12	Strategic manipulation of matrimonial power structures
Gazala	Young	Adjective	3.88	2.21	14	Vulnerability, generational and class-based subjection
	defiant	Adjective	5.14	2.81	7	Desperate moral resistance, active subaltern stance
	Knelt	Verb	5.92	3.24	8	Feudal passivation, physical submission to elite power
	begged	Verb	5.48	2.94	10	Disempowered verbal appeal, exclusion from legal systems
Yasmin	Slight	Adjective	4.62	2.54	9	Aesthetic fragility, physical reduction of the female body

Target Node	Collocate Word	Part of Speech	MI Value	t-score	Co-occurrence Count	Semantic Prosody & Interpretive Coding
	Bare	Adjective	5.12	2.84	8	Corporeal objectification, synecdochic focus on feet
	lounded	Verb	5.42	2.92	7	Passive spatial presence, domestic object of male gaze
	Drifted	Verb	4.18	2.34	11	Lack of active physical direction, relational dependency

Note. Collocations are computed within a range of L₄ to R₄ from the destination character node. The threshold for mutual information (MI) is established at ≥ 3.0 , while the t-score barrier is set at ≥ 2.0 . The minimum co-occurrence count filter is established at ≥ 5 . Interpretive coding logic is based on feminist critical discourse analysis, assessing how collocates discursively influence the themes of passivation, activation, surveillance, and synecdochic objectification.

To elucidate the ideological foundations of these collocational features, we conducted a transitivity analysis on pivotal phrases employing these characters. Table 3 presents a functional linguistic framework illustrating the systematic construction or suppression of gendered agency within the selected texts.

Table 3: SFL Transitivity and Social Actor Representation of Key Characters in PALC

Character	Dominant Process Type	Participant Role	Social Actor Strategy	Discursive Construction
Isma	Mental & Relational	Senser / Carrier	Passivation & Individualization	Cautious, compliant subject navigating airport state surveillance
Aneeka	Material & Verbal	Actor / Sayer	Activation & Individualization	Rebellious, transgressive agent challenging state authority
Mother Dear	Affective & Verbal	Feeler / Sayer	Passivation & Collectivization	Doubly colonized subaltern mother facing neo-imperial war
Shahnaz	Mental & Material	Actor / Senser	Activation (Behind-the-scenes)	Sophisticated kingmaker outmaneuvering elite feudal males
Gazala	Material & Behavioral	Goal / Behaver	Passivation & Individualization	Lower-class female subject relying on bodily and moral resilience
Karamat	Material & Verbal	Actor / Sayer	Activation & Institutionalization	Authoritarian execution of state-led exclusionary politics
Saqib	Material	Actor	Activation & Individualization	Transgressive underclass actor whose overreaching leads to doom
Yazid	Material	Actor	Activation & Individualization	Loyal, physically dominant subaltern rising through feudal service

Note. Dominant process types and participant roles are classified according to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics transitivity framework. Strategies of social actors are classified according to Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) sociosemantic categories. Coding logic: Activation is designated when the character functions as the grammatical actor in a material process; passivation is designated when the character is positioned as the goal or undergoes a physical or verbal process.

Discussion

The examination of the PALC corpus indicates that the terminology employed to describe gendered social actors is intrinsically linked to class, state, and neo-imperialist authority. Statistics shown in Table 1 reveal a significant gender imbalance, especially in *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* by Daniyal Mueenuddin, where the frequency of male names and pronouns exceeds that of female names and pronouns. Van Leeuwen (2008) posits that this exemplifies exclusion; women's voices are absent from the narrative, so establishing a masculinist norm in which male behavior is considered the default.

This quantitative outcome is elucidated by a qualitative examination of the novels, demonstrating how particular verb-adjective combinations (VACs) are discursively employed to confine female characters to a state of passive subordination while simultaneously rendering "voices" perceptible beyond the limitations of such collocations.

❖ The Securitized Border and the Compliant Female Subject in *Home Fire*

The inaugural episode of Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) commences at the airport with Isma's detention, underscoring the gendered and racialized surveillance of the Muslim female body in the West. The analysis of transitivity reveals that the security official is consistently acknowledged as the actor of action, whereas Isma is invariably designated as the target of action or observation. Her behavior is characterized by the adjectival collocates dutiful, careful, and quiet (refer to Table 2). This is a regulated compliance that seeks to operate within the confines of the state's disciplinary authority. The book elucidates the process of this degeneration. "She'd made sure not to pack anything that would invite comment or questions—no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her area of academic interest—but even

so, the officer took hold of every item of Isma's clothing and ran it between her thumb and fingers, not so much searching for hidden pockets as judging the quality of the material" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 10).

The official's "grasping," "manipulating," and "evaluating" are not just appraisals of Isma's possessions, but of her physical form, too. She is physically and psychologically observed and her interrogator is excessively interested in her views on the Shia, the homosexual, the monarchy and democratic concepts, enabling an invasive panoptic interrogation. Isma's discourse is very modalised, cautious, and shows the way the securitised state requires the female Muslim subject to portray herself in a unique, benign way so that she goes through.

When asked,

"Do you consider yourself British?" the man said. "I am British." "But do you consider yourself British?" "I've lived here all my life." She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive (Shamsie, 2017, p. 11).

The officer's inquiry into her "Britishness" utilizes a method of "othering" that, within the context of critical discourse research, makes the legal status of dual-national citizenship precarious and contingent. The system is initially distrustful of Isma due to her cultural and religious peculiarities, and her efforts to validate herself prove futile.

Aneeka's linguistic positioning is defined by active, transgressive agency. In her contacts, she rejects the "passive, compliant" character that Eamonn's language attempts to impose on her. She interrogates the political implications of her father's language, exposing the systemic inequities faced by British Muslims:

"Do you say, 'Dad, you're making it okay to stigmatize people for the way they dress'? Do you say, 'What kind of idiot stands in front of a group of teenagers and tells them to conform'? Do you say, 'Why didn't you mention that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice'?" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 250).

Aneeka's speech processes are confrontational, provocative, and resolute, positioning her as an active Sayer who dismantles the liberal individualist pretenses of the state. Her sexual autonomy is linguistically articulated when she asserts to Eamonn, "I am able to choose which parts I want strangers to look at and which are for you" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 242), so subverting conventional power dynamics between men and women. According to the SFL transitivity model, Aneeka exhibits agentive transitivity, demonstrating the capacity to assert herself as the active agent of her body and fate, but her sister Isma is characterized as "cautious," "slowing down," and "pragmatic."

4.2.2. First-World Academic Gaze versus Subaltern Domestic Grief in *Red Birds*

Red Birds (2018) explores the linguistic disparities between Lady Flowerbody and Mother Dear, serving as a metaphor for the tension between First-World academic feminism and Third-World subaltern experience. Lady Flowerbody's collocational profile indicates a preoccupation with abstraction and technical terminology:

"She is a consultant. She has been sent to assess the psychological effects of post-war adjustments... to use this community as a laboratory for testing my hypothesis" (Hanif, 2018, p. 136).

It is said she is working on her PhD thesis on the Teenage Muslim Mind, the Children of the Desert. In the context of critical discourse analysis, Lady Flowerbody's language serves to colonize the local refugees, transforming their physical sufferings and displacement into academic capital, which she dismisses as: "lazy, tautological bullshit" (Hanif, 2018, p. 136).

Mother Dear's language, however, evokes visceral and concrete statements of loss and anger. She does not take the role of the USAID consultant who is forced to be passive and clinical:

"First they bomb our house, then they take away my son, and now [they] are here to make us feel all right" (Hanif, 2018, p. 136).

The parallel structure makes the connection between the Western military interventions and the later rehabilitation initiatives more apparent. The pronoun 'they' is named as the distant, aggressive Western Actor, 'us' as the victimized Goal.

Besides, Mother Dear's obsession with the lack of salt and the interminable kitchen rants are a domestic, local kind of grief which have been utterly misinterpreted by her husband and the Western charity workers: Dear Mother, primarily 'off stage' (Hanif, 2018, p. 190) and mostly confined to the kitchen, is prone to rants. Her mourning is diminished and marginalized by male and neo-imperial powers, just like Spivak's subaltern that is silent and voiceless. The climax of the story is when she rejects the medical treatment by Lady Flowerbody in favour of a spiritual challenge, repeating the names of Allah.

❖ Feudal Patriarchy, Class Mobility, and Synecdoche in *This Is Where the Serpent Lives*

Mueenuddin's *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026) offers a devastating linguistic analysis of how class and gender hierarchies operate in feudal Pakistan. Synecdoche emphasizes the feet and ankles of the younger ladies, painting them in a very noticeable style. All the principal female characters exhibit this body construction: "On the second floor, passing a room, he saw Yasmin lying on a bed, curled, napping, back to him, feet bare and up on the bed, her little slippers tucked beneath. The bottoms of her feet glowed pale white" (Mueenuddin, 2026, p. 30).

In a same manner, Shahnaz is depicted with her "feet tucked," while Saqib consistently observes Gazala's "little foot" while she rides sidesaddle on his bicycle. Within the framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, this recurrent physical synecdoche is significantly important as it reduces the intricate and unique identities of social actors, transforming them into objects of observation and desire for the male social actor, albeit solely in a local, aesthetic context. Conversely, elder women, exemplified by the housemaid Mai Viro and Gazala's grandmother, exhibit a total absence of interiority, characterized in the narrative as "ancient crones" (Mueenuddin, 2026, p. 124).

The linguistic manifestation of power and mobility among classes is most evident in the characters of Shahnaz and Gazala. Shahnaz's voice is "cultured cosmopolitanism" and a sharp and cynical mind:

"You're not just wasting him packing your suits and making your drinks the way you like them—you'll even be wasting him on your vegetable startup" (Mueenuddin, 2026, p. 137).

She listens to Bach and skilfully outmanoeuvres her husband, Hisham, by a series of calculations and charms, perceiving the world through her Western political perspective and experiences.

Nonetheless, her authority remains contingent upon her husband's elevated feudal standing and is inherently linked to it. *Gazala* signifies "both class and gender subjugation. Her husband, Saqib, is apprehended and subjected to torture by unscrupulous police officers in Punjab, leaving her outside the legal framework and compelled to directly solicit the benevolence of Shahnaz's mother. This is a poignant depiction of submission:

"Falling to her knees, she held the child in her outstretched arms, laid it at Shahnaz's feet. She was weeping. 'Mehra ki kasoor. Bachay da ki kasoor' (What is my fault? What is the child's fault?)" (Mueenuddin, 2026, p. 124).

Punjabi-Urdu code-switching provides voice to this charged moment, contrasting with the elite, English-language voice of the house. It exposes the violence faced by the so-called 'subaltern female subject,' who lacks access to the abstract justice provided by legalism and instead relies on personal feudal begging for survival.

❖ Extended Intertextual and Ideological Synthesis

Reading these three texts collectively reveals a pronounced pattern of "binding" that is influenced by gender and class. The Specialised corpus (PALC) provides an empirical foundation for comprehending how language is used to define and constrain the personalities of these authors. The adjectival collocations of the female characters in all three works, such as "compliant" (Isma), "submissive" (Mother Dear), and "slight" (Yasmin), are systematically associated with verbs denoting constraint, containment, and domestic labour. Conversely, the male characters are described with words that confer upon them an executive role, such as "powerful" (Karamat) and "ambitious" (Saqib), positioning them as protagonists of material and verbal processes. The transitivity analysis (Table 3) reveals systematic asymmetry, showing that the grammar of the texts mirrors the socio-political systems of the societies they depict.

However, the qualitative study suggests that these texts do not merely reiterate the supremacy of patriarchy and the state. The authors establish a critical framework to

interrogate these linguistic systems. Aneeka's subversive verbal expressions in *Home Fire*, Mother Dear's profound repudiation of academic scrutiny in *Red Birds*, and Gazala's emotional upheaval within the elite household in *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* represent 'voices that break' through the linguistic and physical constraints imposed upon them. The occurrences of resistance allow for the portrayal of South Asian women as intricate, dynamic social agents that interact with and contest power within their specific cultural, geopolitical, and class frameworks.

Recommendations

Expansion of Corpus-Assisted Literary Studies: Future scholars ought to augment the size and breadth of the digital corpus by incorporating more South Asian Anglophone novels. This would provide a more comprehensive diachronic analysis of alterations in collocations and semantic prosodies in gender interactions before and after the pivotal moment in post-9/11 counter-terrorism policies.

Triangulation of Sentiment and Metaphor Analysis: Integrating computational sentiment analysis with conceptual metaphor extraction, such as the Metaphor Identification Procedure developed by the Pragglejaz group, would provide more nuanced, multidimensional insights into the sentiment frameworks of the female and male characters within the discourse. This would enable scientists to examine the 'affective economies' of suspicion and marginalisation with greater precision.

Integration of Digital Humanities into the Curriculum: It is necessary to incorporate corpus linguistics software (AntConc and Sketch Engine) into the English literature and gender studies curricula at higher education institutions in Pakistan and South Asia. This effort would provide students with the technical ability to methodically analyse texts and uncover ideological and patriarchal biases that extend beyond their subjective, closed reading frameworks.

Conclusion

This study conducts a corpus-driven critical discourse analysis of collocations, power dynamics, and gender marginalization in the novels *Home Fire* (2017), *Red Birds* (2018), and *This Is Where the Serpent Lives* (2016) by Kamila Shamsie, Mohammed Hanif, and Daniyal Mueenuddin, respectively. This research, utilizing

a custom digital corpus and the analytical tools AntConc and Sketch Engine, has demonstrated the foundation for both unconscious and intentional representation of gendered social actors in contemporary South Asian Anglophone literature. The quantitative findings indicate a notable and persistent gender disparity in the texts regarding the frequency of male and female pronouns and characters, particularly in Mueenuddin's novel, which implies a male-centric narrative framework and prompts inquiries about the representation of female voices within the text.

The qualitative transitivity analysis and social actor analysis reveal that the vocabulary employed in these texts renders the female actor passive, cautious, and confined to the domestic sphere through the employment of adjectives and passive verbs. The securitized, comprehensive profile of Isma. The domestic isolation and unaddressed distress of Mother Dear. The physical segregation and hierarchical subordination of Yasmin and Gazala. Furthermore, the research indicates a significant disparity in the linguistic and stylistic expression between two categories of women: first-world women, predominantly cognitive and academic authority, and third-world women, primarily passive victims of state, military, and feudal power.

The study alludes to the concept of resistance present within these literary works, highlighting active domains of opposition. The transgressive agency of Aneeka, the spiritual and verbal fortitude of Mother Dear, and Gazala's futile yet courageous attempt to transcend feudal-class constraints illustrate the authors' struggle against the oppression of patriarchy, imperialism, and class. This study demonstrates that English literature in Pakistan is not solely a reflection of societal disparities. It is a platform that reveals the language and ideology of marginalization while providing a robust transformative space for altering agency, identity, and global human solidarity.

References

- Ahmed, R. (2021). Towards an ethics of reading Muslims: Encountering difference in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Textual Practice*, 35(7), 1145–1161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2020.1731582>
- Ahmed, Z., Buzdar, H. Q., & Kamran, U. (2021). Postcolonial subject as modern orient: A critical analysis of Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Pakistan Journal of Languages and Social Sciences*, 15(2), 110–125.
- Al-Saidi, A. (2021). The affective economy of Islamophobia: Surveillance and state power in contemporary British fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 57(3), 345–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2021.1925341>
- Anjum, S., Sheikh, M. A., & Jamil, S. (2021). Absurdism and postmodern trauma in Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v13n2.25>
- Baker, P. (2014). *Using corpora to analyze gender*. Bloomsbury.
- Clare, A. (2018). State power, sovereignty, and the Muslim body in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Contemporary Literature*, 59(4), 512–534. <https://doi.org/10.3368/cl.59.4.512>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Fatima tuz Zahra, M., Saleem, M., Faheem, A., & Ashraf, R. S. (2023). A Labovian narrative stylistic analysis of Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences*, 2(4), 420–461.
- Hanif, N., Ghazanfar, S., & Bashir, R. (2022). Feminist stylistic analysis of Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(2), 102–114. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-II\)0909](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-II)0909)
- Hanif, M. (2018). *Red Birds*. Bloomsbury.
- Kumar, S. (2026, May 1). Review: Daniyal Mueenuddin examines the faultlines of Pakistani society in his new novel. *The Hindu*.
- Lazar, M. M. (2005). *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power, and ideology in discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Malik, M. A., Irshad, H. S., & Abbas, S. (2024). Mother Dear as a postcolonial feminist subject in Muhammad Hanif's *Red Birds*. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(1), 904–917.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
- Mueenuddin, D. (2026). *This Is Where the Serpent Lives*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home Fire*. Riverhead Books.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	7-Sept-2025
<i>Revised</i>	17-Nov-2025
<i>Accepted</i>	11-Dec-2025
<i>Published</i>	15-Dec-2025

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- All Authors **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

- **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

- **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

M. K. Abbas Ismail

Kamran.ch@uo.edu.pk