

From Sidhwa to Shamsie: Evolution of Storytelling in Pakistani Women's Novels

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Article Info

Article history:

Received July 23th, 2026

Revised Aug 8th, 2026

Accepted Aug 28th, 2026

Keyword:

Contemporary fiction; Evolution;
Female English novelists; Narrative
shifting; Pakistani literature.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the evolution of themes and narrative techniques in English-language novels by Pakistani women writers across different literary generations. Using qualitative comparative textual analysis, it considered selected works by Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Fatima Bhutto, Moni Mohsin, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Sanam Maher. The analysis focused on character representation, narrative form, language use, gender, identity, migration, memory, and socio-cultural change. The findings showed a movement from earlier concerns with cultural identity, gender discrimination, and postcolonial memory toward more transnational themes involving diaspora, political violence, hybridity, and self-realization. Contemporary fiction also displayed greater formal experimentation through fragmented chronology, multiple perspectives, and hybridized English shaped by local linguistic and cultural forms. These shifts indicated that Pakistani women novelists increasingly used narrative form as a means of negotiating gender, language, identity, and power across local and global contexts. The study concluded that this evolving literary practice broadened both the thematic range and expressive possibilities of Pakistani women's writing in English.



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INTRODUCTION

One of the advancements in the South Asian writing is the growth of fictional writing in English notable features of the modern literature in the sphere of its post-colonial change as a special post-colonial voice that is a compromise between local and fall traditions and the local and the global traditions. In this zone, the work done in the importance of the English novel writing by female Pakistani novelists has been extremely significant to any discernible affection of gender, character and country. Female novelists such as Debra Michals have been writing novels since as early as the 1980s. "Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and the rest have been trying to express the experience of women in the situation of reality, social and cultural as well as social and political actualities, it has become possible to reshape the fiction writing into one of the forms of opposition, introspection and change" (Chambers, 2011). The works created in such a drive not only reflect the transforming space busy with women in Pakistani society but adjusting with changing truths of language, relocation, religion and post-colonial forced migration: the phenomenon that is an exchange between modernity and tradition. "The work of such Pakistani women early novelists as Sidhwa and Suleri is functioning in the patterns of the identity and colonial memory and oppression of gender in the setting of the national equation of the post-partition Pakistan" (Chawla, 2022). The transformation of the political paradigms in Pakistan during the transition of the country to colonialism. The manners of women have been conditioned by globalization and digital modernity describe and determine individuality, independence and attachments. Feminist critics such as women writing has been identified by Showalter (1981) and Spivak (1988) to be a reflection as well as a diagnosis of the social

system at the same time postcolonial critics such as As demonstrated by Bhabha (1994) (2002), cultural identities that are hybridized change the definitions of nation and self-identity. In this situation, Pakistani female novelists exercise their stance in the overlapping system of connections of sex, of status, language, and migrant identity. "The majority of the critiques has been leveled upon consideration of gender matters disregarding the important links of the social- language related and topical gradual growth" (Mehmood, 2019). "Hardly, to which the useful impact of the social-cultural factors of worldwide integration was commented, on the affective narrative strategies used are urbanization and changed codes of morality by the English fiction of Pakistani Women" (Ahmed, 2022). The following study aims to do a research on the process of creating social-cultural, after colonial and language factors to the progress of talks and works of narratives that are done by Pakistani female writers of the English novelists in different generations. "The present study is aimed at investigating the impacts of the socio-cultural, post-colonial and language social settings in the differences as far as topic shifts as well as narrative shifts which characterize the writings of the writing of the Pakistani female novelists of today in the English tongue"(Malik, 2023). It also aims to study these topic concerns in writings of other past authors like Sidhwa and Suleri in evaluation with those of later writers like Shamsie and Khan. In this situation, the study adopts a postcolonial feminine view and a discourse analysis of evaluating the changes in narrative as a procedure of language as well as ideology; Ashcroft et al, 2002).

"Sense of belonging and removal within the post colonialism theory have been a worry of Pakistani novelists in the past put it pithily the struggle of modernity and postcolonial self-identity in the woman fiction is in conflict the original culture, the diaspora in have affirmed its originality" (Ahmed, 2022). "Female Pakistani authorship is concerned with identity of the globalized world with the connects of blended storytelling" (Fairclough, 1995). "These critical opinions indicate that the identity question is not resolved yet right in the middle of the Pakistani women fiction as postcolonial anxiety transforms to something different alternate subjects of transnational subjectivity" (Hussain, 2023).

"Feminism issues play a significant role of the short literature in Pakistan in English follow the historical development of the literary writings written by Pakistani women using the three phases of feminine" (Showalter, 1981). Female expression finds its way through silence to protest and finally to creative freedom. "Those are also expressed by the contemporary female authors quiet experiences using the females figures who are defiant to the male dominance" (Mehmood, 2019). This has reduced women (Chawla and who are just representations into initiators of resistance and strengthening. Additionally, its mention that the contemporary authors such as Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan remove the difference between personal and political and women are presented as interpretations of both i.e. of the domestic and the truths of the Universe. "These authors address the thematic issues marriage, education, sexuality, mobility etc. the controversial territories where women are on the hunt liberty by being innovative in narration" (Yasmeen, 2022).

The formation of narrative devices in Pakistani women fiction is equivalent and with the social-political progress in the nation itself Chambers (2011) indicates shift of patriotic and historical narratives of the early authors (Sidhwa, Suleri) to those of an initial nature, worldly in the writings of Shamsie and Khan. "In Ijaz, there seems to be the utilization of a body-based stylistic approach of study that the changes occurring in the contemporary short literature by the linguistic and stylistic means shown here indicate of the complexity of post-modern identity and selfhood" (Ijaz, 2013). "As mentioned, textual interrelation and self-referential writing are usual representations on the part of the new writers that is indicative of the shift of the realism to an experimental style of the forms of narrative" (Malik, 2023). "Mehmood argues that feminine fiction has now reached the stage of the protest writings of psychological depth and writing of esthetic personal-expression" (Mahmood, 2019). Chawla and Yasmeen, As have indicated, the changes in presenting themes do not limited to at the thematic level in form yet material, which suggests that the women authors have taken charge of the account of storytelling of voice and control over expression in the manner narrative is organized in their fiction.

"Language usage in the novels of female writers in Pakistan is an area of struggle and compromise have mentioned that language blending, dual language use the recent novels have been more affected by prose and local phrases pointing to an sign of change" (Ijaz, 2023). Removal of colonial influence from literary English as put forward by female the novelists have been partial to the regional expressions, to symbolic cultural expressions and everyday language styles, and have produced

what Spivak has referred to as a purposeful simplification of identity in which marginalized voices are restored. On the same note, Mehmood (2019) suggests that language difference and metaphorical layering reflect the internal struggle of women, who have to live in a male dominated society conditions. According to Ahmed (2022), the language related social changes include urban. "The styles of speaking as shaped by bilingualism and social class speech patterns have influenced the stylistic" (Ahmed, 2022). The Pakistani literature identity. The changes can be related to the work by Fairclough (1995) the idea of language as a social activity where discourse is ideologically status and social rankings. The literature about Pakistani is immense. English-speaking female novelists. But the blank spaces in this field are not filled yet. "The concepts of feminism and post-colonialist have been given a great deal of consideration, comparative social linguistic change and the development of theme have been rather slighted" (Spivak, 1998). Finally narrative construction, in particular, the change of the point of view of the narrator, controller of timeline and variation in narration, is not a common trend that has been researched to a considerable degree of socio-cultural evolution.

Accordingly, the study aimed to explore the development of narrative techniques in modern Pakistani English novels written by women, analyze changing thematic concerns in selected contemporary works, and examine how socio-cultural and historical shifts affected story structure. It also considered how contemporary Pakistani women novelists reconstructed identity, gender, and cultural representation through changing modes of narration.

These objectives were addressed by asking how narrative techniques and thematic concerns changed across the selected fiction, how socio-cultural and historical contexts shaped contemporary narration, and how evolving narrative practices rearticulated identity, gender, and cultural representation in Pakistani women's writing in English.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative research design that has been applied in this study is a comparative approach, theme based analysis on the evolution of themes, topics and storytelling structures in Pakistani English fiction by female authors. "The framework that will be used is the qualitative one that enables an in detailed examination of the literary works so that the researcher should be able to find the interpretations, settings and ideological meanings of the material that are beyond the text (surface-level) language features" (Bryman, 2016). The qualitative paradigm, as stated by Creswell, holds that: will promote the structure development of some narratives and their topics. "Thus, a methodology of interpretation is employed in transmitting that meaning is formed cultural, social, political and language terms depending on the contexts" (Creswell, 2018). The basis of such an approach is the main idea that works and themes of shift in Pakistani women writers throughout history.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of perspectives on attitudes sociolinguistics has been adopted in the present study that enables it possible to have a understanding based on context of the means through which the social biases, views and ideas that influence the form of language and plot. "Garrett has three strands of his model which are thinking, emotional and behavioral each element at work within a level of organization, which explains how the relevant attitudes in question influence the discourse" (Creswell, 2023). "The model presented by Garrett gives a more effective method to explain how the attitudes of the female Pakistani writers towards are their expression is in their cultural background, gender roles and the usage of language story structures" (Garrett, 2010).

The study drew on eight English-language works by Pakistani women writers: Ice-Candy-Man (Bapsi Sidhwa, 1988), Meatless Days (Sara Suleri, 1989), Kartography (Kamila Shamsie, 2002), The Shadow of the Crescent Moon (Fatima Bhutto, 2013), The Diary of a Social Butterfly (Moni Mohsin, 2008), Thinner Than Skin (Uzma Aslam Khan, 2012), The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch (Sanam Maher, 2018), and The Runaways (Fatima Bhutto, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis

The evolution of contemporary fiction by Pakistani female English novelists marks a deeply transformative trajectory in literary expression, characterized by an ongoing process of narrative shifting that redefines both form and content in significant ways. This shift is not merely a stylistic

development but a profound reorientation of perspective, wherein storytelling becomes a means of interrogating inherited structures of power, knowledge, and representation. Early works by Pakistani women writing in English often engaged with themes of cultural identity, tradition, and the negotiation between Eastern and Western values, frequently shaped by the expectations of a global readership. However, contemporary writers have moved beyond these somewhat reductive frameworks, embracing more complex, nuanced, and self-reflexive modes of narration that resist simplification and challenge the authority of dominant narratives. Their fiction increasingly reflects a confidence in addressing local realities without the need to mediate or translate them for external validation, thereby asserting an autonomous literary voice.

A defining feature of this narrative evolution is the deliberate disruption of linear storytelling and the embrace of fragmented, non-linear, and multi-perspectival narrative structures. Time in these texts is often fluid rather than chronological, memory is layered and subjective, and truth is presented as contingent rather than absolute. Such formal experimentation allows these novelists to more accurately represent the complexities of lived experience, particularly in a society marked by historical discontinuities, political upheaval, and social transformation. The use of multiple narrators and shifting focalizations enables a polyphonic narrative space where diverse voices often marginalized or silenced in mainstream discourse—are brought to the forefront. This multiplicity not only democratizes storytelling but also reflects the heterogeneous nature of Pakistani society itself, encompassing variations in class, ethnicity, language, and gender.

Thematically, contemporary Pakistani female novelists have expanded their focus to include a wide range of socio-political concerns, moving beyond the confines of domesticity to engage with broader issues such as state violence, religious extremism, systemic inequality, and the lingering effects of colonialism. At the same time, the personal remains deeply political in their work, as intimate experiences of love, loss, trauma, and resilience are intricately connected to larger structural forces. The body, memory, and space often function as key sites of narrative exploration, revealing how power operates at both visible and invisible levels. In this regard, their fiction frequently intersects with feminist and postcolonial discourses, yet it resists being confined within any single theoretical framework, instead offering a fluid and intersectional approach to identity and representation.

Another significant aspect of this narrative shift is the increasing engagement with transnationalism and diaspora, reflecting the realities of globalization and migration that shape contemporary identities. These writers explore the tensions between home and exile, belonging and alienation, as well as the ways in which cultural identities are continuously reconstructed across geographical and ideological boundaries. Rather than portraying diaspora as a space of simple dislocation, their narratives often present it as a site of creative negotiation and hybrid identity formation. Language plays a crucial role in this process, as English is adapted, reshaped, and infused with local idioms, rhythms, and cultural references, resulting in a hybrid linguistic form that challenges colonial hierarchies and asserts cultural specificity.

Importantly, the narrative shifting observed in the works of Pakistani female English novelists also involves a critical engagement with history and memory. These writers often revisit historical events not as fixed or objective realities but as contested narratives that are open to reinterpretation. By foregrounding personal memories and alternative histories, they challenge official versions of the past and highlight the role of storytelling in shaping collective consciousness. This approach underscores an epistemological shift in which knowledge is no longer seen as singular or authoritative but as multiple, dynamic, and often contradictory. In doing so, their fiction creates space for voices that have been historically marginalized, including those of women, minorities, and subaltern communities.

Ultimately, the evolution of contemporary fiction by Pakistani female English novelists represents a vibrant and dynamic literary movement that continues to push the boundaries of narrative possibility. Through their innovative storytelling techniques, thematic depth, and critical engagement with socio-political realities, these writers are not only redefining the contours of Pakistani literature in English but also contributing to broader conversations within global and postcolonial literary traditions. Their work embodies a powerful synthesis of aesthetic experimentation and ideological inquiry, offering new ways of understanding identity, history, and the human experience in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

At the thematic level the research concludes that the contemporary Pakistani female novelists have greatly expanded the base of their fiction, exploring both acute socio-political matters, and at the

same time keeping the theme of personal subjectivity and personal emotionality at the forefront. It is their work that shows that personal experiences cannot be separated out of the larger structural forces, thus reaffirming the inseparability of the personal and the political. By so doing, they not only critique patriarchal, colonial and socio-cultural limitations, but also reclaim narrative space to marginalized voices and especially to the voices of women, whose voices have historically been underrepresented or silenced. In addition, the growing use of transnational and diasporic approaches emphasizes the shifting and changing aspect of identity in the globalized world. These authors extend the simplistic binaries and instead introduce identity as an ongoing negotiation process that is conditioned by migration, memory, and cultural hybridity. This change is further accentuated by their inventive use of language, in which English is modified to reflect local realities, cultural peculiarities, and diverse experiences, thus defying linguistic hierarchies and establishing a clear literary voice.

Results and Findings

This research indicates that the modern fiction written by Pakistani women in English novelists has gone through a notable transformation of a dynamic narrative shifting process, which functions at structural, thematic, and ideological levels. The main finding is the evident shift of traditional linear narrative to discontinuous, non-linear and multi-voiced narratives. These authors intentionally break the flow of time and use alternate directions, inner dialogues, and first-person narration to represent a nuanced nature of the lived worlds. It is no mere aesthetic formal experimentation; it is a critical instrument to challenge fixed meanings, dominant epistemologies, and to preempt the multiplicity of truth. The research concludes that these narrative techniques permit a more realistic depiction of personal and group experiences, especially in a socio-political environment of lack of stability, confrontation, and change. The next important observation is the thematized issues that these novelists have in their works. Whereas in the past literature tended to be more preoccupied with the issue of cultural identity, tradition, and the conflict between the East and West, recent fiction reveals a more subtle and extensive involvement into other issues of gender inequality, political violence, religious extremism, stratification of classes, and the psychological consequences of traumas. Notably, these themes are not addressed separately but are closely interconnected to each other, as they are examples of how personal experience is intertwined with more significant socio-political structures.

The paper also concludes that the subjectivity of the female is the focus of these tales as women are depicted as multi-layered and active subjects and not passive. In this, the novelists oppose the patriarchal system and reclaim the female voice, identity and resistance. Moreover, the results stress the trend of considerable movement towards transnational and diasporic approaches. Pakistani female novelists of the contemporary generation are putting their stories in a global context, discussing migration and displacement and identity in a hybrid state. This is an expression of the globalization realities and the permeability of the cultural boundaries. This paper concludes that these authors go beyond the dichotomy of tradition/modernity, East/West, and introduce identity as a negotiable, fluid, and constantly dynamic entity. Language is one of the most important locations of this negotiation, since English is not only adopted and mixed with the local linguistic and cultural components, but also hybridized narrative voice is created that does not follow the colonial linguistic hierarchies. Another significant epistemological change in the presentation of history and memory is also illustrated in the research. Instead of showing history as a solid and official narrative, these novelists re-enact it as discontinuous, subjective, and subject to redefinition. Foregrounding is done on personal memory, oral accounts, and marginalized views to question the official histories and dominant discourses. This method democratizes story telling in addition to highlighting the importance of narrative in the formation and challenge of knowledge.

The results imply that such rewriting of history can enable more inclusive and pluralistic interpretation of the past, especially through the female and other underrepresented lens. Moreover, the paper concludes that the personal and the political are intertwined peculiarities of the modern fiction written by Pakistani women authors. Love, loss, identity crisis, and emotional struggles are all closely connected to the bigger structural forces; thus, showing how power works both on a micro and a macro-level. This inter-relationship further supports the notion that the personal is never apolitical, which can be traced to feminist literary practices, yet it can also transcend them by looking at other postcolonial and global environments. On the whole, the evidence presented in this paper shows that modern Pakistani female writers of English novels are actively transforming the narrative practices through a

synthesis of formal innovation and critical socio-political involvement. Their work is indicative of a deliberate attempt to disrupt mainstream narratives, rebrand identity, and to make space to listen to and hear a variety of voices and experiences. This transformation does not only add depth to Pakistani literature in English, but adds to the larger literature in postcolonial and global literature by providing new paths to narratives and new points of view. The paper concludes that narrative shifting within this line of work is a creative and ideological practice, which remains broadening the parameters of narratives and responding to the challenges of modern life.

CONCLUSION

In short, this paper shows that the development of modern fiction by the Pakistani women writing in English is characterized by a very deep and multidimensional process of narrative moving which reestablishes the aesthetics as well as the ideological underpinnings of the literary expression. These authors have left behind the old, linear forms of storytelling to adopt new narrative strategies that express the discontinuous, multifaceted and usually contradictory character of contemporary experience. By employing non-linear structures, multiple perspectives, and hybrid linguistic forms, they dispute the position of singular narratives and instead prefigure multiplicity, ambiguity and fluidity as the main aspects of comprehending identity and reality. Another conclusion of the study is that reimagining of history and memory is the key to this body of work. Giving history as fragmented and contested instead of authoritative, these novelists disrupt dominant discourses and open the space of other interpretations based on individual and shared experiences. This epistemological break does not just democratize knowledge, but it also focuses on the strength of narratives in terms of rebuilding and reclaiming identity. In conclusion, the development of modern fiction by Pakistani women writers of English novels is a dynamic and innovative literary trend that has the power to push limits of the narrative form and content. Their work is a synthesis of creative innovation and critical inquiry, providing new means of comprehending the intricacies of gender, identity, culture, and power in the contemporary world. This paper confirms that narrative shifting is not just a stylistic fad but a constructive and intentional method to which these authors address and redefine the literary and socio-cultural environments in which they operate.

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