

Gender Dynamics in Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*: A Textual Analysis

Irfan Afzal¹
Rashida Imran²

Abstract

*This paper examines gender dynamics in Mueenuddin's short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). Using textual analysis as the method, it analyses two stories, "Provide, Provide" and "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" to find instances where the boundaries of patriarchal gender constructs are pushed, and positive alternatives presented. The research employs Cornell's concepts of multiple masculinities, hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity as the main theoretical framework. Other feminist theories such as patriarchy, gender roles and intersectionality have also been utilised. The study reveals that Mueenuddin tends to destabilise the hegemonic status of masculinity at the hands of self-confident, aggressive, and ambitious women seeking to change their circumstantial reality. However, deeply entrenched patriarchal structures reclaim the space and relegate such women back to their socially defined position(s).*

Keywords: Masculinities, femininities, hegemonic masculinity, Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*

1. Introduction

Patriarchy is deeply entrenched in Pakistani society (Safdar & Yasmin 2022; Shaheed 2010), where gender roles and identities determined by cultural, social and ideological factors are largely upheld (Grünenfelder, 2013). Drawing variably from the Islamic ideas and ideals (Shaheed, 2010), as well as from the country's colonial past (Das, 2010), the society's clearly defined gender dynamics assign power and control to men, while women remain disempowered and disadvantaged (Hadi, 2017). Farid (2021) maintains this state of affairs is sufficiently reflected in misogynistic response from the state's leadership, official machinery and religious quarters in the wake of incidents of rape and violence against

¹M. Phil Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, AIOU, Islamabad

women.¹ The country's poor performance in terms of gender equality as reported in The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2022* (2022) also tells a similar story. The report ranks Pakistan as the region's second-worst performer on gender equality index, and notes that women in Pakistan are under-served and underprivileged in terms of economic participation and opportunity, education, health service and survival (UN Women).

The foregoing state of affairs underlines a need to explore contemporary Pakistani literature as a site to examine representations of gender, with special emphasis on masculinities. Hobbs (2013) maintains analysing a work of literature from a masculinity studies perspective educates the reader [...] by presenting positive examples. And since the existing feminist-oriented work on Pakistani fiction remains tilted towards representations of women and the female voice, a holistic take on the subject, involving the entire spectrum of gender identities (especially masculinities) is highly warranted. Josep (2019) contends there is increasing evidence as to the portrayal and representation of masculinities in works of literature, but in terms of scholarly work on masculinities, the field remains largely "unpracticed and unknown" as compared to the analysis of literary women in feminist research (p.427). A general neglect of Pakistani short fiction, which usually gets pegged with the umbrella term "fiction" (Shamsie, 2010) further validates the current undertaking. It is in view of these considerations that this study examines gender dynamics in Pakistani anglophone writer Daniyal Mueenuddin's short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). It particularly attempts to look for instances where the boundaries of gender roles and constructs are pushed, and positive alternatives proposed.

2. Literature Review

Masculinity studies are considered inter-disciplinary. Its origin is traced in anthropology, sociology and psychology, providing multi-dimensional and multi-perspective frameworks to analyse literary works (Kimmel, et al., 2004). These included perspectives as varied as cultural differences,

¹ Pakistan's political leadership and government representatives often respond to rape incidents with victim-blaming as evidenced in these reports: *Outrage after Pakistan PM Imran Khan blames rape crisis on women* (The Guardian); *Lahore CCPO blames motorway rape victim for choice of route, travelling late at night*. (Geo TV)

emotional attachments, social structures and norms. Gottzen et al. (2019) trace the origins of masculinity studies to the 1980s, thanks to pioneering work by some pro-feminist scholars in the West. This set the ball rolling for the discipline to develop and evolve, leading to the emergence of new dimensions, ramifications and perspectives, particularly so in the 1990s. Gottzen et al. further argue some scholars like Beasley gave a new dimension to the subject by bringing into play more modernist perspectives, offering social constructionist and socialist-feminist frameworks to study masculinities. However, it was sociologists R. W. Connell and Michael S. Kimmel, who in 1987 ushered in the emergence of masculinity studies “proper” with the “multiple masculinities” perspective being their main contribution (Gottzen et al., 2019, p. 2). This allowed successive scholars to dismiss the notion that masculinity was always the same, static and monolithic. Connell further crystallised the debate on masculinity by aggregating Gramsci’s concept of hegemony which underpinned the role of intellectual and moral leadership to bring about domination through consent rather than coercion (Kurtz, 2001). She defined hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice” that legitimised patriarchy as a system to secure domination of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Elaborating on the salience of the concept, Messerschmidt (2019) maintains Connell initially understood hegemonic masculinity “as a specific form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide social setting that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (p. 86). Importantly, reformulation of the concept by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledged hegemonic masculinity’s relation with emphasised femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities, recognised “the agency of subordinated groups”, and conceptualised “how hegemonic masculinity may be challenged, contested, and thus changed” (p. 88).

In the light of Connell’s concepts of multiple masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, this research probes how in the selected work hegemonic masculinity stands in relation to femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities such as complicit, subordinate and marginalised types. Kimmel (2001) posits it makes sense to speak of masculinities and femininities in the plural because their meaning could vary dramatically “even in the same society at the same time” (p. 9318). In Kimmel’s view, masculinity (*read gender*) — italics ours — derives its meaning from the social, cultural and historical context, and its manifestation may therefore

change when the context changes. Subsequent and ongoing discussions have thus gone on to explore its culturally or historically derived variants such as Islamic/Muslim masculinity (Aslam, 2012), Arab masculinity (Halabi et al., 2021), and postcolonial masculinity (Stanovsky, 2007). The study also benefits from the concept of intersectionality, which explains how multiple forces and factors impact the dynamics of power and gender (Crenshaw, 2017).

While the foregoing expository discussion provides one cogent reason to study gender dynamics from the perspective of masculinity studies, a relative lack of research work on the subject in relation to Pakistani anglophone literature is another. In this regard, Pakistani short story merits greater scholarly attention as it often gets smothered under the overarching term “fiction” which chiefly focuses on the novel (Shamsie, 2017). Shamsie maintains Pakistani short fiction underwent “a long period of gestation” (p.473), during which pioneers like Zulfiqar Ghaus and Zaibun-Nisa Hameedulla and subsequently diaspora writers like Daniyal Mueenuddin, Aamer Hussein, Talat Abbasi and Hanif Kureishi earned it a respectable place in the world. Shamsie further argues Pakistani anglophone short story is considered to have turned a new page with the publication of Abbasi’s *Bitter Gourd and Other Stories* (2001) and Mueenuddin’s *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). Mueenuddin’s collection has won wide acclaim for its multi-perspective take on issues related to class, gender, and power, and is seen as an important work of fiction by a Pakistani-American writer. This study examines the dynamics of gender in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). The research is delimited to two stories from the collection, namely “Provide, Provide” and “In Other Rooms, Other Wonders”.

3. Methodology

The researchers have utilised various feminist and gender theories including Connell’s formulations of hegemonic masculinity, multiple masculinities and emphasised femininity (2005). Other concepts informing the study include sex-gender difference (Upstone, 2017; Klages, 2006; Tyson, 2006; Vance, 2011); gender role variations across cultures, over time, over the course of a person’s life (Kimmel, 2001), and intersectionality, which refers to “the multiple social forces, social identities, and ideological instruments through which power and disadvantage are expressed and legitimised” (Crenshaw, 2017, para 1).

The researchers have employed textual analysis as the method to examine the selected texts. Lockyer (2008) maintains textual analysis attempts to find a preferred meaning of the text. McKee (2003), however, defines textual analysis as a practice of analysing texts for making “educated guesses” about ways in which the readers might interpret a particular text (27). The researchers have drawn from McKee’s textual analysis technique. Key steps of McKee’s process are: choosing the topic, developing research questions, selecting relevant texts, expanding the list of relevant texts, developing a “semiosphere”, and interpreting the selected text (pp. 138,139).

4. Analysis

Australian sociologist R. W. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for gender-related analysis of the selected texts. It allows analysis of multiple types and levels of masculinities, as well as the dynamics of power between men and men, men and women, and between masculinities and femininities. Furthermore, Connell’s assertions about emphasised femininity provide an opportunity to study the role of women in accommodating desires of their male counterparts. For the purpose of textual analysis, the researchers have combed the two selected stories to develop a kind of “semiosphere”, identifying thematically relevant portions for analysis in accordance with the research question(s).

In “Provide, Provide”, the dynamics of gender may be examined by focusing on the pivotal character of Chaudrey Nabi Baksh Jaglani whose rise and fall the story tracks. Jaglani’s accumulation of wealth, his political ascent, his marital life, and the way he exercises authority on his servants, subordinates and family members, give useful insights into the interplay of gender and power in the story. The analysis thus takes three key dimensions: Jaglani as seen in the execution of his personal relationships, chiefly the relationship with his senior wife and mistress-turned-wife, Zainab; Jaglani’s exercise of power over his subordinates, including his servants and sons; and gender hierarchies as evidenced in Jaglani’s private, public and political life.

In terms of his personal relationships, Jaglani is examined according to how he acts and behaves towards his two wives, and reciprocally how they respond to his patriarchal and hegemonic status. Jaglani’s relationship with Zainab gives a new dimension to the former’s masculinity, which is

patriarchal and hegemonic *per se*. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, “legitimizes unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities in a given historical or society-wide setting” (Connell 2005, p. 77). This is evidenced in the way Jaglani unleashes his predatory sexual power on Zainab, and later forces her poor husband into divorce to legitimise his own relationship with her. Zainab initially exhibits emphasised femininity (Connell, 2013) in being too compliant to the whims and desires of Jaglani. She fans and fosters his hegemonic masculinity by going beyond her mandated role as a servant. She cooks and serves food, presses his feet, massages his legs, and offers “uncomplainingly” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 40) whatever he wants. However, her announcement that she married Jaglani not out of love or lust for his riches, but to have children with him -- “I only married you because of that” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 45) -- calls into question her own emphasised femininity (Connell, 2013) and qualifies her to be seen from a different perspective. She has her own ambitions, and she uses her sexuality to realise them. She is thus positioned as a self-confident woman who would have her way. Zainab’s confidence subsequently accounts for Jaglani’s anxiety when dealing with her. Throughout the story, there are sporadic hints and references that tell of her strength and Jaglani’s discomfort with it: “She had a hard pale face, angular, with high cheekbones, almost beautiful, but too forceful” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 38). Beside her strong hands and arms, there was an air of an overall surety about her demeanour. Zainab’s willingness to serve Jaglani notwithstanding, her “hardness toward herself, contained violence” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 44). Her refusal to accept his patronizing care, shakes Jaglani’s masculine confidence. He “feared Zainab [...] although he had made a career of fearing no one and of thereby dominating this lawless area” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 44). Even in seeking Jaglani’s grandchild, a girl, to be adopted, she transcends the conventional son-preference mentality, urging her husband to give her his son’s daughter to raise. All in all, the relationship between Jaglani and Zainab clearly shows that the former’s hegemonic masculinity is on the retreat when confronted by a strong woman. Connell (2013) argues hegemonic masculinity gains its meaning in relation to non-hegemonic versions and femininity. It is therefore important to underline the relational aspect of Jaglani’s masculinity. Since emphasised femininity is oriented to accommodating interests and desires of men, Zainab, by not being compliant to the dictates of subordination, triggers a crisis of masculinity in Jaglani, which, Lemon (1992) argues, is a perceived sense of insecurity

among men when their power and privilege are undermined by the awakening of consciousness among women and deviant masculinities. Jaglani himself betrays this crisis through self-censuring castigation: “Secretly, and most bitterly, he blamed himself for having been so weak as to love a woman who had never loved him”, and for having thrown away “his manliness and strength, for a pair of legs that clasped his waist and a pair of eyes that pierced him and that yet had at bottom the deadness of foil” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 49).

Jaglani’s nameless senior wife also needs to be examined from the emphasised femininity (Connell, 2013) perspective. By not assigning even a name to the woman, the writer underlines her lack of identity under Jaglani, who marries Zainab without seeking the former’s consent. Initially, he keeps the marriage secret fearing reaction from within their common family, but there comes a time when he believes it is his prerogative to take a second wife. It is then that he just announces it to his first family. The senior wife takes it silently and without protest. Jaglani then recounts that after being diagnosed with bone cancer, his first wife had never reproached him. Instead “she quickly became old”, and “stopped caring for herself”. Her body became “a body thrown away, throwing itself away, the old woman sitting all day in bed ...” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 49). Jaglani’s first wife is thus a typical patriarchal woman, devoid of any agency, voice or choice. Regardless of featuring in the story only to the extent of being a mere mention, the first wife is totally erased under the hegemonic power of her husband. According to bell hooks (2000), being oppressed is the absence of choices, and according to this standard, Jaglani’s first wife is the antithesis of Zainab by virtue of her extreme effacement. Furthermore, the first wife is an exemplar of a woman who performs the patriarchal ideal of unremitting emphasised femininity, which, as Kimmel (2001) argues, is born from gender binarism. Emphasised femininity, he explains, is about compliance and conformity to a prescribed gender role. Patriarchy’s structural arrangements within a heterosexual marriage hold women responsible to raise children and tend homes. This leads to the peculiar positioning of gender roles, prescribing dominance to men and subordination to women (Greig, 2016).

Consequently, the two wives stand in striking contrast with each other. Zainab, being ambitious, resists complete domination by Jaglani; she employs her sexuality as a tool. The senior wife, on the contrary, remains

completely subordinated to Jaglani, thus being a perfect example of emphasised femininity. It is however important to note that in the end, it is Zainab and not Jaglani who has to cede ground which may be seen as a reassertion of patriarchal social structures. Once diagnosed with cancer, Jaglani undertakes to set things right in favour of his senior wife and family. He returns to the family and launches hectic efforts to have his sons' political future secured. The sons, on their part, make sure that Zainab (their stepmother) does not get anything from Jaglani's property despite their father's commitment to her otherwise. In his final moments, Jaglani and his family slam the door on Zainab as she is denied any access to her husband: "She wept quietly and kept saying to herself, "And they didn't even offer me a cup of tea." (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 52). This cold response could also be seen as an effort on Jaglani's part to foil Zainab whose masculine aura and inaccessibility seemed to undermine his authority and exposed his "prosthetic masculinity" (Sadaf, 492), which, as noted earlier, was manifested in a kind of crisis in him.

The problem this study set out to examine was what happened when the boundaries of prescribed gender roles are pushed. From the two above examples, it is evident that in a strictly patriarchal setting, a woman venturing beyond her mandated heteronormative role is up for a rough ride. Such women shake the confidence of men who might be seen flaunting their hegemonic masculinity in other situations and settings. In the end, though, patriarchalism carries the day and the hegemonic culture is perpetuated rather than subverted.

Chaudrey Jaglani's masculinity may also be examined by setting it against that of his servants and subordinates in both domestic and public settings. Here, Jaglani asserts his masculinity through a blatant and unscrupulous use of power, which he employs to have people arrested or released, appointed or removed from government jobs, or to settle murder cases. He openly indulges in an extramarital affair with Zainab but nobody dares speak about it out of fear. He forces Aslam, Zainab's (legal) husband, into divorce, and by way of compensation asks the latter's employer to give him a pay raise. When Aslam begs Jaglani not to take what was lawfully his, Jaglani replies: "I have so much because I took what I wanted" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 43). In the domestic sphere too, Jaglani's sons remain completely overwhelmed by their father. The presence of masculine hierarchies within the story testifies to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity which provides an essential framework for

identifying multiple masculinities. Connell's designation of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalised masculinities offers a useful tool for analyzing unequal gender relations between men and men, which the story clearly demonstrates. Class and power come into play to establish a hierarchical arrangement of masculinity with the poor, lowly social classes featuring as marginalised masculinities. Such male characters are easily dominated, oppressed, and abused by those in position of power or from an upper class. Furthermore, the hierarchical domination of poor, disenfranchised men by powerful, wealthy ones reveals how characters with lesser social and societal status emulate the upper class and position themselves in relation to the hegemonic form. Another important feature of the masculine hierarchy is that those who have some power in public life are obliged to compromise their masculinity in private and domestic spaces. The resistance these men face in the family, and their consequent lack of control elicits different reactions and responses, such as masculine anxiety in case of Jaglani. But the version of masculinity Jaglani exhibits when dealing with his servants and subordinates is different from what we see in his interaction with Zainab at a later stage in the story where he betrays his emotional vulnerability, and is seen deriding himself for the relationship. The change in Jaglani's performance of masculinity seems consistent with Connell's claim that hegemonic masculinity is not an unchanging phenomenon; gender and masculinities are fluid and subject to challenge, and a change in specific social, societal, and cultural circumstances brings hope that alternative masculinities can exist and operate un-oppressively (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The third dimension of masculine hierarchies in the story is evidenced in the presence of various characters in the political sphere who are placed in different levels of power and class. There are the Makhdooms, the local hereditary saints "who controlled huge areas of land" and wielded great deal of political power (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 45). They could hand out election tickets for Muslim League, one of the the strongest political parties in the Punjab province. From the same family belongs Jaglani's patron, Makhdoom Talwan, the dominant landlord and politician in the district, and a member of the National Assembly. At Jaglani's funeral, he flippantly dismisses his son, Shabir's political ambitions with a cold, sarcastic remark that the seat vacated after his father's death was now *his* to lose in by-election. Eventually he forces Shabir to withdraw in favour of another man, advising him to "Enjoy what you have and learn to know your level" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 53). Another important figure in terms

of masculine hierarchies is K. K. Harouni, the master, the feudal lord from Southern Punjab, who could sell his lands for thirty years,. Jaglani deceitfully bought Harouni's lands to spur his own rise and political ascendancy. On top of the political ladder is *the* Chief Minister (of Punjab) boasting his postcolonial masculinity (Stanovsky, 2007) in his "Western clothes, a pinstripe suit and gold cuff links and English shoes" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 48), a dress code that visibly distinguishes him from Jaglani and other supplicants waiting in the anteroom. Such supplicants routinely frequent the offices and *deras* of powerful politicians for different kinds of favours, and could be seen as an example of marginalised masculinities. That Jaglani is made to wait with these people instead of being given direct access to the chief minister seems to position his masculinity as such, which is consistent with Kimmel's assertion about gender role variations ... over time, and over the course of a person's life (Kimmel, 2001). At the bottom of the political ladder is Jaglani's son Shabir for whom the dying father seeks a political career. But, as testified by Mustafa, the family's driver, "the boy barely has enough spine to stand upright. The big guys around here will eat him up once Jaglani's gone" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 47). Masculine hierarchies are thus clearly evidenced in the story, and the domination-subordination binary, punctuated by political power and class, underpins the relevance of intersectionality which explains how multiple forces and factors impact the dynamics of power (Crenshaw, 2017; Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the second story "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" gender dynamics can be navigated by focusing on two characters, that is, the retired bureaucrat and landlord K. K. Harouni, and his poor but young relation Husna, who lives with K. K's estranged wife. Needing a job, she visits "Uncle" Harouni with a letter of introduction from the Begum. Harouni tells her to start taking typing lessons from his secretary Shah Sahib. When Begum Harouni proceeds for *Umrah*, Harouni asks Husna to move in and settle in the annex. It takes them only a week to start sleeping together. Harouni's health, however, is precarious, and after his death, Husna is made to leave and go back to the Old City from where she came.

Both the central characters of the story fall short of exhibiting the traits typically assigned to and idealised in their respective genders. From the perspective of patriarchal gender roles (Tyson, 86; Greig, 11) as well as Connell's concept of emphasised femininity, (Connell, 2013) Husna is anything but a typical, compliant woman. Her aggressive pursuit of

ambition to change her plight positions her as a non-conforming woman, her age and class notwithstanding. K. K. Harouni, on the other hand, is a retired bureaucrat and a landlord who despite his old age engages in a romantic relationship with a girl younger than his daughters, thus defying the age-related stereotypes society upholds.

Generically speaking, the subordination and oppression of women is not evident in the story. Except for Harouni's estranged wife who has been expelled from the home for behaving inappropriately to one of her husband's female friends, women, by and large, hold sway. Begum Harouni can be seen as an example of emphasised femininity (Connell, 2013) as she "lived in a state of suspended equilibrium, hoping to be recalled to her husband's side" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 67). Other women appear to enjoy greater freedom. Harouni's well-off female friends come to his place freely, play rummy, drink wines, and their morality transcends the middle-class scruples. His own daughter Sarwat is married to a rich industrialist. She flies in from Karachi twice within the span of few days the story covers. Her sister Pinky's daughter, Mumtaz, has made off and got engaged with Bilqis Talpur's boy. The girl's elopement with the boy from a rich landowning Talpur family is in striking contrast with Begum Harouni, who being a typical patriarchal woman, earnestly prays for reconciliation with her husband. The examples of Pinky's daughter and other women referred to above, sufficiently hint at changing female consciousness where women are shown as confident, ambitious, aggressive, and hegemonic in their own right, thus falling short of displaying the traits of emphasised femininity (Connell, 2013). Importantly, this consciousness or absence of it is not particularly instanced in one or the other social class as seen in the example of Husna and the old Begum Harouni.

Husna, the female protagonist, stands in complete defiance of the role prescribed for women by hegemonic and patriarchal gender constructs. She allows herself to be spoiled with daydreams, making her parents *afraid* of her moods. Her father, she believes, is weak and can give her nothing, having lost his connections. This is reason enough for her to spurn his control over her life and body, and to escape the stifling constraints and economies of a possible arranged marriage to somebody in the Old City. Ambitious as she is to change her lot, Husna employs her sexuality as a tool to penetrate the rich and exotic world of K. K. Harouni, a possible springboard for the girl to escape the rut of her bitter reality.

Not ready to marry a clerk, not hoping to attract someone from the rich established families, she offers herself to Harouni, knowing this was her chance, and that a salary man was always accessible. Juxtaposed to Husna's clear sense of purpose is the dotting Harouni, whose expression of gender is conditioned by his inherent benignity, his loneliness, and his age. Harouni, on the masculine hierarchy, is marginalised which is determined by multiple factors including the age of a person (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). He exemplifies ageing masculinity (Calasanti, 2005), which is about making sense of "identity in later life, particularly against the backdrop of hierarchy of dominance, subordination and marginalisation" (Tarrant, 2016, p. 193). K. K. Harouni, who has to contend with his age-related marginalisation, forges a relationship with Husna to make sense of his identity in old age: In K. K.'s own words: "She keeps me company. [...] At my age, what I need is companionship, and Husna can give that to me" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 72).

The lived experience of Harouni's ageing masculinity finds expression in his own actions and words. When Riffat, one of his old girlfriends, comes whirling in, with Husna already sitting there, Harouni receives her with a kiss on the head, but when Husna leaves, he bestows a *fatherly* kiss on her cheek, which Riffat quickly notices, forcing the old man to situate his masculinity: "At my age, my dear, she's in no danger" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 64). No wonder Husna initially refers to him as "Uncle", but after her first sexual encounter with Harouni, while decrying the insulting attitude of the servants and K. K.'s daughter Sarwat, remarks: "I gave you everything I had, but you give me nothing in return. I have feelings too, I'm human" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 72). Harouni betrays his kindness and vulnerability in response to Husna's threat that she'd leave: "Now stop [...] Do you want me to have another heart attack?" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 72). He is kind, considerate and consoling; a crying Husna upsets him so he nestles her under his arm and strokes her hair. His decision to separate from his wife is referred to as uncharacteristic, and in that too he does not divorce her for he had "no intention of remarrying and no desire to humiliate her" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 67). But with his wife away, and daughters settled in their homes, he seeks companionship which he finds in the person of Husna. When Sarwat, Harouni's daughter from Karachi tells him to maintain a respectable distance from Husna, he replies:

I'm lonely, Sarwat. You're in Karachi, Kamila is in New York, and Rehana has barely spoken to me in ten years. My friends are dying off or

don't go out anymore. She keeps me company. [...] At my age, what I need is companionship, and Husna can give that to me. (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 72)

In laying bare the dynamics of his ageing masculinity, the writer clearly establishes that Harouni's marginalised masculinity is not susceptible to class-related shocks and effects. Tarrant (2016) maintains accumulation of wealth and consolidation of financial power across the life-course can prove instrumental in offsetting old age, and this is clearly the case with Harouni whose class, position and accumulation of resources is linked to his ability to resist ageism. Harouni's affluence thus remains a source of strength and stability in his life, with his old friends, girlfriends and daughters still in touch, his old age notwithstanding.

While K. K. Harouni's masculinity might well be seen as non-hegemonic owing to his age, his overall kindness and gentleness hints at an alternative, transformative masculinity. Despite being rooted in a setting where "the old barons still dominated the government, the prime minister a huge feudal landowner" (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 66), Harouni exudes the persona of a kind, benign person. However, things quickly change for Husna after Harouni's sudden death, who is let to contend with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, demonstrating that they still hold the sway. The fact that eventually she has to go back to the Old City clearly suggests that for women like Husna (whose identity is informed by their gender and social class), change at the societal level remains elusive.

5. Discussion

In both the stories, the masculinity of the central male figure is undermined, as their female counterparts venture out of their socially prescribed roles. However, women are forced to retrace their steps, and embrace the system-prescribed (patriarchal and heteronormative) gender identity. Mueenuddin also underlines gender hierarchies by presenting different types of masculinities and femininities. Factors such as wealth, social class, ethnicity, and age play a role in situating a person's gender. Deliberating on the key elements of class, Morgan (2005) finds property, occupation, and masculinities strongly interconnected. This emerges as a theme in both the stories in that wealth and property figure as an important aspect as socially and politically strong and powerful characters, are seen unleashing their masculinity on subordinated and marginalised men. By presenting different versions, varieties and classes of men and

masculinities including feudal lords, bureaucrats, politicians, the elderly, drivers, cooks, domestic servants, and so on, the writer testifies to Connell's views about plurality and hierarchical organization of masculine identities.

Like masculinity, femininity is performed in different modes, determined at times by characters' social and economic status, and at times by wider socio-cultural norms. The setting which contextualises the femininity of Zainab and Husna, the two central female characters in the stories, is characteristically patriarchal, and the gender dynamics tend to be defined by that reality. Despite display of audacity and defiance by women, societal and cultural norms eventually carry the day. In fact, the collective fate of the female characters—Husna, Begum Harouni, Zainab, Jaglani's senior wife, and Shabir's wife and daughter—and of marginalised men like Zainab's husband, resonates with bell hooks' notion of interlocking webs of oppression, which feminists currently refer to as an intersectionality (Biana, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017).

Be it masculinity or femininity, a person's gender identity is certainly impacted by a number of other factors such as class, wealth, age, culture and ideology. However, in these stories, men, by and large, are privileged and in power. Strid and Hearn (2022) describe patriarchy as an organised system that gives greater overall power to men and endorses masculine hierarchies both at individual and group levels. In both the stories, it is this system, and not one or the other individual (male or female), that prevails.

6. Conclusion

This study was aimed at understanding gender dynamics in Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009), with a goal of highlighting the instances where male or female characters push the boundaries of prescribed gender identities. For this, representations of masculinities and femininities were examined in two titles, "Provide, Provide" and "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders". The study demonstrates that Mueenuddin stops short of validating any specific version of masculinity or femininity as *the* one to be emulated. However, gender identities in both the stories appear to have been destabilised, thanks primarily to the female characters who shun their socially sanctioned gender roles and identities. Such women trigger a crisis of sorts in the likes of Jaglani, while elderly and marginalised persons like K. K. Harouni take it as an opportunity to forge companionship. In the process, the stories also bring forth instances of

transformative and alternative masculinities as seen in the person of kind-hearted Harouni. Both the stories seem to tow a similar line in showing the two central female characters compelled to go back to their original position and embrace the reality therein.

However, the examination of gender dynamics in the two selected stories does not essentially yield an insight that can be generalised to the entire collection. It would be very interesting to see what the rest of the stories have to say on this important subject. Discussions and debates surrounding Mueenuddin's work reveal his deep understanding of gender-related discourses. In this regard, his work is comparable to that of Hanif Kureshie whose short stories invite a reading for the masculinity in crisis, and for hinting at alternative, non-hegemonic versions (Schötz, 2020). Notably, other contemporary works, such as *Attar of Roses* (1997) by Tahira Naqvi, handle gender much differently. In Naqvi's work, for example, unequal gender relations are hardly addressed, much less questioned, at the societal level. The current study, by delving into Mueenuddin's unusual treatment of gender, serves as a foundation for other researchers to explore this dimension not only in Mueenuddin's oeuvre, but also in other Pakistan anglophone writings. Such undertakings are expected to expose the inhibiting effects of patriarchal gender-constructs, and in doing so, can draw the society's attention to much-needed alternatives.

References

- Aslam, M. (2014). Islamism and masculinity: Case study Pakistan. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 135-149.
- Aslam, M. (2012). *Gender-based explosions: The nexus between Muslim masculinities, jihadist Islamism and terrorism*. UNU Press, 90-91
- Biana, H. T. (2020). Extending bell hooks' feminist theory. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(1), 13-29.
- Calasanti, T. (2005). Firming the Floppy Penis: Age, Class, and Gender Relations in the Lives of Old Men. *Men and Masculinities*, 8(1), doi:10.1177/1097184X04268799, 3-23
- Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ). (n.d.) *What is intersectionality?* <https://www.intersectionaljustice.org/what-is-intersectionality, n.p>.
- Connell, R. W. (2013). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. John Wiley & Sons. 183.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*, University of California Press,

- Berkley, Los Angeles, 77-80
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (2017). On intersectionality: Essential writings. The New Press. n.p.
- Das, R. (2010). Colonial legacies, post-colonial (in) securities, and gender (ed) representations in South Asia's nuclear policies. *Social Identities*, 16(6), 717-740.
- Farid, Faiza. "Women, piety and autonomy in Pakistan." South Asia@LSE (2021).Geo TV. (2020 Sep 10). *Lahore CCPO blames motorway rape victim for choice of route, travelling late at night.* <https://www.geo.tv/latest/307200-ccpo-lahore-blames-motorway-rape-victim-for>, n.p.
- Geo TV. (2020 Sep 10). *Lahore CCPO blames motorway rape victim for choice of route, travelling late at night.* <https://www.geo.tv/latest/307200-ccpo-lahore-blames-motorway-rape-victim-for>, n.p.
- Gottzén, L., Mellström, U., & Shefer, T. (2019). Introduction: Mapping the field of masculinity studies. In *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.
- Greig, A. (2016). Self-Learning Booklet: Understanding Masculinities and Violence Against Women and Girls. *La Esperilla: UN Women Training Centre*. 7-18
- Grünenfelder, J. (2013, September). Discourses of gender identities and gender roles in Pakistan: Women and non-domestic work in political representations. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 40, 68). Pergamon, n.p.
- El Halabi, S., Founouni, Z. N., & Arawi, T. (2021). Social Construction of Arab Masculinity and Its Effects on Mental Health. In *Handbook of Healthcare in the Arab World*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 3295-3305.
- Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 4(4), 205-212.
- Hobbs, A. (2013). Masculinity studies and literature. *Literature Compass*, 10 (4), 383-395.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Pluto Press, 5
- Josep M. Armengolm, (Gottzén, Lucas, Ulf Mellström, and Tamara Shefer, eds.) *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies*. Routledge, 2019.

- Kimmel, M. S., Hearn, J., & Connell, R. W. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*. Sage Publications.
- Kimmel, M. (2001). Masculinities and Femininities, Editor(s): Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes, In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Pergamon. 9318-9321
- Klages, Mary. (2006). *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum International Publishing Group, Great Britain, 96
- Kurtz, D. V. (2001). Hegemony: Anthropological Aspects. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 6642–6645.
- Lemon, Jennifer (1992). *The crisis of masculinity and the renegotiation of power*. *Communication*, 18(2), 16–30.
- Lockyer, S. (2008). Textual analysis. *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, 1, 16.
- McKee, A. (2003). Textual analysis: A beginner's guide. *Textual analysis*, 1-160.
- Messerschmidt, J. W. (2019). The salience of “hegemonic masculinity”. *Men and masculinities*, 22 (1), 85-91.
- Morgan, D. (2005). Class and masculinity. *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, 165-177.
- Mueenuddin, D. (2009). *In other rooms, other wonders*. WW Norton & Company.
- Sadaf, S. (2014). Daniyal Mueenuddin's dying men. *South Asian History and Culture*, 5(4), 490-504.
- Safdar, M., & Yasmin, M. (2022). Muslim female subjectivity in Mohsin Hamid's how to get filthy rich in rising Asia: Disrupting the binary of the religious and the secular in Pakistan. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(6), 701.
- Schötz, B. (2020). “What Is a Man?”, or the Representation of Masculinity in Hanif Kureishi's Short Fiction. In *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*, Brill. 217-250.
- Shaheed, F. (2010). Contested identities: Gendered politics, gendered religion in Pakistan. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6), 855.
- Shamsie, M. (2017). *Hybrid tapestries*. Oxford University Press. 478-481
- Shamsie, M. (2010). The English Short Story in Pakistan: A Survey. *ARCHIV FUR DAS STUDIUM DER NEUEREN SPRACHEN UND LITERATUREN*, 247(1), 135-148.
- Stanovsky, D. (2007). Postcolonial masculinities. *International encyclopedia of men and masculinities*, 493-496.
- Strid, S., & Hearn, J. (2022). Violence and patriarchy. In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*. Academic press. (pp. 319-327).

- Tarrant, A. (2019). "Maturing" theories of ageing masculinities and the diverse identity work of older men in later life. In *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies* (pp. 192-200). Routledge.
- The Guardian. (2021. June 25). *Outrage after Pakistan PM Imran Khan blames rape crisis on women*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/25/outrage-after-pakistan-pm-imran-khan-blames-crisis-on-women>, n.p.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. Routledge, 83-113 UN Women. (n.d.). *Pakistan*
<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan>, n.p.
- Upstone, S. (2017). *Literary theory: a complete introduction*. Hachette UK. 164.
- Vance, N. (2011). Language, Gender & Reality. *GENDER ROLES & EQUALITY*, 33-40.
- World Economic Forum. (2022), *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, Insight Report. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf,
24