

LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND POLITICS: FEMINIST STYLISTICS IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF BENAZIR BHUTTO AND INDIRA GANDHI

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Abstract

In this study, we conduct a feminist stylistic analysis of the autobiographies of two leading South Asian female political prime ministers, Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi. Our aim is to understand how Bhutto and Gandhi narrated their identity by analyzing 'Daughter of the East' & Indira Gandhi: A Biography, and how they addressed patriarchy in their narratives. Using the feminist stylistics paradigm developed by Sara Mills, we examine how these leaders manage their political and personal identities through their use of style — at the lexical, sentence, and discourse levels. Our analysis reveals the deep penetration of patriarchal norms and the high rhetorical performance of feminists in addressing these challenges. The results of our study significantly contribute to feminist literary criticism and extend our knowledge of the nexus between politics, gender, and narrative ways of meaning.

Keywords: Autobiographies, Patriarchy, Feminism, Feministic stylistics.

Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that significant political figures' autobiographies are essential reading for comprehending how personal stories intersect with larger sociopolitical contexts. The autobiographies of Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi, two leading South Asian female political prime ministers, are particularly important in this regard. Authored in a region steeped in deep-seated patriarchal structures, these autobiographies provide a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of gender, power, and discourse (Jabeen & Afzal, 2023; Imran et al., 2023).

Autobiographies provide a window for writers' subconsciousness. By reading the writer's autobiography or autobiographical work, we can infer the direction of thoughts in his head (Imran & Ismail, 2022). Not only is this kind of information fascinating, but it may also be motivating and educational. (Wahab et al., 2021). Autobiography is a chronicle of a person's previous life. Autobiography describes a person's past experiences and incidents through their own lens. (Wahab et al., 2021). Women have been excluded from the exercise of power at higher levels, especially in governance, from all over the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia (Bhutto, 1988; Johnson-Sirleaf, 2009; Robinson, 2012)

Political communication should occur within the confines of socio-political discourse, although it has grown to become an archive of discriminatory and sexist content. Stereotypes about female leaders' leadership prevalent in political discourse are mostly responsible for gender trolling, which automatically categorizes women

according to a set of guidelines (Aaldering & Van Der Pas, 2018; Imran & Chen, 2020). Hence, it is not surprising that males are always labeled for positive characteristics, and women are designated as negative. Positive stereotypes are not challenging, whereas negative stereotypes are problematic and shape a male-biased mentality (Reutler, 2013). Pakistan and India's political traditions and practices continue to be dominated by men and unwelcome by women (Bhutto, 1988; Gandhi, 1982).

This research embarks on a meticulous and academically robust analysis from a feminist stylistic standpoint, focusing on the autobiographical works of two iconic South Asian political figures: Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi. Memoirs, autobiographies, journals, and biographies often contain the most insightful life lessons. Individuals who pen autobiographies typically have a compelling tale to share the ups and downs of their own lives, which is a singular and intriguing record that may be used to support a writer's identity in literary studies and retain its historical value as a first-person perspective. Autobiographical work was subjective. (Jayaannapurna, 2017). According to Cholakian (2000), women write to find their own identities through how they tell stories about their lives, projecting their sense of self.

Domna Stanton coined the term in the 1980s to categorize autobiographies authored by women. Her book, *The Female Autograph* (1984), emphasizes the importance of recognizing female autobiographies in conjunction with male writing. The introduction of "gyno" in the term "autobiography" foregrounds those women's autobiographies that are specific to women's observations. Through their remarkable works, they sketch themselves in autobiographies according to the rules of different cultures and socio-political lives. Stylistics can be explained as the study of the language of literary scripts, generally taking its theoretical prototypes from linguistics to assume this investigation Mills (2002 *Feminist stylistics*. P.4). (Verdonk, 2002) considers stylistics to be the study of language's portrayal of style, and it can also be explained as "the exploration of distinguishing expression in words and how its goal and consequences are portrayed." Stylistics analysis involves the analysis of different languages and texts to extract hidden meanings and messages from the text.

Therefore, the current study examined the common linguistic developments and patterns that authors of these autobiographies have used to demonstrate their social individualities and wisdom of self. This study, therefore, inspected language and gender in the nominated autobiographies. To my knowledge, no researcher has conducted any study on language and sexual characteristics in autobiographies transcribed by South Asian political females from a feminist stylistic perspective.

Objectives of the research:

- To analyze how Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi construct their identities in their autobiographies
- To explore the stylistic choices and rhetorical strategies employed by these leaders
- To examine the patriarchal challenges reflected in their writings

Research Questions

- How do Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi represent themselves in their autobiographies?

What stylistics and rhetorical strategies are used to construct their identities?

How are patriarchal challenges addressed in their narratives?

This research is significant because it unfolds writers' hidden meanings and choices. . Thus, studying language deeply enables us to understand its hidden meanings and perspectives. Therefore, the investigation of autobiographies at the word level and the unfolded discourse is quite significant. In addition, this dissertation contributes to growing research on autobiographical writings, specifically the writings of women. This highlights how women present their lives, both individually and socially. This work highlights the struggle of nominated women and adds a valuable contribution to existing literature on feministic stylistics.

Literature review

In recent years, examining autobiographical texts has garnered substantial interest in feminist literary criticism. Autobiographies offer a distinctive platform for individuals to express their life experiences, beliefs, and perspectives (Imran, 2019). According to Abdulkasoud (2012), an autobiographer is a virtuous person whose deeds serve as a model for society and culture. Feminist critics have taken an interest in the autobiographies of female writers. When well-known political individuals, especially women, write these memoirs, the stories transcend from personal narratives to the status of sociopolitical documentation.

Kunovich and Wall (2012) conducted a significant study that examined how female politicians' autobiographies were portrayed online regarding their gender identities. The current study explores a number of topics, such as the roles that mothers and spouses play, educational backgrounds, feminist identities, and martyrdom and selflessness in media.

This analysis revealed a consistent pattern in the manner in which women presented themselves to others (as well as... d ourselves) and that almost every time made reference to being among the oppressed. This different trajectory in autobiographical writing of female politicians suggests some societal trends. Abdurrahmani argues that black female autobiographers resist normative social patterns by choosing writing instead as a mechanism for the articulation of their subjectivity. As such, this essay historicizes the female appetite to speak by connecting the apogees of women's autobiographical production to moments when their address in public debate was particularly great within mainstream American literature.

In a more complex conversation, Azeem (2020) scrutinized the involvement of women in leadership, with an emphasis on Pakistan's political legend, Benazir Bhutto, as well as her heritage. Because she rose so quickly through the ranks after her father's assassination and became one of the most charismatic leaders in a critical era for Pakistan, Ms Bhutto is held up as an example. Bhutto-style leadership is distinctly unusual but effective at breaking domestic and international norms in the Pakistani context. The research will further discuss how Bhutto has offered women's empowerment with a view to utilizing her prime ministership to encourage and strengthen their status in the social, political, and economic spheres of Pakistani women's society.

Budha (2018) emphasized how Bhutto's autobiography depicts the complex interplay in post-partition Pakistan between discourse, power, and social dynamics. Focusing on her examination of the power dynamics and deceptive remarks made by General Zia. It explores how communication constructs knowledge to wield power, affecting both the governmental and private spheres. Examples of how jealousy and secrecy impact discourse creation and power dynamics, which in turn impact post-partition Pakistan and interpersonal relationships, are given by Benazir.

Ghani and Ali(2015) examine the rare instances of women assuming leadership roles in South Asia, citing renowned figures like Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi as examples. The purpose of this study is to clarify women's leadership characteristics in connection to their political environments, with a focus on variables like economic expansion, political party reorientation, and women's participation and empowerment.

Green (2013) conducted a comprehensive analysis of Indira Nehru Gandhi's life and political career, focusing on how her historical background influenced her disposition and equipped her to navigate the numerous political obstacles India faced throughout her tenure as prime minister. Gandhi's rise appeared to her service from 1966 to 1977 and subsequently from 1980 till her horrific death in 1984. This study focuses on a feministic stylistic analysis to recognize the linguistics strategies. Here's how these leaders used storytelling to shape and challenge gender norms within their communities. Through their autobiographical stories, we were able to track the vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns used in such distinct natures as a way of furthering our understanding of these patriarchal shadows that loomed over women's political aspirations. So, we shall make our way through this feministic stylistic analysis which shows us that these are not just stories about ourselves but they operate on a sociopolitical level as texts maneuvering the treacherous landscape of politics and gender (Akhtar & Hayat, 2021). The complex language narrative style and the feminist positions in these autobiographies describe a continuous struggle against patriarchy that it permits us to view behind the tensions and negotiations entailed political power (Imran, s. o.). By using these autobiographies as examples, we wanted to make a case for how this can be different, rendering visible throughout the illustrious academicians' hardships "in the shadow of patriarchy".

Theoretical framework

The autobiographical writings of female political leaders are the main subject of this work since they enable them to communicate their pain, share their experiences, challenges, and challenges, and take a stand (Moor 2015). Research techniques and designs are important for all types of research because they are utilized in previous research (Creswell, 2013). As a result, the frameworks, designs, methods, and tools chosen had a greater impact on the current field of research in this dissertation. The published autobiographies of two South Asian women who were elected as the first female leaders of their respective states are examined in this dissertation. The autobiographies of these ladies were picked for a number of reasons: They are notable for being the first elected female leaders of their nations and for their expressive writing styles and astute observations in their fields, which have drawn a lot of scholarly

attention. Furthermore, they were successful in gaining a significant position in politics, their pertinent sector, despite being a minority. (Rhee and Sigler, 2015; Cook and Glass, 2014; Powell and Butterfield, 2011).

Women were chosen from a different era with markedly different political, social, and cultural norms, which can reveal the subtler ways in which gendered norms affect people's lives. According to Dar and Masroor (2020), women also talk about how they respond to criticism from peers and constituents as well as reasons for their political opportunities and decisions.

Data

Indira Gandhi, the first female prime minister of India, authored a book called *Indira Gandhi on her experiences*. a Papul Jayakar biography. This book was authored by one of Indira Gandhi's closest friends. She was a well-known writer, a congress activist, and Indira Gandhi's cultural advisor. She was also close to the Gandhi family. The chronological order of Jayakar's book starts with her early years. It is broken up into eight chapters that cover her childhood, adolescence, marriage, and leadership. Her three terms as India's prime minister, spanning from January 1966 to June 1975, are covered in three chapters of the book.

DAUGHTER OF EAST (1988)

"*Daughter of the East*," written by Benazir Ali Bhutto, was released in 1988. This autobiography has two divisions, and each section is further broken into fifteen chapters. "The Years of Detention" is the first section in which she talks about how her life started, how her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was killed on April 4, 1979, how she spent multiple periods of house arrest and jail time, and how her support system and connections throughout the world helped her survive. In the second portion, "Taking on the Dictator," she chronicles her journey to become the first female prime minister. She discussed her journey to become the country's first female prime minister.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

In order to investigate how the selected women used language to shape their sense of self, their relationships with others, both personally and professionally, and their political and social environments, this dissertation uses autobiographical texts. The initial steps in the procedures include reading the data, coding for noteworthy patterns or themes, obtaining the tables, obtaining the information from the figures, and analyzing the results in the tables or figures (Creswell, 2013). Women have experienced injustice, discrimination, and subjugation throughout history. This kind of behavior led to a movement among women who wanted to alter how women were treated. The term "feminism" refers to this phenomenon. The scientific examination of a text is known as stylistics. Depending on their goals, stylistics can take several forms, such as literary stylistics, linguistic stylistics, feminist stylistics, etc.

Feminist stylistics as a means of feminist analysis of texts. This framework looks at the ratio of one gender's dominance over the other and the imbalance of power. According to Mills (1995, p. 13), feminist stylistics downplay the importance of language's aesthetic viewpoint. The choice of feminist stylistics over alternative feminist models found in literature can be attributed to several factors. First, feminist stylistics does not marginalize the significance of specifically gendered identities and

the social inequities to which they contribute, as conventional critical discourse approaches do (Walsh, 2001, p. 27). The feminist stylistics model proposed by Mills is a bottom-up approach. The analysis was done at multiple tiers. Word level is the first, phrase level is the second, and discourse level is the third. Text analysis was conducted across all levels.

The comparative analysis of feminist stylistics in the autobiographies of Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi, based on *Daughter of the East* by Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi: *A Biography* by Pupul Jayakar, presents a comprehensive examination of the portrayal of gender roles and political power in these texts. It elucidates significant insights into patriarchal language and its influence on South Asian female political leaders.

Feminist Stylistics Framework

The feminist stylistics model developed by Sara Mills was used to evaluate both texts, with particular attention paid to language, discourse, and gender representation at the lexical, sentence, and discourse levels. This paradigm looks at how the writers' language choices support or contradict patriarchal standards and how female leaders like Bhutto and Gandhi navigate political environments dominated by men.

Lexical Analysis

Benazir Bhutto:

Bhutto's autobiography *Daughter of the East* also has its moments of gender-bias — especially in her description of relationships with men — that underscores a point, even though women like Bhutto (and others before and after her) rebelliously defy North American expectations, South Asian society still expects women to behave in very consolidated ways. Bhutto then feels scared and helpless when men enter her room without permission—I can't show you a man sloppily scrubbing the sole of his boot on her carpet; maybe it's because Bhutto is supposed to be one of the most powerful people in Pakistan, but really, I think the phrase "Pity" then changing it to "terrified" are the only ways anyone ever saw Bhutto as a woman: as vulnerable. The words suggest pre-conceived ideas of what a particular gender should behave like, in women's case, submissive and obedient. She points out the double standards to which she is held, by way of example, her marital status; single men in her position do not have to answer similar charges, Bijani said. She films when reporters ask people about her single state, highlighting the glaring sexism that perpetuates the belief that women are inferior when they lack a man. Whereas men are never asked to.

Indira Gandhi.

Contrary to that, the biography Pupul Jayakar of Indira Gandhi epitomized a woman who went against all societal norms. However, she is cross-examined by patriarchy. The language she uses to justify her actions, such as that her father doesn't like fairy stories, reflects social notions of intellectual pursuit as primarily the province of men. Examples of the emotional strain on women in leadership are phrases like "miserable" or "resented"), juxtaposed with Gandhi's emotional struggles. Gandhi's leadership style is seen as weak; we wish to point out that this limitation of his emotional sensitivity reflects not merely the ubiquity of male leadership as normal but also an interrogation of authority denoting female control.

Sentence level Analysis

Both memoirs use phrase structures and metaphors that reveal deeply rooted gender bias at the sentence level.

Benazir Bhutto:

Many of Bhutto's autobiographical statements are explicitly patriarchal. Like in diplomatic circles, agreement: "A boy has been born," or no agreement. "a girl is born." This is a great metaphor for how women are undervalued in our society and how even having a girl child has a stigma attached to it. Bhutto provided countless examples of how patriarchy can be applied to subdue women zip-patriarch (woman)l. She is pointing to the masses in a way that she is likened to Mussolini, thus killing her charismatic ruling persona through a comparison of man to woman ruler, symbolizing how women are not normal when it comes to power.

Indira Gandhi

Her presentation contains metaphors that could delegitimize the authority of Gandhi. So when political enemies call her a "dumb doll" or liken her to a "concussed boxer," they are letting loose how emotive an impression of her they have allowed themselves to create. As if that language could muddle her image of herself and paint a picture of emotions instead of a boss. Similarly, describing her opponents as only "Mrs. Gandhi" rather than the appropriate title of "Prime Minister" represents a scoff at her realm of politics and instead emphasizes that she is wed to Feroze Gandhi. How gendered titles can be employed to undermine the leading women's roles casually?

Discourse-Level Analysis

The discourse level of both autobiographies addresses the idea of women's responsibilities in politics and how patriarchal assumptions in society shape these positions.

Benazir Bhutto:

Benazir Bhutto: The story of Bhutto exemplifies how patriarchy still exists in our South Asian nations. Her leadership is framed in discussions by the fight she waged within gendered norms. This book is a memoir of Benazir Bhutto, detailing her personal struggles and providing a host of anecdotes on the gender inequality at play in all of our lives — from how we view unmarried women) (and examine their emotions). The use of dismissive, condescending language all across echoes just how little room women are allowed to claim authority unencumbered by patriarchy.

Indira Gandhi:

Indira Gandhi: This speech is a reflection of Gandhi's struggles to resist patriarchal standards in her biography. Gandhi is portrayed as having little influence even though she is one of the most important leaders in Indian history, as being emotionally open to criticism and has her leadership questioned by men in her generation. For example, Atal Bihari Vajpayee describes her as someone who "was unable to accept criticism. "By demonstrating how female leaders are frequently unfairly judged using criteria that are not applicable to male executives, he perpetuates the stereotype that women are overly sensitive. The account also illustrates how Gandhi's opponents used her femininity as a

tool to undercut her authority, especially with disparaging remarks like "going gorilla" (Dumb doll), highlighting the fact that women are still subject to discrimination even in positions of authority.

Comparative Analysis

Contrasting the feminist-style representations of Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto, it is apparent that in the public sphere, as democratic politicians, both leaders were individuals navigating through a political environment created by patriarchal systems. These autobiographies set out how women undergo marginalization regarding the lexicon, metaphors, and dialogue used even at high-level offices. You see, her own portrait of Gandhi is more about the personal cost of leadership but also how Bhutto's gender was leveraged against her by male opponents — and then you also have their story to provide a gripping narrative on Bhutto as an unmarried woman in politics respectively fighting and ignoring societal expectations.

Despite the differences in style and strategy of both leaders, they illustrate that patriarchy is not just a semiotic feature of narratives by South Asian female political actors but is endemic to them more broadly (Imran & Hart, 2018). With the aid of Sara Mills's feminist stylistic framework, we demonstrate how language proves to be an effective tool for perpetuating and, indeed, naturalizing gender inequality. These autobiographies not only lay bare the pervasively entrenched gendered cultural norms that still influence and warp understandings of female leadership but also provide us with some of our most compelling portraits of Bhutto and Gandhi, who are simultaneously women as well as political giants. In that sense, not just in terms of the personal but also in the struggle to find room for political action within their femininity, we should see both leaders as connected forces whose legacies contribute new layers to our conversation on women in power and about politically imposed gender.

Autobiographies are among the most critical genres for their insight into understanding how gender, identity formation, and politics work together to provide a coherent network of hierarchy of power within the realm of political leadership across South Asia. This is what this paper, "Language, Gender, and Politics: Feminist Stylistics in the Autobiographies of Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi," also means. Using a feminist stylistic analysis, the study details Bhutto and Gandhi's unique narrative methods and linguistic techniques to bypass and resist the patriarchal restrictions of their societies. This article argues that the autobiographical genre served Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto to assert their individual and political selves vis-à-vis received gender norms and social conventions by conducting a close reading of both narratives — "Indira Gandhi: A Biography" by Pupul Jayakar, and *Daughter of the East*.

Bhutto's story, in this context, is one of the challenges she experienced as a woman leader in Pakistan and how social criticism could even seep into her personal life: frequent rumors that she was single (she got married at 29) were used as deadpan proof of her political callousness. When compared to the assessment of her male counterparts, Gandhi's portrayal, however, accentuates the personal trials and tribulations as well as the sexist oppression she faced, differences that are often regarded in interpreting his leadership. However, they both used their autobiographies to challenge social norms and gendered expectations back in India and Pakistan, respectively, as well as articulate a political self on the page. Gandhi delves into the implications

of such gendered appraisals and their emotional and psychological bearings, while Bhutto tackles society's judgments on a whole new level linked to her personal life. As a whole, these stories provide support for feminist literary criticism (...) by demonstrating how powerful autobiographical accounts of political leadership can be used both to articulate and contest its gendered dynamics.

Comparative exercises such as this one confirm the potential of literary autobiographical writing not to solve but to articulate and exploit political ("race," in Kallen's day; "gender" and the like more recently), which targets a specific area of feminist criticism. The paper contributes to contemporary scholarship by expanding the existing work on how women leaders use language and style strategically as they perform their roles under patriarchal political conditions. The results suggest the importance of autobiographies as a source to analyze story strategies used by female politicians to challenge stereotypes and construct their public personae. In short, the study reflects that even today women have still to grapple with the ramifications of Bhutto and Gandhi in terms of what is expected of them politically, but it also informs our broader understanding of how gender shapes politics and how narrative methods articulate such relationships. In turn, it adds to the burgeoning literature on gender and the power dynamics of political discourse by promoting greater academic study of how women in leadership positions leverage narrative techniques that are counter to patriarchal frameworks and aid them in their project of self-construction.

Through this very study, "Language, Gender, and Politics: Feminist Stylistics in the Autobiographies of Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi", we can see how autobiographies aid women to negotiate with patriarchal perches that surround them. This investigation relies upon a comparative textual analysis of the autobiographical texts of Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto to illustrate how these two iconic post-independence women leaders skillfully used discourse and narrative strategies with both references to orality, gendered stereotypes in Indian politics, as well as authentication of the self against others. The biographies of Bhutto and Gandhi illuminate the paradoxes between gender requirements and political leadership, providing veritable stories about their strategically targeted public reactions, focusing on the unique challenges faced by women in positions of power in male societies.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis widens the reach of literary studies on women's writing generally and feminist literary criticism more specifically. However, it also points to the possibilities of autobiographical writing as polemic and creative resistance — not only speaking back through personal narrative against cultural expectations but also changing them in a way that benefits society itself. By providing some clear evidence about narrative and how it might capture the complex connection between gender, identity, and power, this study adds to an expanding literature. It also opens up many possibilities for scholarship on how women across different venues are writing their way into new positions and challenging patriarchal boundaries. The findings provide an expanded recognition of the potential for the narrative to contribute to change and avenues for additional research on how women's stories may help advance our understanding and dialogue about gender and leadership within a global context.

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