MEGA INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies
ISSN Print 2959-0957 ISSN Online 2959-0965
Volume 4 Issue 7 2026
Pages 279-292
Open Access

Gendered Power and Disability: A Critical Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's *Geometry of God*

Publication Details
Paper Received:
May 14, 2026
Paper Accepted:
July 21, 2026
Paper Published:
July 23, 2026

Dr. Saadia Siddique
Sessional Instructor, Department of Philosophy, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program, University of Calgary, Canada.
Email: saadia.siddique@ucalgary.ca
Dr. Rab Nawaz Khan
Associate Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan.
Email: rabnawaz@awkum.edu.pk/rabnawaznuml@gmail.com

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.71281/jals.v4i7.712

Abstract
The study focuses on the ways gendered power is (ab)used between characters with disabilities and characters without disabilities in a Pakistani socio-cultural discourse. The study is delimited to the analysis of Uzma Aslam Khan's Geometry of God. It utilizes feminist critical discourse views of M.M. Lazar as conceptual framework and critical stylistics by Lesley Jeffries as methodological/analytical framework. The study highlights that male characters in the novel use various linguistic tools and strategies, such as choice of nouns, choice of verbs, equating and contrasting, prioritizing, assuming, modality, negation, direct and indirect speech, and deictic elements to assert gendered power on a blind female character, Mehwish. The study reveals the intersection of gender, power and disability in the selected text. In the novel, Mehwish becomes an easier victim of sexism because of her gender as well as her disability. The male characters in the novel fail to understand that Mehwish's identity is not fixed by her disability. They demean her abilities through insensitive words and do not approve her entitlement to be a strong and independent woman.
Keywords: Gendered Power, Disability, Intersectionality, Feminist Critical Discourse Views, Critical Stylistics, Pakistani Fiction.

Published by MIARD. Copyright: © the author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) license (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/ 4.0/).

1. Background of the Study

This study is focused on the analysis of gendered power and disability in the selected novel. Power is defined as the ability to cause an effect, such as control, domination, authority, influence, etc. It benefits an individual in having respect,

preferential treatment, promotion, social interaction, economic resources, and social influence. Power cannot be defined as good or bad. The way it is used makes it useful or abusive. Similarly, not using power in certain situations can be seen as abusing power. Gender and power are intrinsically related. Gender is the major system through which power not only restricts people, but also constitutes them. It falls under the category of invisible power that exists in the most persistent form. Koester (2015, p.1) writes that "gender is one of the most persistent causes, consequences, and manifestation of power relations. Understanding gender can therefore significantly enhance our understanding of power and vice versa." She further highlights that some debates on power revolve around power relations that are directly observable and are conferred through formal institutions and decision-making. While others focus on the hidden ways powerful participants shape these processes by controlling the ones who participate in the discussion and decision-making (Koster, 2015). Shepherd (2010) writes that one cannot ignore the ways in which gender informs and influences the practices of world politics. According to her, "gender is . . . not only a noun (i.e., an identity) and a verb, (i.e., a way to look at the world, as in the phrase gendering global politics'), but also a logic, which is produced by and productive of the ways in which we understand and perform global politics" (Shepherd, 2010, p. 5). The realization, that men and women differ anatomically and socially, has led to different uses of gender. It is interesting to highlight that within these debates, the holistic understanding of gender is difficult. Butler (1988, p. 519) writes that "[g]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts." She highlights that gender is a performance with cultural survival at its end. Therefore, gender is constructed, and it repeatedly conceals its origin. There is an unspoken agreement between subjects to perform and maintain distinct genders as

cultural fictions are hidden by its own construction. Sex is a biological category, while gender is a cultural performance. Hence, to be a woman is to become one, i.e., to force the body, talk and behavior to conform to the historical idea of a woman, to make the body a cultural symbol, and to be involved in a historically delimited possibility. It is noteworthy that individuals, who fail to perform their gender roles, are often punished (Butler, 1988).

The purpose of this study is to highlight the role of gendered power in the lives of Pakistani women with disabilities. Writers, like Morris (1993) and Vernon (1997), argue that Disability Rights Movement has overlooked the needs and issues of women with disabilities. Women with disabilities have also shown dissatisfaction towards feminist movements. In Pakistan, feminist movements, like Aurat March, an annual feminist demonstration held every year (since 2018) on International Women's Day, have highlighted various issues, such as child abuse, domestic violence, forced marriages, honor killings, violence against trans-community, etc. Unfortunately, Aurat March has failed to acknowledge the issues faced by women with disabilities in Pakistan. It is pertinent to highlight that women with disabilities are subject to patriarchal oppression and are often victims of sexual discrimination. While the academic discussions about disability in Pakistani context have only just begun, the experiences and voices of Pakistani women with disabilities have received little to no consideration.

2. Conceptual Framework

This study uses feminist critical discourse views of M. M. Lazar (2005) as conceptual framework to explore how gendered power is abused in the selected discourse, raising issues of gender, power and disability. Traditional feminist views have failed to consider the intersectional nature of gender oppression. It views women's experiences in universal terms. Different systems of oppression and privilege, like gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc. do not exist

separate from each other; rather they have complex interwoven relationships (Crenshaw, 1989). Although CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) is concerned with investigation of different forms of social inequality, Lazar (2005) proposes the need for feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) to study discrimination against women. Feminist critical discourse study critically examines the different cultural and institutional contexts in which "taken-for-granted social assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, perpetuated, negotiated and challenged" (Lazar, 2005, pp. 1-2).

According to Lazar (2005), the role of feminist critical discourse analyst is to critique those discourses that sustain patriarchal social order since such a system privileges men as social group and subjugates women as social group. In her work, she reveals that gender ideology is hegemonic in the sense that it seems normal, natural, and hence, acceptable to all. This goal of making gender ideology as consensual is achieved largely through "discursive means, especially in the ways ideological assumptions are constantly re-enacted and circulated through discourse as commonsensical and natural" (Lazar, 2005, p. 7).

3. Research Method for Data Analysis

The study utilizes tools of critical stylistics, given by Lesley Jeffries (2010) as methodological framework. Critical Stylistics is a branch of Applied Linguistics that is primarily grounded on the works of Jeffries (2010). It has introduced a set of tools which are much more inclusive and viably applicable on data under study. According to Jeffries (2010), the main objective of critical stylistics is to provide a complex set of tools to understand the power of written and spoken texts and to provide an explanation of the ways in which readers might be affected by the text's ideological structure. The suitability of critical stylistics to the present study is justified as it is the latest version of critical inquiry in literature, and it involves the use of an amalgamation of various tools borrowed from M. Halliday's textual

analysis (1971), Paul Simpson's stylistics (1993) and Norman Fairclough's CDA (1989).

The first tool of naming and describing in critical stylistics explores how texts name the world. The tool of representing actions/events/states focuses on meaning that is related to verbal element of the sentence or clause. While equating and contrasting tool deals with how texts create new synonyms and antonyms, exemplifying and enumerating focus on different kinds of lists. The tool of prioritizing deals with recognizing the part of the sentence prioritized by the discourse producer. The tool of implying and assuming relies on the idea that English language has the "ability to use assumption and implication to make ideologies appear to be common sense" (Jeffries, 2010, p. 93). Jeffries concludes that presuppositions are text-based; hence cannot be cancelled in negated form. However, implicatures are more easily cancelled. The tool of negating highlights the process of negation in discourse. Negation can be established through pronouns, such as none, nothing, nobody, etc. Negation can also be introduced through the semantics of the words used by speakers. The tool of hypothesizing asserts that whenever a speaker expresses his/her opinions, regarding the truth or desirability of an event, the resulting situation becomes hypothetical. The tool of presenting other's speech and thoughts focuses on how the narrating voice of the text mediates the speech and thoughts of participants of a discourse. The tool of representing time, space and society highlights how time and space create the text world. The last tool, speech acts, deals with meaning and function of the speech acts.

Discursive Construction and Representation of Gendered Power and Disability

Passage I

The selected lines have been taken from the chapter, titled 'gateway the third: the word.' The lines are narrated from the point of view of Mehwish. They occur in a context where Amal, Mehwish and Omar are watching a blind cricket match at Mehwish's school. Mehwish has brought flowers for her teacher, Miss Amna. They could not find her, so Amal suggests that they should give them to Miss Fauzia instead, since she is tired of carrying them. Omar laughs and suggests that he will carry them for her. The discourse highlights the issue of gender, power, and disability in the novel.

[1] "I'll carry them," says the voice I do not know laughing. [2] I do not like pee pull laughing at me thinking I am deaf.

[3] "*No.*"

[4] "Oof! She's a firecracker!" (Khan, 2008, p.155; italics in original).

Identification and Labeling of Critical Stylistic Tools

1) **Naming and Describing**: Choice of nouns or referring to ("firecracker"), noun modification, i.e., pre-modifiers and post-modifiers ("deaf")
2) **Representing Actions/Events/ States**: Material action intentional ("carry"), mental reaction ("like"), verbalization (""I'll carry them," says the voice . . . ")
3) **Equating and Contrasting**: Metaphorical equivalence ("She's a firecracker")
4) **Assuming and Implying**: Implicature ("She's a firecracker")
5) **Negating**: "not," "*No*"
6) **Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of other Participants:** Direct speech ("I'll carry them, says the voice")
7) **Representing Time, Space and Society**: Deixis of person ("I," "she")
8) **Speech Acts**: Commissives ("I'll carry them")

Critical Stylistic Analysis

Critical stylistic analysis of the selected lines highlights how gender intersects with disability. In sentence 1, Omar using MAI 'carry' offers Mehwish that he will hold the flowers for her. Though Mehwish has a disability, through an MR ('like') she highlights that she does not appreciate other people offering help to her just because she is blind. She likes to do her chores herself and no longer accepts help even from her sister, Amal. In Pakistani society, it is a common perception that women are helpless and need men's help. Mehwish fails to understand that it is not just her blindness that puts limitations on her movement; it is her gender as well. Later incidents in the novel prove that she is doubly oppressed, i.e., because of her gender, as well as her blindness. Since transitivity offers different options, so the discourse producer suppresses some possibilities. In other words, the lexical verbs used present the situation in a way that the novelist desires. In sentence 2, she asserts that she is offended when she hears Omar laughing at her. She asserts that she may be blind, but not deaf. So, she can feel when a man mocks at her. Use of the word '*No*' (negation) shows her refusal to accept Omar's offer. The use of negation makes the reader aware of an imaginative scenario that is not taking place but presumably may have taken place in other situations. Here, it is a reference to a scenario where Mehwish accepts Omar's help. This version of the situation created in the mind of the reader is clearly at odds with the one confirmed in the selected discourse. The use of implicature ('she's a firecracker') not only reflects Omar's opinion about assertive women but also indicates the general thinking of Pakistani men for whom hearing a '*No*' from a woman is unacceptable. Sentence 4 highlights how different metaphors (such as 'firecracker') are used to demean and belittle strong independent women. Words like these are coined by sexist men and women who want to diminish the spirits of women with minds of their own. In Pakistani society, most men expect women to behave like mindless creatures.

Any woman, who speaks her mind and has opinion about things, is declared a 'firecracker.' The word is also used to sexualize a woman who is lively, adventurous and energetic. In contrast, a man with similar characteristics is considered as a leader. Here, Omar is snatching Mehwish's right to be a strong, confident, proud woman. His words are insensitive and do not promote respect and understanding. He fails to understand that having a disability does not make someone an inspiration, a hero, a saint, or a victim. 'Well meaning' people like Omar assume that all people with disabilities need help, which becomes a source of frustration and irritation for the latter. The use of metaphorical equivalence in the selected lines shows the capacity of discourses to create equivalence between words/things that are not related.

In the selected lines, the use of direct speech makes the discourse more authentic and reliable. Moreover, it indicates that the idea does not belong to the novelist, but to original speakers. In this case, the discourse producer directly quotes the conversation between Mehwish and Omar. The deixis of person ('I,' 'she') in the selected lines create a discourse world in the mind of the reader. Hence, various linguistic tools are used by a participant of the selected discourse to abuse gendered power during conversation.

Passage II

The selected lines are narrated from the point of view of Mehwish. They occur in a context where Mehwish is sitting at her school's bookstore waiting for Baba, an old man, who looks after the books. While eating her lunch, a young man enters the shop and tries to sexually assault Mehwish. She escapes from the shop but suffers injuries from hitting a wall. The discourse highlights how women with disabilities are more vulnerable to sexual violence.

[1] "I do not *want* to touch you"

[2] "You will never get a second chance. [3] Have you *seen* yourself?" [4] He laughs.

[5] He moves my hand, down his onion neck, buttons are open, hairy. [6] "Stop it!" [7] I pull.

[8] My wrist twists his voice changes. [9] "Which part don't you like? [10] This? [11] Or this?"

[12] . . . "Don't be afraid. Nothing you can do. [13] The door is, shut."

[14] . . . "Relax! Enjoy your only chance!" (Khan, 2008, pp. 229-230, italics in original).

Identification and Labeling of Critical Stylistic Tools

1) **Naming and Describing**: Choice of nouns or referring to ("chance," "neck," "wrist," "voice," "door"), noun modification, i.e., pre-modifiers and post-modifiers ("onion," "hairy")
2) **Representing Actions/Events/States**: Material action intentional ("laughs," "moves," "pull"), mental reaction ("*want*"), circumstantial relations ("The door is shut")
3) **Hypothesizing**: epistemic modality ("will")
4) **Negating**: "not," "never," "nothing," "don't"
5) **Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of other Participants:** Direct speech: ("Stop it")
6) **Representing Time, Space and Society**: Deixis of place ("down," "this," "that"), deixis of person ("I," "he," "you")
7) **Speech Acts**: Declaratives ("Which part don't you like?", "Stop it!")

Critical Stylistic Analysis

Critical stylistic analysis of the selected lines highlights the issue of gendered power and disability. In sentence 1, through an MR ('*want'*) Mehwish highlights

her refusal to touch the young man who has come to Baba's shop in his absence. The negation 'not' indicates her rejection of his offer. She is clearly not giving her consent. The man, however, refuses to understand her rejection. As for him, a woman's consent has no value. The use of negation makes the reader aware of an imaginative scenario that is not taking place but presumably may have taken place in other circumstances. Here, the reference is to a situation where Mehwish accepts his offer. This version of the situation created in the mind of reader is clearly at odds with the one confirmed in the selected discourse. The MR '*want*' in sentence 1 is italicized by the novelist in order to prioritize the information. The important information in this case is also put in the last part of the clause. Hence, the reader knows where to look for salient information.

In sentence 2, the young man uses the phrase 'second chance' to highlight his belief that this is Mehwish's only chance to be with a man. The epistemic modality 'will' in sentence 2 shows his view of a possible future. As he further says in sentence 3 'have you *seen* yourself?' The MP '*seen*' in sentence 3 is italicized by the novelist to prioritize the information. Here, the word '*seen*' is a reference to the information that Mehwish is blind. According to him, her disability makes her unpleasing in the eyes of others. In other words, he believes that due to her blindness, no man will ever want to be with her. She will never be considered for marriage or viewed as a suitable partner. Hence, in his view, forced sexual encounters are her only chance to feel intimacy. The young man assumes that women with disabilities are unable to have healthy fulfilling relationships. Unfortunately, in most cases, their partners are assumed to be their carers. The novelist uses MAI 'laughs' in sentence 4 to indicate how the young man makes fun of Mehwish's disability.

The use of declarative 'Stop it!' by Mehwish in sentence 6 shows her refusal to consent. Unfortunately, in Pakistani society, many women find themselves in

sexual encounters where their consent is not involved. In this case, Mehwish's gender, as well as her disability makes her an easier target in the eyes of the young man. Here, it is important to mention that the young man assumes that Mehwish desires his touch. He fails to understand that when it comes to sexual consent, there are no blurred lines, i.e., 'no' means no and 'yes' means yes only. Any sort of pressure involved makes the act non-consensual. Here, he tries to threaten and coerce her to agree. As transitivity offers different options, so the novelist suppresses some possibilities. In other words, the lexical verbs (e.g., 'touch,' '*seen,*' 'laughs,' 'moves,' 'pull') used present the situation in a way that the novelist desires.

In sentence 12, he uses negation 'nothing' to refer to Mehwish's helplessness. Not only Mehwish is a woman, alone in the presence of an older man, but also blind, and the door is shut. Hence, there is no way she can escape the evil intentions of the young man. The use of circumstantial relation ('The door is shut') in sentence 13 by the discourse producer indicates that the two are alone, and nobody can come inside. In other words, the young man can exploit the situation to his benefit. If she calls for help, no one will come to her rescue. Here, the image of her disability is intensified by her gender, resulting in intensified passivity and helplessness. The use of adverb 'only' in sentence 14 further highlights the young man's belief that Mehwish will, forever, be alone due to her disability.

The use of direct speech in the selected lines makes the discourse more authentic and reliable. Moreover, it indicates that the idea does not belong to the novelist, but to original speakers. The reader is often aware of interference of the narrator and understands the distance between them and the original speaker. In case of indirect speech, they automatically conclude that the narrator is hiding some information. In this case, the discourse producer directly quotes the

conversation between Mehwish and the young man. Since it is a direct speech, it is not up for debate. Different linguistic tools have been used by a participant of the selected discourse to promote gender discrimination and to abuse gendered power. It is an unfortunate reality that girls and women with disabilities in Pakistan have the lowest literacy rates as well as the lowest employment rates. Experiences of sexual harassment at schools and academic institutions further discourage them to pursue education.

In the novel, Mehwish's older sister, Amal, inquires if something is wrong, but Mehwish hides her experience of sexual harassment. In Pakistan, girls and women with disabilities are much less likely to report violence because of multiple reasons. Some of these reasons are inaccessibility to police stations, financial dependence on abuser, communication barriers, social taboos, and lack of socio-psychological support.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the issue of gendered power and disability in *Geometry of God* by Uzma Aslam Khan, using feminist critical discourse views of M. M. Lazar as conceptual framework and critical stylistics as methodical framework. Critical study of the selected novel reveals the plight of women with disabilities in Pakistani society. The novel reveals systemic violence against female characters with disabilities. In the novel, Mehwish suffers from both sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of male characters. Male characters use various linguistic tools, such as choice of nouns, choice of verbs, equating and contrasting, prioritizing, assuming, modality, negation, direct and indirect speech, and deictic elements to assert gendered power during conversation. It can be argued that Pakistani women with disabilities face complex forms of discrimination that cannot be fully understood if viewed purely through a lens of gender or disability. Analysis of the novel also unveils various misconceptions

attached with Pakistani women with disabilities. It is assumed that they are fragile, cannot be independent, lack the desire and ability to have relationships, do not want to enjoy their femininity, and have interests different from women without disabilities.

Disclosure:

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

Funding:

This research received no external funding.

References

Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. Theatre Journal, 40 (4), 519-531. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracial politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, (1), 139-167.

Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and power. New York: Longman Group.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1971). Linguistics structure and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's The Inheritors. In S. Chatman (Ed.), Literary Style: A Symposium (pp. 332-334). New York: Academic Press.

Jeffries, L. (2010). Critical stylistics: The power of English. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Khan, U. A. (2009). Geometry of God. United States: Clockroot.

Koester, D. (2015). Gender and power. Development Leadership Program,4. Retrieved from http://publications.dlprog.org/Gender&Power.pdf.

Lazar, M. M. (Ed.). (2005). Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morris, J. (1993). Gender and disability. Disability Barriers-Enabling Environments, edited by John Swain, Vic Finkelstein,Sally French, and Mike Oliver, 85-92. London: Sage.

Shepherd, L. J. (2010). Sex or gender? Bodies in world politics and why gender matters. In L. J. Shepherd (Ed.), Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations (pp. 3-16). London, LDN: Routledge. Retrieved from http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415453882/pdf/chapter1_gender_matters.pdf.

Simpson, P. (1993). Language, ideology and point of view. London: Routledge.

Vernon, A. (1997) Multiple oppression: A Minority interest or a majority experience? Paper presented at City University, London, London, January.