

**Investigating gender subversion: Bridging the blur through
Shinwari and Colfer's depiction of women survival in Pashtun Afghan culture
and American culture**

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Abstract:

The paper attempted to investigate the gender subversion of the stereotyped ideas of female subjugation and male domination in society. The paper portrayed marginalization and dislocation of women in the far end communities of the world. Shinwari's (a Pashto Afghan author) and Colfer's (American author) depiction of women's endeavor of survival through gender subversion among the ideologies of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority, provided the subject of investigation. Butler's (1999) theory of gender subversion provided the theoretical framework to investigate, through textual analysis, the characters of Zarlasta from *Modern Woman* (Shinwari, 2013, *The Rain*) and Charlotte Bailey from *The Enchantress Returns* (Colfer, 2013) for the study. The paper measured how far the female characters are successful in remonstrating against the gender stereotypes to gain personal liberty, power of expression and empowerment. The findings revealed that women, despite cultural context, endeavor to subvert gender which provided them with proper strength and vigor to protest against the hegemonic patriarchal norms. The two authors portray women who equip themselves with proper education and social status and thus, establish their protest against the men folk in society. The results cannot be generalized, but they lead to diverse results of subversion, a final acceptance and a final submission, after the determined struggle.

Key words: Gender, subversion, Pashto culture, women depiction, women survival.

Introduction:

Sex and gender describes role execution in society. It involves the division of humanity into male and female gender with particular roles. Traditionally, man subjugated the general communal parameter. Marvin Harris, 1977, defines that it was due to man's physical strength (Khan et al. 2015, p. 15). He further argues that in past, societies were structured in small groups to secure their dwelling and station from rivals, needing physically strong individuals for display of power, command and courage, as compared to women. Thus, the males arose as rescuers and females turned out to be possessions for the tough and the influential. Consequently, women are indulged in tasks like cooking, clearing, grating, firewood, and nurturing. This

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prehistoric attitude is trusted by Harris, to still be persistent and it survives with an inferior consideration for women. Contrarily, Lemer (1986) delineates the dearth of healthcare system and the survival challenge in pre historic times, as essential to gender roles. Woman was confined to her pregnancy and nursing roles. Whereas, man's role was destined to hunt, skill, contest, making it a justification behind his power in community sphere. Huber (1990) added that men controlled the matters and demoted women to minor station in social organization. Contrarily, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, 1986, disagrees that biology is the answer to gender differences. She suggests that differences are social factors and in social control. She elucidates that in earlier societies gender roles were less demarcated and less severe. Whereas, in contemporary world, rigidly prescribed social agencies are responsible for segregated gender roles (Khan et al. 2015, p. 15).

Actually, the anthropological stance of cultural conditioning shows that the culture plays its role by shaping approaches, actions, social practices and the gender roles, without determining if biology or nature have determined the differences in role to be played. Contrarily, the focus had been on discovering the cultural traits of life that shape behavior by providing dissimilar identity through socialization and cultural habituation through generations. The base of every society rests on its particular culture. E.B. Tyler, 1871, elucidates that culture is the complete package of the information, views, talent, ethics, rules, trends and other abilities and behaviors developed by man as an adherent of a specific civilization (as cited in Khan et al. 2015, p. 14). It grows into a style and design of life that is erudite, joint and conveyed into next generations. Complexity occurs with the passage of time in the social and cultural relations of people, changing the cultural viewpoint and bringing variations in human associations and related gender roles. Culture is the medium of transformation of these gender roles, thus, creating a unique personality.

However, the term gender and its application and connotation is the result of the feminist post-structuralism. The focus, in particular, has been on the particular procedures whereby the persons are made the gendered subjects, turning it noticeable, analyzable and revisable, in specific, the man/woman, male/female binaries, which map on to other binaries like grown-up/child, ordinary/anomalous, sensible/insensible. The analysis of texts shows how relations of power are built and upheld by surrendering to regularity, prudence and naturalness, which are considered dominant terms in any binary, and in contrast, how the subordinated terms are marked as other, as missing, and irrational (Davies & Gannon, 2005).

Literature review:

Gender and its subversion:

The words sex and gender offer the elementary context for any feminist theory and are means of labeling the variances among women and men. Both the terms are inter changeable, always moving and generating new variations in meaning (Glover & Kaplan, 2009, p. 1).

Butler (2002), however, suggests that how gender and sex are generally talked and thought about, and thus, tend to, assume and anticipate the options of conceivable and attainable gender formations inside a culture (p. 13). She also claims that the bodies are attired and transformed in line (Lodge & Wood, 1988, p. 607) with the anticipations of regular lifespan, or as Gauntlett statuses, controlled by prevailing treatises (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 150). Though some trust that gender could be immovable and everlasting, fixed by culture, Butler (2002) chooses the historic and anthropological points which comprehend gender which is relative amid socially established subjects in specific settings (p. 15). In another way, gender is a fluid than immovable, but, something changes in diverse settings. Gauntlett (2008) states that gender is nothing but a performance. Butler (2002) further, proclaims that the expressions of gender establish the gender identity, thus, making identity a performativity which is established by the resultant expressions. So, there is no gender identity apart from the behavior that makes the gender (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 150). Gender, is what human beings do at specific periods. Individuals could possess different identity patterns, but none are fixed or prearranged (ibid. p. 151). Further, Gauntlett asserts about Butler's gender theory that gender is a performance, something that is learned and regulated, constantly worked on and scrutinized (2008). Giddens (1991) however, argues that, clearly gender consists of learning and constant work, rather an elaboration of biologically assigned sexual differences. Besides, Butler (1993) claims that femininity is not an optimal, rather, the violent mention of a rule, one which is complex rooted in history and is a non-erasable discipline, whose disobedience results in punishment. Women are not given liberty to choose to be feminine, but culturally has to accept to be a women through the criteria of identity, which is already set.

While dealing with identity, Woolf's (1931) quote, that one is not simply one, but complex and many, is significant. Factually, social norms and implicit rules to be a woman have pressured them to conform to these ideals that limit a person's capability to describe one's self. Identity affects and relates to both men and women, and according to Giddens (1991), self-identity is an inevitable subject, what to be done and how to act, or who to become, are questions which everyone has to answer, expansively or through communal performance.

While the feminist literature spoke of historic demotion and abuse of women by men, the literature related to men, focused their ontological anxiety. Shweder (1994) provides an insight that men are also affected by the implicit societal norms. Along with women, men are stuck in the gender category. Shweder (1994) further argues that the multiple limitations and meanings of a gendered world are created around the resistance of work and family, manufacture versus reproduction, paid work versus unpaid, rigid versus lenient, blurred boundaries, and by telling men to choose to be someone else. Adichie argues that masculinity is a firm, minor enclosure, to enclose boys, taught to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of helplessness, and masking their true selves (Adichie, 2014, p. 26).

Heather Boushey, implicates subverting gender roles and asserts that girls, in today's world grow up in a post-feminist surroundings, with surety that they can do whatever they want in life, making it a huge change. It was only a generation and a half ago that roles for women and men were completely different from today (as cited in Williams, 2010). Williams, too, argues that in today's environment, the world lacks a clear border and difference. Thus, it was challenging and hard to be a man and harder to feel good about being one too (Williams, 2010).

Thus, the present comprehension of gender could be challenged and subverted, "through alternative performance of identity" (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 153). Simone de Beauvoir, also claims that, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Reid, 2008, p. xvi). She discriminates sex from gender which is identity that is slowly attained. The notion of woman is not a shaped biology, but through a communal production. The understanding of bodies as male or female, is molded by social and communal situation. De Beauvoir (2015) designates women's subservience in terms of the other, as what men are not. According to Peach (1998), a consideration for being a woman is to be Other to men (p. 20), making gender a cultural construct and ideological, which Eagleton (2007) defines as a body of concepts distinctive of a specific communal crowd or group.

In this context, Moran (2012) inquires the social forces shaping the surrounding ideals and images, "...Should we use Botox? Do men secretly hate us? And why does everyone ask you when you're going to have a baby?" and if there is a need for feminism with contemporary environment suitable for women, "Whatever it is we want the future to be like, no one's going to have to die for it" (p. 307). Though, different waves of feminism influenced the society's understanding of woman. Moran (2012) however, asserts that the root cause of problems for women are they themselves, that, "If what you read in magazines and papers makes you feel uneasy and shitty – don't buy them!" (ibid). She argues that though women came a long way, there are still problems with gender. Even today, women encounter patriarchy, like, at work and marriage, or as Sawyer argues that being female in the UK is the same life architecture for women, with overbearing general atmosphere affecting one (Sawyer, 2011).

Moran (2012) ironically states, that, "women in the Western world can bring about pretty much whatever change [they] want by writing a series of slightly artsy letters, whilst listening to Radio 4 and drinking a cup of tea" (p. 307). Women are all in a part of the center, and moving away from it is silencing and reducing their voices.

Thus, the contemporary literature portrays with courageous female protagonists, who managed to endure one disaster after another with no support of their societies (Zipes, 2013, p. 124). Contemporary stories carry, "a double potentiality" (p. 205), by duplicating traditional metanarratives of gender, and stressing gender-specificity, being culturally specific and flexible to altering views and rules. Though, post-structuralist feminism breaks the theoretical frameworks

with inevitable gender and sexuality, but does not assume liberty from expansive structure and rule of self (Davies, 2000). Writing opens up strategies for resisting, subverting, disintegrating the discourses, which constitute people (Barthes, 1977). The need is to create new subjectivities, not through hostility and confrontation, but through a series of escapes, meager slides, of flights, that open consideration. The fresh authors encounter main social metanarratives of gender. The authors challenge social forces that surround gender affecting and creating, “ambivalence by simultaneously rejecting...” (Haase, 2004, p. 30).

Cultural gender depiction of Pashtun Afghan women:

Like other societies, Pakhtuns regulate their lives and culture in accordance to their customs and traditions in the code of honor, the Pakhtunwali, the social setup and the non-written code, which the local Pashtun person principally follows (Shah, 2018, p. 1). Pashtunwali is an anticipated law for the Pashtun people and they submit to this law. Though, it is not a formal state law, but undefined rule for social and ethical life.

However, still in Pashtun society, the patriarchy persists. Barth, 1959, uses Game Theory to explain competition sense among Pakhtuns for attaining social parity (as cited in Shah, 2018). Ahmad (1980) in his study of Muhmand Pakhtun, along Durand Line, between Pakistan and Afghanistan, highpoints that tribal society of Muhmand, for equilibrium, designates a tribal nature. Nevertheless, there is no mention of issues of women authorization and cultural breaking in, among Pakhtun culture.

Nonetheless, to highlight gender roles and the predominant social system could establish the phase for extended and enduring modifications and authorization. In its nature, Pakhtun society is tribal and a vast proportion of the population live in mountainous and rocky areas. The degree of literacy is low and the major profession is agriculture. Three main causes of inner disagreements contain money, property and women, sometimes the dispute persists over generations. The grander social virtues contain defending family and tribal honor and exhibition of bravery in social conditions. The folk songs or tappas abundantly link into such themes and as a result, man is admired in community sphere and women are recognized in shielding family integrity and in their moral support to men (Mumtaz, 1987). The depiction of men and women is founded on the ideals of Pakhtun society. Pakhtuns, are male-dominated challenging tribes, where victory in community sphere rests on physical strength. Women are in charge of the home affairs and men facilitate them.

In Pashto literature, like in cultural folk songs, masculinity and the status of ideal man, authority, bravery, honor and vigor, are usually discussed. The portrayal is not essentially biological, but superiority based on cultural relativity. “A man is not called a man because of his name/A man is he who behaves like men” (Katozai, 2005, p. 323). Women complain the miseries and the deserted and secluded life (Enevoldsen, 2004), as, “The world is life’s deserted bazaar, For sale is nothing but sorrow from start to finish” (p. 60). The married life challenging and because of

indifference of in-laws, they long for the good days at their parents' homes (Tair & Edwards, 2006). The culture considers women weak and they need men to guard their honor.

The tappas approve gender identity pattern and value women who have their fathers or brothers to defend their honor (Enevoldsen, 2004, p. 40). Many tappas elucidate appearance and behavior of women that she has to look good (Shaheen, 1988). The ideals of the culture demand women to remain loyal to their spouse or family, and not to revolt against their decisions (ibid.). However, at several places, women cry over their helplessness to challenge family verdict against their marriages (Shaheen, 1988). Even in cinematic movies, the silver screen depiction of women is heavily influenced by male prejudices and without representing the social or political roles that current women can play, and as a result these representations influenced discernment or effected people's attitudes too (Shah, 2018, p. 2)

In Pashtun Afghanistan, the gender and ethnic issues are problematic. Gender relations are historically precise, determined by social, economic, period, political, lawful, cultural and religious factors (Buijs, 1993, p. 55). In Afghanistan, the interface of Islamic culture and religion with secularism, patriotism, society and other important historical, social and economic structures influence the lives. The Islamic culture and religion are used to determine the identities of women and to validate war, profession and assault. Notwithstanding frightening situations under Taliban, several Afghan women pulled themselves out of isolation and domination to find a space to practice autonomy and agency. They dared to break the preset limits of imprisonment and hush. They challenged the idea that of a Muslim society constructing blockades to shut women, by convicting them into a domestic and oppressed life (Rostami-Povey, 2004).

In this regard, the mass media articles produce dominant ideologies, which are often operated, preserved, fortified, and also subverted. The mass media representations of socially erected difference indicators like gender, ethnicity, class, and religion can denaturalize and dismantle these ideologies, which legitimize power imbalances and contribute to material conditions that benefit some at the expense of others (Anderson, 2006).

Anderson (2006) elaborates Lacayo's article as the most in-depth one on the lives of Afghan women under the Taliban regime, published in Time magazine. Though, the magazine focused little on these women. Otherwise, among few articles that dealt with the Afghan articles, the length continued no longer than a couple of pages.

In her book, *Does Khaki Become You?* The feminist and political scientist, Cynthia Enloe (1983) resisted that wartime narratives portray war as fundamentally male field by denying women and label them the camp followers (p. 15). Thus, the militarist ideology considers femininity with inactiveness, family, and home life to glorify military strength. Wartime news report, echoes this ideology, as Enloe declares that the conventional minds set women as only family members than

liberated actors, supposed to possess childlike innocence regarding international affairs (1994). Political scientist Augusta C. del Zotto (2002) recognized gender conflict by reporting the professional practices of journalists, which overlooks women's roles in war. As she argued, "the media, in their relentless pursuit of speed and simplicity, tend to reduce the complexity of war to a set of manoeuvres, orders and declarations made solely by state actors" (p. 142).

Mass media scholars Stabile & Kumar (2005) qualitatively analyzed newspaper and newsmagazine articles published during the U.S. attack on Afghanistan that viewed the hardships faced by Afghan women. According to the analysis, the logic of the protection scenario places women in need of guard from the voracious clutches of an actual or fictional enemy, here, the Taliban (Stabile & Kumar, 2005, p. 770). And according to Orientalist narratives, the military action is legitimized to control and civilize the barbaric extremist Muslims in the Middle East (ibid., p. 771).

In the context of depiction of Afghan women in media and literature, Cloud (2004) analyzed photographs of Afghan women, on Time magazine's Web site, <http://www.time.com>, to analyze the "clash of civilizations". Keeping in mind Michael Calvin McGee's (1980) definition of ideographs that invoke ideologies that can organize consensus to a specific social structure (Cloud, 2004). By constructing binary oppositions as U.S. and the enemy, a patriarchal stance is evoked toward Afghan women, that linked the West with freedom, and led the images to support the U.S. war against Afghanistan (Cloud, 2004, pp. 286-287).

The social researcher, Franks (2000) objects the criticisms against the veil to be oppressive. She interviewed British Muslim women and concluded that the veil is neither oppressive nor authorizing. Her research concluded that hijab could be practiced as rescuing or cruel by dissimilar women in the similar the social order, reliant on variables like religious faith, status, salary and everyday practices.

Thus, the magazines like the Time present women in the text and photos as victims, in dire need of protection from the Taliban, their husbands or other male family members. On basis of the brutalities women tolerated, the article stated, "The Taliban made Afghanistan a laboratory for the systematic oppression of women" (Lacayo, 2001, p. 38). The article raids women by confirming their helplessness.

A trademark of patriarchal culture is, "The display of woman as spectacle to be looked at, subjected to the gaze of the male audience" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 87). The women portrayal in art, literature and media, promoted man as spectator and woman as spectacle, in patriarchal society spirit. This determines not only relations between men and women, but of women to women. Berger, 1972, explains that the examiner of woman in herself is male, the surveyed female (as cited in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 87). Thus, the women is denied a viewpoint of their own but from the male. This patriarchy, privileges the male stare and smashes viewpoints and prejudices that could contest its domination.

There are frequent references to woman's appearance in various literatures published in magazines like clothes and the articles about Afghan women's faces, makeup and their freedom. Of the beauty products, "In a society that forbids them, they seem weirdly precious" (Anderson, 2006, p. 37), related freedom for women meant approval to wear lipstick. After all the depiction, it cannot be denied that Afghan women are consuming back their jobs in government, returning to jobs they left when the Taliban came to power, and contributing in reconstruction of Afghanistan's future (Anderson, 2006).

Cultural gender depiction of western women:

The depiction of women across cultures and in different eras had been a difficult issue. Stephens and McCallum (2017) assert that in any tale or folklore, gender is, "one of the more recalcitrant elements" (p. 201), which has continued in the literary tradition as well. Folk and general cultural and ethical tales are chiefly male domain. Warner (1995) suggests that the cultural tales and their retellings offered women a publicly accepted way to speak about social restraint and power dynamics, chiefly regarding gender (p. 24). The traditional tales and retellings are created in a cultural field of creation, that is a force field of encounters where various writers, performers, and groups of people cope for authority and influence (Zipes, 2014, p. 122).

Though, not only is gender a challenging subject, it has been, the most prominent one too. Gender as an omnipresent force in western society, possibly functioned as, "the most primary method of social organization" (Lewis, 2011, p. 1). Annabel Martín elucidates that gender, "is a very complex term because it also deals with men and women understanding their psychological, social and cultural beings and how they understand themselves as entities, as social beings, in a society." (as cited in Koning, 2017, p. 17). In *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher stated that the American society was aggressive towards girls, declaring that young women, "have long been evaluated on the basis of appearance and caught in myriad double binds: achieve, but not too much; be polite, but be yourself; be feminine and adult; be aware of our cultural heritage, but don't comment on the sexism" (ibid, p. 17). The cultural and social tales and their retellings have a large impact on the growth of gender identity and social commencement of children and young adults (Lieberman, as cited in Koning, 2017).

It was the second half of the twentieth century, that the feminist critics brought gender issues in literature to the forefront by using fairy tales, ethnic and social stories and retellings for enculturation and socialization. Authors of current thematic based modern tales and retellings were highly influenced by modern women's movements which were sought to oppose the depiction of women as passive agents, by offering substitutions. Authors might, "point to possible destinies, possible happy outcomes, [and] they successfully involve their hearer or reader in identifying with the protagonists" (Warner, 1995, p. 23). Often, unlike their ancestral tales, the current tales and retellings advocate, "a means of escaping imposed limits

and prescribed destiny” (ibid. p. 24). This is done by suggesting an alternative way of being. Though contrasting to the traditional depiction, the feminist metanarratives have already started to subvert the foremost patriarchal based metanarrative, by employing a massive amount of criticism, and it remains authoritative in many young adult stories (Stephens & McCallum, 2017).

Bettelheim (1989) argues, that tales and stories are precisely non-gendered in the portrayal of life as means of passage. The stories depict several pathways to the same result. That as a girl is depicted in her inward struggle to herself, a boy violently deals with the external world, and both strive to gain selfhood. The learning and mastering the inner and the outer world, projecting the same process, everybody undergoes while growing up.

The feminist critics, like Lieberman, strongly disagree with this statement, and argues that tales portray a different paradigm of growth, that are yields of gendered social actions (Stephens & McCallum, 2013, p. 204). Lieberman further argued that representations of women based on this conservative metanarrative fortified restraining ideas of femininity, enculturating young girl readers into passive roles created under patriarchy (as cited in Koning, 2017). Therefore, the feminist writers revealed gender stereotypes and offered substitutes to prescribed societal modes of conduct (Stephens & McCallum, 2013, p. 122). They wanted to oppose depictions of women as inert agents and other types of sexual stereotyping. Obviously, illuminating this practice and offering opposing gender roles for women in tales, stories, novels and retellings became and stayed central. For instance, in Carson Levine’s 1997 retelling of “Cinderella,” *Ella Enchanted*: the heroine, Ella, struggles with the curse of submission that was put on her as a baby by shifting her path to learn to act and choose for herself. In many films in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this kind of subversion is portrayed, like in, *Ever After* (1998) and the *Shrek* franchise (2001-2007).

Daring female protagonists in the current literature are shown to manage and endure one adversity after another, without the sustenance of their societies, by overcoming prejudice (Zipes, 2014, p. 124). This, however, does not mean a structural and significant breakdown of main ideologies, but the individual attainment converted to the tell-tale sign of gender equality. The individual actions did not contest or alter the main gender metanarratives, rested in patriarchy. Women were stimulated to adopt a patriarchal production of female roles and the belief that compliant to this structure will lead to the prizes of marriage, prosperity, and well-being (Stephens & McCallum, 2013, p. 205). This led many critics to consider that the rites of passage was generally firm, traditional, oppressive and restraining (ibid. pp. 204-5). Contemporary stories, however, always carry at least. “a double potentiality” (p. 205). They replace outmoded metanarratives based on gender, or, by emphasizing gender-specificity, are able to show how metanarratives are socially and culturally specific and adapt to altering opinions and standards.

The tales and stories offered by contemporary authors challenge the prevailing social metanarratives of gender, as these stories understand their audiences. The contemporary authors work along and within the customary basis of the story, and a job cleverly done, brings pleasure to the reader by mixing acknowledgement and wonder (De Vos & Altmann, as cited in Koning, 2017, p. 5). This is typically helpful for young adults in understanding, directing and changing the psychological, social and cultural situations, in a certain society (Zipes, 1997, p. 11). Writers, who focus the social forces around gender that affect young women and men generate, “ambivalence by simultaneously rejecting...” (Haase, 2004, p. 30).

A numerous bulk of researches have been conducted on the concept of gender, with numerous indications about defeat, confrontation, domination and contests. To mention a few, Hoeber (n.d.) *A Post-Structuralist Feminist Perspective Of Gender Equity And Organizational Change In A Sport Organization*; Kenway et al. (1994) *Making 'Hope Practical' Rather than 'Despair Convincing': Feminist Post-Structuralism, Gender Reform and Educational Change*.

Thus, the following study explores the gender subversion among women for the sake of survival and establishing their identity. Wakil Shinwari has inscribed a number of educational, research, critical, political and legendary essays, which are published in several journals in and outside Afghanistan, originally composed in his mother tongue, Pashto and translated in English, Urdu and other languages. The book description, *Fifty Million*, states him to be a native of Afghanistan, which served as the subject for his short stories, focusing on the culture and conditions of his people. Depicting the troubles Afghans, he reveals the suffering and violation of rights by commanders, activists, and unethical officials, which influence the behaviors of individuals by vice, during wars and battles. The first-hand knowledge of Afghan culture, help readers understand the culture and psyche of Afghans. The translation into English, makes these stories accessible to the global population. He has to his credit two books of short stories in Pashto, namely *Old Castle* and *Fifty Million*. For the purpose of investigation, his creation, the character of Zarlasta from *Modern Woman* (2013), is selected.

Patterson (2012) in his review of the book, says that Colfer wrote a kind of stern traditionalism which undergirds the story. When it comes to imagining the continuing lives of the storybook legends, the author denounces the Disney fiction of the classics and emerges with something novel and unexpected. For investigation, his created character, Charlotte Bailey from, *The Enchantress Returns* (2013) is selected.

The purpose of investigation rests on the reason that both the above mentioned characters are working women who work to support their family. Both subverted gender to survive, by breaking the norms and notions of women stereotypes. Both women, are proposed by their male colleagues, but the method and mode of proposal were different and in what way the women dealt with the situation and what were the outcomes of the episodes, are the questions to be interrogated in the study. The study also focused whether cultural, economic, religious, social and

ethical contexts also plays its role in the decision of gender subversion by women and under what circumstances, the women give up on subverting gender and submit to the stereotype role again.

Methodology:

The undertaken qualitative research, through textual analysis built on the theoretical framework provided by Butler (1999). Butler is considered a new voice, whose work on gender as feminist critique has been argued to be some of the most important advancements in the area of feminist and political studies in the twentieth century (Lloyd, 2007). To guide my inquiry, a selection of specific concepts from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999), are used. The paper analyzes the changing and subverted gender roles of women through the framework provided by Butler (1999). Butler (1999) declares that, “The act of harassment may be one in which a person is “made” into a certain gender,” (p. xiii).

Butler (1999) asserts that, “It is important for me to concede, however, that the performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice” (p. xiv). According to this ideology a gender is a social construct, which is not based on biological sex, but on the historical, cultural and social context. Butler (1999) discusses gender identity and its relation to performativity. Gender as a, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (p. xv). Furthermore, Butler’s concept of subversion imparts important ideas about challenging domineering arrangements, by respecting the diversity, self-respect and worth of each person in society. She admits to have, “A strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality” with the longing, “from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such (p. xx).

Butler (1999) provided critical insight to discuss the positions of gender and the roles they can play in the society indifferent to what is expect from them or they stick to the conventional roles that are assigned to them by the word of tradition and orthodox norms. Though, she clearly declaims that, *Gender Trouble* (1999) is not a prescription to, “subvert gender in the way that I say, and life will be good” (p. xxi). Butler (1999) guides by deconstructing the notion of an achievable, stable identity. Butler suggests that, “The act of harassment may be one in which a person is “made” into a certain gender” (p. xiii).

Butler (1999) added depth to ideas about gender identity, gender staging and help in shaping behavior. She asserted that, “contexts” undergo temporal change, exposing the disunity (p. xxi), thus, “the reality of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be “real,” what we invoke as

the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality” (p. xxiii).

Two female characters, one from each author, Shinwari and Colfer, are selected for the study. For data selection, the gender subversion indicators are adapted from Bulter (1999), Haugh (2010) and Warin (2015). The different issues, which might aid as indicators of gender subversion are, firstly, the fragmented sense of self in society. Secondly, availability of options for flexible gender roles. Thirdly, challenging gender stereotype choices are the prospects of achieving new identity, challenging and reverting enactment of the forced roles through confidence, power and enlightenment. The dress/speech/acts normalcy rejection, includes the general or culturally accepted and inscribed gear. Fourthly, destabilize gender norms by a constant repetition of subversive acts. Finally, the diversity, the multiplicity and homogeneity needs to be honored and given space of recognition.

Data analysis:

The character of Zarlashtha (*Modern woman*, Shinwari, 2013)

The starting sentence of the story gives a clue of gender subversion, ““Miss, you’re not going to perform the pre-prayer washing ritual with such long nails” (Shinwari, 2013, p. 186). However, the criticism was so sudden that the lady was not prepared for such an attack and she was forced to revert back into the stereotype gender role again as she reacted with a, “Shocked at the new minister’s question, was overcome with shame, lowered her eyes and didn’t make a sound” (p. 186). Zarlashtha, after a lost sense of identity, had tried to use the option of rising for her identity but was soon pushed back into a low self-esteem, a victim of anxiety of non-identification, non-signification and into a being of worthlessness in society. She tried to reject the general or culturally accepted and inscribed gear to be ritually followed through wearing makeup and nail color and through her dress, but the subversion was soon overruled.

The minister used the religious restriction to forbid her from straying and diverging from the set rules by patriarchy, “What will you say to God?...I don’t want our brother Mujahidin to be put in harm’s way” (p. 186). As a result, the attempt for gender subversion was led down and the attempt was defeated as, “Zarlashtha was as still as a statue”. The next question of the minister was for whom she had adorned herself for, kept her not to refrain from silence.

Zarlashtha, finally, accepted the challenge, “could no longer keep her silence” and summed up her courage and made a move with vigor which enraged the man, by asking the minister to fire her then, “from behind her tears”. She, rethought the availability of options for flexible gender roles and choices for change by altering the dismay into hope in the forcible assigned role, and thus, perceiving the situation going thoroughly against her, she utilized the option and boldly asked him to, “break my legs”.

On hearing that she had no husband, father dead and young brothers, the minister, “was silent and then said slowly, ‘Why have you remained without a

husband? We Muslims will not marry you, and the other dirty ones won't have found you" to which Zarlashtha started crying and thought over her gender subversion, which she had to take to support her family, but the strong effort from her to leave home and find a respectable job, was smashed into pieces, "she wanted to say something but bit her tongue". Zarlashtha, was tired of performing her gender and wished to transform and alter it. She did it, by leaving her home and transforming herself to look bolder and confident, using dress and looks, but still the change being not repetitive seemed to be unnatural and unaccepted. In this regard, Butler (1990) is of the opinion that the gendered body, "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (p. 136), which suggests that gender is not a performance which a subject elects to do, rather, gender is an effect expressed by the subject. Zarlashtha tried to break that effect as the social categories do not express natural differences, rather, produce that difference itself, which needs to be reversed. When, the term performance proposes enactment or doing, performativity suggests structure of controlling notions and their effects. The repetition creates illusion of gendered authenticity, which is not a subjective action. For Butler (1990), this reversal is rooted in her theory of performativity which understands the, "natural" notion of the sexes as a discursive effect (p. 8). She proposes that while performativity and its permitting power construct delusions of natural and heterosexually created genders and force or restrain the forms they take, these might be subverted. Parody, repetition, and re-signification can in some way act to subvert main constructs of gender and sexuality.

Pragmatically, the minister proposed Zarlashtha, and she knew, if not him there will be someone else to entrap her. Thus, she summed up her courage to avail the opportunity and subverted her gender by understanding the fact that not only the boss could fire her if she denied but could also her troubles at home might double. So, wisely, she transformed her tone, speech and actions, and placed before the minister who was, "mad for modern women" her terms and conditions too (Shinwari, 2013, p. 188). Zarlashtha knew there was no way out, thus, she availed the available options and subverting gender, "Zarlashtha laughed. 'What about my nails, lipstick and eye shadow?'" (p. 188) she inquired. She quickly perceived that her subversion could not withstand the unchanged reality, thus she reverted back into the stereotype after trying, but submitted to the norms as the space for availability of more options was scarce. In this relevancy, Butler (1990) suggests that nonconformity from the norms do not inevitably involve subversion, as norms rely on anomalies for their constant being. Thus, challenging the norm with relation to the norm, is important. Butler (1999), however, argues that norms can limit and enable what humans are capable of. Thus, Zarlashtha, also tried, but reverted back, as in her case the norms were strong enough to be broken, "she still controlled herself, kept her composure" (Shinwari, 2013, p. 187) but she achieved the security of her family, through subversion and made the minister agree to her conditions for marriage, but after all that, reverted back to the typical established norm of submission.

The character of Charlotte Bailey (*The Enchantress returns*, Colfer, 2013)

After the death of their father, the Bailey's moved to a rental house, with, "a flat roof and few windows..." (Colfer, 2013, p. 27). Charlotte, the mother, had overcome many of their financial problems, but still had a long way to go with the twins. After a long time with a fragmented sense of self, currently, "something else had been occupying Charlotte Bailey's time recently..." (p. 27). Charlotte, had lately been subverting gender, and she who had never been late, "usually home by six...", didn't reach till six thirty, and it was unusual. The twins reached a conclusion that, "there's been a development" (p. 28).

Very recently, the twins received a gift from Dr. Robert Gordon, their mother's colleague at the hospital, and turning into, "a close family friend" (p. 28). He was a kind man, with, "a natural smile". His big friendly eyes and caring nature, "made him an instant friend to anyone he met" (p. 28).

However, the twins discovered that Buster, the dog, from Bob, "was a bribe!" (p. 32). The twins were surprised to discover their mother had a friend. Charlotte, had to subvert gender, the moment she felt the twins were exaggerating in questioning her about her relationship, "I'm sorry, did someone promote you to parent?" (p. 35). But, she soon recovered and changing her tone to a soft one, explained to the kids that after their dad died, Bob, "was one of the few people I could talk to about everything...I needed an adult to confide in. we talked every day at work and became very close, and recently, that friendship has grown" (p. 36).

Charlotte explain twins how much she loved their father. She declared that their father was the love of her life. Without him, after twelve years of marriage, life had been the, "hardest" (p. 36). However, she knew their father would have desired her to move on. She, thus, subverted her gender, "if the roles were reversed" (p. 37). The prevailing situation is described by Butler's (1990) approach which changes the center on the relationship amid permissions and norms on two main points. First, Butler (1999) thinks that power is not negative which only forbids or suppresses. It is not restricted to juridical power, where one subject damages the other. But, the power of norms is productive as certain pleasures and desires are produced when others are delegitimized. Second, Butler (1999) shifts away from the concept which regards the subject a rational being making liberal choices about norms to conform to. Actually, norms manufacture and regulate subjects and bodies. This could be explained thus, that normally and conventionally, normativity is understood in terms of thoughtful choices of self-sufficient subjects, ignoring the survivability of non-normative bodies. This is the focus of Butler, that is, the susceptible subject as it depends on norms. She criticizes the notion of voluntary resistance by unpacking the fact that norms are political agency site, and the vulnerability of the subject is closely related to normative regulations. Therefore, those who fail to conform to heterosexuality are expected to proclaim their deviation from the norms plainly and openly. Accordingly, to subvert would lead to less legibility and undermining the practices of norms.

In the similar impulse, Charlotte, subverted gender, by breaking the set rules of conforming to societal rules for the sake of her desires, which rested on her kids. Charlotte admitted that when her husband died, the worthlessness and a sense of non-identification struck her hard too, “I thought part of me died with him and I would never be able to love anyone again” (Colfer, 2013, p. 37). She received the confidence and power to break the gender stereotype through her actions and finally, needed to be honored by her family. She declared, “Bob makes me really happy, and it’s been a long time since I’ve felt this way” (p. 37). This enabled her to face the world, but, “part of me died with him”, until she met Bob. She, finally, received option for a flexible gender role, that appeared like a ray of hope for her and she declared that, “Bob makes me happy, and it’s been a long way since I’ve felt this way”.

The mother is not just a role to be performed, it is a matter of feeling, a matter of syncing with the subject. The family discussed about how their mother felt for Bob. Charlotte discovered when she saw Conner was trying to hide a question, “as you always purse your lips like that when you have something to ask” (p. 37). She encouraged him to ask, “knowing her son better than he knew himself”. Charlotte had a challenge to overcome the defined role with courage, self-empowerment and vigor. The gender subversion of Charlotte occurred from a lover to a mother. For a while, Charlotte’s gender subversion back to mother, “she felt horrible for feeling it, a part of her felt like her mom was being unfaithful to her dad” (p. 38). But the assurance from Charlotte, that the place their dead father occupied in their lives, “nothing we do will ever push him further away, either” (p. 38). This condition of Charlotte is explained by Butler (1999) as she elucidates that the lived life possibility is dependent on recognition only as a subject which is legitimate and legible. An intelligibility which is regarded normal is profoundly related to being. One continuously live in a world where stern marginalization and corporeal violence could be endangered for the pleasure, the imagination personified and the gender performed. It elaborates that the norms can normalize and valorize by rewarding obedience and punishing nonconformity. Therefore, norms are inseparably connected with rewards and consent that is formed and legitimized in the societal, religious, economic and traditional domains. Thus, when the assumed power relations are rejected, or overlooked, or substituted, the individuals can experience difference in spite of prevailing norms. That is the moment or the crisis on which Butler pays attention to, by asserting a claim to an accommodating life with no previous authority and no strong assisting norm in place. Charlotte, did the same. She subverted gender by playing a role of a beloved, which was least expected by her kids. They were shocked to see a diversion, a change in their mom, but overcoming the power relations and bondages, Charlotte was able to overcome the tremor by repetition of a changed behavior which forced the twins towards acceptability.

Therefore, the progress in relationship extended with time and consent, “She loves him and he loves her. What’s going to stop her?” (Colfer, 2013, p. 61). The

moment Bob personally asked the twins, “But I am asking for your permission to ask your mother to marry me. I don’t want to do this without your blessing” (p. 60). Thus, finally, the twins accepted with open hearts the transformation of their mother by honoring the change.

Discussion:

Kapur, 2002, comments that, “A woman should be aware, self-control, strong will, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense” (as cited in Das, 2017, p. 7). In the context of gender subversion, Butler’s work provided with the concepts of submission and mastery and subversion by allowing to explore the diminuendos of identity creation and the association between self and society in strategy-making. In formation of the subject, Butler (1997) stresses instantaneous mastery and submission. She explains that, “The more practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Where one might expect submission to consist of yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself...the lived simultaneity of submission and mastery, and mastery and submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself” (Butler, 1997, p. 116–17)

The data analysis revealed that both the characters are able to resist the mute miseries and helplessness. They are hybrid characters who could cope with the societal influences and native culture. Both of them opposed the male-dominated society which symbolizes the miserable position of extremely profound and emotional women who are tortured by inattention and solitude. Though, the lives of both Charlotte and Zarlasta may be devastated, but they do strive for a change and contribute to the suppressed voice of the women.

The data also revealed that the cultural circumstances play a lot in defining gender roles and to what extent they could be subverted. The culture where Charlotte works, accepts working women and thus she also goes on night duties in the hospital without dread or fear. But, Zarlashtra is tied in family and societal chains which can still question her to go out and work only after seeking permission from father or husband. The dealings of Charlotte with co-workers is in routine, but Zarlashtra, “How can you expect me to leave you here in the office in such a state of sparking red and white – what official could resist you?” (Shinwari, 2013, p. 186).

Also, it is revealed that the economic conditions of the country also add to the general behavior and the chances of gender subversion. Charlotte subverted gender as a bold, confident woman, who had to work fearlessly for her children in a country far away from dread of war. But, economic conditions for Zarlashtra were tough enough, as the male colleagues still looked down at gender subversion with disapproval.

Plus, there is no hindrance of religion described to be faced by Charlotte. But, for Zarlashtha, the religion threat was dragged in by the minister to achieve his personal gains. Thus, the findings depict that in Pakhtun society, gender roles are clearly defined for both men and women in social life. In Pakhtun society, women's presence to perform in public life is less likely to happen, thus, affirming the suggested roles from the standpoint that Pakhtun culture is chiefly patriarchal, primitive and rural. The data analysis also revealed that the attempt to subvert gender, objectified women to men's gaze, in Pashtun Afghan society.

The analysis exposed that the Afghan story succeeded in challenging the ideologies. Though, the stratagems to disempower women, like regularly depicting and making them recall that they are passive sufferers with no influence to guard themselves or to control their futures, stays noticeable, like, "If you fire me and don't take care of my family, I won't have any choice but to get married, will I?" (Shinwari, 2013, p. 187). Moreover, the story depicted women's position as objects of male gaze. By depicting them as submissive victims and by objectifying them, the upheld patriarchal ideologies were still confronted by categorizing women as frail and helpless. Thus, the finding reveal that in case of Zarlashtha, despite her strength and agency, she failed to challenge patriarchal ideologies, associating femininity with passivity, family and domesticity, supporting the patriarchal status quo by allowing women agency only within their customary roles as wives.

Though, in both the stories it is revealed that the gender subversion is either strengthened or weakened by the interactive partners. In case of Charlotte, Bob treated her with respect, space and honor, which gave Charlotte more courage to subvert and prevail with her transformative condition and affirm her future decisions with contentment and satisfaction. However, in case of Zarlashtha, the minister blackmailed her and forced her to take a future decision without contentment and satisfaction, rather a compromise. Her gender subversion, reverted her back into the position she wished to escape.

Conclusion:

Though, the results of the study could not be generalized, as the diversity of working women's stories depicts their diverse positions. Some stories tell about the achievement of new knowledge and power, others tell about marginality, confrontation and struggles for survival. This paper has revealed how working women bravely endure hostility and inequality forced upon them by religious dogma, itinerant presence and imperialist dominion. Butler's theory of gender subversion (1999) explained the art of mastery and submission to be intermingled and overlapping as at one time a woman submits and at other time she masters over the situation. They are willing and able to rebuild a better world. However, particularly in Afghanistan, the promised restoration, equality and women's rights have been limited to seats for women, but not improvement in their living standard, guaranteeing women's equal rights.

Thus, gender subversion is shocking, troubling and unaccepted for the family and surrounding people but never impossible, as long as one's identity and powers are in jeopardy. In the wider cultural field, new freedoms of gendered expression have been resisted and contested. But, it is the writers, whose work clearly subverts accustomed gender stereotypes and long-lasting myths of stable female identity, which is denounced by Butler (1999), as there are no stable and fixed identities.

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