

# A Study of Themes and Symbols used in ‘The Bull and She Devil’ by Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah

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## Abstract

A theme is a major topic, matter, or statement inside a tale and symbolism is a literary method that employs symbols, whether the words, characters, markings, places, or abstract concepts symbolize something more than the actual meaning. Thematic concepts refer to what readers "believe the work is about," while thematic statements are "whatever the work expresses about the topic". The major goal of this proposed study was to examine and debate the thematic concerns and symbols found in Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah's novella ‘The Bull and She Devil’. She is regarded as a pioneer of feminist literary studies in Pakistan. Her contribution to the field of English literature is noteworthy. ‘The Young Wife and Other Stories’, a collection of her short fiction; deals with the impression and expression of sexuality in state of depression in a male dominated society. Nature of this research work is qualitative, and it explains various themes and symbols used in the story. Sample of the study is “The Bull and the She Devil”, a story taken from Hamidullah’s afore mentioned collection of short stories. Study discusses the mental approach and dilemma of the rural young man’s physical, psychological and emotional state regarding marital relationships with his wife along with the plight and repressive state of mind of females in male dominant societies. The author skillfully interacts with forbidden issues without being too overt with help of symbolic representations and thematic interpretations.

**Keywords:** Symbolism; Thematic Analysis; Patriarchal Mindset; Socio-psychological dilemma.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The young wife and other stories by Hamidullah deal with problems faced by women in male dominant society in different relations such as mother, daughter, and sister in-law and mother in-law, wife and sister. The perspective of her writings is to raise voice against social issues in male dominant society. Most of her stories deal with issues of females but this story is concerned with psychological dilemma of a male who is suffering from patriarchal mindset. Sexual inequality is most common problem in history of humans. The short story the Bull and the She Devil explains the psychological dilemma of a peasant Ghulam Qadir. Who is of view that the men are masters and their women are submissive. However, when he finds the situation opposite to his viewpoint, he commits suicide. (Imtiaz, 2012) states that this story is about story is about a man who is charmed by the beauty of his wife and at the same time he is conscious about his position in male dominant society. This idea

scares him that other people are sharing the love his wife (Khalique, 2009).

The thematic concern in the story is of dilemma of protagonist female position in the male dominant society and specific gender roles. There are many symbols used by the writer to make story interesting like symbol of Bull and She Devil, symbol of stone throwing, symbol of blood-stained hands and symbol of controlling the bull. The major aim of the present research is to study the thematic concerns and symbolism in the Bull and the She Devil, a short story written by Hamidullah. Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah served as independent professional Pakistani women and redefined the role of Pakistani women in term of contribution towards society. She was the first Muslim female who writes for Indian newspaper before partition. She is credited for being the pioneer of English journalism, English literature, and of feminist thought in Pakistan. She also held the honour of being first female political commentator.

### 1.1. Rational of the Study

Literature reflects the psychological and emotional state of human beings and their relevance in the physical setting and the society. The incidents and events happening around us directly impinge the sub-conscious and unconscious of the mind and human psyche. Quite similar psychological enigmatic representation has been made by the Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah in her short stories. This study has explored the symbolism and thematic concerns discussed in "The Bull and the She Devil" to express sensitive issues and taboos at individual and societal level.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. What kinds of thematic elements have been discussed in the short story "The Bull and the She Devil" written by Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah?
2. What kinds of symbols are used in "The Bull and the She Devil" to express the sensitive themes of sensuality?
3. How is the dilemma of male characters presented in the patriarchal society at physical and psychological domain?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it aids in understanding the themes and symbolism in "the Bull and the She Devil" (further narrated as TBSD). It explored the issue of the story's male protagonist, who appears powerful on the outside but is weak on the inside, and ultimately commits suicide. The story at one side enables readers to know about the failures and ill-mentality of male gender in the male chauvinist society, while on other side it reflects the physical outrage, psychological agony, and social quandary of the male characters in the trodden out society.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In both ancient Urdu and English writing in Pakistan, dealing with topics of sex, sexuality, and prostitution was a taboo subject. However, there have been a few of dissenting voices who, contrary to all odds, etched on forbidden subjects. "Sadat Hussain Manto", "Ismat Chughtai", "Rasheed Jahan", "Kishwar Naheed", and "Fehmida Riaz" are famous in Urdu literature for breaching stigmas in their poetry and literature (Siddiqui, 2008). On the other hand, Pakistani Anglo-Phone literature (Malik et al., 2015), which has a stronger political emphasis than Urdu writing, has a few dissenting voices, but not as well-known as Manto and Chughtai. Temina Durani writes about her marriage in her biography (My Feudal Lord, 1991). Tariq Ali confronts the conventional image of disturbed and subservient Muslim ladies in his Islam Quintets by portraying a courageous picture of intelligent, knowledgeable, and dynamic women.

Zaib-Un-Nisa Hamidullah (1921-200) is a famous Pakistani novelist. She skillfully communicates the society's complicated and forbidden issue with the

assistance of her themes, symbols, lexical and grammatical choices. She highlights the challenges and sufferings of Pakistani women as a revolutionary feminist author. "The themes of her literary work were a mix of conventional and ridiculous existential in their approach," adds Riaz (Riaz, 2014, P.2).

Hamidullah is one of those writers who had taken up the cause of developing the society by influencing through literature. She wants her women characters to be free from social sufferings and that's why she raised her voice against the norms and traditions set by patriarchal society. Patriarchy, as per (Sultana, 2012), is the most significant impediment to women's advancement and growth. Regardless of differences in dominance levels, the overall values stay the same, i.e., males are the super powers. The type of authoritative control and its usage may differ; resultantly it is critical to grasp the plan to keep women oppressed and inferior, as well as to reverse its functioning to fight for women's advancement in a systematic manner. Patriarchic norms unduly create barriers for females to advance in the social structure in today's society, where women's advancement should be based on their potential.

The Bull and the She Devil tells the story of a guy who is both a praetor and a prey at the same time. These characteristics are given to him to authorize him and control women, but they really weaken him by preventing him from developing a strong relationship with his spouse, which leads to psychological problems. It trains him to possess his women physically but not to absorb their affection. It is not just the macho norms implanted in his head by the male-controlled system that has produced a 'void' in their relationship, but also the lazy portion of their sexual interactions assigned to her by the male dominant system. Man is taught to be passionately detached by macho norms. The only appropriate sensation in male emotive coding is annoyance (Winman, 2003, P.139).

### 2.1 Plot and Settings of 'The Bull and the She Devil'

The narrative of the story TBSD is written in a straightforward manner. The setting of the story is simply depicted rural life with plain and simple life style but orthodox mentality. It is about sexuality's repression in orthodox Muslim society. Ghulam Qadir (GQ), the protagonist, is a conservative villager who recently married Shirin, a lovely and young lady. He lives with his brother and nephew in a mud hut. He is scared and enraged after his marriage since he hasn't been able to dominate his bride. Even though he has repeatedly physically dominated her, there is something he thinks is beyond his control, and this frustrates him. His spouse and his bull now become targets of his "manly" rage, which manifests itself in insults, rage, and abusive behaviour. The tale may be broken down into two parts. The protagonist is seen in his field, tilting the ground with his bull, thinking on his marital

dilemma, in which he feels helpless to manage his wife according to her patriarchal desires (Saeed *et al.*, 2020).

He continues calling her a '*sheetan (devil)*' and '*her demon's* since she has captivated his elder brother, nephew, and even his bull with her kind, charming words. He intends to leave work early and return home to gratify his wife, as his brother and nephew have left for the city. GQ's house is the setting for the second portion of the action. When he returns home after finishing his work early, he is disappointed to find his brother and nephew already there. He forgets to tether the bull out of fury. The bull, frightened by the enraged master, flees the home, pursued by the latter. The bull is solely managed by his wife, much to Ghulam Qadir's chagrin and despair. This is when the street youngster began to chuckle. This enrages GQ, who injures his spouse and murders his brother and nephew with a shovel before falling into a well in his fields to commit suicide (Rizwan, 2021).

## 2.2 Readers Response Theory

A theory popularized in the late 1960s that places a greater emphasis on the reader's or spectator's reactions to a given text than on the writing itself. Dislikes of reader responses can be connected to post-emphasis structuralisms on the reader actively creating texts rather than passively dominating them. Unlike text-based methods such as New Criticism, which are based upon some impartial sense already present in the work being scrutinized, reader-response criticism says that a transcript has no sense before a reader skillfully reads it. The reader-response critic's job is to inspect the scope and diversity of reader responses and examine the habits in which diverse readers, sometimes called "explanatory societies," make meaning out of both virtuously individual responses and inherited or socially conditioned ways of reading. The philosophy is famous in both the United States and Germany; its main philosophers include Stanley Fish, David Bleich, and Wolfgang Iser.

The researchers have utilized the concept of assumed readers while investigating the themes, contents, signposting, symbols and stylist devices used in the story TBSD. The implied readers belonging to different societies explore different perspectives of the story. The female author has written this framed narrative with very limited point of view of one male character i.e. Ghulam Qadir's point of view. The outburst emotions and agnostic feelings of Ghulam Qadir have been portrayed in beautiful manner; however the delicate sensations, feelings and flimsy attitude of Shirin has not been discussed by Hamidullah, hence declaring her an insubstantial physical entity.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Conceptual Framework

The whole study is based on qualitative pattern. The research is also designed on the close reading of the text. Various journals and articles have been consulted to collect the data and information. A detailed textual study is conducted for this research paper. The qualitative method is chosen because it is considered the most feasible way to explore apparent and inherent meaning and the context of the text. The population of the study is Zaib-Un-Nisa's collection of short stories named the young wife and other stories 1958, as well as articles and journals from the digital medium. The sample drawn from the whole book was one story 'The Bull and the She Devil' (TBSD). Both typical and critical case sampling strategies were employed while selecting the textual lines and events for the sake of analysis and interpretations. The reader's response theory was applied to evaluate the overt and covert themes mentioned in the story along with multivariate cohort signs and symbols. The selected text was codified and categorized in the gender specific perspective of the symbol and themes for the logical interpretation.

### 3.2 Methodological Framework

The methodological framework of was developed after careful reading of the text and dividing it into the further categories. The data was analyzed and logically discussed after thematic and symbolic recognition of the text in socio-psychological patriarchal traditions.

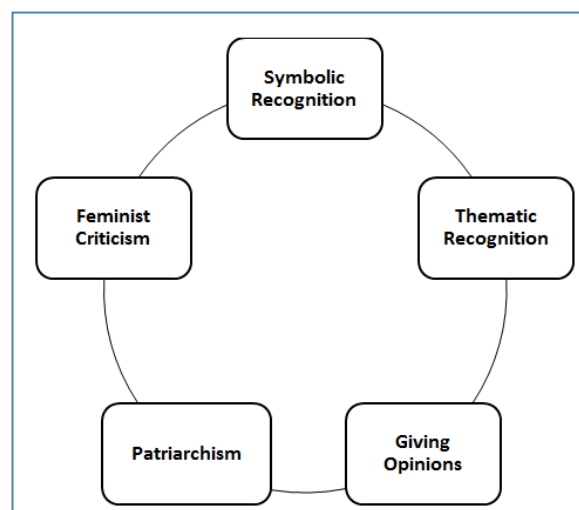


Fig-1: Methodological Framework

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hamidullah's short stories share common elements of women repression, rural people mindset and viewpoint about gender and male dominance. But if we talk about the specific story "the Bull and the She Devil", here writer unveil disorder of female sin male dominant culture as well as weakness of patriarchal

man. The evaluation of salient themes and prevalent symbols discussed in the story is given below:

#### 4.1 Thematic Concerns in TBSD

It is through her character that touches upon several important thematic concerns. However, if we analyze the Bull and the She Devil, most of the themes are related to the male character. Even the whole story has been narrated from only male point of view.

##### 4.1.1 Women Objectification

"The Bull and the She Devil", a short story by "Zaib-Un-Nisa", depicts Ghulam Qadir's tormented relationship with his wife. This tale is entirely narrated by the protagonist Qadir, who never hear Shirin directly (Mahar 2003). The male centric figure GQ wants comprehensive compliance of his wife. She is supposed to please the physical wishes of her husband. She is treated as just as an article of male imagination. She was little more than a body and a body to him throughout the first several weeks of their wedding. A gorgeous and supple body quenched his senses' long-suppressed longing (Hamidullah 43). She was handled as if she were a commodity. Qadir berates his spouse for her gentle tone and demeanor in public. She was penalized only for having a distinct personality, and she discreetly bore the brunt of the penalty (Haider *et al.*, 2020).

##### 4.1.2 Disproportionate Gender Roles

According to Imtiaz (2012), sexual inequality is the most prevalent occurrence in human history, and its roots may be traced back to a society's social system of values. Honour killing should be the inevitable result for safeguarding the family's honour if a lady is shown to be a wanton. He murders his nephew and beats his brother in the end because they both adore his wife. The anecdote demonstrates how our society's gender roles prevent males from seeing power as a female trait. In many societies, a guy cannot love his lady because of the established gender role. Women are treated as if they were a sexual object or toy. Shirin's treatment by her husband illustrates the power imbalances that exist in society. In her short tale, Hamidullah attempts to discover this gendering strategy.

##### 4.1.3 Psychological Dilemma of the Protagonist

The novel provides a profound insight into the psyche of a guy who is a victim of masculine norms in a male-dominated culture. It demonstrates that the character wishes to preserve the patriarchal man's image by his words and actions, but that after producing this image, he feels remorse instead of satisfaction. He took up a stone and directed it right at the animal head, as the language reveals, irritated by the memory of the night prior. He was humiliated even now, just remembering it (Hamidullah 45). Spiritually, he was a disordered person, who wanted her women to want him but at the same time he doesn't want to become weak by showing his desires (Moose, 2019).

#### 4.2 Symbolic representation in TBSD

The morphological and lexical choice of diction used in TBSD is repellent with mentally agonized, physically sturdy, and sexually repressed symbols. Verbs, adverbs, nouns, and adjectives all contribute to the story's overall theme. The author's use of verbs and adverbs demonstrates Ghulam Qadir's mental state. The terms used to describe his actions, such as hit, struck, dragged, caught, and shouted out loud; depict a guy who is repressive and authoritarian. He also uses a collection of phrases to convey his inner sentiments, such as comforted, desired to get, and wanting to be. These word groupings depict a strong image of a powerful guy, yet with a need for harmony (Qamar, 2018). It demonstrates that patriarchal cultures, while attempting to make its male members dominant, instead render them weak. Only from the outside does it make them powerful. From her husband's perspective, adjectives like softness, roundness, curled eye lashes, and light complexion reveal the patriarchal man's traditional picture of his lady. It demonstrates how a guy in a male-dominated culture is physically loyal to his ladies yet emotionally estranged from them.

1. Symbol of stones throws in the well, Hamidullah reveals through the figure of Ghulam Qadir the way many Pakistani women are treated by their husbands. When GQ sees his wife's face in water of well he drinks from, he hurls a stone into dispel the image and shouts "She Devil! She Devil!! She Devil!!! (Hamidullah 42). This has great significance because it mimics a symbolic ritual that Muslim pilgrims perform at Mina outside of Macca each year for the annual Hajj. The ritual signifies renunciation of evil in once life and this is echoes GQ throw stones into Shirin's reflection because he believes that Shirin has "bewitched" him, his brother, nephew and even his bull (Khurshid, 2010).

2. When GQ fails to control the bull for the second time, Shirin rushes out of the hut and starts calming the bull down but the humiliation for the GQ is too much especially when the children say, "Shabash Aunty, you have succeeded where uncle could not" (Hamidullah 50). At this GQ started to beat his wife and his brother who tries to rescue her. This beating of his wife shows the weakness of GQ's character. Symbol of controlling the bull represents the power of female that is not recognized by the male of patriarchal society. Inability of not controlling the bull represents the inner weakness of the so-called powerful patriarchal man.

3. When GQ's nephew sees his uncle beating his father, he comes to rescue him, by this time, GQ has undergone a change and eyes Allahwasaya with the "cunning of a wild animal" (Hamidullah 50). He picks up a heavy stone and aims at his nephew head and killing him. This animal act has transformed GQ who suddenly realizes what he has done. Much of the language, Hamidullah uses to describe him suggests that he is no better than a beast. He brushes his tears



with his hairy blood-stained hands “wail (S) like some immortally wounded animal at the foot of the well. His blood-stained hands symbolize his beast like nature and his use of power like an animal that prey weak animal.

4. Bull is a symbol of the power and She Devil is the symbol of the bad woman who bewitched man with her charm. Title of the story is significant as it represents the viewpoint of the protagonist about his wife whom he thought does not control because of his typical mindset. According to him she is devil and bull is symbol of power. The weak woman controlling the bull in the story is the symbol of her emblematic control over the character of her husband.

## 5. DISCUSSION

“The young wife and other tales” a collection of short stories by Hamidullah, is about women in diverse situations. Her stories are on women's difficulties and societal issues including arranged marriages, domestic abuse, and honour killings, among other things. TBSD was written from a masculine perspective as well. The narrative concludes with a positive note. It contains a glimmer of optimism that those who want for a better life and strive to bridge differences by keeping within bounds may receive what they deserve. After the close analysis of the text and getting idea from different journal articles, it becomes clear that Hamidullah is true representation of Pakistani rural women issues. Although she wrote about the condition of man in patriarchal society, at the same time in her story Bull and the She Devil she wrote dilemma of man who apparently seem very powerful but internally very weak.

It is through her character that touches upon several important thematic concerns. However, if we analyze the Bull and the She Devil, most of the themes are related to the male character only. In this study the researchers explored that women have been treated as a super object. The male centric figure GQ wants comprehensive compliance of his wife. She is supposed to please the physical wishes of her husband. She is treated as just as an article of male imagination. She was little more than a body and a body to him throughout the first several weeks of their wedding. The second thematic concern upon which this research throws light is specific gender roles. The anecdote demonstrates how our society's gender roles prevent males from seeing power as a female trait. In many societies, a guy cannot love his lady because of the established gender roles. Women are treated as if they were a sexual object or toy. Thirdly, it also discusses psychological dilemma of protagonist. It demonstrates that the character wishes to preserve the patriarchal man's image by his words and actions, but that after producing this image, he feels remorse instead of satisfaction. The final thematic concern of this research is lexical items. Verbs, adverbs, nouns, and adjectives all contribute to the story's overall theme. For instance,

from her husband's perspective, adjectives like softness, roundness, curled eye lashes, and light complexion reveal the patriarchal man's traditional picture of his lady.

As described earlier, symbols are often characters, settings, images, or other motifs that stand in for bigger ideas. There are multiple symbols used in this study including stones thrown in the well, blood-stained hands, and even the title of story the ‘Bull’ and ‘She Devil’ is also a symbol. Stones thrown in the well symbolizes the figure of Ghulam Qadir the way many Pakistani women are treated by their husbands. Moreover, his blood-stained hands symbolize his beast like nature and his use of power like an animal that prey weak animal. Furthermore, this research finds that ‘Bull’ is a symbol of the power and ‘She Devil’ is the symbol of the bad woman who bewitched man with her charm. Finally, this research also discusses how the dilemma of male character is present in the patriarchal society in the short story of the Bull and the She Devil written by Hamidullah. This is a story of a guy who is both a praetor and a prey at the same time. The researchers observe that the characteristics are given to him to authorize him and control women, but they really weaken him by preventing him from developing a strong relationship with his spouse, which leads to psychological problems.

## 6. CONCLUSION

According to Foucault, power is a complex network in which even the poorest members of society wield power in some manner. In many societies, a man's set gender role prohibits him from loving a woman for the sole purpose of benefiting from her. Patriarchal societies consider women weak and make their men strong in a sense that men become weak psychologically and mentally. They scared to share what they feel. In the Bull and the She Devil; the super object Shirin gains all the power and without uttering a single word and the subject who is apparently authoritative is confused in a dilemma of what to do to get his wife like him. He desires her to want him but does not dare to ask. Specific gender roles seem to fail in this story as the protagonist at the end fails and commits suicides. It is not necessary that always a subaltern figure be helpless, one with remaining in its limits can get the shade of a super object which has a power to subvert the powerful subject.

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