



A Deconstructive Investigation of the Prevalent Matrimonial Norms Creating Gender Disparity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Bride* (1990)

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Abstract- Based on qualitative research, the paper endeavors to deconstruct gender disparity in matrimonial stereotypical norms in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Bride* (1990). Sidhwa is one of the key Anglophone, diaspora American-based Pakistani fiction writers whose art can be taken as a representative voice for minority and segregated segments of society. The study plumbs into the textual-cum descriptive investigation of the novel from the post-structural (deconstructive) perspective of Judith Butler, a modern acclaimed gender theorist. The theoretical threads that can be found in the novel that manifest the influence of marriage, race and tribe. Therefore, the revered institution of marriage that has been denoted predominantly in the novel, is centered upon the cultural norms of ethnicity, race and patriarchy that shape disparity in gender roles on the basis of sexual classification. Consequently, the two different categorizations of identity work through the culture, one that grants a favourable role to men (husbands) and the second that determines subservient role for women (wives). The study thus deconstructs the matrimonial gender roles that pose a threat to equal possibilities for men and women requisite for the progress of a society.

Keywords: Sidhwa, deconstruction, disparity, gender, matrimonial norms, gender classification.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background Knowledge

By deconstructing the patriarchal normative gender concept that has an obtrusive foundation, Sidhwa provided an alternative way to escape from its stereotypical binarism through the depiction of various characters, contexts and clashing cultures in the

selected work, *The Pakistani Bride* (1990). The novel critiques the conservative normativity through the theoretical characterization, the thematic and narrative technique in the tribal contextualization of Kohistani society. The segregation and repression on the pretext of its normativity is one of the concerns of the study,

Women's literature from South Asia, Africa, South America, and African Americans in the USA see themselves as situated at the intersection of three repressive discourses and structures: racism, imperialism and sexism...Sexism, at the hands of an oppressive patriarchy even in native societies, reduced them to machines of reproduction and labour. (Nayar, 2008, p. 120)

Gender stereotyping therefore caused the conservative view of its categorization that is challenged by the performativity of the focused characters and contexts in the novel. It led to the telling point that constructed identities of the key focused characters from multiethnic and multiracial background depend on their consistent roles and performances. The socio-cultural construction is questioned that defines gender identification with sexuality based on a biological division, "Gender is not essential, biologically determined quality or an inherent entity but is repeatedly performed, based on, and reinforced by, societal norms" (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018,1).

The diversity and variety of gender roles of the various characters exhibit that the stereotypical norms play a crucial role in shaping biased classification of their roles in a society. For illustration, the focused

novel by Sidhwa, *The Bride (1990)* questions its rampant normative ideals in Pakistani tribal and clannish culture of Kohistan that categorizes its construction into binary of men and women segregating all others who don't fall into the set demarcation. The work dramatizes the repressive gender dogmas that caused the protagonist, Zaitoon along with other key focused characters to embark on a journey of resistance to conformism of their identity that is compulsorily imposed upon by the patriarchal culture she is surviving in. Butlerian post-structural concept is used as the foundation of the textual and analytical study of the novel that divulges the aporias or contradictions in upholding of gender stereotyping. Thus, *The Bride* narrated, more explicitly to say, the wretched tales of three brides- Afshan, Zaitonn and Carol, who are in conflict with the haunting repression and marginalization of gender clichéd ideology ubiquitous in the tribal society. The traditional gender-ridden plot of *The Bride* has three major layers, as is analyzed by Anita Desai (2007) that the novel is the combination of three worlds to form the basic plot. Thus, this is the manifestation of the resistance to gender normative standards by the diverse performances and identity of the key characters in the novel. More specifically to recap, the different contexts and diverse cultures create different shades of gender identity challenging the presumed notion of gender stability

The study of sex and gender underwent through a conceptual variation and development with the advent of the post-modern and post-structural theoretical approach that mainly considers gender as a separate entity from sexuality. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Electra and Oedipal complexes remained dominant theme in psychology to conceptualize sex differences mostly propagating the stereotypical viewpoints of gender. But that has been changed now for understanding its identification. "The psychoanalysis was the state of art, and the Electra and Oedipal complexes presumed to account for sex differences" (Risman, 2012, p.1). Gender is often imagined a bipolar concept that is followed up conventionally. People are assigned their idiosyncratic categorization through the lens of bipolarization. As Stryker (2008) opines, "gender is not the same as sex, though the two terms are often used interchangeably, even in ...literature, creating a great deal of confusion" (p. 11). Stryker offers the idea that no person is born a man or woman, but rather becomes one through a "complex process of socialization" (Stryker, 2008, p. 11).

II. THE AUTHOR AND THE CONTEXT OF THE SELECTED WORK

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the renowned post-colonial South Asian fiction writers (Escherle, 2013). Her art is ranked to be the representative voice for minority people, women and segregated segments of society. The artist earned national and International awards equally to be recognized worldwide. She was awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, the Pakistan highest national honour for her contribution in the Pakistani English literature. Besides winning local awards, she got also a Bunting fellowship at Radcliff and prestigious Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Writers award. Her novels have been translated into other world languages; this grew the further interest of her readership in the world. Furthermore, the representation of concerns of the marginalized segments of society in her works fascinated a director of movies to consider her novels to be dramatize for theater, *The Earth* (Movie) is actually *The Cracking India's* dramatization by Deepa Mehta, the director of the movie (Edward, 1991). Thus, her novels adaptations brought more potency of her literary voice in the world literature. The artist attracted vast critical responses and explorations internationally. There is an extensive body of critical, theoretical and research works done about her art by various scholars and writers.

The publication background of Sidhwa's notable work, *The Pakistani Bride* is worth probing. The book is based on a real incident the novelist comes across while her visit to a mountainous town in Karakorum during her honeymoon (Desai, 2007). Sidhwa came across a story of a young bride who was killed cruelly on the spot as she tried to run away from her husband's home. This shocking incident forced the novelist to write down something about this and to voice for the woman in that tribal culture. The murder of the bride was named as a protection of the so-called 'honour' of her husband and the tribal culture. And then, the bride's dead body was found floating in the river consequently, while staying there, Sidhwa heard the story of a Punjabi girl who had come by the camp on her way to be married off to a Kohistani tribal. After the wedding she ran away, but her husband and his relatives hunted her down. Later, her decapitated body was found in the river. This story made such an impact on Sidhwa that she felt compelled to write about the girl's fate, albeit with a different ending. (Marwah, 2008, p. 15)

Therefore, the novel is literally a pathetic voice for the victims of gender discrimination in the tribal culture that does not let a women to voice for their rights except at the cost of their lives. The novelist extended a short story written on this issue later on into a complete novel with a title of *The Pakistani*

Bride. So it took almost four years to complete the novel. The novel can be a representative book to throw light on the unavoidable impact of socio-cultural gender norms in the context of Pakistani tribal culture, "The Pakistani Bride is Bapsi Siddha's most vocally feminist work. Through an array of different characters, the artist explores women's conditions of life, love and self-worth in Pakistan" (Marwah, 2008, p.16). Moreover, it is a significant work that provides a comparative literary analysis on the lives of women in the tribal areas in Pakistan versus metropolitan city of Lahore. The clashing gender norms in the two areas are manifested through the pages of the novel.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the deconstructive gender perspective that critiques gender stereotyping?
2. How do the matrimonial gender norms create disparity between men and women?
3. Does the novelist portray gender roles supported by a patriarchal culture as a risk to equality of rights for both the sexes?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the renowned post-colonial South Asian fiction writers (Escherle, 2013). Her art is ranked to be the representative voice for minority people, women and segregated segments of society. Her novels have been translated into other world languages; this grew the further interest of her readership in the world. Furthermore, the representation of concerns of the marginalized segments of society in her works fascinated a director of movies to consider her novels to be dramatized for theater, *The Earth* (Movie) is actually *The Cracking India's* dramatization by Deepa Mehta, the director of the movie (Edward, 1991).

Kapadia (1996) contends that Bapsi Sidhwa deals with the trends and concerns of post-colonialism deftly in her art. Her standing as a distinguished writer in the company of other artists is due to her exclusive sense of eccentricity and humor. Her novels are concerned with numerous subjects like acrimonious experiences of partition, refugees' issues, and segregation of women and minorities, besides all her themes of inter-faith weddings and cultural and global subjects. Dhawan and Kapadia (1996) are of the opinion that she frequently discusses Parse community in her novels that is why sometimes she appears to be the novelist of ethnicity by her readers and analysts. Racial, cultural and ethnic concerns are the key areas of her works and she portrays all these issues through the prism of Parse community. Despite considered as a local novelist, her art is lively and timeless. Her themes are not limited to only regional issues and concerns rather her art paints the picture of all, living and suffering in the wretched plight as a result of segregation, migration and partition etc. ¹

The doctoral study, *Unruly Alliances: Gender and Discourse in Nationalism in South Asian Women Writers, Partition Narrative* by A.J. Didur (1998) is an exploration of how the works of Bapsi Sidhwa, Attia Hosain, and Jyotimoyee Devi problematize the suppressive hegemonic orthodox discourse of nationalism that silences the women voice (1998, p.v) during the partition of India in 1947. The novels offer women's multiple identities in order to cope with the precarious situation for their safe survival. In chapter four of the thesis, *Cracking India: Gender Minorities and agency in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India*, analyzed how the trope of (172) women became an alibi for colonial powers and how it led to the intervention into the daily routine affairs of women in the text.

When I Raised My Head Again, Feminism and the Female Body in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels: The Pakistani Bride and Cracking India by Marwah (2008)² is a doctoral study that explores the rampant patriarchal system in the two works by the novelist in detail. The comparative study has been done by the scholar on the two novels by shedding light on how the female characters are marginalized by the male-motivated socio-cultural system that has been depicted by the novelist.

F. Chaudhary (2013) in *Hiding and Seeking Identity: The Female Figure in the Novels of Pakistani Female Writers in English: A Feminist Approach*, debates the struggle and resistance of women against the patriarchal structures rampant in the south-Asian fiction that has been highlighted by Bapsi Sidhwa, Qaisra Shahraz and Umera Ahmad- the chosen Anglophone Pakistani writers for the doctoral study here. Although women suffered the sexual discrimination and oppression as a consequence of the socio-cultural and religious standards, yet the selected female Anglophone Pakistani writers keep painting the resistance of female characters in their respective works to accommodate female voices as well as to expose the repressive and restrictive patriarchal culture to be reformed. The first two chapters of the doctoral dissertation explore Sidhwa's two pivotal works, *Ice-Candy Man* and *The Pakistani Bride* respectively.

V. THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK APPLIED: AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW:

This is a qualitative, narrative research that follows a descriptive-cum investigative method. The textual references from the two novels are given for the support of the arguments of the undertaken study. This section of the study therefore plumbs into a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical framework undertaken by the present research. The research is qualitative in nature, it explores how and why gender identity is constructed out of socio-cultural norms through the investigation of the two works by Sidhwa from Butlerian post-structural gender viewpoint. She encounters the rampant notions that certain gendered behaviors are normative and natural. The pursuit of research objectives through the textual and analytical study of the two novels is to be carried on through the guidelines of the applied research methodology. It aims at interrogation of the normativity and integrity of gender construction which are taken for granted as a result of association of gender and sexuality together. That leads to establish the classification of the both, gender and sexuality through binary concept. More importantly, this conservative concept about gender is not challenged by the traditional feminist and gender schools of thought. So our identity is interpreted and shaped in light of our gender category determined by social standards (Butler, 1990).

The theoretical background of the applied methodology of this research is branched off from Judith Butler's deconstructive perspective of gender that is probed and explained in detail for the convenience of readers and researchers through this study. The Butlerian deconstructive gender approach is applied as a research framework to pursue the set research objectives. Her thoughts, more specifically to say, theoretically influenced modern thought.

Butler (1990, 1999) argues to create 'Gender Trouble' by interrogating the binaries of gender, sex and sexuality. It is one of the focal points of her approach to unfold the wrongly assumed association between gender and sex taken since long as identical entities. Gender, "is not essential, biologically determined quality or an inherent entity but is repeatedly performed, based on, and reinforced by, societal norms" (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018, 1). To challenge or go against the prevalent notions of deeply rooted gender stereotyping is like to go against what is 'natural' to them. So that deviation from the assumed concept of gender as a natural is considered as a strange and bizarre. Furthermore, it is one of key ideas in deconstructive gender perspective that gender is not a natural, or objective entity but this is constructed through performativity (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). It is explained as follows,

Because there is neither an essence that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective deal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, but the various acts of gender create the idea of gender and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is thus, construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective argument to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The author of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness. (Butler, 1990, p. 522)

It is to resist the inequitable gender identification designated in pre-existing and pre-defined script, those who don't meet the binary gender criterion are taken as an abnormal or strange by the societal norms of gender stereotyping. The gender stereotyping starts since the birth and keeps continuing imposingly throughout the life through socio-cultural, ethnic, racial and religious canons.

VI. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS.

The Disparity of Gender Identities through Matrimonial Conventional Norms

It is one of the leading propensities in a stereotypical culture to find the other partner who should be of the same race, caste or class, this is one of the ways of association of gender, caste or class together (Eckert & McConnell- Ginet , 2003). These are some of the categories about gender classifications like a class, a race that systematically construct a family life. These theoretical threads can be practically observed and explored from *The Pakistani Bride* that exhibits the influence of marriage, race and tribe upon structuring of different shades of gendered identity that are rooted in the tribal culture portrayed by the novelist. Therefore, the institution of marriage that has been denoted predominantly in the novel, is centered upon the cultural norms of ethnicity, race and patriarchy that lead to shape a specific identities. Consequently, the two different categorization of identities work through the culture, one that is favorable role is reserved for husbands and the second - subservient role is set for wives.

Therefore, the marriages in the novel that are the manifestation of the influence of ethnical, racial and tribal affinities in favor of one partner and against the other. So the subordination of wives in the institution of marriage is used as a medium and pretext of hegemony for husbands. Wives are oppressed mostly in the orthodox culture once they come in the bond of matrimony due to the force of socio-cultural norms that are in service of patriarchy. Similarly, *Water*, another one of Sidhwa's conspicuous works, the novelist remarks on the institution of marriages as a mean of control and objectification of women, "Just as the giver can no longer lay claim to an object that has once been donated, the parents of the traditional Hindu bride have no rights over their daughters once she has been gifted to the bridegroom" (Sidhwa, 2006, P.21).

The study here focuses specially on the forced marriages of the two brides, Afshan and Zaitoon. The novel unfolds the imposition of socio-cultural ideals upon the two brides who are to marry to the men whom they know nothing about. So creation of submissive and hegemonic roles of brides and bridegrooms respectively is to represent the undue and unjust treatment by society on gender difference. Anita Desai (2007) argues this, "We meet the central character, Qasim, as a ten-year-old boy being handed a gun by his father and being told he is to be married; a fellow tribal who has failed to repay a debt has promised him his daughter instead. The boy does not comprehend what marriage might entail but delighted with the weapon".

Thus, the gender identification of a married woman brought about by the novelist reflects that marriage is a transaction between the two families to pay off their ethnic and cultural tribal issues using a woman as a scapegoat. A bride's identity is no more than to be a product for transaction. Here the bridegroom attains authoritative role over a bride through the backing of the socio-cultural customs. In the beginning of the novel, Sidhwa critiques the transaction of two families to dispose of their loan by using a woman body as a commodity. Resham khan, the bride Afghan's father, had to settle their scores on behalf of his family to his enemies for his old conflict. "Haven't we settled enough scores?" (Sidhwa, 1990, p.1). Therefore, the identity of a woman is her utility to avoid the feud or to pay off the loan. When Resham Khan promised to grant his daughter in marriage to his opponents. He comments, "Anyway this will not lead to a feud. Resham khan has promised us his daughter" (Sidhwa, 1990, p.1). Qasim and his father are contented because of receipt of an acceptable commodity by his enemy in the shape of a woman.

Culturally, gender is thought to be based on compulsory, binary system that grants specific characteristics to sexed anatomy (Hausman, 2001). It causes inequitable roles for husbands and wives contrarily through the institution of marriage. Next victim of ethnicity and caste system of tribal Pakistani society is Zaitoon. As is discussed by Dipika Shai (2006),

The *Bride* is a women's lyric cry in prose against the existential fate and societal abuse. Sidhwa has fashioned complex metaphors to orchestrate the multiple agonies of a woman, a successful portrayal of pain and suffering in the character of Zaitoon. She has written dramatically of a particular culture, marriage, loyalty, honor and their conflict withhold ways. (1990, p.85-86)

The study centers on constructed identity of Zaitoon that is sexed, based as a result of tribal patriarchal culture granting the absolute powers to masculinity in the pretext of the institution of marriage. As is explained by Qasim, "Bibi, you will like my village. Across the river, beyond those mountains, we are a free and manly lot" (1990, p. 85), the manifestation of the superiority complex by the representative character

of tribal society, Qasim, "You will see how different it is from the plains. We are not bound hand and foot by government clerks and police. We live by our own rules calling our own destiny! We are free here as the air you breathe!"(85) The telling point exhibited from the above words of conversation is that patriarchy, "manly lot" (85), is coupled with ethnicity and socio-cultural gender ideals, "We live by our own rules calling our own destiny!"(Sidhwa, 1990, p. 85). The collusion of these two elements mainly-ethnic tribal custom plus patriarchy, leads to define the dissimilar domains of gender construction for men and women. Consequently, the fluctuation of her wretched plight to a daunting and defiant lady appears in front of readers of the novel. Initially, her performativity is to resist the strong ethnic, social, religious and tribal standards at the time when she was made cognizant by her father that he promised to marry her to his cousin whom he did not even see. Zaitoon did not utter a single word in reply.

Bibi, we talked of your marriage,

Zaitoon felt her body tremble. She froze, digging painfully into Qasim's legs.

'Sit down, child,' he said. 'What do you think of it?' (Sidhwa,1990,p.80)

Zaitoon pulled her chaddar forward over her face. Her voice was barely audible, "Anything you say, Abba" (Sidhwa, 1990, p.81). Zaitoon, an orphan and adopted girl, suffers from the culturally shaped institution of forced marriage that is inherited from normative ideals of Kohistani society. Now it is an understood rule of gender stereotyping after the transaction of marriage that a wife has to survive obeying her husband always. Women's status, residence, dress and food in a family are not in any sense equal to their strong partners. Sidhwa mirrors the unequal identification of married women as follows as for the standard of food, accommodation etc.

The untidy row of buildings that crowded together along their street contained a claustrophobic warren of screened quarters. Rooms with windows open to the street were allotted to the men: the dim maze of inner rooms to the women a domain given over to procreation, female odours and the interminable care of children. Smells of urine, stale food and cooking hung in the unventilated air, churning slowly, room to room, permeating wood, brick and mortar. Generations of babies had wet mattresses, sofas and rugs, spilled milk sherbets and food, and wiped hands on ragged curtains; and, just in case the smells should fade, armies of new-born infants went on arriving to ensure the odours were perpetuated. (Sidhwa, 1990, p. 56)

The marriage concerned roles grant unrestrained powers to a husband like a king that are at the best reflection in the Kohistani culture. "Husband whether he is Qasim, Sakhi or Farukh has overwhelming sense of superiority. A man is judged by how well he can control woman. Cultural requirements and expectations direct woman how she should lead her life as a wife" (Salman, 2011, p.98).

The matrimonial life of Zaitoon with her hilly spouse creates the situation of mockery of human values against the socio-cultural, racial and tribal gender settlements. Despite of her unwillingness to be comfortable with the system which is in clash with her own background, she very pathetically pleads her father, "Abba, take me back... if I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains...I will die rather than live here" (Sidhwa, 1990, p.13). Qasim gets furious at the unexpected response of his daughter as a challenge to the decision of a father, he considers it like questioning his authority, "I've given my words ... it is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hand" (Sidhwa, 1990, p.137). How a Punjabi woman is wedded in a tribal culture, places her in a weaker gender position having the cultural clash.

The force of the orthodox belief in one's stereotypical customs makes one blind of seeing anything impartially. And that is the case of Qasim who was suggested by Maj Mushtaq, Ashiq and Marrium to quit his illogical idea of getting her daughter married in a culture that is too inconsistent and hostile to the culture she was brought up in. "They try to convince Qasim about the differences of the Punjabi and Kohistani cultures, and opine that the marriage would be a complete failure" (Alvi, p.86). But Qasim is not ready to consider any counsel that goes against his tribal customs. This brought Zaitoon to a stage where she has no individuality and identity that can create a dissenting voice there. So, marriages that are based on ethnicity, caste of the tribal system create unequal gender construction that go against the equal possibilities for development of women.

VII. CONCLUSION

The paper examined the marriage-constructed identifications/roles in Sidhwa's *The Bride*. Resham Khan gave his daughter, Afshan to Qasim to pay his loan which he could not pay back. He offered his daughter a cheque to resolve his old rivalry (Salam, 2011). It exhibited girls and women as a commodity to be used by men for compensation of their loans and crimes. When Qasim as a young boy of ten proclaimed, "I will kill him with this gun..... His father laughed. Then, seeing the hurt in the boy's solemn face, he said: Haven't we settled enough scores? Anyway this will not lead to a feud. Resham Khan has promised us his daughter" (p.1). Thus, the gender identification of a married woman brought about by the novelist reflected that marriage was a transaction between the two families to pay off their ethnic and cultural issues using a woman as a scapegoat. A bride's identity was no more than to be a product for transaction. Here the bridegroom attained an authoritative role over a bride through the backing of the socio-cultural customs. In the beginning of the novel, Sidhwa critiqued the transaction of two families to dispose of their loan by using a woman's body as a commodity. Resham Khan, the bride Afghan's father, had to settle scores on behalf of his family to his enemies for his old conflict. Hence, the sacred institution of marriage is used to create gender disparity among men and women

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