



Politics of Gender in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel The Bride

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to explore female gender subjectivity in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, The Bride. Gender Politics plays a significant role in depicting male and female characters in literature. Female writers pen the characters of female in over exaltation and reveal degeneration of male counter parts. Similarly male authors inclined towards male characters and reflects patriarchy in their works. This paper would emphasize that genuine representation of male by women writers and female by men writers are not possible. The author's gender subjectivity always influence the characters in his/her novel. Gender subjectivity is the main focus of this analysis and I have chosen Bapsi Sidhwa's novel The Bride for gender analysis. This research paper will justify that gender, apart from biological sex , plays a vital role in determining characterization in the novel.

Keywords: gender, female, sex, difference, characters

Female subjectivity is deep rooted in the tribal Pakistani society. Women witnessed various violations on the basis of gender. Generally Pakistan's socio-cultural set up provides a platform for gender inequality. Female gender faced a lot of discrimination right from their birth to death. Women are considered by the patriarchal society as a worthless creatures where as men are considered as treasures. Many writers have written women characters as inferior and weak in their novels .But the real fact is that women are facing more problems and difficulties than men. It is very important to know the difference between sex and gender. Every society has a system which is based on sex or gender. In short, sex is a term which is related to biology and gender expresses socially or culturally constructed qualities. The main focus of this paper is to explore the construction of female subjectivity while analyzing the male characters in the novel. 'One is not born but rather becomes a women.'(De Beavoir,295). Every one born in this world should be either male or female. Anatomical differences are the basis for categorizing the sex. Gender identity means that the appropriate role of performance of a male or female in terms of personality, structures, attitudes and behaviours. Family plays a vital role in gender inequality. It is within the family that the

children will become boys and the girls. Female and male babies were treated differently by their parents. The main reason for this treatment is that the mother and the father are not treated equal at their childhood. The male and female babies are described fundamentally as same with one difference. The difference is that women's genitals were inside the body while the men's were outside. The gender difference was imposed by force. The idea of gender differences helps men to sustain the reality of male dominance. Men and women are not treated equal in any culture of the world. In every culture and society it is told that a man is different and superior to the women. This wrong notion gives birth to the patriarchy. Ruthven explains it as a system which enables men to dominate women. This line indicates that patriarchy has tagged women as inferior to men for biological reasons. Julia Kristeva defines femininity as that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order. Patriarchy has developed the feminine characteristics such as sweetness, modesty, humility, subservience etc. As Simon De Bevoir puts it in her second sex:

The fact is that woman has always been men's dependent if not his slave. The two sexes have never shared the world in equality (De Bevoir, 20).

Gender and literature are very closely related to each other in every society and culture. Sex is the creation of God but gender is not the God's creation. The creation of patriarchy serves the male flair for domination. A Patriarchal social set up allows men's superiority over women. Although women have played a vital role in the creation of society, the patriarchal thought has always relegated them to margins. Literature not only reflects social reality but also shapes the complex ways of men and women organization, their interpersonal relationship and their perception of their social-cultural reality.

Literature provides pleasure to the readers particularly the male readers. The male readers are getting pleasure by the depiction of women as passive, decoile, dependent, helpless victims of the hands of men. Women's inner experiences are rendered invisible as they were considered to be insignificant. The main roles of women in all societies confined to their motherhood. Hence many literary works of male writers failed to reflect the experiences of the muted female half of the society. In the early phase of creative writing, many women writers used pseudonyms to hide their identities. In most of the cases, they used men name as pseudonyms George Eliot, Acton Bell, Curer Bell are such names the women authors used as pseudonyms. And lack of confidence was seen in their writing as they thought it was hard for them to get recognition. Showalter in her introduction of A literature of their own wrote:

If women lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writings, they would have had a literature of their own. (showalter, 3)

In Showalter's opinion, women are living in a different world from that of men. Women have always had a literature of their own. Bapsi Sidhwa is an internally acclaimed author who gave her voice to the voiceless middle

class women. She goes deep into the pschye of women characters and pens down their sufferings. The novel, The Bride is based on a true story , narrated to the author when she travelled to the Karakonam Mountains. This novel is a story of victimized women , Zaitoon. She has a strong will and mental courage. She occupied a central position in this novel. K.Nirupa Rani in “Gender and Imagination in Bapsi sidhwa’s fiction “says,

Sidhwa’s men have distinct personality traits but her women are not extravagant .
they are ordinary devoid of feelings. In their limited orbits they are socially active
and lead only a superficial existence.Even though they are active, they are flat
characters. (123)

Sidhwa’s novel The Bride explores the authority and previllage of men towards women. In this novel, The Bride ,Zaitoon is a Punjabi orphaned girl. She was adopted by a Kohistani tribes man because the girl reminds him of his own daughter who was dead from the small-pox. The desease carried off all his family. He migrated to the plains to get rid of the pain of the loss of his family. He raised the orphan girl and decided to arrange marriage with one of his tribe man, Shaki. He knows that Zaitoon is hardly suited to his mountain tribe and she can never lead a happy life at the mountain. Sidhwa narrates this as:

Women the world over , through the ages , asked to be murdered , raped, exploited,
enslaved,to get unfortunately impregnated , beaten up, bullied and discriminated,
it was an unmutable law of nature.(226)

Women’s identity is denied in the society. Women are treated as sexual objects or the other. In this novel, The Bride , Zaitoon is forced to marry Shaki against her wish. She is not consulted. Though she is discontent with marrying a tribal man, she is threatened with death. Her life becomes miserable after her marriage with Shaki. The novel presents the stories of three brides namely Zaitoon, Afshan and Carol. Afshan is married to a ten year old boy, when she was at the age of fifteen. Afshan’s father has not been able to reimburse the debt he got from Qasim’s father, Resham Khan. AFshan is offered to Quasim to compensate the loss. This transaction clearly revealed that women’s position in the society is nothing more than a bargaining commodity. The girl’s opinion is not considered in making decision of her own marriage. Afshan is amazed by the physical appearance of her husband, when she first saw him. Sidhwa narrates this as:

The girl did not know whether to laugh or cry. She had been told that her groom was
very young but she had thought that he would be like herself, at least fifteen. She began
to laugh , while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks. She laughed

uncontrollably and Qasim stung to the quick, rushed for the door. (10)

Afshan adopts herself quickly to her new environment and easily earns the love of Qasim's mother. Qasim becomes father at the age of sixteen. His wife and his six children died of small-pox, when he was at the age of thirty four. Then Qasim flees to Pakistan and adopted a girl whom she named after his daughter, Zaitoon. He gave good education to Zaitoon. Zaitoon was married to Sakhi without her consent. At first she was really impressed by the beauty of the mountain. She was very badly treated by her husband after her marriage. Sakhi beats her fanatically. Sakhi tries to find out one or other reason to torture her daily as she was raised by Qasim in Lahore in the liberal way of life, she can not understand Sakhi's murderous jealousy and hate.

This novel, *The Bride* describes that women are slaves to the men of the family. Zaitoon prefers death instead of dying slowly by her husband. She knows well that her escape from home brings dishonor to her husband, Sakhi. She knows that the mountains are pathless and it is impossible to escape. In order to escape from her husband she has chosen the pathless mountain to lose herself. Sidhwa writes down these lines as:

Zaitoon knew that somewhere in the serpentine vaults of the ravine and in the glacier-riven valleys she has lost her direction and that the river gorge could be hidden anywhere in the myriad furrows between the mountains. Darkness fell and with this came fear. (197)

Sidhwa correctly says that she wanders in the mountain to save her life from the tribal men. Finally she reaches the military camp and the soldiers helped her. Though she was rescued by the soldiers, she cannot go back to her husband's house as there is no humanity left in those tribal men. At the same time she cannot go back to her father Qasim's house as the society never welcomes a girl run away from her husband's house. Sidhwa states in this novel that the society norms have become stronger than the humanitarian standard.

Carol is another bride in this novel, who suffered from her husband's behavior. Carol is a woman from California. She thought that Pakistan is a land of romance. She failed to realize the world of veils. In Farukh's absence, she flirts Farukh's friend Major Mustaq. She is surprised to know that Pakistan men marry their cousins. Though Mushtag is attracted by Carol, he does not like a permanent relationship with his friend's wife. He cannot even dream of forsaking his children and wife. Mustaq politely declined her offer as:

In spite of what you hear about our being able to have four wives, we take marriage and divorce very seriously. It involves more than just emotions. It's a social responsibility.

For one thing at the very least, my wife's life would become unbearably confined, drab and unhappy. And we are cousins, you know. (181)

After she was rejected by Mushtaq, Carol turns back to Farukh. She thinks of having children and making her life with Farukh successful. She even dreams of going into the tribal world and enlightening the savages and cavemen. But her fantasy is shattered immediately. She faced the reality with heavy heart. She realizes the differences between the two culture of America and Pakistan. Carol's conflicts are solved when she accepts her marriage to be a failure and returns to her own land.

To sum up, this paper clearly reveals that women are treated as a commodity of transaction in the tribal Pakistani society. Sidhwa interrogates the institution of marriage and expressed male chauvinism. Child bearing is considered to be the main role of female gender and education is least important to them. Women are discriminated and experienced suffering in every walk of life. Thus this paper justifies the fact that gender politics plays a vital role in characterization. After analyzing the salient features of Zaitoon, Carol and Afshan, we can conclude that genuine depiction of male characters by women writers and female characters by men writers is not possible. This paper can be concluded that Sidhwa, as a female writer, is unable to depict the male characters neutrally since her gender subjectivity involved in depicting the characters.

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