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GENDER VS CULTURE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S NOVEL WATER

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ABSTRACT

The Critical Discourse Analysis study of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* (2006) aims to explore and highlight the gender stigmatization of women in the name of cultural norms and traditions. Through CDA, the analysis unmask the element of cultural hegemony by studying the characters of widowed women in Indian culture as depicted by Sidhwa. The miseries of these lower-class widows, represented by the protagonist Chuyia, are examined. The research's framework, along with Gramsci's viewpoint of cultural hegemony, is designed with the help of Fairclough's modal of CDA. The study's primary purpose is to investigate the terrible situations imposed upon women by Indian Patriarchy as well as the strategies utilized to maintain hegemony and to stigmatize underprivileged women as commodities. Antonio Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony reflects the ideological image of Indian society before partition. The study uncovers the ideological schemes and vivacious cultural tricks employed by the upper classes to imprison the widows residing in the Ashram. The Oppressed lives, contentious problems, and the identity of women, especially of lower class are thoroughly evaluated by the effective implementation of CDA and Gramsci's cultural hegemony for clearer understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The research *Gender vs. Culture: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel Water* is an effort to foreground the oppressive predicaments of women through a critical examination of novel *Water* (2006) written by Bapsi

Sidhwa. For investigating hegemony organized by culture and society, the Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough's modal) is employed along with Gramscian (1930) viewpoint. The purpose of this study is not to highlight a purely feminist issue, but to analyze the role of cultural and societal structures in establishing hegemony over the lives of women, particularly widowed women. The broad feminist critique creates a forum for the rights of women, but the matter of female discrimination on grounds on marital status and class necessitates not just a cultural, but a cultural hegemonic standpoint to resolve this seemingly unimportant trouble of women portrayed in the selected novel.

With a gist of exploration, the researchers attempted to do justice by implementing CDA and Gramscian perspective. Another key part of the research is the function of language as a living organism in exercising cultural hegemony and preserving power relations. Whereas Fairclough (1989) views language as a social activity and an active social agency in the development of culture, Gramsci perceives culture as a wellspring of hegemonic practices. Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is exclusively exercised within the same cultural and ethnic communities. To describe the dominant classes' supremacy in capitalist society in order to sustain power over the people, he invented this very term. A cultural framework is essential to preserve hegemony. Hegemony transforms into an ethnocentric dynamic in this sense. In addressing with the destinies of the key characters, *Chuyia* and *Shakuntala*, the novel's narrative demonstrates an ethnocentric inclination.

The feminist concerns of Bapsi Sidhwa are prominent in her writings. In the history of South Asian literature, Sidhwa is considered as a pioneer author to speak up for the women's rights in South Asia (the Subcontinent). Her expertise lies in addressing the cultural and social concerns of modern South Asian thought terrain. As Dr. Najia Zaidi points out, "Bapsi Sidhwa occupies a central position in Pakistani English Fiction writings. Her novels are written with genuine social purpose." (2011) Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsi, Tehmina Durrani, Arundati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Qiasra Shahraz and Uzma Aslam Khan are among the writers who seek to highlight not just women but also the political, economic, cultural, and socio-ethnic motives that are used to wield hegemony.

To talk about postcolonial feminism, Bapsi Sidhwa is one such exceptional English fiction writer from Pakistan who has contributed to the literature abundantly. Bapsi Sidhwa is a prominent celebrated writer of Pakistan. She has multiple citizenship in Pakistan, India, and the US, but prefers to be identified as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsi woman. Her novels *The Crow Eaters* (1978), *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) and *An American Brat* (1993) are about her life experiences as a Parsi, Punjabi, Pakistani and American woman respectively. In the case of writing *Water* (2006), Sidhwa said, "the plot and characters were already there, but I had to bring the skeletal script and cinematic images to life with words. Aside from being a riveting narrative, the plot touches on a subject near and dear to my heart: the repressive grasp that tradition, in this instance, religious tradition, has on women. It depicts

the limitations and the oppressive attitudes that a patriarchal culture enforces even on a girl-child's life.

Water (2006), the selected novel, illustrates the struggles and misery of widows in Indian society of 1930s. *Women on the Verge of Existence* is a study that tries to uncover the dominant and cruel social influences that operate against women and hinder them from regular lives. As portrayed in the selected piece, the situation worsens for widowed women. The book *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa is given a CDA (Fairclough) supported by Mohanty's feminist viewpoint as well as Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The analysis of language as a weapon of hegemony is conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis, and Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony is applied to the study of hegemonic cultural standards that prevent bereaved women from leading a fulfilling life. Where Fairclough regards language as a cultural body that is controlled through society there Antonio Gramsci believes that culture is a fundamental aspect that participates in nurturing hegemony. Primarily, the research examines how class division and stratification shape the existence of women, mainly widows and women from lower socioeconomic groups, in light of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* (2006).

Water (2006), a work of fiction penned by Bapsi Sidhwa, was also adapted into a film with the same title directed by Deepa Mehta. *Water* (2006) is set in India in 1938, against the backdrop of Mahatma Gandhi's rise to power and the anti-colonial campaign. When India was under British colonial administration, the custom of marrying minors to elderly men was popular. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) is about women's predicament in 1930s India, in which age-old conventions that victimize women are portrayed in great strength, dragging the heroine of the story to the brink of destruction at a young age. It draws the reader much nearer to understanding the suffering of Brahmin widows. It discusses the massive cultural revolution and how social mores control the everyday lives of the forsaken widows, as well as the dread, scorn, and disdain with which the external world perceives them, and how the widows are forced into prostitution for a living. The novel's central topic revolves around the treatment of women, particularly widows, as things or possessions. In that era, widows were subjected to a Hindu custom that required them to devote the remainder of their lives in renunciation at a widows' *Ashram* (house of widows) if their husbands died.

The novel carries the settings of pre independence colonial India during 1930. It opens with a description of the protagonist running after a pup. This is to depict the innocence and purity of heart of the little girl *Chuyia*. The plots move on with a treacherous decision of *Chuyia*'s father to marry her with an old man of 44 years. This aims to bring grace for family. But that man dies in two years and ultimately leaves *Chuyia* as a widow. She is left with the options to be burnt with the dead body or to get married with her husband's brother or to live a life of seclusion at *Ashram*. Leaving for the third option makes her to wear a white *saree* and eat simple and less than the needs of survival. Life at the place is resented terrible where the widowed women must sing and dance for eight hours in temple in order to earn a meal for them. The meal simply comprises of a

fistful of lentils and rice. Their lives are bound to be doomed at the hands of sickness and starvation.

The novel brings into account the miseries and pains of widowhood in the form of the suffering of the characters of Kalyani and *Chuyia*. The novel opens a tumultuous India of 1930s when there was terrific religious exploitation going on against women. They were made to realize that the only had a meaningful existence in the company of their men. The selected novel *Water* (2006) entails the penalties portrayed by Bapsi Sidhwa against widowed women in Hinduism. It illuminates the capitalistic exploitation of widows. It is not that Bapsi Sidhwa rejects any restrictions that are allowed in Hinduism, but she intends to raise her concerns against the brutalities against widowed women. She intends to address the gross issues and heinous crimes committed against them in the name of protection and seclusion of *Ashram*. Kalyani as a young widow is represented sexually exploited and is shown sexually abused and used by *Ashram* head in the name of support for *Ashram*. Insignificance of the characters is shown in the helplessness of both *Chuyia* and Kalyani for obeying the orders silently.

Chuyia is later depicted as a feminist voice who attempts to break the rules of the place.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) examines the subject of widows in colonial Indian society and seeks to break away from tradition. Sidhwa's work is notable for its emphasis on traditional, cultural, and religious hegemony. *Chuyia* (little mouse), a six-year-old girl who lives with her parents in a village on the *Bihar Bengal* border, has been used to demonstrate the key feature of cultural hegemony. When she marries *Harilal*, a 44-year-old widower, her childhood and carefree life come to an end. At the beginning of the novel, a demonstration of gender discrimination is witnessed when *Chuyia's* father *Somnath*, a poor Brahmin priest, dismisses his wife's worries about *Chuyia's* age with this authoritative passage from the *Shastras*, “‘In the Brahmanical tradition’, said *Somnath*, ‘a Woman is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband’”. (Sidhwa, 2006, p.6) *Chuyia's* blithe life suddenly ended when her spouse passed away. *Chuyia* was meant to reside in *Ashram*, as per ancient customs (A house of Widows). And then there came significant plot twists in her destiny. *Chuyia's* existence was reduced from a human to mice in the genuine meaning of the term by the merciless influences of culture and society joining forces against her.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hegemony, or cultural hegemony, urges intellectuals and historians to consider cultural customs as effective actors in its preservation. They continue to discuss the problem as a socially reinforced phenomena (Lears, 2016, p.572). A subject's entire metamorphosis into imprisonment inside an environment is referred to as hegemony (Urbanati, 1998, p.370). Antonio Gramsci (1930s) was the first to develop the notion of hegemony, and it is important to remember the intellectual and historical settings while interpreting this concept of cultural hegemony. Or else, it may lure the readers astray (Lears, 1985, p.568).

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci gives a detailed discussion of how the phrase "cultural hegemony" is defined. According to him, it is an alliance between

the intellectual and aristocratic elites to uphold a moral framework by which they exercise influence over the people and therefore trap them (Ramos, 1982). Antonio Gramsci coined the notion of "cultural hegemony" to describe the power balance between various social classes (Noor and Riaz, 2014, p.219). The concept of cultural hegemony by Gramsci exposes a force that operates via culture. Its goal is to control both individual and group submissions. The victim has no influence on the lives and situations they are forced to endure in under this type of subjugation (Urbanati, 1998, p.370). Hegemony, according to Gramsci (1930), refers to the ruling class's authority and dominion over the populace. Its purpose is to persuade the lower classes that the ruling elite's objectives are the concerns of all classes (Mambrol, 2017). Rape, incest, and wife beating are all widespread in these patriarchal socioeconomic systems. They can retain control over males via socio-ethnic domains such as nations and tribes (Mercanti, 2011, p.164).

Feminism is a 20th-century movement that attempts to improve the attitudes towards women's rights. It aspires to develop as a voice for women from underrepresented communities (Srivastava and Singh, 2015, p.152). Women, according to feminists, are the most downtrodden and oppressed creatures on the planet. Patriarchal and societal pressures mistreat, victimize, and marginalize them emotionally as well as physically (Joiya and Gull, 2016, p.17). According to Weinrich (1979), feminists must struggle to abolish all forms of prejudice since women live in a patriarchal culture that views males as symbols of authority in all parts of life. These many difficulties become emblems of suppressed women's tragic lives. These issues determine the imprisoned experiences of women in uneducated tribal communities who force them to live terrible lives (kumar, 2014, p.1170).

Miti Pandey (2003) explains the function of feminism in literature as follows: Feminism in literature denotes to a style of approaching a book with a primary interest for the nature of women's experiences in it. Female fiction authors' key concerns from a feminist viewpoint include the fictitious experiences of characters; the author's reasoning, intuitive, or creative ability; and the experience inherent in language that interrogates societal prescriptions that subjugate, belittle, and regard women as lesser beings (Pandey, 2003, p. 1).

Bapsi Sidhwa's works offer a comprehensive view of the many roles that women played during the partition period. Sidhwa has presented her character so well that she does not appear altogether empowered or completely victimized (Kleist, 2011, p.70). Sidhwa's novels are primarily concerned with showcasing the plight of women in patriarchal societies. Her characterization art is so distinct that her characters appear to be alive in the world of literature (Joiya and Gull, 2011, p.18). In a culture that strongly believes in women's restriction and isolation, Sidhwa seeks to capture a wide variety of human feelings (Chaudhary, 2013, p.41).

Sidhwa's English literature is based on her own recollections during the division of the subcontinent and the atrocities women had to face at that time (Srivastava and Singh, 2015, p. 153). Bapsi Sidhwa is known for emphasizing how women, regardless of their age, are trapped in strict gender roles mandated by patriarchal

society (Chaudhary, 2013, p.33). The novel *Water* by Sidhwa is set in pre-colonial Indian civilization and deals with widowhood and marriage (Salam, 2011).

Water (2006) illustrates the backdrop of Gandhi's independence campaign in colonial India. It shifts patriarchal hegemony from masculine dominance to cultural hegemony and look further than the problems exerted by patriarchal authorities. Its goal is to raise awareness about the harsh cultural and religious restraints that Hindu widows face (Mercanti, 2011, p.162).

For deeply analyzing this selected novel, critical discourse analysis is a good instrument. *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa examines the identities of widows in Indian culture, particularly lower-class widowed women. Critical discourse analysis investigates how the colourful trickery and linguistic methods of high classes have captured and repressed the lives of widows in *Ashram* by uncovering and analyzing discourses in their social context. The Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used to put into words the inferior positions of widows in Indian society. The widows are regarded as “inauspicious”. They are not allowed to participate in social-religious ceremonies, and they are bound to adopt Hindu’s orthodox traditions. She has endured years of prejudice, oppression, and exploitation because of her subjugated status, particularly in economic life. Postcolonial Feminism is a subset of feminism that developed in the 1980s.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The selected novel is dissected by Critical Discourse Analysis considering Fairclough's view of language as a social phenomenon. According to Fairclough (1995), CDA is defined as follows:

“By critical discourse analysis aims to systematically often explore opaque relationships between cause and effect and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) social and cultural structures, relations ,and processes; to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to analyze how the opacity of this relationship between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.” (pp. 132-3)

Norman Fairclough is a prominent person in the CDA community. From his perspective, CDA is a way for studying cultural and social alterations that might be used to rebel against a privileged group's influence and power over others. Hegemony, as per Fairclough and Chuliaraki (1999), involves the naturalization of practices and their social links, as well as dominance based on consent and linkages among practices (Noor, Riaz, 2014, pg.220).

Gramsci describes Hegemony as follows in his book *Selections from The Prison Notebooks* (1971): “Hegemony as a form of control exercised by a dominant class, in the Marxist sense, a group controlling the means of production; Gramsci uses intellectual group to stand in euphemistically for class” The notion of cultural hegemony was established by the Italian philosopher Antonio

Gramsci in response to Karl Marx's theory that culture's prevailing ideology mirrors the ruling class's views and goals.

As stated in Noor and Riaz's (2014) paper, "Fairclough borrowed Gramsci's concept of Hegemony (1971) which is not simply about dominating group but rather about integrating them through their consent to the moral, political and cultural values of the dominant group. According to this concept women are defined as opposite to men." (p.219)

The three levels of analysis in Fairclough's theory are text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Each discursive occurrence, in other terms, has three dimensions: It's a spoken or written text; a form of discourse activity that involves the creation and analysis of texts, and it's a social activity.

To emphasize the hardship of women in colonial India, a feminist perspective is taken in connection to Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, in which women are treated as victims of socio-economic catastrophe. The Postcolonial perspective of Chandra Talpade Mohanty is the most appropriate for the scenario. In her book *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991), she discusses the impact of race and class on women's lives. As a result, Mohanty's viewpoint borders Marxist Feminism.

Like Western women, these Third-world women, are constituted as subjects by the cultures in which they reside and behave in culturally and historically particular ways, as per Mohanty (1991). Feminism is commonly viewed as a fight opposing a sexist and patriarchal oppression — a fight for female equality, an attempt to make women more like men. Mohanty promotes women's education and has an anti-capitalist attitude, which can help to critically assess the events presented in the selected novel *Water* (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The selected novel *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa is about the widows of *Ashram*. The novel depicts the exploitation of widows who have been victimized by society's domineering inclinations. The primary characters *Chuyia*, *Kalyani*, and *Shakuntala* are investigated intensively to show the sinister side of widows' lives, especially those from the lowest classes. The researchers evaluated the novel using feminist theory and women's problems as a backdrop and concluded that hegemony and gender-based prejudice are prevalent in the selected work.

The chosen novel revealed the hardship and mistreatment of *Ashram* widows. The affluent Brahmin set strict limitations on widows, such as not allowing them to wear any decorations or garments other than white, not allowing them to consume fried food, not allowing them to participate in any festivities, and most importantly, not allowing them for remarriage. The research uncovers the social position of widows who are mistreated in the guise of religion, even depicting their shadows as unlucky. They are regarded as harbingers of doom.

The selected novel shows the interlocking elements of hegemonic philosophy of tradition, culture, gender, and problematic themes such as marginalization,

stereotypical beliefs, patriarchy, religion, poverty, and child prostitution that exist in Indian society. Women are born to serve males, whether they are their husbands or fathers, according to Indian tradition. Women do not have their own individuality; they are only valued in community when they are accompanied by a male. Brahmin (rich and higher cast of Hindu community) are the ones who govern the sociocultural rules. In the narrative, power interactions are at the heart of the entire game. *Somnath's* comment: "Outside the marriage the wife has no recognized existence in our tradition. A woman's role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created to have son! That is all!" (Sidhwa, 2006, p.7)

"Cultural hegemony refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means. It is usually achieved through social institutions, which allow those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview, and behavior of the rest of society." (Cole, 2018) The systemic brutality is visible in the novel's scenarios of underprivileged women who are forced to earn an income by selling and degrading themselves by singing and dancing at temples.

The narrative shows the society's duplicity, unfairness, and hypocrisy against women in the guise of traditional religion. Everybody has the right to live independently on our planet. People have classified femininity into separate categories, such as married, unmarried, and widows, which is truly an anti-human conduct. In *Water*, Sidhwa says (2006) "A woman is recognized as a person only when she is with her husband." (p.6)

They have been treated by society in accordance with their socioeconomic status. Widows have been the ones who have sacrificed the most at the clutches of Indian orthodoxy. For the sake of society, the people are represented as mindlessly obeying the conventions in the sake of custom. Bapsi Sidhwa depicts a culture that, in the name of tradition, has shattered the lives of woman sufferers. By *Chuyia's* dialogue with her father, *Somnath*, the writer uncovers wrongs against women: "'your husband is dead', said *Somnath*. 'You are a widow now.' 'For how long Baba?'. *Chuyia* asked *Somnath* looked away, unable to meet her gaze. He could not answer her." (Sidhwa, 2006, p.27) *Chuyia's* father, vulnerable against the painful reality of having to send his daughter to *Ashram* (a widow colony), and her mother, reluctantly surrender to the ancient conservative belief that after the death of the husband, there is no position for the widow in the society, and they must live in *Ashram* until they die, represent the religious primacy imposed on widows by Indian orthodox structure. Her father is quite concerned:

"*Somnath* though numbed with sorrow, was resigned to fulfilling his and his daughter's proper duty to the sick man and his family. *Bhagya's* thoughts tormented her all night. She knew that in Brahmin culture, once widowed, a woman was deprived of her useful function in society—that of reproducing and fulfilling her duties to her husband. She ceased to exist as a person; she was no longer either daughter or daughter-in-law. There was no place for her in the community, and she was viewed as a threat to society. A woman's sexuality and fertility, which was so valuable to her husband in his lifetime, was converted

upon his death into a potential danger to the morality of the community.” (Sidhwa, 2006, p.21).

Widows' existence is depicted as existing symbols of apology and guilt. *Mudhumati*, the governor of the decaying *Ashram*, whose word is considered law, informs the kid *Chuyia*: ““Our Holy Books Say, A wife is part of her husband while he’s alive, right?”, The widows nodded their heads in Solemn concurrence. ‘And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die’. She paused for effect and sighed dramatically. ‘So, how can a poor half-dead woman feel any pain?’ she asked, not really expecting any answer. Chuyia’s tears still slipping down her face, raised her head, and between snuffles, replied with a child’s innocent logic, ‘Because she’s half alive?’” (Sidhwa, 2006, p.36) It portrays stereotypical traditions followed by Hindus who adhere to blind ideals for the sake of religion. They are denied the opportunity to possess property and land, which is why they are shown as engaging in unconventional methods of earning such as dancing, begging, and singing. They are discovered being coerced into prostitution to earn a few pennies for a meal. Widows are shown as being bound by patriarchal customs and religious regulations, as well as facing prejudice in their inheritance rights. These phrases by Sidhwa reflect the economic situation of widows: “They paid the temple priests, and the widows were given a cup of rice and a fistful of lentils for every eight-hour session of singing and dancing. For many widows, this was their only means of sustenance.” (Sidhwa, 2006, p.42)

In the phrases said by *Narayan's* father to him, the author alluded to this sexual exploitation of widows, “Narayan, perhaps you are not aware of this. Our holy book texts say Brahmins can sleep with whomever they want, and the women they sleep with are blessed.” (Sidhwa, 2006, p.149). Sidhwa's portrayal highlights the cunning conduct of patriarchal men, who use sacred scriptures for their personal profit.

By utilizing Fairclough's model, it is discovered, that men and Indian conservative culture employ immoral adjectives to describe widows, such as *dour old women, stray animals, prostitute, inanimate object, poor child, inauspicious, and a whore*. This demonstrates the patriarchal Indian society's cruel stance toward widows and their rank. This is also visible in Narayan's talk with his friend *Rabindra*. He declares “My father doesn’t even bother with their names anymore. There’s the old one, the fat one, the new one, the young one....” (Sidhwa, 2006, p.63) In the patriarchal society of India, this reflects the personality of widows. They were handled inhumanely to the point where their names were disregarded.

CONCLUSION

The research study culminates by spotlighting of the colonial Indian society's two-faced ideals and arrogant hypocrisy in the 1930s, particularly when it comes to women and widows. The focus of this study is to learn how religious practices and social structures reinforce patriarchy's strength and, especially, the control of society's dominant classes. In colonial India, these strong classes are described as attempting to alienate women in order to prevent them from becoming self-sufficient. To put people under oppressive burdens to work for

bread and butter using low-cost and demeaning methods. By exhibiting doubly hegemonized women in the selected work, this behavior is observing the mechanism of double-colonization.

The purpose of this study is to promote awareness about the different challenges that these marginalized and underprivileged women face in everyday life. The results and findings of the research study suggest that this combination of CDA and transitivity can be executed in a literary analysis to identify hidden concepts and themes such as uneven gender positions in a male-dominated environment. The present research does not only emphasize the hardships, toxic masculinity, and brutal hegemony encountered by women but also disclose the dilemma of widowed women and the ones belong to inferior classes. The CDA, in conjunction with the Gramscian viewpoint, seeks to characterize the battle of widowed women in colonial India as a Marxist struggle, just as shown in the selected work.

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