



RESEARCH PAPER

**Deconstruction of Patriarchal Structures and Post-Colonial Themes
in Bapsi Sidhwa's Short Story, 'A Gentlemanly War'**

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PAPER INFO	Received	Accepted	Published
	September 12, 2021	December 20, 2021	December 25, 2021

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to analyze one of the story 'A Gentlemanly War' from one of Bapsi Sidhwa's famous collection, "The Language of Love" by using the lens of postmodern literary theory, 'deconstruction'. Deconstructive analysis includes questioning the common meaning of the text, exposing the cultural bias, to read between the lines and to look for meaning below the surface level. The study also intends to extract implicit patriarchal structures and post-colonial themes from the story. The analysis is done by taking the methodological framework of Barbara B. Stern (1996). It involves Three-Step Textual Analysis: Identification-Construction-Deconstruction. Various post-colonial and patriarchal themes including privilege of elite class, sufferings of poor after partition, trauma of war, psycho-social behaviors of people, typical mentality of society and hidden ideologies and revelations are made in this study. It directs future researchers to deconstruct other such themes in rest of the short stories of Bapsi Sidhwa.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Feminism, Patriarchy, Post-Colonialism

Introduction

Pakistani short fiction is as much exuberant, rich and versatile in taste and style as that of any of the world's literature. Its richness is perceived to be a result of its versatile post-colonial history and theories. The literature of most of Pakistani writers is embedded and has its projections in the local culture of the country. Most of Pakistani short story writers exhibits certain facts and traits like the depiction of condition of women, local attributes of culture, the struggles of layman and other common issues of Pakistani diaspora.

The concern of this study is to deconstruct some of the post-colonial themes in Bapsi Sidhwa's collection of short stories, "Their Language of Love". Her language is evocative, rich and sometimes overripe. As she has her own colonial style of writing as a poster child of proper English. Her refuse of poetic license is considered to be an admiring characteristic of her poetry. She wrote in times when after partition roles were assigned to individuals and females were being neglected to prove themselves worthy of being independent to be the leading members of the nation. In those circumstances, we see her work as the beacon of enlightenment for the women of this society. She mostly used psychoanalytical technique to give voice to the inner desires, wants, enthusiasm and emotion of females. The depiction of women of varying classes as narrators of her stories and imitation of their works, all roundedness and compelling nature is the strength and fortitude of her work.

Gebauer & Wulf (1995) argues that no matter what we say about an object, it never describes it as it is in itself. He further says that whatever humans perceive in isolation about an object is not pure knowledge. Any object perceived by humans' will must have the human

modes of perception. But the objective of this study is to deconstruct a particular story from this collection in such a way that it explores those ideologies or agendas that are unable to be perceived by a general reader. This linguistic and post-colonial deconstruction will elaborate such themes and notions that are somehow implicit and need to be addressed. In this regard, following research questions have been generated:

- What are the underlying post- colonial themes in Bapsi Sidhwa's short story 'A Gentlemanly War'?
- What are the underlying patriarchal structures that are highlighted in Bapsi Sidhwa's short story 'A Gentlemanly War'?

Literature Review

As stated by Clark and Csapo (1991), Deconstruction came into existence in 1967, when Derrida criticized Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of linguistics regarding signs. The theory given by Saussure was given in the form of lectures in Geneva, from 1907 to 1911, it also gave rise to the theory of structuralism and by criticizing Saussure, Derrida has criticized structuralism. Saussure is presented as to portray the whole Western metaphysical tradition. This critique has two stages. Derrida depicts that Saussure has given points which are not even close to being flawless. Some things in his points may appear logical but Derrida poses them as ideology based. Derrida focuses on ideological aspects rather than logical aspects.

He believes that Saussure has contributed a lot to the development of linguistics but none when it comes to ideology. Derrida is not focused on providing some philosophy regarding language. He is focused on exposing and bringing forth the underlying Western ideologies. He acknowledges the fact the field of linguistics is in debt to the work of Saussure, he has coined the binary oppositions which have long played an important role in linguistics and semiotics. However, Derrida wants to dissolve this dichotomy and put forward deconstruction as a weapon to fight against the underlying ideologies. So, deconstruction here is a tool of language not a philosophical stance. It may be used to explore the embedded themes of feminism and post colonialism.

According to Ashcroft (1989), feminism and Post-colonialism are closely related. However, the examinations of post-colonial female authors have a tendency to focus on the sociopolitical suppression of the females but no one has combined both and or given a possibility of a specific post-colonial feminist theory. There is no combined entity. Poovey (1988) asserted that feminism depicts women's experiences and can be described as a form of protest against the patriarchal structures in a society. To believe that women's biology sets the ground for them to have certain form of experiences and to be positioned as the other of a "man" and considered as a binary opposition and to argue that their suppressed state is the result of this opposition would be considered "to fall into this humanistic trap". But when we look at it from the perspective of deconstruction, nothing is simply black and white, and "woman" is a merely an image created by the society that has nothing to do with the biological being of a woman.

Britannica described Postcolonialism as the set of events or affairs that represent the circumstances after the colonialization by the West. Postcolonialism depicts the hope of a future that is free from colonialism, however, different forms of oppressive practices, other than colonialism might appear. But it does not mean that the world we live in is free from colonial aspects. As stated by Khan, Lodhi, and Naveed (2020), Bapsi Sidhwa started to write in 1980's, which was the time when women were to be contained in their homes, kept away from the realities of the world and almost no female postcolonial writers were writing at

that time. Datta (2006) pointed out that it was the division of the Sub-continent that forced the women to come out and acquire education, take up jobs as a means of survival. And Bapsi Sidhwa's work voiced the females of her time and she remained the voice of the women of Pakistani. Her writing gave a voice to females of the subcontinent and Sidhwa continued to write as an advocate for the female population of Pakistan. And her works contain underlying ideologies of feminism and post colonialism that the present study aims to deconstruct.

Material and Methods

For the analysis of the short story "A Gentlemanly war" qualitative analysis is preferred. As the purpose of this study is to deconstruct the text by highlighting various implicit themes in the story. So a three step textual analysis will be done.

Three-Step Textual Analysis: Identification-Construction-Deconstruction

- *Identification of Attributes:* a. Language, b. Character, c. Plot
- *Construction of Meaning:* a. Genre categorization b. Rhetorical tactic
- *Deconstruction of Meanings:* a. Oppositional binaries, b. Revelation of gaps, C. Deprivileging privileged voices

Above is the three step textual analysis that is taken from a study done by Barbara B. Stern (1996) named as "Textual Analysis in Advertising Research: Construction and Deconstruction of Meanings". This model of textual analysis is quite comprehensive as it will firstly describe each component of the short story. On the second step, a general meaning will be constructed to explore the genre and rhetorical tactics used in the story. Then in the third step the meanings will be deconstructed and researchers will try to make explicit every implicit agenda, gaps, themes, Deprivileging the privileged voices and so on.

Analysis of "The Gentlemanly War", written by Bapsi Sidhwa

Step 1: Identification of Attributes

Language

The language of the short story consists of many devices and idiomatic phrases, skillfully employed by the author. The language of the text is clear and lucid, and there is a beauty in its simplicity.

There are many idioms used in the short story, to create a depth of meaning e.g. "*bone of contention*". And aspects of Pakistani English are visible as well as the protagonist addresses her husband by cliched Pakistani nicknames as "*jaan*", *Jana* and "*janoo*". Furthermore, words like "*Data Sahab*", "*British Raj*", "*Arrey bhai*" are also found.

Here, English language has been given a flavor of the Pakistani culture, so that the readers get that Eastern rustic feel. There is also excessive usage of adjectives throughout the story. Adjectives are generously used to provide the reader with descriptive images. Through such descriptive language the readers can imagine whatever is happening in the story with such clarity and detail that they feel like a part of the story and that they are experiencing everything first hand. For example, the description of a young "Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto" is given in such a precise and vivid manner that the reader can clearly imagine the figure;

"A lick of dark hair marked his bronzed forehead. In a face slightly flushed with drink, his eyes shone with amber light. Confident, debonair, aware of all the stares drawn to him, he appeared marked for success."

Moreover, the story contains numerous metaphors and similes like, ***"often find ourselves in the peripheral swells that edge Pakistan's erratic political shores"***. The use of such rich language makes the story more vibrant and appealing.

Characters

Zareen

Zareen is the protagonist of the story, wife of Cyrus and a mother of two daughters, Feroza and Parizad. She has a bump on the nose, sculpted cheeks and full lips. She has brown eyes with thick droopy lashes. She is a Zoastrian woman, belonging to a wealthy family. She is a stereotypical, Pakistani woman, who is dependent on her husband and her brother to be protected. In the middle of the 1965 war, she is worried about her honor and her daughter's innocence. She is portrayed as a helpless scared mother who seeks protection. A loving and compassionate wife but still she has the will to take her own decisions, this may be due to her sound background. She also appears to believe in supernatural powers, as in the story she believes that it was Data Sahib's presence that protected Lahore against the Indian army, which was seven times larger than the Pakistani army.

Cyrus

Cyrus is Zareen's husband and a father of two girls. His eyes are grey. He is a typical Pakistani husband. He is protective of her wife and children and won't let anyone touch them or harm them in the dangers of the war. Although, he is reckless and boastful during the wartime. He is enthusiastic about it and is preparing his guns and exchanging information regarding weapons with his friends. He is portrayed as the man of the house.

Abdul

A loyal and responsible servant at the Vine cottage, Zareen's parental home. He wears a Khaki colored uniform.

Rustom

He is Zareen's younger brother. A good looking and well dressed man in his mid twenties. And the only one with fair complexion in the family. A young patron of the house who is still learning to get used to the responsibilities of leadership. He is irresponsible and careless as he was wandering in Abbottabad while his sister along with her children were in Pindi when it was being bombed by the Indian forces. He feels under pressure in social gatherings with higher authority individuals as he did in his meeting with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. He is struggling to be the man of the house after the death of their father. But he is learning that in order to go about in the world he must make use of certain assertive expressions and exude authority.

Sarahbai

She is Zareen's elder sister who is the widow of a 55-year-old widow. She is a well-maintained and good-looking woman, with short fashionable hair. She is a stereotypical rich **"matriach"**. She is very conscious of her social appearances as she changed her appearance just to suit her status of a rich widow, from a bold look to a modest one. Now she keeps her head covered gracefully by the border of her sari and wears light-colored nail polish. She is

trained during the time with her late husband, to remain calm and composed in elite social gatherings. She is observed to have a flirting nature.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

A real life politician, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, is fictionalized in the short story. He is a landlord's son. A playboy in his youth, with glowing brown skin and dark hair that falls on his forehead. He shiny eyes with a goldenish glow and emits an aura of confidence. However, in his mid forties, when he is appointed as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in the reign of General Ayub Khan, his hair gets thinner and face gets grey as he is worn out by the 1965 war.

Plot

The story revolves around the protagonist, Zareen, a wife and a mother of two children. She belongs to a wealthy Zoastrian family, who ran the business of alcohol before the partition and after the formation of Pakistan they switched to bottled juices and the manufacturing of glass. Here, the 1965 war is seen through Zareen and her family. It also shows us what common people civilians go through in the time of war and how the wealthy remain away from the atrocities of the war and they even consider it "gentlemanly". It is the story of a scared mother who wants to protect herself and her daughter's honour, from the barbarians involved in the war. For this purpose, she leaves her husband in Lahore and moves to Pindi, to live at her mother's house. The story also shows that despite the fact that Indian army was much larger and well equipped than the Pakistani army, they still couldn't occupy Lahore as if there was some supernatural power protecting it. And it is depicted how the war has taken a toll on the politicians and how abruptly the war ends when Mr Peterson of America arrives and gives his terms for the ceasefire to occur between the two countries.

Step 2: Construction of Meaning

Genre Categorization

In every one of the tales of *Their Language of Love*, Bapsi shows up as either the audience of a companion's story, or one of the lead characters. Not all realities stay flawless when fictionalized, particularly not the plots, and just Sidhwa knows which of the turns in these stories are from reality. In one of the very first autobiographical story of her collection, "A Gentlemanly War" as well she remained realistic and presented the situation of one of the Parsi family during 1965's war as a narrative story.

Rhetorical Tactics

As stories, they work essentially in light of the fact that they are held up with rich, suggestive language. Now and again, the language is overripe, for example, sentences that show up in the interpretive introductions to the snapshots of activity in the tales. Such as in this story. "A Gentlemanly War," she has used the language as: *"But to trace the fluctuating history of Prohibition, which has existed since the inception of Pakistan, is to track the incursion of religion in the opportunistic politics of the country."* Somewhere else, she composes sentences that range a great deal of material in everyday dips, except become almost trivial.

In the midst of the charged environment in Lahore in the wake of an undermining Indian attack, a privileged Parsee family plays out the internal pulls and clashes of adoration, connection to family homes and recollections, and obviously nearness to undertakings of the state, as may be normal in medieval Pakistan. The experiences are rich, and for an Indian, the story gives uncommon look at what the opposite side was feeling during that time of contention. The narration of such a situation requires very demanding language to put all the feelings, emotions and inner conflict into words that Sidhwa has rightly done.

Sidhwa's style is very visual, which gives incredible shading and temperament to her accounts. The mental experiences are sharp without being thick. It is the nature of being not kidding without turning dismal, of being fun loving without relapsing into joke, which attracts readers to her works.

Step 3: Deconstruction of Meanings

the need of this particular step which actually is the main objective of the study as well is to reconsider the 'What' in this particular text. The New Basic recognizable proof of language at- accolades and types fills in as a springboard for deconstructive investigation of the "unperceived, the non-present, and the nonconscious" (Derrida 1967, p. 68) parts of language. Deconstructive pundits engage in the perusing of "existences" (things "in" the text) just to uncover the hidden "nonattendances" (things not in the text). These nonappearances are the holes, inconsistencies, and logical inconsistencies (Derrida 1967, 1975) at play in the double restrictions basic to the indication of significance. The construction of meaning made by the readers is collapsed into a bigger contention for boundlessly open implications achieved by the play of language itself.

Oppositional Binaries

The story is narrated through a family privileged with wealth and political links. Cyrus, the husband of the protagonist calls the war "*A Gentlemanly War*", it is difficult to see how a war can be gentlemanly. Only he can say so because he belongs to a family by which he is privileged to stay away from all the harms of the war, he is not one of those refugees who had to evacuate their homes and flee or lost their lives to the war. Cyrus further adds that the war did not have any civil casualties, but the question arises that do the lives of the soldiers who are dying in the war do not count. There is also an incident where description of young Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is drawn.

A lick of dark hair marked his bronzed forehead. In a face slightly flushed with drink, his eyes shone with amber light. Confident, debonair, aware of all the stares drawn to him, he appeared marked for success.

He is shown as a drunk son of a feudal Lord sitting in a bar with his buddies with an aura of confidence and is described as having the potential to make his mark in politics. This shows the irony between an irresponsible image and an ideally responsible image of a politician.

The unreliable nature of politicians is also shown when Zareen's family gives Mr. Bhutto a check as a token of support during the war which is to be forwarded to General Ayyub Khan.

I can tell he doesn't trust the Foreign Minister to convey the message of the Brewery's largesse to the President with due weight—if at all.

But there is a sense of hesitancy from Mr. Bhutto's side in order to forward it which is then picked up by Rustam.

I angrily assume my brother has been seduced by the tranquility of the tree-spangled hills—not to mention the cossetting of Sarahbai's dotting friends—to spend another day in Abbotabad.

The usage of language and personification to depict the love for natural scenery explores the hidden mentality of the society. It is perceived in our households that the men

can be easily captivated and seduced by women and beautiful creatures. The word 'seduced' here depicts the hidden oppositional binary attached to it in typical Pakistani culture society.

Revelation of Gaps

Throughout the story there are many gaps which hint the patriarchal society. As Zareen describes:

my father (and later my brother), sensible of the politics of Prohibition in an Islamic country, branched also into bottling fruit juices and the manufacturing of glass.

First when the conversion of the family brewery to a factory manufacturing glass and bottling juices is described it is mentioned that the father and the brother of the family were sensible of politics. It implies that women do not know anything about the world outside their homes.

The character of Cyrus is shown as typical male character of a patriarchal society. he has protective instincts to be the man of the house and to look after his daughters and wife and also protect their honor.

Four days later Field Marshal Ayub Khan went on air to declare a ceasefire, stating exactly the terms described by Mr. Peterson. Well ... If not God, the junior American officer was—so far as Pakistan was concerned—a close approximation

Another gap that can be seen is the notion of protection that Zareen thinks is given to Lahore by Data sahib. It can be seen as a superstitious and unrealistic notion as Mr. Peterson of the American army is the actual person who comes and puts a stop to the war by offering his conditions. As the protagonist thinks to herself:

Cyrus calls the next morning. He sounds exultant and excited, 'So, did you enjoy all the bombing in Pindi?'

The war and terror are two words associated with each other. If there is war, there is terror as well but the deconstructive analysis highlights some hidden ideologies and it explores the explicit gaps in the text. The enjoyment of bombing is not just taunting and sarcastic oppositional binary. Though it is the belief of Pakistani people on divine strength and assistance in the time of war as well. It depicts the faith of people on spirituality, Sufi saints and messengers that people especially men are not terrified of the havoc of the war. But they are internally satisfied that bombing and the sounds of guns cannot make them terrified but exalted and excited.

Going against the cynical logic of war, flying in the face of its brutal ethos, I believe in the underpinnings of the strange miscalculation was an unacknowledged compassion. The ties between the two countries between the two halves of the divided Punjab-of friendship, shared languages, neighborhoods and customs, were palpable in the stories that filtered through, in the miracles that abounded (p.27-28).

One vital topical concern which runs all through practically every one of the brief tales is (realization) which not just outcomes in puberty to adulthood, rather gives reflections mentally. Heroes go to an acknowledgment of profound inward certainties that different characters, regardless of whether female or male can't see. Sidhwa effectively presents her female heroes as going through a mental furthermore, mental excursion, one which permits them to arrive at an acknowledgment of some kind of generally accepted fact, concealed by different characters. Something like this happens here as well. Zareen turns into the one individual who understands a reality that the others are uninformed of; the two

nations never having battled as a result of empathy instead of erroneous conclusion. She has gone to an acknowledgment of a widespread sensation of empathy.

Deprivileging privileged voices

In the beginning of the story it is shown that the Indian troops have advanced a canal inside the border and it is considered as symbolic of inviting psychological barrier of the privileged class. As we can see throughout the story that no real danger has come Zareen's way but she has constantly been delusional regarding the dangers of the war.

In the story when Zareen visits, Data sahib there is a whole line of refugees who have fled from their homes as the areas of their residence are being bombed. and she being privileged has come over there to just offer food to hem to get blessings.

Another incident of the privileging privileged voices can be seen as the bravery after protectiveness family is shut down by Mr. Bhutto but then again the property is being used by the government. Mr. Bhutto close their bravery but he himself had been often accused of drinking, to which he responds that he drinks alcohol but does not drink the blood of poor people.

The privilege of the elites is one of the major post-colonial theme highlighted in this story. Such an example is

'Is Sethji back?' I shout hysterically, using the appellation the servants use for my brother.

It shows the use of surnames, labels, epithets and particular titles for those elites not only by their own employees but by locals, and even other family members. It seems that particular element of respect is being inscribed in the minds of employees through the usage of these titles by their family members.

Moreover, there are pity things that suggests the privileged tone of elites in the story. Sarah Bai is described as

"Her stylishly cropped hair, partially covered by her sari, is naturally dark, her skin velvety...cautiously switching from fetching-lovely to modest matriarch...She wears translucent, anemic-pink nail polish instead of the brighter colors she wore before her transformation" (p.230).

Her tribulations because of her philandering husband are embodied through the fact that *"she acquired an American bra through an American friend" (p.202).*

The deconstructionist analysis takes the attention of the readers towards the home-stricken people who have lost their every asset in the war of attaining a separate homeland. But the elites are being particular about such trivialities like their branded bras. The fact throws light on the war and concerns of elites in that situation.

Conclusion

Bapsi Sidhwa is known for her unique and remarkable short stories. With the language being embellished and the embodiment of multiple meanings. Her short story "a gentlemanly war" from her short story collection the "Language of love" contains numerous culturally and socially embedded themes. These themes call for an in depth analysis and in depth analysis could only be reached by applying Derrida's deconstruction which came forward as a reaction to Saussure's structuralism. Deconstruction is to read between the

lines and to look for meaning below the surface level, question the common meaning of the text and exposing the culturally and socially embedded bias. This is done by applying the framework of Barbara B. Stern. It involves a 3 step analysis with identification, construction and deconstruction. Numerous post-colonial and patriarchal themes emerged from the analysis, which were otherwise hidden in the short story by the mastery of the author. The analysis shows the diverse and typical characterization mocking the convention patriarchal roles assigned in a traditional society. The genre of the short story came forward to be realistic, a narrative view of the real life. The story unfolds many patriarchal aspects as the protagonist is portrayed as a helpless mother, trying to protect herself and her children in the war time by seeking her husband's and brother's protection. Post-colonial aspects have also emerged as the unstable political condition during war is somewhat due to the colonial past of the country. And the consideration of Mr. Peterson, a white, as equivalent of a God is also suggestive of post colonialism. The story remarkably hides many layers of meaning in it.

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