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Gender presentation - in post-colonial literature: By diasporic writer – Bapsi Sidhwa, (Solemn feminist paradigm)

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Abstract

Post-colonial literature is evidently the mirror document of values of the related era. Specifically the main concerns or the core aspects of postcolonial writings have been gender related. The relative positioning of gender in the social circumstances as and when the document registered in the time-period renders some thought banks for the readers. The question of women stance in the society has always been there and unfortunately never been answered wholesomely. To some extent the plight of the weaker sex has been exposed to the thread by the postcolonial writers. We can name it as postcolonial feminism in other sense; it would be a subset of feminism but not in mythical nous. In the present paper, diasporic writings would be the basic focus of attention; Bapsi Sidhwa marvel - novels portraying feminism. They, no less, have laid out the continuum of female condition through and through. The family patterns of the colonies have been described in an intricate crisscross way. Postcolonial writers contest misconceptions of the world related to the female portraits globally. This paper unfolds these misconceptions step by step and present them as gems of postcolonial literature.

Keywords: Postcolonial, gender, feminism, colonies, subset

1. Introduction

Postcolonial literature has always been looked at as a historical document. Though the events have been visibly seen and perceived by the writer's point of view. Still the picture presented can be authenticated by the circumstances and conditions all around us. Portion of fiction is much less in the mixture of the words used by the writers. In the crux of all postcolonial writings there is an obvious element i.e. postcolonial feminism, sprouting from the same mainland called as colonized. Without any doubt best postcolonial literature ever produced is by Diasporic writers. True pictures carved out of historical visions and presented with the amalgam of deep rooted land – affinity.

The term diaspora has reached extremes after gaining its acronym in Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, History and eventually – Literature. Its new terminological turn came in 20th century literature where every minority away from original homeland is regarded as diasporic specifically with religious connotations. (Safran, 2004)

Inevitably, the meaning of the term boomed anew, with inclusion of emigres supporting their families back in their homelands. In other terms, diaspora is also ethno-national individuals, who though living in other countries, maintaining transnational spaces, have deeper link to their homelands.

1.1 Colonizers and Colonized

Colonizers and Colonized is an interwoven term, weaved with crafty stories, accounts and events of historical concerns. Altogether, the term cannot be deconstructed to be understood separately. Substance of colonizers cannot be without being themed with the colonized. The mechanics of the term are better utilized by the diaspora writers. Their accounts deal most with the psychological impacts of being colonized and the psychological superiority shown by the colonizers.

“No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the

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indigenous man into an instrument of production.”^[1] Thus the contact between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers are thingified. With every passing day, there is a justice not given, the severe beating by the policeman, the workers denied their demands. What remains lurking behind – the value of our old societies – the democratic, cooperative and fraternal societies, very opposite of ante-capitalist society imposed by the colonizers?^[2]

1.2 Development of thought

Postcolonial by its subtext proposes an opposition to immense colonial clout which shaped the culture of colonizer. Moreover, the expression nubs upon the colonizer’s discourse that distorted the personalities by imbuing their souls with atrocities. The people were labelled – third world, out of civilization, an inferior nations. It also aided in the production of marvelous pieces of literature by the colonized that debated their identity and recouped their past in the face of otherness they had been experiencing.

Postcolonial feminist approach scans the grid of feminism thoroughly. The true picture is portrayed by diasporic writers. Their feelings about women and the status she is suffering. They casted their thoughts into impassive historical artefact. According to Schwarz and Ray “Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights”.(Ray, 2005)

The telltale is not an effortless task. The novelists, story tellers make the telling in an unfamiliar language. As it is not their own story but the tint of expression is their own. The most outstanding aspect of this literature is that there is sequence in the series of events with coherence. The narrator never wavers from its true direction. Each expression is composed logically and rationally.

The colonized women are also a sensitive touch in the postcolonial literature. The feminist criticism scrutinizes the women representation, and even move forward, to prove all the assumptions about these women wrong – of the society and literature. Evidently post colonialism is interlinked with patriarchy. Historically if the empire winds up its business in the colonies does not mean the gender oppression also ends. Almost all the postcolonial literature pin points specifically how the women of colonies were oppressed, suppressed, type casted and downgraded. These postcolonial feminist writers slothfully upbraid the “culture of oppression.”

After 1990, most plausibly these writers rejected the idea that white women should be taken as a standard for all the other women to be judged with. This feminist approach has brought in some marvelous piece of literature two of them Asian and African being the subject of our present paper. They remarkably persist on the opinion that belonging to different social structures women have very different problems and how they respond to these problems is also of varied nature.

¹ Taken from Joan Pinkham, trans., *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972 [1955]) pp. 20-25. Copyright 1972 by Monthly Review Inc. Reprinted by permission of Monthly Review Foundation. Further elaborated by Aimé Césaire (1955) in “Between Colonizer and Colonized.”

² Between Colonizer and Colonized by Aimé Césaire (1955)

2. Feminist Paradigm through female protagonists

“Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human as a human being, she is said to imitate male.” (Beauvoir, 1949)^[3]

In this present paper focused postcolonial - diasporic writer is Bapsi Sidhwa. The discussion upon gender presentation would go in and out of the patterns of plot weaved by some writers in compendium. Their choice of language with sporadic use of native words created sharp effects upon the readers.

Notoriously feminist Bapsi Sidhwa gives sizzling interpretations of women status in the society. Her novels could be regarded as the reality – on – paper presentation of gender biases. Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the Anglophone novelists. A Parsi woman having a keen eye over the plight of women irrespective of religion. Striking characterization of genders leave very little doubt about the reality of the situation. A linger on retrospective aura is always there for the reader, hours after finishing the book. A marvel of actinoid and situationist writer indeed.

The *Bride*, her first novel deals conspicuously with the oppression upon women in the Pakistani society typical of patriarchal. Based on true story novel presents the setting of far area of Karakoram. The woeful story of a hapless girl was told to her by army engineers. It states thus: a girl was taken away from the plains of Pakistan to be married to local tribesman. Being not willing to adjust, she ran away, hiding herself in the rugged mountains of Karakoram. She was closed at heels by her husband and some other men. At last caught and punished by her husband by throwing her into the raging waves of River Indus.

Though Bapsi Sidhwa has put in some points away from the real story by not letting the girl die. The scene might be more tragic than being grasped by the readers. Her fictional presentation of the story, introduces the tribesmen of Karakoram mountain ranges with their callous norms and customs. The novel provides an inside look into the life of women, that how marginalized were they. The sequences of events presented by Sidhwa sometimes get more argumentative. She is continuously so critical upon the beliefs and customs of the tribesmen, exposing the “unjust traditions” corroding the whole structure of that community. The main character Zaitoon, a well-trained Muslim woman, is the victim of her father’s dreadful visions of the mountain-paradise.

The bride has been said to be a challenge to the typical patriarchic-socio-culture of Indo-Pak societies. Fawzia Afzal Khan says the bride encounters sharply, “The patriarchal culture and values of Indian—Pakistani society.” (Ross, 1991) Bapsi herself says, “Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable Law of nature.” (Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride*, 2000) Zaitoon’s struggle is at one stage is a struggle of man against Nature but it is also struggle of a woman against the cruelty of both man and Nature. (RAJ, 2016)

Description of women in reality-picture continues in yet another fame-cast-Feminist novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, a combination of women will power and the miseries they

³ *The Second Sex* is a 1949 book by the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, in which the author discusses the treatment of women throughout history. Beauvoir researched and wrote the book in about 14 months when she was 38 years old.

face at the advent of partition. A history re-incarnated. The shocking events of partition, experienced by both the nations, India and Pakistan. Bapsi carved Ice-Candy man in the same way as Tamas by Bhisham Sahni, and Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh. The Pakistani version of disastrous implications that history record on Partition, is Ice Candy Man. The dual connotation of the name of the novel also attracts the attention of the reader, amid the mayhem of migration. The Ice denotes the coldness of heart and Candy is the sugary aspect of the hero, before migration, and train to Pakistan.

Nonetheless we cannot remain untouched by the feminist approach of the novelist, in telling a tale of misery of Muslim women. This novel presents a sequential torrential series of female characters who suffered the worst in their lives while the migration was in progress. The gender biases are so candidly taken into account that without leaving a bitter taste in mouth they pass on the barriers of our minds, accepting the situations and feeling the feelings of those women. The novel takes on emotional turmoil of the females at the time. The utmost historic nature of the series of events and the characterization insinuates the heat of political situation, we cannot remain aloof without feeling the heat of events.

Not only the novel treats injustices done to the Muslim women but presents a realistic picture of the Parsi women too, who observe silence whatever the circumstances. The male dominated society is not just overpowering Muslim women but minorities too, were active-silent victims. Ice Candy Man is a prototype of gynocentrism – expostulating women psychology amid diabolical experiences. Though Ice Candy Man seemingly appears as the protagonist of the novel, as mostly the events are related to him, but to the sensitive eye females are the real protagonists, who turn into morality-delimitate.

Partition-Literary text delineates “women victimization” undertone of violence, communal rifts and riots and oppression as a result. The same canvas of political wars is used by some other partition-writers, such as Khushwant Singh, “Train to Pakistan”, Attia Hossain’s “Sunlight on a Broken Column”, Chaman Nahal, “Azadi”, Manto’s “Toba Tek Sing”, highlighting worst scenarios of sectarian violence impregnated with communal hatred vented out on women. In the universe of these novels there are monstrous examples of how violence is committed upon women – the biological-beings. The aplomb characterization is depicted through a powerful tool of feminism.

Asia - an amalgamation of patriarchic socio-cultural values, is replete with occurrences where sense of superiority is linked with males and inferiority is another name of females. The masculineness denotes power, crowing and dominance, while the other side of the picture shows weakness, passiveness, and obedience to the extreme subservience. What we find in postcolonial novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, is not a fresh scenario of gender biases. It has been the order of the day since ages, women symbolize domesticity. Their potentials to partake decisions has always been marginalized. Bapsi through her female characters brings out some axiomatic truths about gender biases. Whether it is the hapless, voiceless bride from the plains or the mother of Parsi spokesperson of the society, Lenny, or the poor victimized ayah, or the resourceful grandma, they all in their own respect show assertiveness of their sex. Bapsi speaks for a need of change in social thinking about

genders, at all levels. She aspires through the child-thinking and voice of Lenny to acknowledge women as integral part of social order. Strong characterization emphasizes equality of women in social orders, even in their household decision making in the least. Her women characters are robustly active in handling some very sensitive situations where men are crippled to make decision owing to their hefty natures, and burning hateful desires.

The fictional world of Bapsi Sidhwa is vibrant with lively women characters, that let the reader think about them long after finishing the book. The central consciousness of the reader is actively pinned with that of the characters. They seem to be moving around us, breathing, and exuding sufferings, they have gone through. Their fictionalization is turned into reality, being true replicas of our own living strata.

3. Discourse of Woman – Best judge of women’s quandary

The true reality of the situation is depicted through innocence and awe. Lenny becomes the spokesperson of Bapsi in matters of concern. She is not only observant of the situational background and ponders in her own childlike manner, but even suggests some drastically implicit aspects of women hood too. Lenny is not just one character of Bapsi, she is universalized by her perspectives on the surrounding realities. The latent emotional upheavals and fissures between the sexes are laid evident for tallying situations visionarily. Lenny, is a sister character of Attia Hossain’s Laila.

The subject of molestation of women and children could not be better treated than by minute observation of girl child, sensitive to changes being around her violently. She is cajoled into believing racism and gender biases even at that immature age. Her questioning is absolute realization of the situation pointing the crux of issue. The conversation between Lenny and her godmother about “fallen woman”^[4] is evidently exposition of inscrutable patriarchal laws. Lenny observes the biological manipulation of women, as she becomes mentally mature. She is under the spell of torturing-awe, upon Ice Candy Man’s inhumanity against his own wife. The incidents of history are evidences of rifts in male and female orientation, hidden somewhere in our society.

Bapsi an active feminist exposes men turning into beasts, tramping moral values, even the human values. By igniting a small spark, the noblest minds change into hideous corrupted souls. As Lenny finds Ice Candy Man, changing into a monster, declaring his superiority over women by assaulting them, his own relations or no relations. The victory is celebrated on the bodies of women, and the defeat is avenged on the bodies of women, expostulated by Lenny. (Bapsi, Ice Candy Man) Shashi Deshpande^[5] in her famous lines says, that “Rape is the grossest violation of trust between two people.... It is also the greatest violence against the mind of the woman...”

The difference between male discourse and the female discourse is that sometimes male version of text does not handle the intricacies of the situations faced by women. It distorts the reality, the real feel of the event, which female discourse can relate dexterously instilling the right cord

⁴ The Ice Candy Man (page 215) Bapsi Sidhwa, Penguin Books India, 2000

⁵ Shashi Deshpande is a famous Indian novelist and short story writer, she is known to be ardent feminist writer.

intrinsically. Bapsi et.al repudiates the centuries old pathetic role of women. “Females need to not be emotionally and intellectually invested in a male future”. (Syrett, 2011)

No doubt in macho-feudal societies, women are visualized as bearers of sanctity and honor. Traditionally they are supposed to be highly respected but actually they are just as vassals of that honor and culture. Their lives are structured thus to suit the system. They are not allowed to step outside the system, while men have freedom of actions. Partition-literature lays evident “deeply ingrained misogyny” in deplorable fashion. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs – hatefully wanted to take revenge for their misshapens. For this they searched for women of the rival religion to kidnap and rape afterwards. The angry mobs pelted upon the women, making them commit suicide to save honor. “The carnage of partition still impacts Britain's South Asian Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities.” (Hundal, 2007)

According to rough estimate more than 83,000 females were molested and most of them committed suicide. Some of the accounts of the partition describe that male members of family killed their female relatives to save them from shame of tainting their honor by rape. Some women killed themselves before and after the atrocities. This is not an account of partition only, or suggestive of Indo-Pak separation indictments, but it had been the rule of thumb in wars for centuries in past, and maybe of the centuries to come, the victorious got the rewards of living-biological material things – females.

Bapsi Sidhwa, recounts the events of Partition but she also exposes the atrocities being done on the weaker sex. She claims a need to overhaul the system, tucking in women as not property, but a human being, with flesh and blood and intricate emotions. She also takes up the matter of marriage in her write-ups. Young girls being married off against their wills, spanning all their lives with mental torture and agony.

4. Post-colonial women swamped in Silence

Silence is deeply connected with the post-colonial text. A medicament for the female characters of post-colonial writings. But the most remarkable thing is that this silence is speaking loud for gender roles specified by society. The scriptures speak, and the dissonance rebounds to us from domes of gloom surrounded by these women. Such vibrations of soundless-sound mark the revolt of post-colonial females against the inequalities of society.

Having different cultures and origins the silence is given different angles to spread its wings of manifestation. For every cult it has its different connotation. Africans consider silence as an agony, in the face of torture, more often diatribes against the gender related issues. Same aphasia is wholesomely shown through the characters of Sidhwa.

Woman – thy name is silence, is very true if we scrutinize lives of female characters of Bapsi Sidhwa. Zaitoon was got married to tribesman, silently. And then an array of characters we find in Ice Candy Man. Women voice is nowhere to be heard. Lenny's mother is silent in course of her own life, and thinks women should not speak against the male superiority. Ayah, who suffered prostitution at the hands of her own husband, did not speak but one word and silently left the scene. Even the lead narrator – Lenny is silent observer of all the cruelties against women.

If we say these are fictional characters, hence not related to our own existing world. That notion would be utterly wrong. These characters, no doubt fictional, are picked and chose

from the social system presently in vogue. They are the types, the real-to-fact examples of us, living in this world. They are “us”, though not tangibly present to be touched and felt, but, they are there thriving, breathing have flesh and blood of vibrancy of expressions put out by the throbbing words.

The picture of postcolonial feminist discourse is not complete without the mention of Ngugi's “The River Between”. It's so comprehensively realist about the plight of women. The sufferings are dumped on our minds so heavily, questioning about their pictorial authenticity is solecistically unimaginable. Bapsi's females are closely related to Ngugi's.

5. Conclusion

Perhaps since the evolution of societies woman has been the victim of male dominance. It is written in her lot that she should be such no other option is given to her. She has been bearing the suffering mutely. Bapsi Sidhwa contributed radically to postcolonial feminist literature. She put together many disciplines challenging norms and customs openly and assertively. The aim of postcolonial writings is to make visible to the world how the weaker sex has been through all those tribulations done by men. Purposefully Bapsi Sidhwa took up the task to unveil some of the problems faced by women of the community.

Sidhwa's feminist touch to her characters moves violently forward despite many obstacles. She exposes the true selves of women by observing the lives too closely and understanding the limited space given to them in this patriarchal social system. With amazing combination of politics and social order, she highlights the feminist framework. She does not shy away from stating that women are by nature faithful, in whatever role they are placed in the society. They long for love but become the victim of lust, just because of their lovable nature.

In her essay published in Times magazine, Bapsi Sidhwa reflects on women victims of rape during the process of Partition:

“What legacy have these women left us? I believe that their spirits animate all those women that have bloomed into judges, journalists, NGO officials, filmmakers, doctors and writers – women who today are shaping opinions and challenging stereotypes.”

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