

Negotiating Identity and Socioeconomic Disparity in *The Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa: A Post-modern Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the complex relationship between negotiating cultural identity and socioeconomic disparity in Bapsi Sidhwa's 'The Bride'. The present study employs Nancy Frazer's theory of social justice as a theoretical framework. The goal of the research is to show how the characters' experiences with cultural identities are closely linked to their socio-economic disparities. The research intends to elucidate the intricate processes that effect the characters' goals and reactions to social issues by utilizing Frazer's Theory of social justice. By providing comprehensions to the larger conversation on social justice within the post-partition community, this analysis develops our understanding of the intricacy present in characters' identities and their socio-economic status. The conclusion of this research tends to explore the negotiation of identity and socio-economic disparity in post partition context by utilizing the theoretical framework of Frazer theory of social justice.

Keywords: *Social Justice, Cultural Identity, Struggle, Socio-economic disparity, Partition*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present research explores the intricate and complex dynamics of negotiating cultural identity and socio-economic disparity in '*The Bride*' by Bapsi Sidhwa. The purpose of this research is to scrutinize and analyze the experiences of the characters, in the selected text, with their identity and socio-economic status in the context of post-partition of India. Nancy Frazer's theory of justice has been employed to understand the impact of cultural identity and socio-economic disparity in the characters. This research focuses on the development of a better understanding of post-partition society by analyzing the characters' reactions, grappling with their cultural identities and socio-economic status in the selected text.

The research also focuses on the themes of identity and economic inequality which provide an extensive review of the post-partition socio-cultural identities within the novel's cultural context. The men somehow enjoy the most valuable and desirable status in the society

whereas the women are confined to their homes, denying their basic rights and torturing them physically and mentally (Rind 14). Sidhwa has portrayed the painful picture of women subjugation in the whole novel with different female characters (14). However, this research negotiates the identity and socio-economic disparity between the classes of the society. Frazer's theory of Justice has been incorporated as theoretical framework for this research.

Frazer, a feminist philosopher and social theorist with an emphasis on justice, recognition and the connections of identity (Mladenov 2) highlights the socio-political social structure of the society. Her theoretical contributions have been predominantly impactful in the fields of critical theory and political philosophy (2). Frazer's theory of justice is crucial and perhaps an important idea in the development of contemporary political rational. Furthermore, it demonstrates two significant dimensions: one is recognizing people that means to recognize their identity, status and background and the second one is the redistribution rather fairly distribution of the resources (2). Fairness according to Frazer is about respecting and accepting every individual's identity. It is not only about giving equal resources. She believes that a society that claims to be a fair society must fix financial problems as well as abolish the unjust treatment based on culture and politics (Thompson & Wilhelm 223). In short, her theory claims that being fair includes both sharing of the resources and treating everybody with respect and esteem devoid of their culture, language religion and race (223). Therefore, she is considered a renowned social thinker because of her understanding of the society and her struggle to create justice in it.

The novel presents the biographical elements attached with Sidhwa's visit to KKH (Koh-e-Korakoram Highway) with her husband in an army camp. There she heard the story of a Punjabi girl who tied knot to a tribal man and later tried to escape from that territory. Her husband was in continuous hunt for her and just near the army camp he founded her and killed her brutally out of shame and pride of tribal norms. Sidhwa recaptured the real incident with slightly different ending.

The themes of identity and socioeconomic disparity are complexly intertwined into the narrative of Sidhwa's *The Bride* which provides the lens to discover societal dynamics. Frazer's theory of social justice functions as an important analytical framework. The research explores struggle of the characters dealing with complicated identities i.e. cultural, gender, or religious, with Frazer's emphasis on the importance of respecting and admitting different identities within a particular social structures. Instantaneously, the selected text highlights the socioeconomic disparities as well reflecting bigger economic inequalities and injustice (Movva et. al 214). The theory of redistribution by Frazer becomes relevant to examine the characters and their struggle while facing severe economic challenges. The research also offers a lens to examine the characters' efforts to observe inequalities and their struggle for fair distribution of resources.

1.1 Research Objectives:

- To examine the socio-cultural and post-partition identity crises of the characters in the selected text
- To analyze the influence of the socio-cultural identity on the characters' socioeconomic disparity in *The Bride* by Sidhwa

1.2 Statement of Problem:

The characters, in the selected text, face the complexities of the formation of socio-cultural and economic identities. However, the dynamics of the ways of cultural identity negotiation interacts with and is influenced by socioeconomic inequalities are explored particularly within the framework of Frazer's theory of recognition and redistribution. The study aims to address the gap by delving into the complexities of identity negotiation and economic disparities in the novel, contributing to a deeper understanding of the post-partition Indian context and the wider implications of these dynamics.

1.3 Research Questions:

- How do the characters in *The Bride* negotiate the formation of socio-cultural identities in the context of post-partition India?
- How do the negotiations of cultural identities intersect with the socioeconomic disparities experienced by the characters in the selected text?

An examination of the previous body of literature of *The Bride* by Sidhwa shows the themes of women sufferings, marginalization and male dominance in Pakistani society. The researchers have thoroughly discussed the selected text with respect to the themes discussed above. In this chapter, different articles have been incorporated to highlight the already studied areas of research.

In the article "*When I raised my head again: feminism and the female body in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels The Pakistani bride and Cracking India*" the authors demonstrate that women's suffering, subjugation and powerlessness are Sidhwa's main themes. The suffering and suppression is closely related to the female's body and the male's control over it. Despite their rebellion against patriarchy, the novel's female protagonists ultimately succumb to male dominance. The society in which the novel is set does not change, but the reader is shown a truth that must be told. The novel lays its emphasis on the flaws and faults in the patriarchal system, which has been exploited for personal growth or the greater good (51). Even though Zaitoon is punished for seeking independence from her husband, the novel still allows to speak and be heard at the conclusion. The female characters other than Zaitoon carry out their own rebellious actions to challenge patriarchy. The researchers bring attention to the plight of Pakistani women who are subjected to oppression. The aforementioned feminist approach to the text focuses on the various ways which shows the oppression of female body in the patriarchal society of 1947. The body of female is something expected to be covered up, shows misuse of the female body that makes the message doubly strong (19). Women are shown to question the traditional norms, acquire their knowledge of the world and affirm their intellectual power.

Kolekar in her article "*Interdisciplinary Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's 'The Pakistani Bride'*" investigated that interdisciplinary alludes to the coordination of different scholastic disciplines, fields of study, or subject matters to tackle complex issues or issues, address testing issues, or on the other hand gain a more exhaustive comprehension of a specific subject. Scholars from a variety of fields have come up with a variety of definitions for the term. Interdisciplinary examinations are characterized as a course of responding to an inquiry, tackling an issue, and tending to a subject that is as well expansive and complex to be managed sufficiently by a solitary discipline or calling, "It constructs a more comprehensive perspective by integrating the insights of disciplinary approaches" (Klein and Newell 393). In order to generate novel insights, theories, and solutions that cannot be achieved through a single discipline alone, it involves

combining information, methods, and perspectives from a variety of fields. In recent decades, the idea of being interdisciplinary has become more important because many of the problems we face as a society are complex and require multiple points of view to solve. In order to better identify and comprehend the multifaceted phenomena of a complex system, the interdisciplinary study involves integrating insights from various disciplines (Klein 50). Teaching, research, policymaking, and other interdisciplinary endeavors are just a few examples. Due to the fact that it frequently involves gathering and synthesizing data from multiple sources, the study may necessitate more resources and time than conventional disciplinary research. It requires people to step outside of their comfort zones and be open to new sights, approaches to problem-solving, and ways of thinking.

Anita Sharma highlights in her article "*Victimization of Women*" that Zaitoon's body begins to experience transformation. Zaitoon was asked to avoid playing with boys after she reached at the age of puberty. Furthermore, she was bound to wear burka to cover her body and face from other males. Miriam persuades Qasim that he had to skip Zaitoon's school so that she may learn the household things before her marriage. Peculiarly, a lady most ardently supports the orthodox upsides of Pakistani society and is worried to lay out Zaitoon as a wife and mother. Miriam, who has not had any training, only knew from experience that a woman needs to be good at doing things in the house. Miriam's perceptions and thoughts about ladies are frail as she expresses the conventional view that Zaitoon is safe as a spouse in her future parents in law's home. The first half of the novel also shows prostitution that how it serves as the main focus, with a strong prominence on the female figure from the outside. The deep emphasis on female sexuality in this section of novel balances the unwanted and wanted looks on Zaitoon and Carol in the second half. Both the ladies' sentiments about their own sexual and arousing feelings, as well as their encounters with male members are explored in this half.

Nair. S in the article "*Transgressing the Threshold of a social and cultural restriction*" highlights the wretched state of women subjugation in patriarchal culture of Pakistani society is the subject of the narrative. The real-life incident in which a girl was viciously abused by her husband and how she managed to flee and hide for fourteen days in the cold mountains served as the basis for the story. The researcher explored the essential component of this tragic incident to make her own strong characters. The story rotates around the stories of three major characters Zaitoon, Ditty and Afshan who were utterly maltreated in a closed-minded society. Zaitoon's parents were killed in the political unrest of partition 1947 and she was undertaken by Qasim as step-father. She was prepped up as a sophisticated and loyal Muslim young lady. She conceived of the peaceful life in the mountains in her fantasies. When Zaitoon got married to a tribal man who physically and mentally abused her, she was completely stunned. Zaitoon always thought of mountain life as a paradise in his dreams: "...a region where men were heroic, self-assured, and unbreakable, ruled by a code of honor that forbade all evil and injustice...their women were as beautiful as houris, and the bright rosy-cheeked children lived beside crystal torrents of melted snow" (Sidhwa 90). Sakhi, the better half of Zaitoon treated her badly, abused her brutally and beat her viciously. Zaitoon became aware of the fact that her life would be hell in this Kohistani culture as her mother-in-law was being beaten by her own son. Sakhi and his ways were supported by society as a whole. Therefore, Zaitoon made the decision to persevere rather than living in a brutal world. The story of Afshan, who wed Qasim, a ten-year-old boy, to pay off a

loan, is told in the second part of the plot. Afshan's marriage was set up by her father without her desire and permission.

Women have tolerated to be raped, exploited, enslaved, murdered and subsequently impregnated, beaten, bullied, and disinherited. This had been a permanent law of nature (Nair 2). When physical rights take precedence over the more nuanced qualities of a woman, it's no wonder that women in this area form such strong friendships to defend themselves. Carol the American citizen who married Farrukh fell in love with Major Mushtaq and later Mushtaq mistreated her sexually. Eventually, Carol made the decision to leave Pakistan, realizing that Pakistan and America were not only two different countries, but also diverse in terms of their values and culture. She resolved her struggles by deciding to return to her own land where she belonged.

The selected text has been studied previously with the context of women subjugation, patriarchy and male-dominant society. The problems and complications faced by Zaitoon have been highlighted by the different authors. This present research, however, deals with the identity and socio-economic disparity between the characters of the novel. Nancy Frazer's theory of social justice has been taken as the research methodology for this research. This research aims to apply Frazer's concepts of recognition, redistribution and representation to see how the characters negotiate with their cultural identity and how it further leads to socio-economic disparity.

The current research is qualitative, descriptive and interpretive in nature. To analyze the selected novel, Frazer's theory of Justice has been implored as analytical methodology. Sidhwa's '*The Bride*' has been taken as the primary text for this research. The selected text focuses on the prevailing social issues of Pakistani patriarchal society. Sidhwa highlights the social issues of marginalization of women in difference areas of Pakistan. Frazer has talked about the recognition and redistribution in her theory of social justice (Mladenov 2). Her theory of social justice shows different perspectives and viewpoints which has shaped a stronger frame for the study and analysis of political, pragmatic and moral dilemmas in the present era of cultural global pluralism (2).

3.1 Redistribution and Misdistribution:

3.1.1 Redistribution in Frazer's Theory:

- **Associated with Economic Justice:**

Frazer recognizes the significance and important of economic justice as she considers it one of the dimensions of social justice (Frazer 6). In this context redistribution supports the aim of discussing economic inequalities within a society.

- **Essential to Inclusive and Comprehensive Justice:**

Frazer argues that to achieve the status of social justice in a society needs to address economic disparity with recognizing mutual dependence of economic and cultural dimensions. Therefore, redistribution is fundamental part to a complete method to justice.

3.1.2 Misdistribution:

- **Rooted in Economic Injustice:**

Misdistribution is an index of economic injustice within the framework of Frazer. It happens when economic resources are unequally circulated, preserving or intensifying existing disparities and inequalities.

- **Interrelated with cultural and political dimensions:**

Frazer's theory highlights that misdistribution is not merely an economic issue rather it is organized with cultural and political extents of inequality, injustice, which contributes to a bigger universal problem (8). Misdistribution can be observed in those circumstances where certain groups or people have restricted access to cultural resources, capital, opportunities and recognition which in the end adds to cultural injustice.

3.2 Recognition and Misrecognition:

Recognition and misrecognition, according to Frazer, are vital concepts that investigate the cultural aspect of justice. She claims that social justice contains economic dimension i.e. redistribution and also the just recognition of different identities, diverse cultures and social groups (10).

3.2.1 Recognition:

Recognition discusses the acknowledgment and endorsement of various identities, different cultures, and social groups. It stresses the significance of giving respect and prominence to the diversity and multiplicity of experiences within a whole society.

- **Integral to Cultural Justice:**

Cultural justice is one of the aspects of Frazer's theory which is strictly tied to recognition. Attaining recognition means confirming the equal value of diverse cultural and different social identities. The essential aspect of achieving and attaining recognition is to recognize and respect the identity and individuality of marginalized groups such as gender, religious minorities.

3.2.2 Misrecognition:

Misrecognition happens when some particular identities, sexes or groups are marginalized, insulted or deprived of equal status, rights and representation of themselves within a society. It is a type of cultural discrimination that shoots from the failure to admit the variety of experiences and perceptions. Misrecognition can be apparent through the continuation of stereotypes that generalize or misrepresent the identities and individualities of certain groups, prominent to their marginalization (10).

- **Integral to Justice:**

Misrecognition is not merely an indication of cultural injustice but it also gives to wider social injustices. It can prolong stereotypes and inequalities within a society. So, it can be said that when certain voices are thoroughly omitted from public discourse, it embodies misrecognition, restraining the multiplicity of perspectives and obstructing democratic discussion.

3.3 Representation and Misrepresentation:

Frazer's theory of social justice in the context of political justice also explores the concept of representation and misrepresentation. Frazer endorses the importance of just and comprehensive political representation a major element of accomplishing justice within a society.

3.3.1 Representation:

Representation according to Frazer refers to the just and equal contribution of individuals and groups in political procedures and institutions (12). It includes the interest, perception and experiences of one class considered and imitated in the decision making structure and body.

- **Essential to political justice:**

This aspect of Frazer's theory revolves around the fair and equal distribution of political power and representation. Furthermore, representation makes sure that diverse and different voices contribute to determining policies and structure for governance.

3.3.2 Misrepresentation:

Misrepresentation takes place when some groups are incompetently or incorrectly represented in political practices. It adds failure to reflect and integrate the various perceptions and interests of marginalized or colonized groups which leads to an inequality of power and influence.

- **Integral to Justice:**

Misrepresentation according to Frazer is one of the integral part of representation. It observes power imbalances and hamper the realization of political justice excluding the voices from decision-making processes. Ethnic minorities and women are constantly underrepresented in political arena for a long time and it symbolizes a form of misrepresentation that wants to be discussed and addressed.

Frazer's theory gives us a complete and comprehensive framework for addressing the complexities and difficulties of injustice in the political and social system of modern societies. By highlighting the mutual dependency of recognition, redistribution and representation she suggests the need for a joined approach and method that considers the cultural, economic and political aspects of justice. Her work encounters dualistic views and calls for comprehensive solutions and resolutions that go to the cause of these systemic inequalities. Frazer's assistances continue to form current considerations on social justice and activists.

'The Bride' draws the attention of the reader toward the social standing of women particularly in the institution of marriage in Pakistan (Movva et. al 214). She explores the status of women at different levels in the patriarchal social system. According to her, women are denied to speak out on national and international concerns in all the regions of the country (215). However, women, in the novel, are depicted as brave, energetic and powerful. Despite of their basic rights being eroded, they fight hard for their identities against the dogmatic male society of Pakistan (215).

The partition of India in 1947 was one of the biggest socio-political events in the whole region. Two new countries arose on the map of world with the name Pakistan and India (Smith 110). The partition has a significant role in the novel as it created psychological, identical and economical issues to the people of that time (Movva et. al 216). “India was to be partitioned, and that summer the anger and fear in people’s mind exploded” (Sidhwa 17). Zaitoon, the protagonist of the novel, suffers the most painful incident as her parents were brutally killed by the mob while they were on train to Lahore after the announcement of partition.

Recognition is one of the important aspects in Frazer’s theory as it acknowledges the recognition of one’s social status, identity and race (Frazer 8). Zaitoon’s identity in the novel suddenly changes after this incident when Qasim adopts her and calls himself her father, “I am your father, your new father. You are my little Zaitoon bibi” (Sidhwa 26). Qasim belonged to the hills of Kohistan, an area in the northern sides of Pakistan. He lived in the village named Pattan. Zaitoon’s identity was questioned mostly because of the difference of the color in both of them. Qasim’s color was white whereas she looked dark, “the girl is dark” (29). Hence, Zaitoon and Qasim both were misrecognized by the society due to their color, language and dialect.

The negotiation with cultural identity proves to be a problem in the novel. Qasim, on the other hand, also was unable to adjust himself in the culture of Punjab after the partition of 1947. In Punjab, it is very common to ask about the family of others. When Nikka Pehelwan asked about the wife of Qasim then he got furious, “you don’t ask a hill-man about his womenfolk, understand?” (Sidhwa 29). Post-partition time have created these intricacies and complexities in the negotiation of identity of the people of that time.

Misrepresentation happens when a particular person is represented incompletely in terms of identity, race and sex (Frazer 10). Misrepresentation further leads to the disturbance and failure in a society. In the novel there is place name Heera Mandi which is a red light area in the walled city of Lahore is of much importance in terms of its history. Every twenty-four hours after switching their identities the commercial sex workers earn their livelihood on the upper floor of shops at night (Kochhar 2021). Shahnaz is another character in the novel who works as the dancing girl in the redlight area of Lahore. She also faces numerous problems with her identity of being a dancing girl. Qasim and Nikka both used to visit the area off and then at night to see the dance of Shahnaz. Nikka wanted to involve sexually with her as he thought her a prostitute. Her identity was well misunderstood by both of them, “Shahnaz is a dancing-girl, not a prostitute. We are a respectable house” (Sidhwa 67). Shahnaz’s identity was misrecognized and misrepresented by the male members of the society.

The differences between the cultural identities are prominent in the novel. Nikka and Miriam both belonged to Punjab and Qasim was from Kohistan. The culture, norms, traditions and language of both provinces are completely diverse. When Qasim agreed to give Zaitoon’s hand to his cousin’s son, he faced much pressure from Miriam and Nikka. Miriam was continuously opposing this proposal, “They are savages. Brutish, uncouth and ignorant!” (Sidhwa 83). On the other hand Qasim was negotiating with his own cultural identity as he replied, “Sister, I gave him my word” (83). The aforementioned incident also shows that both Miriam and Qasim were unaware of each other’s culture and they were misrecognizing and misrepresenting each other’s culture.

Sidhwa has not only explored the cultural identities between two local cultures of the country but also it shows the difference between Pakistani and American culture. Carol, in the novel, was married to Farrukh who was serving in Pakistan Army. She also faced numerous issues with her identity and was unable to adjust herself in the Pakistani society, “to begin with she has bristled, finding the question indiscreet and much too personal” (94). Carol was continuously negotiating with her cultural identity because she and Farrukh were facing problems because of that. In the USA, it is common to greet people, to shake hands with them regardless of their gender. In Pakistan, however, Carol faced such problems as she belonged to another culture, “don’t you know if you only look a man in the eyes it means he can have you” (98). Frazer’s theory has helped us to understand that misrecognition and misrepresentation is actually a universal phenomenon and it can happen to anyone.

Socio-economic disparity is also visible in the novel. The partition of India 1947 has created numerous challenges for both of the new states in terms of social, economical and political issues (Hamdani & Maini 2). Though Nikka & Miriam both belonged to Punjabi culture and both of them know the language and culture of the province. Qasim, on the other hand, was totally unaware of the culture of Punjab. He moved to Jhallundur all the way from Kohistan before partition and then to Lahore. Qasim could not find a suitable job for him because of the economic condition of the country of that time, “Qasim worked at odd jobs as a construction labourer and coolie” (Sidhwa 41). The effect of partition is quite evident here that has influenced Qasim and he had to do different jobs to feed his family.

Redistribution according to Frazer is the fundamental part to maintain justice in a society. She argues that a society must end economic disparity in order to create a balance in a particular society (Frazer 11). The concept of redistribution deals with the fair and just distribution and division of money within a society. Nikka Pehelwan was in continuous search for a shelter for his family after the 1947 partition. He even borrowed some money from Qasim in order to run a business, “Care to do business with me? I have no money, but I know the guts of the paan and betel-nut business inside out” (Sidhwa 31). Economic disparity is quite visible in the novel after the partition of sub-continent in 1947 and this is mainly because of the misdistribution of wealth in the society which has influenced the lives of characters in the context of this novel.

The newly born Pakistan was in serious condition in terms of economy. They were lacking basic structure and lack of money to run the state affairs. In the novel, the struggle of Nikka Pehelwan shows the effects of socio-economic disparity in the aftermath of partition. Though he was young, sturdy, muscular male but still he was fighting for his existence. His fame spread in the town as a brave and strong man and he also opened a small shop but still he was undergoing an economic crisis. He was once offered to murder someone in exchange of money and political power, “You will be given protection, my friend. Our benefactor is a man of his word, loyal to his followers, a king” (Sidhwa 52). The class difference is clearly shown in the novel as the rich exploit the needs of the poor and force them to use unfair means for their illegal works.

In the end we can say that characters in the novel negotiate their cultural identity in a particular way. Recognition and Representation are the major factors of Frazer’s theory of social justice to discuss the issue of cultural identity. Zaitoon, Qasim, Nikka, Shahnaz and Carol all of the characters face the issues with respect to their cultural identity. Furthermore, it is proved that socio-economic disparity is basically the result of misdistribution of the resources that creates a

lot of problems in the society and leads to the birth of class systems. Nikka Pehelwan and Qasim both struggled hard to meet the needs of their family. Nikka was exploited by a wealthy rich man for target killing and Qasim had to do odd jobs in order to give proper food and shelter to their families. Sidhwa has clearly shown the effects of maldistribution of resources within the society of post partition.

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