

## **INTERROGATION OF GENDER BINARIES IN SIDHWA'S ICE-CANDY MAN FROM BUTLERIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study aims at consideration of gender-delineation in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy Man in the perspective of Judith Butler's deconstructive approach of gender-performativity. All of her four novels Cracking India, The Crow Eaters, The Pakistani Bride and American Brat may present a different approach of gender but here the focus of the present paper is to investigate and interrogate gender binaries in the selected novel. Sidhwa like most of other diaspora female English writers, her works yield and highlight issues, brawls and conflicts of gender in Pakistani patriarchal society particularly at the time of the partition of the subcontinent. The gender representation of focused characters in Sidhwa's novel struggles to break that gender-matrix. This blurring of normative of gender binarism which is social and cultural constructs; it makes gender as fluid subject to their actions and performances. The research is an attempt to remove the misconception that gender-identity is subject to sex-status of characters. From Butlerian perspective of gender-performativity, it is contended to explore that how the constraints of binaries are shattered down. The paper may offer an alternative conceptualization to the already existing notion of gender and it might depict how these gender binaries become unstable and indeterminate.*

**Keywords:** *Judith Butler, Deconstruction, Gender-performativity, interrogation, sexuality, negation of gender-normativity.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender study has appeared as a worthwhile area to attract the attention of scholarly exploration in contemporary debates across the disciplines. The low and substandard status of women was probed by feminist scholars after mid-nineteen century. They commenced campaigns to eradicate the unjust and discriminatory practices prevailed in male centric society. There was no space for the expansion and progression of the women (Barry, 2002). The movements for the underprivileged rights of women were propelled. After the rising movements for the protection of the rights of women, feminism and gender studies have attained much connotation and importance. Gender has emerged as one of the worldwide

studies in which status marginalization and discrimination are examined (Beauvoir, 1972). Gender is not like sex which is a biological notion and concept.

Gender is socio-cultural construct which allocates discriminatory roles that both, males and females are to follow. Gerda Lerner writes in, “The creation of Patriarchy”, “gender is the costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance”. (Lerner 238) She further writes about the gender that the lowliness and subservience of women can be eliminated when they would get rid of, “all other ‘ism’.....racism, classicism, ageism etc..... but it is sexism that must first be eradicated”. In modern world, Gender studies have undergone the radical changes. Originally the gender studies were reckoned the attached part of feminism (Butler, 1999). Now it has become theoretical academic field. It has attained so much significance in contemporary world that there is barely any renowned academic institution which has not considered gender studies in its disciplines (Eagleton, 2003). Gender theories have innovated alterations and it has also impacted traditional disciplines like Sociology, Linguistics, Anthropology and History.

Most of feminist academics and researchers have their diverse positions concerning gender and its relationship with sex. The illustrious Sexologist, John Money is of the view that gender is socio-cultural matter and sex is the biological term. Anne Oakley, the professor of Sociology, says, “Constancy of sex must be admitted, but so also must the variability of gender” (Oakley166). Contrary to the most of other feminist researchers, Butler states that sex is too socially constructed, “perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (Hall, 1995). Gender in Bapsi Sidwa has been a burning and popular area of critical analysis and probe. This study aims at gender in the stated novels of Sidwa is runny, wobbly and indeterminate etc, creating infinite shadows through performance in the light of Butler’s theory of gender performativity.

Women in Sidwa are not only enduring but also a key part of her art. These types of patriarchal conventions in age in which Sidwa was writing leads different critics to take their dissimilar positions concerning the gender representation in her art (Hastings, 2008). To explain this, the study emphasizes Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and subversion of Identity*; her post structural theory of Gender performativity as the theoretical underpinning of the text. In this study of

the selected novel of Sidwa, emphasis of the present investigation would be on identity of key characters, that identity is called one's gender. The novel provoked the readers and researchers to postpone and doubt about long-standing, traditional notion of gender and to describe gender in accordance with Butler's theory of gender (Hochman, 1984).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Novelist, Her Biographical Sketch and Works**

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the few women Pakistani English novelists striving to project women and their issues of the Indian subcontinent into public debate through her art. She is an award-winning Pakistani novelist, born on August 01, 1938 in Karachi. Pakistan (that time part of India) and her family migrated to the city of Lahore shortly. She was brought up in the city of Lahore. Firstly, it became testing and challenging for her to get her work published but later on she overcame all hurdles and constraints for the publication of her work. Then, she became one of the notable writers. She is a conspicuous author of Pakistani background who writes in English.

Being a dynamic social worker, she got opportunity to represent at different forums specially the Asian Women Congress in 1975. Sidhwa as a young girl saw directly blood-stained and chaotic partition of 1947 in which almost seven million Muslims and five million Hindus were affected and displaced from their ancestral hometowns, the most ghastly migration of a big population that ever happened in history. The partition of 1947 was happened by a complex set of political, cultural and social factors including religious differences and the culmination of the colonial chapter in subcontinent. Sidhwa as a novelist writes about her that unforgettable and bitter experience of her childhood, "the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness, alerting me, even at age seven; to a palpable sense of the evil that was taking place in various parts of Lahore".

Typically cogent, she remembers of the event, "I felt more of sadness than horror". (Mass Review 523) Her hometown Lahore as the bordering city of Pakistan and she saw hundreds of thousands of war refugees flooded towards Pakistan through Lahore. Many of these war refugees were women who became an easy victim of rape and suffering. Many of these deserted and tortured women victims were not allowed their entrance back into their families and homes due to ignominy and the hurt honor of their husbands after they were recovered. There

was a rehabilitation and relief camp at the stone-throw of Sidhwa's house and she was spellbound to see the pathetic and wretched plight of these affected refugee women in the camp. She recognized from her early age, "victory is celebrated on a woman's body; vengeance is taken on woman's body. That's very much the way things are, particularly in any part of the world". Howard (1997) this paved the way for Sidhwa's inspiration later on to an activist for the cause of women and their rights.

Sidhwa as a child led a tedious and solitary childhood due to her ailment of Polio which kept her at home schooled. She refers woman as the most powerful and persuasive book of her childhood, as it brings and introduces her to, "a world of fantasy and readin.... I mean extraordinary amounts of reading because that was the only life I had" (Rajan 1). Sidhwa's parents were suggested by doctors not to send her to school. Initially, her time was consumed by daydreaming and listening to stories narrated by servants. That is why, she often writes about the lives of servants with such sympathetic heart because she knew their world better. During her teen years, she read voraciously. She had to bear the series of operation as a result of the issue of her leg more or less removed during her early period of life. However, she went Kinnaird College for women in Lahore and did her B.A from this college but she confesses that she was very much unschooled in life and had no mindfulness of gender discrimination. She got married at the age of nineteen and had three children. She became the queen of words and wrote priceless novels to weave her experiences, perceptions into her lasting novels.

She has a Parsi Zorastrisan background, a religious minority in Pakistan. She depicted Parsi life, their norms, their customs and religious matters in detail in some of her works. She was granted many awards like Sitara-e-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest award and honour. Before her popularity as a writer, she spent her early six years in India from where she migrated after her first marriage at the age of 19. Though her that marriage flopped resulted in divorce finally, after this unpleasant incident, she returned to Pakistan. Despite all this she could not forget her life in India which became crucial in writing her two conspicuous works, *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice- Candy Man* during her stay in Bombay. She sustained her frequent visit after that even to Bombay particularly after divorce. Her interaction with her Parsi community really initiated new horizons of life, her experiences and surveillance in big city life provided her too much to write.

The multi-lingual and multicultural background has a key role to play in her creativity and novels. Her novels have been translated into several other languages. Her brought-up was in a situation of discrimination and apartheid in childhood, because of her handicap and the minority population of Parsi community in Lahore. Hence, she lives a solitary life, living with her servants. When she went to the metropolitan city of Bombay after her marriage, she was introduced to the vast environment of outside world (Jagger, 2008). This proved an enthralling experience for her. It created many more panoramas and vistas for her as a writer to pen down to what she observed with her in-depth insight.

Sidhwa is Pakistan's prominent diasporic post-colonial novelist. She has composed four novels in English that portray her personal outlook of Indian-Subcontinent's division, mistreatment of women, the role of customs and tradition etc. Besides all her distinguished qualities as a diasporic and post-colonial writer she is a born storyteller. The issues of women, divided quagmire of politics, the effect of colonization, all form the major themes of her art according to general and common perception. Since her visit to U.S.A in 1983, she was awarded with many literary wards in U.S.A and abroad. She was conferred the award of both a Bunting Fellowship at Radcliff / Havard and was given the grant from the National Endowment of the arts that permitted her to complete *Cracking India*. In 1991, she was awarded with the Pakistani highest national honour in arts; the Sitara-i- Intiaz. She got published her novel, *An American Brat* in 1993, a story of impediments created for a Pakistani girl by changed culture. She received the Lila Wallace- Reader's Digest Writer's Award, the same year. There are several other honors in her life for her art.

Her following distinguishing works are mentioned here.

An American Brat	(1993)
Cracking India (Ice-Candy Man)	(1991)
The Bride	(1983)
The Crow Eaters	(1980)
Highway to the black Mountains	

### **Cracking India**

Sidhwa's one of the most reputed and often quoted worldly acclaimed , her third novel, initially published in 1991 with the title of *Ice-Candy Man*. Owing to different and undesired meaning generated by its title to the readers in abroad

compelled the author to replace the title with *Cracking India* after the demand of Milkweek publisher too. The novel is equipped with such a practical, popular and genuine incidents that it was filmed by Deepa Mehta; the film was named as “Earth 1947”.

The novel comprises the thirty-two chapters of its magnitude. Besides all other emerging leitmotifs, *Cracking India* springs the historical, social, religious and national chaotic circumstances of the people of Indo-Pak during the most unforgettable moments of the partition of the sub-continent. Usually, it is taken as a mirror to observe the commotion and deplorable past of the two countries at the time of their separation. This issue of partition has enthused so many other novelists indigenously and internationally to sketch the situation in their art. Like Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and there are other renowned novelists who depict the chaotic experiences from Indian perspective unlike Mehr Nigar Masroor’s *Shadows of the Time*, the Pakistani novelist who reflects Pakistani lookout of the partition. But one point common to all is that the both versions are pure from religious favoritism and prejudice (Rognstad, 2012).

Bapsi Sidhwa is the most distinguishing and substantial novelist having noteworthy voice in the world of commonwealth fiction. The novelist presents a catchy picture of gender in all of her novels but more appealingly in *Cracking India*. Out of all, *Cracking India* is the most pivotal one which is replete with discussion of clashing traditional assigned roles to gender. The novel offers such a gender-oriented perspective that it brooches such a forceful debate by the performances of characters to get rid of the socio-cultural construct of gender which is wrongly restrained to bi-categorization of gender i.e masculinity and femininity.

### **LENNY: The Girl and Crippled Child as the Narrator of the Novel**

Lenny is the central figure in the novel, she is the narrator of the novel, despite her background of Parsi, small minority community in Pakistan, remains a vocal and dynamic voice among all other characters. She does not compromise her individuality and identity in all thick and thin circumstances retaining her notable role to play in varied moments of her life and bitter experiences. Being the representative of very negligible minority, she does not remain silent in the company of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh friends.

She, as a child and polio-stricken narrator, sees the inhuman and painful atrocities suffered during the partition period especially weaker gender usually. Though it was the most crucial and formidable situation for all, more aggravating to people belonging to minority, yet she emerges as shrewd and intelligent beyond her age. Ayah, described in a *New York Times* review of *Cracking India* as both “suggestively zaftig” and the “locus of the book,” is the most intimately connected to Lenny (Tharor par 7). She doesn’t like to be silent spectator in her company of particularly of males. It’s due to her assertive role that she is given more weightage and attention by all. The performance or the role of female characters in the novel indicates that they are very self-reliant and confident in displaying their individuality throughout the novel. Lenny is so bold and shrewd in her description of her Ayah, ““full blown cheeks, pouting mouth... a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks” (Safaei, 2012).

Lenny as a key figure depict her dynamic persona, taking new responsibilities and roles while confronting and coming across male characters in diverse situations. She is deviation of stereotypical feminine character in that time male subjugated culture. Even the autobiographical glimpses of Sidhwa herself can be found in her narrator of the novel; as Sidhwa, despite her Parsi minority and physically handicapped background, does not succumb to the adverse circumstances. The discourse and text of the novel by a female character determines her dominating and assertive role which generates variation of gender changes according to Butlerian gender performativity (Schechner, 2002). Unlike other impotent or stereotypical characters, her status of gender on the basis of her sexuality is no hurdle as is wrongly assumed for identification of gender. So the performance of the key female characters in the novels breaks down gender binaries.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored the idea of gender fluidity and gender non-stability by applying the deconstructive gender performative approach of Butler on Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*. After the investigation of gender portrayal in the novel, it might give innovative understanding of gender; liberating it from the long accepted and assigned gender roles based on sexuality which is a biological term nothing to do with identification and determination of gender. It was concluded that transformation of gender of different characters in *Cracking India* depends upon their discursive performances and actions. As a result, characters undergo variation of their actions generating different shades of gender. So actions and

performances of characters determine their gender identification, not their sexual traditional categorization.

Therefore the study at the hand has concluded in the selected Sidhwa's novel with contention that gender is not a fixed, static and stagnant term often associated with sexuality. There are no fixity of gender binaries, these binaries are always in the state of alteration depending upon the performativity of characters as is attempted by the present research.

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