

# Unveiling Orientalism in Pakistani Fiction: A Feminist Discourse Analysis of *The Bride* and *Burnt Shadows*

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study highlights how the theme of feminism is treated by Bapsi Sidhwa and Kamila Shamsie while portraying their female protagonists in their writings. It also focuses on how much this portrayal is affected by their being or not being oriental. The Bride and Burnt Shadows are selected for a comparative study to analyze how the female protagonists survive in a patriarchal society. Within the framework of orientalism, the study takes into consideration the elements of Feminist CDA in both novels. It centers the linguistic features in both novels.*

**Keywords:** orientalism, feminist critical discourse analysis, discourse, patriarchal society

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## Introduction

'Orientalism' by Edward W. Said observes the socio-cultural, historical and political stances of the East from the Western perspective which is usually biased. This paper presents a comparative study of two novels: *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie and *The Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa. The paper highlights how the theme of orientalism is reflected in these novels through language and characters, especially the protagonist females. These females clearly depict how west "spoke for and represented" (Said 6) Orient through them instead of letting them speak for themselves.

In Pakistani fiction, the women's portrayal reflects a significant feministic tendency of the writers in compliance with the changing scenario in Indo-Pak subcontinent under the control of British colonialism. In the portrayal of women, the first prominent change appeared due to the reformist agenda in Indian Muslims and then second prominent development transpired as a result of the Progressive Writers' Movement (1936) which paved way for the new images of women generated by the modern Pakistani writers.

Kamila Shamsie, being a very renowned literary figure, wrote several novels which are widely read and appreciated for their themes related to culture, civilization and history of her homeland as well as subcontinent. Having an enormous literary background, she is no doubt a professional writer whose writings have presented a very positive image of Pakistani women who reflect a completely new look. Her female characters mirror her keen observation of the women belonging to her society which shows her excellence at the art of characterization. Her famous novel *Burnt Shadows* presents Hiroko as a very strong and courageous lady who faces every hardship quite boldly and never gives up. Her character, like many other female characters, has proved Kamila Shamsie a genius feminist writer (Shamsie).

Born in Karachi, Bapsi Sidhwa is considered among the best and most successful Pakistani female writers who know very well how to generate awareness among the western readers about the lifestyle of an eastern common person. *The Bride* presents a number of issues faced by the females in Pakistani society. It deals with the suppression of women in the Pakistani patriarchal society. Sidhwa focuses the plight of her female protagonist Zaitoon through the perspective of an American, Carol, which gives an oriental twist to Sidhwa's feminism. Her female characters in

*The Bride* are very strong and courageous who maintain their living without even spoiling their identity (Sidhwa).

The study highlights the status of women in Pakistani society. It focuses on the similarities and differences in the portrayal of female characters by the two female Pakistani writers. The study also explores how much the element of feminism is affected by the notion of orientalism. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis has been incorporated to trace the elements of feminism and the concept of 'Orientalism' has provided a background to view these elements from an outsider's (west) perspective.

### **Research Questions**

- i. How are the threads of Orientalism woven in dealing with the notion of feminism in the two novels?
- ii. What is the status of women in Pakistani patriarchal society according to the two female writers (Shamsi and Sidhwa)?

The study has critically analyzed the two novels as to understand how, through literary medium, the issue of women oppression is dealt with by the selected female writers. It has focused on the feminine psyche of female characters presented in both novels with the application of FCDA. In the present era, the conflict between east and west is increasing day by day in spite of all technological advancements and globalization. Instead of focusing on the similarities, more emphasis is put on dissimilarities which can be seen even in the portrayal of female characters in different literary writings. The study is an attempt to highlight these gaps so that they could be bridged by presenting *oriental* and *non-oriental* perspective in the light of Orientalism by Said.

### **Literature Review**

The female novelists, after the Second World War, transcended the boundaries related to gender in their thematic concerns and began to write about a variety of experiences, including the fetid and terrifying. In the writings of Bapsi Sidhwa and Kamila Shamsie, there is a shift from traditional to contemporary themes and 'feminism' has emerged as an extremely important contemporary notion.

Feminism can be considered as a theme or notion that intends to establish a level of equality between men and women on socio-political, ethical, economic and moral grounds. Feminism is divided under three headings by a group of feminist scholars as Walker also discusses them as "The First Wave, The Second Wave and The Third Wave" (Walker). The first

wave of feminism, dealing with the sufferings of the women, began at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second wave, taking into considerations the issues of women's inequality and discrimination, began in 1960s. Being a relatively recent phenomenon, the third wave exploded in 1990s as an upshot of the failure of second wave feminism (Ahmad 6).

The third wave feminism not only focused the middle class women for their right to equality but also showed concern for their independent identity. It took place under the influence of colonialism as it finds its roots under the influence of western literature where new dimensions were given to the images of women (Ahmad 90). The way the Pakistani novelists portray female characters can be seen in the perspective of postcolonial feminism as Young also asserts: "In the postcolonial state, postcolonial feminism begins from the perception that its politics are framed by the active legacies of Colonialism" (Young 109).

The internationally renowned Pakistani novelist Bapsi Sidhwa expresses her feministic ideologies with the help of her writings. *The Bride* presents a strong and confident image of females in Pakistani context. Although the novel deals with the subjugation of women in Pakistani patriarchal society but the females in Sidhwa's novels "refused to be represented as non-living phenomena under the label of shame, modest, honor etc." (Alvi).

*Burnt Shadow* by Kamila Shamsie offers an incomparable panoramic image of 20<sup>th</sup> century later half. It deals with the journey of Hiroko Tanaka, the protagonist. She travels from one country to another in search of identity after she lost all her family members in Nagasaki explosion. Through her character, Shamsie presents before us "the fluid and dynamic nature of the identity of an individual which transcend across boundaries of time and space" (Chaudary).

*Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* by Lazar () brings together feminist studies and Critical Discourse Analysis to critically evaluate the relation between gender and notions of power and ideology. It is "concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse" (Lazar 5).

The Pakistani literature in English language may glimpses of 'orientalism' in them when it comes to the portrayal of female characters who possess some socio-cultural and religious obligations. The idea of

‘Orientalism’ finds its traces in Edward Said who defines it as the way which is adopted by west to define and perceive the East (Said). The depiction of characters and settings may be influenced by presupposed information which can be biased or half true. *The Bride* and *The Burnt Shadows*, both written by female novelists, focus the plight of Pakistani women from oriental or non-oriental lenses.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Said’s *Orientalism* attempts to unveil the structure of colonialism along with the social relations between colonized and imperial states in order to reveal how the practices of the past and the relations between the two are simulated in the present to produce and manipulate knowledge. This paper investigates how the “Other” (Said 1) is constructed through a process of race, through intellectuals and experts while dealing with Feminism in particular. Said successfully explores the binary relationships of object and subject, of assertive “Occident” and submissive “Orient” (4). Said’s *Orientalism* exhibits the biases, the western writers reflected in their writings and challenged them for creating an image of “Others” through their stereotyped scholarly works. He emphasizes that the Orient is not something natural but it is a production of hegemonic culture propounded by intelligencia (Said 2-3). While discussing any discourse from orientalist point of view, the dichotomy between Occident and Orient, between civilized and uncivilized, between rational and irrational is important to be remembered. Just like an institution, Orientalism banks on what Said calls a “positional superiority,” which positioned the Westerners “in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 7).

Through a comparative study of the two novels, this paper has evaluated how much the notion of orientalism affects the writings of the two novelists while depicting scenes, social and cultural norms and characters in a Pakistani society. It has mainly focused on how feminism is dealt with by having oriental or non-oriental outlook. Sidhwa and Shamsie both are female Pakistani writers. Sidhwa lives in the USA whereas Shamsie lives in Karachi, Pakistan. How much their perspective is affected by the western dominance while handling the notion of feminism, provides a theoretical framework to this paper.

### **Methodology**

This exploratory study focuses on a comparative analysis of the two novels; *The Bride* and *The Burnt Shadows* to trace the elements of feminism in them from eastern and western point of views. Feminism as an ideology is preferred as it finds a wide scope in Asia as far as the treatment of women is concerned. Feminist CDA (Lazar) has been applied as a research method as both novels are related to the lives of women in a patriarchal society. FCDA is an extension to CDA where language and ideology play an important role in constructing gender based ideologies. It focuses on how language is used to construct gender and identity especially in the case of female characters. This method is adopted as it allows and helps the reader to comprehend the role that a female plays in a society in which she is portrayed, coping with all the social, economic and political changes around her. Fairclough's three dimensional model; "*discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice*", has been incorporated to see how women are identified and what discourse and societal practices are linked with them through discourse in these novels.

The study has emphasised the depiction of setting, use of linguistic features and portrayal of characters to examine how they add meaning to 'feminism' on a micro level and how they reflect orientalism at a macro level. Feminism has been traced out through FCDA as it is related to male dominance and cultural hegemony whereas Said's 'Orientalism' accentuates the absence/presence of western biases in portrayal of female characters specially the protagonists.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Sidhwa counters the prevailing male chauvinist discourse of Pakistani literature by presenting an alternative yet unconventional image of a bold, strong and assertive female in *The Bride*. It portrays the heart touching life story of a young girl of sixteen named Zaitoon. The novel covers different aspects of her life from childhood till the time she escapes from her mismatched marriage for better prospects.

The novel starts with a discussion between Qasim and his father about Resham Khan who offered his daughter to Qasim for not being able to pay his debts which presents the image of a woman as a transaction commodity. The woman is presented as a mother, wife and daughter who is suffering but remains successful. In FCDA, this can be related to Fairclough's 'three-dimensional model' as it discloses the societal practices a woman has to undergo in a patriarchal hierarchy. Hiroko in

*Burnt Shadows* (Shamsie) is totally against such an image of woman. She is also leading a hard life but remains independent till end.

Sidhwa exposes the training given to a girl from childhood to be expert in household chores as the only duty she is supposed to perform is to run a house after getting married. Zaitoon is also trained as “From her (Miriam) Zaitoon learned to cook, sew, shop and to keep her room tidy” (45). Miriam discusses with Nikka about such training when she says “Poor child... had she a mother, she will be learning to cook and sew... does Bhai Qasim think he is rearing a boy? He ought to give some thought of her marriage” (42). These lines clearly draw a line of demarcation between the brought up given to boys and girls. Women, here, are identified with household chores by attaching certain words to them. These feminist linguistic features reveal discourse as text to reflect identities and also discloses the female discursive practices exposed through discourse.

Zaitoon’s role as a daughter is that of a very docile one who cannot go against his father’s will but does raise a voice as she says “Abba take me back...if I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains.. I will die rather than live here” (13). The *discursive practice of discourse* reveals male dominance as her father responds to her furiously as he declares “I’ve given my words...it is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands” (137). But Sidhwa appears to be quite Oriental here as she generalizes an individual practice, which occurred in a tribal area, to the whole country.

Another *discursive practice* reveals itself when Carol “gave up her job” (91) because Farrukh, her Pakistani husband, didn’t like it. Sidhwa perceives that the lives of Pakistani women are of no value because “women get killed for one reason or other... imagined insults, family honor, infidelity (195).

No doubt, Sidhwa addresses the issue of woman’s status in a male dominant society but it does not present a truthful picture of Pakistan because it primarily focuses individual stories. She leaves almost no room for the reader to form his/her own judgement as she herself carries certain views. Orientalism finds its glimpses as she herself discloses that the novel is not her firsthand experience and she acknowledges Rana Khan for sharing his Partition experiences. The novel proposes a basic stereotype of the people of Kohistan who are believed to be uncivilized

and cruel by the Westerners and even by those Pakistanis who do not possess sufficient knowledge about the culture and life style of Kohistanis. The view she offers is based on Oriental fiction where East is always exotic but suffering.

On the contrary, *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie is written as an attempt to alter the Oriental perspective of West. The novel does not present the pitiful, oppressed and humiliating condition of woman but the basic themes are of migration, identity and home. CDA also covers the themes of ideology and identity which can be best dealt by FCDA when it comes to female identity specifically to this novel. The novel revolves around a Japanese woman Hiroko Tanaka who struggles throughout her life in search of identity. She is the only survivor who lost her family in atomic bomb explosion. Unlike Sidhwa's *Zaitoon*, Hiroko does enjoy family love. It is obvious when she tries to give the diamond set to Elizabeth but she refuses to take that and insists her to wear or to sell (Shamsie 123-124). She is not presented as a miserable protagonist but a brave and courageous lady whom Sajjad asks "You've come to rescue me?" and she replies "Yes" (195). Instead of depending upon others she lets others depend on her. This discursive practice is quite opposite to what Sidhwa presented in *The Bride*. Despite of all the sufferings Hiroko remains strong and optimist as "She stepped closer to take in the smile of Luis Rivera, its unfettered optimism".

A comparative analysis of the two writings reflect that patriarchy, religion and culture play an important role in *The Bride* to entrap women and change them into submissive docile bodies whereas *Burnt Shadows* presents a unique and unusual image of a woman who challenges norms and defies stereotypes. Both present traumatic condition of women in the context of partition and migration but the difference lies in the fact that the limitations and problems are imposed upon *Zaitoon* from family and society whereas Hiroko has received them by events. Sidhwa, being an Oriental, gives more importance to feminine consciousness whereas Shamsie takes into consideration transnational consciousness.

Sidhwa is although a very sensitive writer but because of her more interaction with western society, her perspective about east is a little hampered by Orientalism whereas Shamsie appears trying to maintain a positive image of the east.

### **Conclusion**



The study concludes that womanhood is the prominent theme in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Bride* but the two novels possess a very vague belief of womanhood. Woman struggles throughout her life to gain respect but is mostly exploited. The two novels clearly portray woman's sacrifices and achievements in order to give her equal status in a patriarchal society. Although both novelists reveal their condolences for the tough lives of females, but it is obvious that the substantial role of women in the upkeep and reproduction of this society is almost impossible to transform. The study has a broad scope because women oppression is a widely spread phenomenon in almost all societies.

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