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Khan's Seduction: The Perspective of
Seven Building Tasks of Language**

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Male victimization of women Covered in Society's Expectation in Razia Sultana Khan's *Seduction: The Perspective of Seven Building Tasks of Language*

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Abstract

Living in the society's expectation is like we are forced to do what they want us to do and it is in the circle of hell. At one time, we need society as the means to communicate and be a natural human being. At the other hands, its culture and custom destroy ourselves especially those who have sexist culture and custom. This Bangladesh short story titled Seduction is one of the representatives of society that has sexist culture. It tells about a young girl who is forced to marry at the young age and becomes the object of her husband's sexual trinket. What the writer wants to emphasize is the way the author named Razia Sultana Khan describe the treatment and the culture through Paul Gee's seven language blocks' perspective. The result of the discussion is that this short story, indeed, contains some of the seven building blocks that are significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign systems and knowledge.

Keywords: men victimization, seven building tasks of language, discourse analysis

A. Introduction

Society is the place where the people socialize and develop their culture. It means that they have the media to express the thoughts and apply them into rules. Rules become powerful when it is decided by the influential people in society and those influential people are the ones who

have the power and in major environment. The greatest majority is when it relates to the gender issue which is very obvious to see that women are the minority and powerless in most society. This paper shows how the Bangladeshi women become the object of sexual pleasure and how they are symbol of objects in post-colonialism era.

Women are the very centered of the object by gender issue. They receive the discrimination from the more dominant gender which is men. Women and girls in Bangladesh face some obstacles in their privacy because of the society and gender discrimination. Girls are considered to be the financial burden to the family therefore

many of them marry in the very young age.¹ Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. More than two-thirds of adolescent girls are married (of those aged 10-19). Nearly two in five girls aged 15-17 are married. The legal of marriage is 18 for girls, however three- quarters of women aged 20-49 were married before 18 (as cited in UNICEF and BBS, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2006, Bangladesh 2007).

The object of this study is the short story titled *Seduction* by Razia Sultana Khan. It is the example of Asian literature that is written in English. The main character is Halima, a newlywed woman who has married in her sixteen. And, the main focus of the story is the woman victimization as the object of pleasure. It is explained through Khan's journal discussing the same issue in *The Good Wife and Other Tales*

1 Noorani, S. *Women and Girls in Bangladesh, issue – child marriage*.2007. Retrieved on October, 2014 from http://www/unicef.org/bangladesh/Women_and_girls_in_Bangladesh.pdf

of Seduction :

Though none of the stories are autobiographical, some of them have sprouted from seeds that the women in my family casually scattered in my path. My grandmother was a born story teller and when I was a child she told me an anecdote about the British enticing the population of their colony in Bengal by offering free tea to the local residents. The British had discovered that the areas in the northeastern parts of India were conducive to tea plantation, and though the best tea was shipped away to Britain, it was economically prudent to have a flourishing local market. The story “Seduction” originated from that².

The above quotation tells about the implicit exploitation that is occurred by the British colony. Though this story does not tell about the British colony, it clearly symbolizes the condition of the tea plantation time. British has conquered the tea plantation and it also becomes flourishing in the own native country and even become the drink for the Bangladesh people. They pay more for their own harvesting product.

What makes this story gender issue is that the way the author describes the main character who is a young married woman who has temptation to be easily seduced by the man outside her husband. Furthermore, this paper analyzes the problems through the seven building tasks of language by James Paul Gee. It uses a discourse analysis to analyze the story.

According to Gee, seven building tasks of language use are significance, activities, identities, relationship, politics, connections and sign system and knowledge. The significance is needed to use language to give them significant or to lessen their significance, to signal to others how we view their significance. The activities are what people say, do, and are in using language

enacts practices. At the same time, what people say, do, and are would have no meaning unless these practices already existed. The identities are when people often enact their identities by speaking or writing in such a way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that people explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. People build identities for others as a way to build ones for them. The relationship is when people use language to signal what sort of relationship they have, want to have, or are trying to have with their listener(s), reader(s), or other people, groups, or institutions about whom they are communicating. People use language to build social relationships. The politics is when people use language to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods. Social goods are potentially at stake any time we speak or write so as to state or imply that something or someone is “adequate,” “normal,” “good,” or “acceptable” (or the opposite) in some fashion important to some group in society or society as a whole. In connections, people use language to give certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things, that is, to build connections or relevance. Things are not always inherently connected or relevant to each other. Often, people have to make such connections. Even when things seem inherently connected or relevant to each other, people can use language to break or mitigate such connections. And the last one is sign system and knowledge that people can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not, in given situations, that is, to build privilege or prestige for one sign system or way of knowing over another.³

Those seven building tasks are under the discipline of discourse analysis which tries to analyze the use of language. It is not only about form but also the practice of language through context. Language not only defines the meaning

2 Khan, Razia Sultana. “The Good Wife and Other Tales of Seduction”.(2010) *ETD collection for University of Nebraska - Lincoln*. Paper AAI3355627. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dissertations/AAI3355627>

3 Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. 2011. Routledge: Cambridge University Press.

of words, but through those words it can be used as the rule to practice what is written or spoken through language⁴ and it is part of how the language uses in the action. . In discourse analysis, language can be analyzed through the transcripts from interview, lyric, or movie, focus group, samples of conversation, published literature, media and web based material. In other words, discourse analysis studies how large chunks of language beyond the sentence level are organized, how the social transaction imposes a framework on discourse.⁵

One of the studies has analyzed Khan's *Seduction*. It is from Kartika Puspaningrum in her undergraduate thesis titled *The Portrayal of Women in Bangladesh in Razia Sultana Khan's Seduction* who studies about the condition of the women at that time using the literature approach. She uses the theory of characters to convey the main problem that is faced by Bangladeshi women. In this paper, the writer would like to study about discourse analysis of Khan's *Seduction* using Gee's seven building tasks of language to convey the men victimization of women especially Bangladeshi women.

Finding and Discussion

1. Significance

The Significance is shown through the quotation that shows the rule of women in Bangladesh who have to marry to a good and respectable family in their very young age.

"We've found you an excellent husband. The Mirs are well-to-do respectable family." Halima had been playing with cowry shells. "Listen when I talk to you!" The sharpness in her mother's voice made Halima stop and the cowries clattered onto the floor (p.120).

This quotation shows the beginning of the problem that even Halima as the main character is only sixteen and she still plays with her cowries. It shows that she is only teenager who

still needs her own time to grow before entering the marriage life.

Another problem that is faced by Halima is that she cannot go outside alone. She has to stay at home all day doing her chores.

Each morning after a quick bath from the family well, she rushed to the kitchen to help in the breakfast preparation....No matter how early Halima woke, her mother-in-law was always in the kitchen before her (p.120).

Her mother's words seemed a thing in the past now as Halima sat in front of the window looking out. This was her favourite pastime in the afternoon when the men returned to their work and Halima's mother-in-law retired to her room to take a long nap. Halima was on her own (p.121).

Based on these two quotations, Halima has to stay at home and does her chores as a good and obedient wife and daughter-in-law.

Then the seduction begins. It shows that Halima in her curiosity and bravery feels bored staying all day in her room or her husband's house.

"We always have the slats pointing downward; otherwise there's no privacy in this room". He (Halima's husband) had paused then added, "Ma is very particular about this" (p.121).

Gradually, the afternoon seduced her to it (window) and she noticed that when the slats pointed downward she could see the legs of people passing by her window (p.121).

An uncanny feeling of herself being watched made Halima look up. The man was staring at her! (p.123).

Halima is alone all afternoon in her room and there is a window that is only covered with slats pointing downward. It signifies that as a woman, Halima can be seduced by the curiosity what exists outside her room. It is part of her boredom staying all day inside the house. She can never

4 Ibid

5 Cutting, J. *Pragmatics and Discourse: A Resource Book for Students*. 2002. London: Routledge.

freely know the news outside.

The point is that there is a man who is a seller of tea to whom Halima takes an interest.

A jaunty smile touched his lips as he sneaked a look at Halima's window, then looked away. So when had the slats moved up! She lowered her eyes but let the slats be.... Halima turned pink under her *ghumta*, sure now that he had seen her behind the wooden slats. Her heart skipped a couple of beats as she imagined the boy coming with some message from the stranger (p.124).

Halima is happy because she can contact with outside world that in this case it is a man that makes her heart beat because of the curiosity.

The significance is not the only way to reveal the men victimization toward women. Above quotations are just the beginning the way the men see women as an object that can easily be seduced and fooled. There is more significance thing that is studied through the activities.

2. Activities

This part discusses the activities that show the men victimization toward women. The activity takes part in the way the seller of tea or *chai* has caught interest on Halima who never has freedom to go outside.

"*Bhabi*, the *Chai Bhai* said to give this to you." He (the boy) stood cradling the clay cup between his small hands.

"What is it?" Halima said in a flat tone. The stitches needed her full attention.

"It's a drink...sherbet."

"What?"

"It's called *chai*."

"Well?"

"He's giving it to everyone." Ahsan looked at her, a little puzzled at her attitude.

"But what is it?"

"He called it *chai*."

Halima still made no move to relieve him of the bowl.

"It's really good. It's something new they're

trying out." As the bearer of the exotic drink Ahsan felt bound to defend the concoction.

"How much?" Halima finally ventured in a low voice.

Ahsan's face cleared, "It's free, *Bhabi*! It's free!"

The activity of offering the *chai* for free for the very first time is of course something surprising for Halima for the one who offers is the man. The man is the one who caught staring at her through the slats and Halima lets him to stare back at her.

Halima approached the cup. Perhaps it tasted different when hot. As she held the cup between her curved hands she thought of the *Chaiwallah*'s fingers touching the same places, and felt her body turning warm.

With each passing day she became a little less timid and adjusted the slats as soon as the *Chaiwallah* came into view. She noticed how his eyes turned to her window and the corner of his mouth turned up in a smile while one eye brow shot up. ...she wondered what less as she focused on the *Chaiwallah*'s biceps. They bulged through the half sleeve of his safari shirt as he stood poised over the cup of tea with the heavy kettle in midair.

The activity shows the start of the way the man seduces Halima with his free *chai*. It is like the beginning of Halima is fooled because of her curiosity. Halima is not aware that she is the object of the seduction starting from the free *chai*.

"One paisa a cup. Hot *chai*. One paisa a cup." His (*Chaiwallah*)'s voice sent tentacles of awareness up her skin (p.129).

"She asked me if I could get her two cups of the *chai* and gave me five paisa coin. And well she might. When I asked Mizan how much I should pay, he said four paisa. That's two paisas a cup. Can you believe that? You can get four bananas for that! " (p.130).

Halima was silent. When Ahsan came that afternoon, she handed him four paisas (p. 130).

These quotations show the result of being seduced and Halima comes into the bait. She willingly gives the man money though she knows that the *chai* is not free anymore and that price is getting more expensive. She gets the temptation of having the pleasure from becoming the object of man's pleasure.

3. Identities

Identities show the one who has the authority and the one who is not. This short story tells us about the obvious difference chores between man and woman. The division usually oppresses women to stay at home all day. At first before the marriage, they have to stay at home. After marriage, they are also supposed to stay at home.

"Listen when I talk to you!" The sharpness in her mother's voice made Halima stop and the cowries clattered onto the floor (p.120).

"We always have the slats pointing downward; otherwise there's no privacy in this room". He (Halima's husband) had paused then added, "Ma is very particular about this" (p.121).

That's how her mother-in-law found her one day, eyes glued to the world outside, oblivious to the sound inside. The older woman gently adjusted the slats and said, "It works both ways, you know. When we look out they look in."(p.122).

Those quotations are from Halima's mother, Halima's husband and Halima's mother-in-law who are gained superiority toward Halima. Even her mother and mother-in-law as women have the authority to rule Halima's way of behaving. Husband's advice is like an order that Halima should be careful with the slats and she cannot peer the outside world through the slats.

4. Relationship

The way the older women have the position to rule the younger ones are being conveyed through this story. It might be the same case that the women are not aware of the gender discrimination rules therefore they obey every rule without questioning and even without complaining. The worst part is they do not understand what is going on with the issue.

"What am I telling you?" Shahina's voice rose with excitement. "They're giving it to whoever wants it, old and young, boy or girl..."

"But why?"

"I don't know." Shahina paused, and gave the question some consideration. Then she shrugged. "Who cares? As long as we don't have to pay for it."(p.126).

Shahina's statement that she does not know the reason why the *chai* is given to everybody and the way she says she is okay as long as it is free shows that she as a woman is not aware of being the object from the man.

5. Politics

The politics element in this story is obvious. It is also analyzed through Khan's *The Good Wife and Other Tales of Seduction*. She says that her grandmother was a born story teller and when she was a child she told her an anecdote about the British enticing the population of their colony in Bengal by offering free tea to the local residents. The British had discovered that the areas in the northeastern parts of India were conducive to tea plantation, and though the best tea was shipped away to Britain, it was economically prudent to have a flourishing local market. The story "Seduction" originated from that (Khan: 2007).

6. Connection

The connection happens when it comes to the comparison of the politics point. Bangladesh is symbolized through Halima as the representation of the woman who is forced to obey the rule in her

society that actually it has no benefit in woman gender. Her limit knowledge of outside world makes her feel curious and she is easily being used in the way the tea seller sells his product. At first it is free, but after that the price is unusually expensive.

The man as he is called *Chaiwallahis* the one who represents the British colony. The British colony takes the tea plantation and makes a good product of it free from Bangladesh and they sell it back to the Bangladesh people to gain more benefit.

7. Sign System and Knowledge

In this part, the writer wants to connect the sign system and knowledge with the short story. Through this short story, the readers can be aware of the existence of the colonial time in the past that is depicted through the way the man seduces woman. Moreover, the one being seduced is not aware at all that she becomes the object of pleasure.

The sign system in this story is the slats that are the means to connect to the outside world, the *chai* as the symbol of the product of the country gives the readers knowledge of the means of seduction so that the benefit can be gained double.

Conclusion

This short story has rich culture of society showing the way the people behaves in the name of society rules. In contrast, part of the society wants to break the rule silently through the curiosity of having known the outside world. The people that have to be ruled are mostly women and that is why it is also part of gender discrimination. It is how the rule only gives benefit to one of the genders. It becomes part of everyday life that even the disadvantage side; in this case women are not aware and easily accept that it is part of their destiny.

In every way, the women always become the object to gain the advantage. This short story has shown the readers the characteristics of women in Bangladesh that mostly curious and brave in particular way. It is as the result of being

abandoned not to go outside before and after marriage. In addition, the women are still under age and it can be concluded that they are still innocent and they do not know the consequence of being curious and brave into certain situation; in this case Halima's curiousness and bravery staring and being seduced by the *Chaiwallah*.

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