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Going Against the grain: An FPDA of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Abstract

The aspects of one's identity are positioned within a context prescribed by culture and they are according to cultural expectation. The present study aims to add/explore power dynamics that are embedded in the discourses of Ishtar and Shamhat. This study is concerned with how in The Epic of Gilgamesh, the two female characters: Ishtar and Shamhat are received and perceived by their immediate audience. The present study through feminist Post Structured Discourse Analysis (FPDA) (Baxter, 2003) lens analyzes characters of Ishtar and Shamhat, the focus of the study is to inspect the ways through these characters negotiates their positions, identities and relationships in a society that is dominated by patriarchal traditional discourses. It is concluded that both female characters in their respective discourses are victorious in their persuasion of action and manner of speaking.

Introduction

Discourse performs a communicative purpose and this communicative goal is achieved through each segment of discourse (Hovy, 1993). These segments are critically analyzed in the domain of critical discourse analysis, which shows how the relations of power and ideologies are built through discourse. Furthermore, the effects of power and ideologies on social identity, social system and belief are demonstrated in human action (Fairclough, 1992). The discourse analysis locates the hegemony which is (re)produced, by social dynamics. Discourse analysis indicates the withstanding of hegemony to continue domineering social relations. Therefore analysis itself is a form of "analytical resistance" which has the potential to make people knowledgeable about social standing and this knowledge develops resistance for change (Lazar, 2005). For Beauvoir "there is an `I' that does its gender, that becomes its gender on such a model culture and discourse undermine the subject, but do not constitute that subject" (Butler, 1990, p. 143). Butler expands the argument and says that in any culture discourse is responsible for social change and positing of the subject.

The epic of Gilgamesh

The epic of Gilgamesh dates from 3000 B.C. (Sandrars, 1972). After the understanding of cuneiform writing as early as 120 years the finest epic became known to the world of literature. The ancient text is available by means of secondary sources, either translation or transliteration (De Villier, 2005). The time Gilgamesh was written the genre of the epic was not introduced. Since epic is poetry so I have taken the translated version of poetry by Andrew George (1999). This epic consists of 2900 lines and 11 clay tablets (Kovacs, 1989). The epic narrates the heroic quest of Gilgamesh the king of Uruk, his friendship with Enkidu and his final journey towards immortality.

Status of women in Mesopotamian society

In early Mesopotamian society women, the role was vital, apart from their domestic job elite women played her part in every sphere of life (Nemet-Nejat, 1998). Cuneiform documents, visual arts and archaeological contexts were the only sources of information about Mesopotamian women (Bahrani,2001; Gansell, 2012; Oppenhein, 1967; Steele, 2007). This evidence furnishes the presence of an elite woman in state affairs, politics, public rituals and priestesses of various ranks. The nonelite woman is less known from these pieces of evidence of information, so it can be inferred that nonelites were not parallel to elite women in their participation in social affairs. In the Dynasty of King Ur III, royal women were lyricist of songs and author of lullabies for princes. Women scribers were appointed for the recording of the transactions, but most of them were slaves.

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Institutionalization of prostitution in Mesopotamian society

A German physician Iwan Bloch declares that societies, where sexual activities have limited prostitution, develops among primitive people who are sexually licentious. However, the institutionalization of prostitution resulted in the regularization of sexual activity (Lerner, 1986). The circumstances under which prostitution institutionalized in a society can be traced out from ancient Mesopotamian history. Ancient Babylonians gods and goddesses were not symbolically represented in the temple, they actually reside in the temple. These personified gods were cared for and fed with day-to-day necessities. In some cases, these necessities of life include sexual services (Oppenheim, 1964). Various kinds of priestesses were appointed to perform different roles. Daughters of the king were selected as high priestesses (en or entu). They were in charge of ritual management, temple affairs like a male high priest. In ancient Sumer nin-dingir priestesses personating the goddess in sacred marriage. The ritual of sacred marriage was thought to bring the richness of land and prosperity of people (Lerner, 1986). It resulted in a separate group of a prostitute. People considered these sexual activities beneficial and sacred (Lerner, 1986). Naditum priestesses were next in rank. Most of them were daughters of high-rank bureaucrats. Naditum of the god of Shamash lived in a cloister house within the temple. They were not allowed to marry. Qadishtum was lower in rank temple servants. During the temple services, they were not allowed to marry but after spending a certain amount of time in the temple they may live outside the temple and marry. Another possibility is that in the course of temple services they may have prostituted (Lerner, 1986). Slavery was also practiced in the Neo Babylonian society. Slave women perform the parallel function to wives from children's upbringing to household chores (Steele, 2007). These slave women occasionally work as a prostitute when they were sold with permission to sexual access by slave owner (Dandamaev, 1984). These are the few pieces of evidence of sexual activities in ancient Mesopotamian society. Mesopotamian women underwent different changes in their roles with successive civilization.

The present study aims to trace the power dynamics that are apparent in Ishtar (goddess of love and war) and Harlot (Shamhat) character. It will examine the speeches of Shamhat and Ishtar along with the responses of immediate audiences. First Ishtar obedience to Mesopotamian expectations and employment of powerful discourse will be discussed. Further, I will discuss Ishtar's disobedience to Mesopotamian expectations will be demonstrated. It will be revealed that how she utilizes her power in her role as Ishtar. To deconstruct the text I will use feminist poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (Baxter, 2003) as a theoretical framework. As McLaren (2009) asserts FPDA allows the researcher to recognize the voice of the subaltern and reflect upon it. This statement implies that "being reflexive is synonymous with being scientific". (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 381) because reflectivity is a significant phenomenon in CDA (Bucholtz, 2001; Chouliaraki& Fairclough, 1999).

Literature Review

Judith Baxter (2003) in his book "*Positioning Gender in Discourse: A feminist Methodology*" introduced the FPDA as a method of discourse analysis. The central idea of FPDA is the amalgam of Bakhtin (1981) formalism, Derrida (1987) poststructuralism and Foucault (1972) in relation to power, knowledge and discourse. Post-structuralists see no essential connection between the word and its meaning, therefore meaning cannot be understood beyond the event and its discourse but only with the help of language (Weedon, 1997). Davies (1989) analyzed gender positioning in feminist stories from the perspective of preschool children and moving beyond the fixation of hierarchical opposition on which gender is based. Thus the notion of deconstruction and decentralization of hierarchical opposition is the core of post-structuralism. Therefore Weedon (1987) insisted on joining the work of Derrida to the work of Foucault, as deconstruction curtails the prevailing social powers doing so may reassure the patriarchal status by non-fixing of meaning.

Complementing effects of Post-Structuralism on Feminism

According to Foucault (1980) self is not a fixed, social and cultural pattern of language positioned self in society. In certain discourse, self appears as powerful in another discourse it may appear as powerless. Francis (2010) presented four reasons for embracing Foucauldian post-structuralism by feminists. Firstly, Foucault gave the idea of "Enlightenment discourse" as a socially constructed narrative. Secondly, post-structuralists contest feminists by describing power as a socially constituted and inconstant phenomenon. It can not only exist between men and women but among women, blacks, working-class and gay. Thirdly, the post-structuralist theory discards the binary oppositions of male and female. Fourthly, the idea of the self as positioned and also as position itself is an encouraging clue for a feminist.

Baxter (2002) drawn a study on the speech of mixed-sex classrooms. The use of feminist post-structuralist analysis allows them to show multiply positioned discourse of girls at times powerful at other times powerless in mixed-sex class and this multiplicity in the positioning of girls reveals the complexity of discourse. FPDA produces the powerful insight of discourse in educational practice and helps to transform the conventional practices in institutions.

Kamada (2009) explored the hybrid identities of multi-ethnic girls in Japan. She being the seventh participant of her own study used FPDA and discursive psychology to analyze the discourse of girls in three years of ethnographic study. Kamada's analysis

demonstrated the nuanced mechanism used by a girl to their discourse to giveaway to marginalized and privileged aspects to their identity. Three years of the study exhibited, how the discourse that marginalized them skillfully deconstructed by these multi-ethnic girls and celebrated their hybrid identity. Non-Japanese parents of these girls, who were basically white foreign-born English speaking provided them opportunities for good jobs and a better future.

FPDA as an approach to history subject has been employed (Schoeman&Fardon 2010) to identify the marginalized women in a school history text. In their exemplar, Schoeman and Fardon identified significant incidences, activities associated with female biasness through invisibility, stereotyping, linguistic bias, and cosmetic bias were quantitatively presented. Through the lens of FPDA Andromache's speeches in an epic Iliad were analyzed (Rowe, 2016). By studying the marginalized character of classical texts, her study demonstrated that how strategically Andromache spoke out against social norms of that time through the available discourse. She applied certain discourse of Greek expectations such as pitiable wife, mourning widow which allow her to convey her thoughts as a virtuous and aristocratic woman.

Few studies on the epic of Gilgamesh have been done (Abusch, 2001; Gresseth, 1975; De Villiers, 2005; Edmunds 2005), these studies articulate the mythological aspects of the epic. Uçar-Özbirinci (2010) investigated the voice of women in the retelling of Gilgamesh as a drama by a Turkish writer Avci (1996). Avci gives voice to the Shamhat and snake who steal the plant of immortality. Her play brings a female perspective in the patriarchal epic. The present study argues that Shamhat is the strong character in the original version of the epic of Gilgamesh and this study presents the contrast of her character with the Ishtar the goddess of love and war. Through the lens of feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis this paper has presented the different discourse of Ishtar and Shamhat and tried to highlight that marginal character may appear dull, but by doing so, understanding of the reader to the culture and society ancient times will be enhanced, and that is the aim of my study.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) to analyze Ishtar and Shamhat speeches is chosen. This analysis is an amalgam of traditional critical discourse analysis with feminist perspectives. According to Baxter (2003), a feminist approach analyzes the power position in a discourse that is negotiated according to the relationship and positioning of the subject in society. That may involve verbal and non- verbal discourse of speakers who establish their identity according to their surroundings.

Analysis

The mythical journey of a hero is the quest of wholeness to restore balance in his life. This awareness of the hero is often aided and progressed female characters in an epic. Thus union with female character leads hero towards totality and mastery over life. Another prototypal and representative character is of Shamhat. She depicts through her character that a woman who is more adhered to the traditional feminine can perform or exercise power. Shamhat is the temple-prostitute she knows the religious ways to civilized society. She is not only connected to the sex to know the ways of man but she shows that she has knowledgeable manners to the ways of civilization and humanity.

At the beginning of the epic Gilgamesh is introduced as self-conceited and arrogant, to teach him a lesson gods have decided to make someone of his equal strength so Enkidu was created. Enkidu is living in communion with nature and unaware of civilization.

 Fundamentally the role of Shamhat is introduced to bring transformation to Enkidu. She is the priestess of the temple. Gilgamesh the king of Uruk called her to bring reformation in wild Enkidu, who was created to be the soul brother of Gilgamesh. Primitive man as Enkidu was considered savage by Mesopotamian literature (Tigay,1982) his uncivilized state was not like Mesopotamian civilization. However, the proponent to civilization was aware of the side effects of civilization (Abusch, 1986). The admirable and exciting city life of Enkidu ends up suffering, illness and death (De Villiers, 2005). According to Damorosch (1987), the complex city life of Enkidu increases his knowledge and this knowledge is compensation to loss of innocence. In this myth, Shamhat personification is not as a seductress but as love and as a Delight to find glory and have a sacred purpose that is gracious, impulsive and full of wisdom. She is represented as an icon of power. Her surrender to Enkidu is the surrender to love and is to be filled up by the universe.

She did for the man the work of a woman,

his passion caressed and embraced her (189-190).

Shamhat is sent to the jungle with the trapper. She employs several discourses of guide, mistress, soother and mentor. In the very beginning her nonverbal discourse gives her authority to hold the wild thoughts of Enkidu. At this point in time, she gets success to yield her body to Enkidu and make him do what she wants. Her attempt to let Enkidu seize her body is an act of giving power to Enkidu. In this situation, his physical power gets over her. She bears herself for Enkidu and let him make love to her for six days and seven nights. In this discourse of sex, we find Shamhat is in possession of power. Through this discourse, she has yielded herself to Enkidu this is what she wants. Enkidu possesses her body but in fact, it is Shamhat who gets hold of his mind. This purposeful

shift of power is a tact which she utilizes to make Enkidu physically weak but knowledgeable. This woman possesses regenerative powers. She is shown as Anima figure. Sex is a vital part of the Mesopotamian culture (Foster, 1997).

So she spoke to him and her word found favor,

he knew by instinct, he should seek a friend (209-10)

Shamhat physical beauty and prowess make her inspired. Enkidu's discovery of himself and the fleeing of his jungle wild creature from him compel him to go back to Shamhat. He finds comfort in her company. Wild animal and beast run away from Enkidu, he came back to her and sat at her feet. Here she speaks to him and asks him

You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god!

Why with the beasts do you wander the wild?

Come, I will take you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold,

To the sacred temple, home of Anu and Ishtar,(201-204)

Here she once again holds the powerful position in the persuasion discourse, she gets success in her motive to drive him and his thoughts away from the wild creature. She is strategic in her discourse and in her action as well. She takes Enkidu to the shepherd to introduce him to the civilized world. The shepherds—fellas who have one foot in a civilized society and one foot in the natural world. In this way she finds help to change his clothes, gives food to him and ale to drink at this point Enkidu transformation is completed. Representation of Shamhat's sexuality in a cultured manner signifying the civilized culture of Uruk. Institutionalization of prostitutes was the development of civilization. The significant role of Shamhat furthered Gilgamesh's expedition by giving him a companion of his equal. She uses her sexuality by humanizing Enkidu and bringing him to the civilized life of Uruk. Enkidu's experience of sex with Shamhat crowded him with wisdom and totality which helped Gilgamesh to further his journey. Shamhat throughout her discourse of teaching and guiding possesses an upper hand over Enkidu. She uses verbal and nonverbal discourses to establish a powerful position. Shamhat is an example of how a woman does not necessarily need to deviate from one's role or space. She depicts through her character that a woman who is more adhere to the traditional feminity can exercise power.

In tablet 3 of The Epic of Gilgamesh, the conversational narrative of Ishtar with Gilgamesh is drawn upon several discourses such as the discourse of an independent woman and the discourse of an aristocratic woman who unwaveringly voices her likeness for Gilgamesh. The first scene sets Ishtar in a powerful and domineering position where she herself offers a marriage proposal to Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh returns to Uruk as a victorious warrior, the defeat of Humbaba in hands of Gilgamesh makes him an undefeatable conqueror. Ishtar admires, appreciates Gilgamesh and she yearns for a relationship with him.

At the pulchritudinous and valiant Gilgamesh Lady Ishtar looked with longing:

'Come, Gilgamesh, be you, my bridegroom!

Grant me your fruits, 0 grant me!

Be you my husband and I your wife! (6-9)

Here her free will makes her powerful over Gilgamesh. As asserts Gill (2003) there is a shift to presenting woman sexually autonomous, desirous and dynamic subject. They are no more in a position of sexual objectification rather sexual subjectification in the territory of sex, where a woman is no longer exploited.

Wealth and power have nurtured Mesopotamian culture, the relation of a phallus with wealth and power gives strength to the structure of patriarchy, where man is given more rights than women. Like Greek civilization, the role of women in Mesopotamian civilization was defined by patriarchal boundaries and it was strictly defined. The woman's identity is subjected to patriarchal identity, she was either the daughter of her father or wife of her husband. Women worked as a dependent family member within the context of families and rarely acted as an individual. From childhood, women were brought up to assume familial and subjective roles of mother, wife and housekeeper. They were trained to cook, wash and weave. They were taught to make beer and beverages, spinning and weaving for making clothes and if they were supposed to work outside they could only sell what they had manufactured at home. Most of their jobs were related to household matters and household tasks, they could work as caretakers at inns and pubs, and they could perform as midwives to deal with issues of childbirth and prevention of childbirth. After puberty, it was the family and parents who would decide the marriage of the daughter, the parents of the bride and groom would arrange a marriage with all customs and rituals. (Khafajah, n.d.)

Stol (1995) maintains that in Mesopotamians the future wife becomes a permanent part of the groom's family and she is the passive object of all family transactions.The groom's family pays the bride price and the girl acquires the status of wife. Whereas Ishtar acts the other way round and she herself boldly praises and selects a man for marriage. Despite the fact that Ishtar is a woman, though from an elite class, acting from the position of powerfulness. She negotiates her independent identity and power position, here the sense of agency that is given to Ishtar makes her strong and empowered. The authority to propose a man in a patriarchal society and deemed herself to choose a man of her own choice shows the authoritative discourse. It is very interesting to note that she does not follow the ritual of bride price rather she herself offers to be groom her own plenitude. Instead of demanding, she entices and offers him wealth and power, she exercises her preeminent position. Despite this Ishtar is acting from the position of

powerfulness. Here the sense of agency which is given to Ishtar making her strong and empowered her. The authority to propose a man in a patriarchal society and deemed herself to choose a man of her own choice shows the authoritative discourse. She offers him wealth and power, she utilizes her dominant position:

'Let me harness you a chariot of lapis lazuli and gold,

its wheels shall be gold and its horns shall be amber.

Driving lions in a team and mules of great size,

enter our house amid the sweet scent of cedar!   (10-13)

From her conciliatory moves, allurements and solicitations, it can be concluded that Ishtar's character judiciously exercised language by incorporating bold discourses of an independent woman. Epic is contextualized with the heroic expenditure of protagonist, bravery, heroism, strength, and power are the salient traits that are depicted within the character of that very protagonist.

Her character manipulates the narrowly defined role in society. In a way she challenges the set social narratives for women, she asserts her identity through a powerful discourse of self- attained, determined, individualistic and self-ruling lady. She goes beyond the permissible status of Mesopotamians for a woman and the role Ishtar adopts finds limited acceptance. Moreover, the response of Gilgamesh makes a shift of power discourse from Ishtar to Gilgamesh. The derogatory rebuff of a proposal from Gilgamesh asserts a rejection of the independent identity of women. Gilgamesh like all other nobles of the tribes favors the discourse of a virtuous, upright and guiltless lady. His turning down of Ishtar's offer, the onslaught on her past affairs and her character shows the shift in power dynamics. In the first stance, Gilgamesh talks about her past relationship with other male and their wretched ends failing to please goddess Ishtar. Women's vulnerability is deeply rooted in this very episode of Ishtar's refutation by Gilgamesh. As he announces his love for Enkidu, the loneliness of women in the patriarchal alliance is vividly depicted. His charge of fickleness to the goddess of the natural cycle is more indicative of impermanence this impermanence is the central theme of epic and sole discomforting notion throughout the epic.

Gilgamesh asserts his completeness he feels inside his soul. The bond between two males cannot be supplanted by heterosexual bonding with Ishtar. The idea of homosexuality alludes to the powerlessness of women within patriarchy. Hardman, (1993) introduced another term homoaffection, which may not include the sexual conduct between same-sex but bounding between them is strong. In the immediate second demonstration of his inclination towards Enkidu, Gilgamesh holds a standard and not honoring the petition he holds the power discourse but at the same time, he fails to play a gender role in heterosexual relationships with Ishtar instead he prefers to adhere with the familial role of homosexuality with Enkidu. Though we find the power position in the interactional discourse that Gilgamesh maintains. Ishtar asks his father Anu to give her Bull of heaven here we find a conflict in the discourse of revenge and discourse of request. De Villiers (2005) suggests that the discourse between Ishtar and Gilgamesh refers to the theme of immortality. Later on in epic, Gilgamesh realizes the finiteness of life. Ishtar's proposal contains in itself marriage and funeral in both states Gilgamesh would have been entered into the Netherworld if he had accepted her proposal. Those nobles and princes that will kiss his feet are an inhabitant of the new world. In this way, Ishtar is deceiving Gilgamesh (Abusch, 1986).

In both discourses, women are victorious in their persuasion of action and manner of speaking. Gilgamesh who sent harlot to Enkidu shows his dependence on women. Ishtar exercised her power over men that loved her. She dominated and hurt them and eventually led them to lose their independence. Though Gilgamesh rejected her proposal yet Ishtar in retaliation asked her father to send down Bull of heaven to defeat Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Eventually, Gilgamesh lost his friend in the consequences of slaying Bull of heaven.

Conclusion

When I first encountered the epic of Gilgamesh, my understanding was limited to the presentation of the heroic deeds and expeditions of the protagonist and his quest for immortality. However, through my study, Shamhat the priestess and Ishtar the goddess of love and war show their position in marginalized society how they use their position and work through the opportunities they have been given. These strategies use through the discourses available to them at that time. Therefore it is worth discovering what purpose this marginalize character serves and what lesson we can still learn today. Interpretation is situational, shaped and constrained by the historically relative criteria of a particular culture; there is no possibility of knowing the literary text as it is (Eagleton,1983). Language can tell the deeper meaning, Ishtar and Shamhat's speeches provide the example of spaces created by the writer for the reader for more nuanced reading. Through the lens of FPDA instances of contradiction became apparent. Thus we will finally be able to comprehend ancient views and from the broader perspective see ancient Mesopotamia which is separated from our modern world in time and space. This is what I want to convey to my readers.

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