

Discursive Exploration of Historicity of Ancient Punjab in *Heer* by Waris Shah

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Abstract

This study argues that the critical analysis of the discourse of a given time and place determines the identity, the social life as well as the social roles of people in that social order. With the help of the theorization of Fairclough and Wodak (1997), it explains how Waris Shah in his renowned discourse 'Heer' uncovers the historicity or social and cultural embedments during the 18th century Punjab. For Fairclough and Wodak the supremacy/ inferiority of social elements is being exercised via discourse. Waris Shah skillfully portrays in his epic poetry Heer how supremacy/ inferiority is interlocked with every incident of the individual(s) and society. His discourse exhibits that whosoever holds authority misuses it to subjugate others.

Key Words:

Ancient Punjab, Heer, Historicity, Qissa, Waris Shah

Introduction

History is witness that literature is overflowing with various famous qissas like Shirin- Farhad, Laila-Majnun, Sohni-Mahinval, Qissa-e-hamza, Mirza-Sahiban, Khusro-Shirin, Puran-Bhagat, Romeo-Juliet and the most celebrated qissa among them is of Heer-Ranjha. The term qissa is an Arabic term that means 'to tell a story. Usually, this term was utilized to tell the religious stories, but in the Islamic period in the subcontinent, it began to be used to narrate other stories that did not have religious characters. In the Persian language, the word qissa was initially employed to narrate the biographies of religious figures or prophets; however, after the second millennium C. E it began to be used for narrating the romantic stories of lovers. *Heer* by Waris Shah is a legendary qissa, and literature is rich with such kind of well-known qissas. It was written in 1766 and is believed to be a real account story of two lovers. It is believed that Heer and Ranjha is a story of two real figures that lived at the time of the Lodhi Dynasty. According to historians, the real name of Heer was 'Izzat Bibi', and Ranjha was 'Miyān Murād Bakhsh'. There is also a tomb in Jhang as a symbol of their love, and it is believed that both of the lovers are buried in a single grave.

Waris Shah is a great figure of 18th century Punjab who is widely acknowledged for his Sufi poetry. He holds his position as a classic poet. Although he has written various works, his fame mainly rests upon an epic poem *Heer*, which is his magnum opus. He was born in Indiala Sher Khan in 1706. At that time, Punjab was going through social, religious and political upheaval and his epic poem is a true representation of his era. He has skillfully depicted in his masterpiece all the turmoil that his age was facing. His poetical work is a mirror of the violence of 18th century Punjab. After the death of his parents in the earliest phase of his life, he became a student of Ustad of Kasur. He started writing his masterpiece when he was living in a small room adjacent to the mosque and he completed it in Malka Hans. Many critics claim that the story of Heer has biographical elements in the form of Waris Shah's unsuccessful love for a girl named Bhagbari. Shah's teacher, in the beginning, was indisposed to read his poetry; however, when he read it, he admired Shah greatly by commenting that 'you have threaded precious stones in a string of grass.

The story of Heer is a tale of two adult lovers who deviated from the prevalent social norms and customs of society. The protagonist Ranjha belongs to a Ranjha clan and is a young man who was the apple of his father's eyes. After the death of his father, Ranjha was mistreated by his brothers and sisters-in-law. They left him alone with a barren land by cunningly taking over his fertile land. They used to rebuke and taunt him for not doing any work and for playing the flute. Because of such constant scolding, one day, in a fury he left his home and village and reached Jhang: the place of Heer. Heer was the prideful daughter of Chaudary Chuchak. When it came to her knowledge that a stranger is sleeping on her bed, she went there with her sixty friends and beat him with a hard stick. When Ranjha opened his eyes and looked at Heer, she lost herself in the eyes of Ranjha, and they both fell in love with each other at first sight. Ranjha became the drover of Heer and started working at the home of Heer without any wages. He did the job of herdsman for twelve

years. Ranjha and Heer began to meet secretly but one-day Kaido Heer's uncle caught them. After this incident, Heer's family and tribe decided to marry her to Saida Khera without her permission. Although she denied getting married in front of Qazi, her family forcefully married her to Saida Khera. After her marriage, Ranjha adopted Jog and became a Jogi. After learning Jog he reached Rangpur, the village of Heer's in-laws. There Ranjha and Heer both made a plan to elope with the help of Heer's sister-in-law Sethi. Sethi and Murad Baloch got success in elopement, whereas Heer and Ranjha were caught and then presented in the court of Raja Adli. At first, he gave the verdict in favour of Khera's but when Heer and Ranjha prayed, and his village caught fire, he asked pardon from them and gave Heer to Ranjha. Then they came back to the village of Heer and decided to marry each other. Ranjha went back to his village to make wedding preparations, whereas his family of Heer plotted her murder. They murdered Heer with poison on her marriage day and sent a letter to Ranjha about her death. After reading the letter, Ranjha made a cry and died of grief.

Research Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) considers discourse a social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). The term has its origin in critical theory related to language, in which language usage is considered a system of social practice. The development of interrelation among people is based on their similar thoughts and interests and also on the certain historical perspectives that are the results of social practices. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), each of these dimensions requires the following analysis:

- Text analysis (description)
- Processing analysis (interpretation)
- Social analysis (explanation)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is based on the idea of exposing power systems, control, and factual claims. It always contributes to the unwinding of a discourse's cognition, exposing that the literary text's idea is coded by a network of multiple meanings. It considers 'language as social practice' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), and takes into consideration the context of language use to be crucial (Wodak, 2000c; Benke, 2000). It also outlines the relationship between society, language, and power structures.

Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is based on the idea of exposing power systems, control, and factual claims. Many CDA theorists think that the core aspect of discourse analysis ensures societal transformation as a result of this. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary method/methodology that examines not only what is stated, but also what is left out or omitted. It denotes the underlying power structures that operate in the context of political and public communications. Van Dijk's 'discourse-cognition-society' triangle, states that "[t]he relationship between social structure and discourse structure is not direct but indirect, which passes through a kind of interface called social cognition" (2002a).

It behaves little argument that given the fundamentally verbal nature of discourse, explicit CDA also needs a solid 'linguistic' basis, where 'linguistic' is understood in a broad 'structural functional' sense. In other words, whatever other dimensions of discourse CDA deals with, CDA as a specific form and practice of discourse analysis obviously always needs to account for at least some of the detailed structures, strategies and functions of text and talk, including grammatical, pragmatic, interactional, stylistic, rhetorical, semiotic, narrative or similar forms of verbal and para verbal organization of communicative events. (Dijk, 2001, p. 97)

It also outlines the relationship between society, language, and power structures. It is probably, the concern of "social and political engagement [...] with] a sociologically informed construction of society" (Krings et al., 1973, p. 808).

For Kress the main assumptions of CDA are:

- language is a social phenomenon;
- not only individuals but also institutions and social groupings have specific meanings and values, that are expressed in language in systematic ways;
- texts are the relevant units of language in communication;
- readers/hearers are not passive recipients in their relationship to texts;
- there are similarities between the language of science and the language of institutions, and so on (1989).

Van Dijk, however, argues that:

The discourse cannot and should not be studied separately from their various kinds of contexts. To understand the different properties of internal speech on semantic and strategic levels, we cannot ignore the role of the conditions, functions, effects and circumstances of the production and comprehension of discourse. (1997a, p. 113)

However, for all the theoretical positions of CDA, the main purpose is unfolding the meaning of the text regarding the hidden power structures and revealing the real theme of the text. Regarding (post)colonial studies CDA portrays an imperial attitude of colonizers (especially writers) towards the natives of a colonized territory. It helps define the actual purpose of imperial writings that are paradigms "of political writing[s] at [their] best" (Alam, 1998, p. 148),

Analysis

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) declare that discourse is understood by the techniques via which it is exercised. Numerous kinds of discourses exist in every society that represent administrative power, legal power, military power, economic power etc. Even though all of these are the diverse forms of social actions but something common among them is their confidence in particular applications and techniques and all these forms gain power by referring to some scientific 'truths'. The kind of techniques and instruments that are utilized in the process, exercise and regulation of disciplinary power are based on the institutions: schools, penitentiaries, armed centers, hospitals, mental asylums, police forces, administrative apparatuses, bureaucratic agencies, religious institutions, and so forth.

Waris Shah pinpoints economic necessities as the root of every single change in society. Ranjha received humiliation at the hands of his sisters-in-law because he was powerless in Takht Hazara. The center of authority was his sister-in-law, and they got more power by the partition of the land when cultivated and productive land was given to his brothers whereas barren land became Ranjha's property. Here power is exercised via the institution of religion: "The sister-in-law poked fun at him./ their jesting was unkind and harsh./ The villagers talked and laughed and grieved/ how Dido had been fleeced and flayed" (Sekhon, 1978, p. 16).

Discourse, according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997) always circulates and regulates in the form of a chain. Whosoever holds power uses it to oppress and subjugate others. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) declare that power is not restrained to a particular place or person, it does not act like a commodity or a piece of wealth, rather it must be examined as something which always operates in the form of a chain. Power works and is exercised via a web-like organization. Individuals always stay in the flowing position of their threads, and in a position of undergoing this power. For Fairclough and Wodak individuals are not its point of function, rather they are vehicles of power. In the case of Heer, the power relation is depicted in the episode of Ludden Mallah, where Heer comes to know that a stranger is taking a rest on her bed, she beats Ludan and Ranjha with a stick, even though in a male-dominated society she is subjugated but she also has limited power because of her father's status and she feels no hesitation to exercise it over a male (p. 32). In her wrath, she firstly beats Ludan and then Ranjha: "'I'll pull him down my couch', she roars, /.../ 'Let him a hundred thousand times/ crawl at my feet, I care not a jot'" (p.32). Ranjha awakes from sleep when Heer beats him, he looks at Heer and they fall in love with each other. Their love was not acceptable by the social order so everybody turned against them. Everyone, including his family, parents and clan turned against Heer based on culture, honor, tradition, rituals, customs, religion, economy, and dominant stereotypes. All these elements denied agency to Heer which was her legal right. When Heer and Ranjha were caught while meeting secretly and the family came to know about it, her father got furious because of her love affair:

'O wife, we should have strangled to death/ this daughter of ours at her birth./ 'You ought to have given her a draught of poison/ which is now offered us to quaff;/ 'Or thrown her into a violent stream,/ or drowned her in a sewage trough;/ 'Or buried her, shedding fear of God,/ like Croesus treasures under the earth'. (p. 44)

To marry Ranjha was Heer's legal and religious right but her family, clan and society deprived her of her right because of the prevalent stereotypical norms which were dominant in 18th century Punjab.

After observing the condition of her daughter, Chatuchak agreed to some extent to marry her to Ranjha if the clan showed consent. In the 18th century, the Punjab clan was a hub of power in every village and nobody was allowed to decide without the approval of the clan. Clan used to hold the power and authority in all respects in the name of tradition and honor:

Chuchak tells a council of his kin./ his daughter should be married away./ 'We may give her to Ranjha if you approve./ or she may be wedded to someone else./ 'We should so plan it that the coin/ of our clan's honor ring not false./ 'To be sure, O Chatuchak, let us call/ some man of law,' the kinsmen say./ 'We never allied ourselves with the Ranjhas,/ their sons could never marry our girls./ 'To add to it, he is a servant,/ and she the daughter of the best of us. (p. 70)

The clan wanted Heer to get married to Saida Khera (although she was unwilling to marry) and gave a decision in the favor of him because he was more economically powerful than Ranjha. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) proclaim that relations of power are closely tied with other sorts of relationships like knowledge relationships, economic relationships, and sexual relationships. These relations are unswervingly influenced by divisions, discriminations, and dis-equilibriums in the community. Instead of simply having a role of inclusion or exclusion, relationships of power also possess a direct productive role.

During the 18th century, Punjab was a male-dominated society. In all spheres of life, men were responsible for the power by regarding women as their subordinates or considering them 'other'. Over centuries various myths have been created about the othering of females, and the differences between the male and female sex are constructed based on their physical construction. The binary of male superiority and female inferiority is legitimized, naturalized and normalized based on biology. In ancient Greek cultures, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) affirm that women were considered to get married at the age of fifteen with the men double their age. In that epoch, women were not supposed to have any desires. The sexual adultery of wives was therefore not a problem; rather it did not even come into the monarchy of prevailing male thought. A very similar thing happened in the 18th century Punjab where women were regarded as a commodity, as an object to be used and bartered to get political, social, or economic benefits. Clan preferred Saida Khera over Ranjha because of

economic reasons. Khera was having a powerful position as compared to Ranjha. Another reason for the rejection of Ranjha was that he served Heer's father for 12 years and therefore he was considered a servant and an inferior entity. So another power relation operated between Siyals and Ranjha was master and servant. Although Ranjha devotedly served them for 12 years without any pay, when they came to know about his affair with Heer they dismissed him without paying a single penny: "[L]et him return from where he came./ 'In public places they laugh at us (p. 44).

Ranjha got furious after hearing these words and throw his stick away and addressed Chuchak you took my twelve years, and I worked hard from you and now by accusing me you are dismissing me from my work without giving any wages. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that apart from capital and commodities, it is the apparatus of power that permits labor and time to be taken from human beings. This form of power is executed via a perpetual method of deep observation, rather than from an irregular method of obligations and levies scattered over time. Instead of having any kind of physical domination, power holds a strong knit of material pressures on its subjects. It is ultimately dependent on particular rules and regulations which present a reliable new economy of power. Simultaneously this kind of power empowers one to upsurge the subjects' forces and improve and increase the force: "'My wages even you will not pay,/ you think I am so craven and mean" (p. 45).

In the construction and regulation of power, the ideologies, the structures and the beliefs of institutes play a crucial role. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) highlight that one always defines and explains the impacts of power in negative terms, like power "excludes", power "abstracts", power "censors", power "represses", power "masks", power "conceals". They assert that this is the time to stop thinking like that and to alter this concept of power. Power does not only repress and conceal, it plays other roles as well those are power produces veracity; it creates rituals of truth and different domains of any item. They emphasize that one must admit that power is created by knowledge. There is a dire need to promote this idea, not merely because it aids power, but rather because power and knowledge are directly interlinked. There is an unswerving relationship between knowledge and power, but many people for the sake of sustaining power over others misuse the power.

Religion is an imperative institution of all societies, it directs about every field of life, and this knowledge is delivered to the people via the practitioner of religion. In 18th century Punjab, this very trend persisted. Common people got all the knowledge and information from Mullahs. Mullah, in Shah's Heer also misused the knowledge to repress Heer. Whereas religion permits Heer to marry Ranjha but simply to sustain his power over others Mullah asserted Heer's choice to marry Ranjha is simply a sin or against the law or Shariah. In Islam, the willingness of a woman is compulsory during nikkah but Qazi and her family made Heer marry Saida Khera without her approval. They made her marry forcefully to sustain their so-called clan's honor and familial legacy: 'My mother and father had promised indeed/ to marry me to the man of my choice./ 'And I gave my word to Ranjha in turn,/ which I will keep to the brink of the grave" (p. 79). After the denial of Heer, Qazi did not pay heed to it and instead of giving her the legal right, Qazi announced to perform the ritual of marriage forcefully: "'Hard nut to crack. the Qazi remarks,/ she will not yield to law or reason" (p. 80). Ranjha left Jhang after the marriage of Heer. He suffered much as he strolled alone while crying. He defined the power apparatus in the following words: "'The elders have discarded truth,/ and the Qazi have been suborned, it seems./ 'One is driven out for siding the right/ and thieves and thugs are aldermen./ 'The word of a man is honored not,/ while tramps and pimps play the leading part'" (p. 84). Power plays a major role in every society. The people who are in power get favor wherever they go, while the powerless are considered to be oppressed and snubbed. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) assert that powerful persons always use their power via threat or by an open display of power. In the medieval era, the sovereigns also held and exercised power in this way. Owing to their execution of power, they had complete authority over their subjects: "'The weaker cannot even protest/ as the stronger takes away his troth. /.../ Even when he is robbed of house, and home,/ the weaker cannot open his mouth" (p. 76).

Simon de Beauvoir, a French feminist and existentialist, protests that throughout history women are never considered humans, a being with their own will. Her body is never supposed to be refulgent, a being of an independent personality. She is never permitted to cross the limits that patriarchy has made for her. She has always been treated as man's other, and man uses her as a commodity. Her 'self' is regarded as the property of a man who thinks her just the embodiment of sex. A similar thing was faced by Heer after her marriage to Saida Khera. In a male-dominated society, females are considered slaves or servants and males as their masters have complete authority over them. By keeping this stereotypical concept in his mind, Khera forbade Heer never to go to her parent's home again: "'Now Heer must never go back to Syal./ 'Lest the cowherd should grab her again/ and heap obloquy on our head./ ... / 'She must not meet her love/ it is final, irrevocable'" (p. 89).

Neither discourses nor history has sublimity or universality. Everyone interprets historical incidents purely from his own perspective. For Fairclough and Wodak (1997), history is divided into several discourses. Each part of the discourse holds its own entering point, and each piece of discourse is a process of birth. Each section of the discourse is a consistently manifold process of desertion, which can be defined, studied and examined. After the marriage of Heer Ranjha left Jhang and reached yogi Balnath for adopting you. After learning yog he went to the village (Rangpur) of Heer's in-laws, in a disguise of a yogi. After meeting Heer and her sister-in-law Sethi they decided to elope. The elopement of Sethi and Murad Bloch remained successful whereas Heer and Ranjha were caught again and brought to the court of Raja Adli. Ranjha praised the king and requested him to be fair in his case: "Ranjha made his plaint, and waived his cloth,/ 'I have heard

much good, prince, of your might./ They have taken by force what was my own./ who other than you may I invoke?/ 'Your ministers appear so noble./ Your court is just and fair of look./ 'If you heed my plaint, I'll pray for you./ and God will set all matters right'" (p. 248). Shah via the character and discourse of Ranjha, further underlined how because of the power Qazi gave order against the religious law: "'Like Satan you have riled the world./ You steal by night, abduct by day./ 'When the Kazi of the law gives you the lie./ You will enjoy the air on the gallows./ 'Power, pelf and pride live not forever./ death is the truth to recognize./ 'And, Waris this world is like a dream./ a night passed in a caravan-serai'" (p. 251).

After paying attention to the arguments of Khera's king decided in favor of Khera's and ordered Ranjha to hand over Heer to Khera. At this decision, Heer and Ranjha both cursed the village to burn and soon, fire spread everywhere. By observing and watching the whole incident, the king recognized his mistake and gave Heer back to Ranjha. Then they safely came back to Jhang where Heer's brothers and her family warmly welcomed them and emphasized that Heer should be married to Ranjha properly and asked him to bring barat. When Ranjha went back to his village for making wedding arrangements, the family of Heer plotted her murder to preserve their patriarchal power and their clan's honor: "The Seals took counsel and resolved./ 'We'll guard our honor at any cost./ 'This girl is a blot on our good name, and/ the tale has travelled far and wide./ 'We lose our honor to send our daughter/ with our own cowherd as his bride" (p. 261). To sustain their so-called honor and patriarchal power the family of Heer gave poison to her on the day of her wedding. After her funeral and burial, they wrote a letter to Ranjha telling her about her death. When Ranjha read that letter he made a cry and died on the spot because of grief. In this way the unkind system of exercising and sustaining power over others took the precious lives of two young lovers: "Like Farhad Ranjha uttered a moan./ his soul joined Hir's in the upper air./ Both passed to the House of Life Eternal./ ... / Firm in this earthly shape of love./ they lived it out with the utmost truth./ Waris, in this place of dreams have many/ blown trumpets and left for nowhere" (p. 262).

Conclusion

History is a significant aspect of human life. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), history is not merely the recollection and retrieval of bygone happenings rather it is a medium via which one can oversee one's present. They accentuate how power structures at institutional levels are utilized as a means of social control. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that in every society there is a variety of relations of power that constitute and define the social body. With the critical analysis of discourse, these relations of power can be recognized and implemented. In Shah's *Heer*, there exist several pictures of the interaction of people. The story depicts the 18th century Punjab where power was not flowing in the whole society rather it was hoarded in a few hands, and the one who held power tried to control and manipulate others' lives. With the critical discourse analysis of Waris Shah's epic poem *Heer*; this study retrieves the historicity of 18th century Punjab and explains how Shah throws light on the misuse of authorities in the domain of justice, religion and jobs.

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