

RESOURCEFULNESS OF WOMEN: A STUDY OF BOURDIEU'S FIELD IN FEHMIDA RIAZ'S *THE DAUGHTERS OF AAI*

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an analysis of Fehmida Riaz's Pakistani English short story: "The Daughters of Aai" (2007) in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's notion "field" (1986, 1990) taken from his Theory of Practice. The field is a context and place of survival of individuals, which determines their position in a social order. Keeping in view this notion, the short story "The Daughter's of Aai" is viewed as a remarkable story of innocence, abuse and the resourcefulness of women in a village in Pakistan. Following close reading analysis method, the study focuses on women's plight in their contextual field. The study finds out that there are two major fields in the village; poor villagers' field (which is again sub-divided into the field of men and that of women) and landlords' field. The village women struggle hard to survive in their devalued and dominated field. They save an insane and innocent handicapped girl Fatima in the name of accepted and identical practices in their field, which is to make her Allah Walli (holy woman). Thus, the collective efforts and unity of women helped to make Fatima a resourceful woman, which otherwise was impossible. The study also finds out that the field of village men supports them in their every action taken for their dis/honour. The men can molest any woman (i.e. Fatima) but cannot afford a word for their own woman. For the sake of honour their whole tribe involves in years long fighting and killing, leaving their women widows and children orphans who face prolonged court cases.

Keywords: *Field, Women's plight, identical field, Resourcefulness.*

INTRODUCTION

Human actions emerge not only from habitus and capital one possess, but develop within a particular Field, which determinates the position of individuals, making them dominant or dominated, powerful or helpless. Women's position in Pakistan, especially in villages is pathetic; they are

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subordinate beings and dependent. The short story of Fehmida Riaz *The Daughter's of Aai* is a vivid portrayal of women's subordinate position in their field where they survive. This study analyses the story to illustrate the multiplicity of field*for different individuals and how does a field help to make individuals stronger and weaker.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study attempts to explore how does a Pakistani English female fiction writer through a simple short story represents the field of individuals living in the same environment with different preferences practised for men and women. The study also explores collective behaviours, trends and superstitions of society in their field which value the practices of some individuals and devalue others. This study is an endeavour to bring attention to the varied fields where women survive with immense hurdles. It also aims to highlight the superstition practices and beliefs in Pakistani villages, which show the acquiescent situation of people in the country. Moreover, to explore impacts of field based on Bourdieu's framework is also one of the objectives of the study.

Research Question

- How does Fehmida Riaz portray the field of men and that of women of villagers in the proposed short story?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Field

The field is social space or setting in which individuals move around, and their social action takes place. More specifically, it is social structure, particular context and circumstances in which individuals survive and unfold their identity. Mickelson deems it as space where dominant and subordinate groups struggle for control (2003, p. 374). According to Bourdieu (1986) individuals' position is recognised by their field, which determined their social position.

In Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (which includes habitus, capital and field) the fundamental concept is that of field. Because rest of the two concepts

*Note: Bourdieu's notion of field may not be mixed with the field which means "a piece of land used for cultivation".

i.e. habitus and capital, revolve around this heuristic notion, which Bourdieu (1990) calls as a “force-field as well as a field of struggles which aim at transforming or maintaining the established relation of forces” (p.143). From a field, the daily life of social agents is understood, by their various interactions, such as, from their regular discussions, negotiations or conflicts. For understanding these interactions, it is essential to first comprehend the conditions and the context where these are formed (Accardo, 2006 cited in Walther, 2014) as every field has its specific rules as well as a system of shared meaning. Bourdieu (1997) deems social fields as the universe in which the agents and institutions are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with field-specific rules. The internalisation of the field-specific rules enables the agent to anticipate future tendencies and opportunities. There is no global rule that applies to all fields. Therefore, Bourdieu (1966) argues that due to their unique rules, fields are autonomous (cited in Walther, 2014, p.8).

Implication of Bourdieu's Theory

Bourdieu's theoretical framework contains universal implication. It has been adopted all around the world in various contexts, cultures and disciplines regardless the confines of time and space. This authenticates the fact that Bourdieu's theory is not restricted to one type of institution but it has application in all sorts of researches. Researchers have adopted the theory in a variety of ways and disciplines like; in literature, cultural and gender studies, educational studies etc.

In literature, the theory is adopted by various researchers like Sapiro, (1996, 2002) and Fowler (2006, 2009, 2012). Fowler's research adopted the theory for British drama in 1960s and used it in the context of new cultural studies. Lo & Stacey (2008) and Kraus (1993, 2006) took up the theory for gender studies. The notion of field have been specifically used by educational researchers like Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Deer, 2003; Naidoo, 2004; Marginson, 2008; Reay 2004; Grenfell & James (2004); Mickelson (2003); Gaddis (2013).

Furthermore, the theory has also been used in comparative studies, Lois McNay (1999) in a study “*Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity*” discusses the issues of disembodiment and disembeddedness in Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field in comparison with Michael Foucault's work on the body and self. McNay argues in this study that Bourdieu's theory of habitus is amore dynamic theory of

embodiment than Foucault's work. Secondly, Bourdieu's notion of field provides a more differentiated analysis of the social context in which the reflexive transformation of identity unfolds.

The field has been a chief theory in the educational research with Michael Grenfell and James (2004) in a study *Change in the field-changing the field: Bourdieu and the methodological practice of educational research*, focused chief lyon Britain. This research brings into attention the use of field, as a theoretical framework, in educational researches. The study argues that relating a particular research agenda in the form of specific programme projects can be misrecognized in the research contract. Therefore, Grenfell and James suggested that Bourdieu's notion cannot be related to any specific agenda; rather it can be used outside of the usual sociological concerns of inequalities of race, class and gender, and their mechanisms of operation.

Jo-Anne Dillabough (2004) carried a study "*Class culture and the predicaments of masculine domination: encountering Pierre Bourdieu*" which offers a critical discussion of, and constructive elaboration upon, Bourdieu's theoretical position on the nature of symbolic/masculine domination as it relates to the study of gender differentiation, particularly (although not exclusively) in educational contexts. The study argues that Bourdieu's theory offers an analytical breadth and range beyond the scope of anything that a normative, liberal account of masculine domination could provide.

Field Determines Individuals' Position

An individual's position is determined in the field where he/she survives. Bourdieu (1986) writes that an individual's position can be understood from the particular field: the place of action, the context of his/her family standing. It is also accomplished from an educational background or institution, the amount of financial capital, the size and type of the social network, etc. He notes that these elements develop an acute relationship between individual's *habitus* and that field escorts to various practices based on a particular field where individual survive (Bourdieu 1990; Reay 2004; Wacquant 1989). Certain behaviours, practices, kinds of capital, etc. are valued in certain fields and devalued in others, which distinguish individual's type of fields. Therefore, each field is "bound" and it is unlike to other because a field is not just the "product" but it also "produces" the *habitus* in a particular field (Grenfell & James 2004, p.510; Jenkins 1992,

p.84). The practices and norms of individuals are related to their field, to their context and the field provides a place to exercise these norms, practices, values and rules. Individuals with an identical situation, environment and identical capital possess parallel dispositions and interests. And these identical ties are more strengthened when they are hereditarily practised in the field, which makes an objective hierarchy of these practices which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities. Thus, the field authenticates the convention of dominant agents. And the dominant ones use their capital to earn power and dominance over the dominated ones (McClelland 1990; Cicourel 1993; Reay 1995).

Field Determines the Value

Field determines the value of individuals' possessions (i.e. capital be it material or symbolic). It is ground provider for competition, for individuals to struggle in various types of capital (Lareau and Horvat 1999). Bourdieu explains that different fields are the multifaceted arrangement of society; there are fields, like economic, artistic, political, legal and religious etc. These multitude fields determine the situation and propose numerous prospects and restrictions on the individuals. The driving force behind individual's practices is judged from his/her field, which offers limitation and also provides certain chances (Swartz, 2002).

Field is individuals' "site of struggle" (Bourdieu cited in Thompson 1991, p.14) where they struggle for power; they uphold or amend certain capitals. Those who entail in these efforts contain various aims depending on their *habitus*, some maintain the status quo while others decline it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is a study of Fehmida Riaz's short story *Daughters of Aai* (2007) in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, Field (1986, 1990) which is a part of his Theory of Practice which contains a triad i.e. *habitus*, capital and field. This study is a textual analysis (Rockwell 2003) carried with the help of close reading method, which is an appropriate technique to acquire textual meaning (Cuddon 1999) from the given text. Following this method, the text is understood by focusing on its particular style, words, meaning, tone, symbols, characters and point of view of the author.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Villagers' Field

Keeping in view Bourdieu's (1986) notion of field, this short story by Fehmida Riaz portrays two types of fields in the village by Asthala Canal. At one hand, there is a deprived and labour-intensive field, and at the other hand, a powerful and dominant: the field of landlords and their wives. The field of poor villagers is again divided into the field of men and that of women. Mainly, the village women work out the home, in the fields, and in the landlord's homes. Whereas, their men either roam around the village or are "drug addicted" such as Aai's husband. When Shahbano (the wife of a landlord) took her sister (who came from Karachi) for a walk through the fields; she noticed that there were only women working in the fields and "all the men relaxing on their cots" (Riaz, 2007, p.33). When she inquired about their work, a village woman replied by telling about men's work "the men *halal* the chickens" (p.33). They perform the religious task to decapitate a chicken or goat to make it *halal*, the work which women are not allowed to do.

The position of village labourer women can be viewed from their field: "context" and the work they do. They work from dawn to dusk in the fields and in the farm houses of the landlords, seven days a week. In sowing and harvesting season they do all the hard labour. They are found early in the morning "streaming out of their shanty huts crossing over the bridge over the canal, picking flowers to sell in the market, reaping grass, hoeing the fields, separating the chaff from the corn, trying innumerable bundle, large or small (Riaz, 2007, p.37). These labour-intensive works of canal village women determine their physical and social position too. These women and their children are mainly weak malnourished, having gastro-enteritis. Their survival depends upon these labour-intensive works, if they don't work at fields or don't go to serve in landlord's home, they would face hunger and starvation.

Grenfell and James (2004, p.510) note that individuals are "bound" to their respective fields, which produce their practices. It is true in the case of the characters in this short story. The poor labourers are intricately bound with their rustic fields, living in shanty huts without having any basic facilities. They have inherited the same field from their elders and now transfer the same to their children. Their children grow up in the same shanty huts playing in wild reeds with clay toys and drinking the polluted water of well

which results in gastro and other diseases.

On the other hand, the field of dominant individuals is quite contrary to them. The landowners are the dominant ones in the village, having big forms and lands to be cultivated. They employ the poor villagers, making them their labourers, farmers and maid/servants at their homes. Even the landowners marry any of their tenant farmer's daughters like Noor Muhammad Shah married Mumtaz; a poor young girl of his renter. The wives of landowners have access to the poor village women to give them any work at their home, or to use them as their messenger for their secrets, such as Mumtaz sent a secret message to Aai (Riaz, 2007, p. 36). The children of these landlords also live in a better field than that of villagers'.

Misery of Position

Bourdieu writes that agents are recognised from their specific field, they practice the identical norms held in that particular field (1986, 1990). It is worth noting in this short story that all the poor villagers are identically weak in all social respects in socio-cultural, educational and economic respects. But at the same time, they are strong, though to varying degrees, in their personal respects i.e. hard work, will-power and motivation. They face their "misery of position" (Bourdieu, 1984) which usually does not result from their personal weakness but it is inherited in their field. The individuals in the field either remain at the constant mercy of the miseries or they struggle to overcome it bravely, as it happened in the case of Fatima.

Fatima's Misery of Position

The village women did not hate Aai's daughter Fatima due to her insane and handicapped condition; even they did not hate when she staggers or lurches, or when spit dribbles from her mouth, she could not talk only smiles or mumbles like infants. Fatima's misery started when she became an adult. Though her field comprising women supported her in her month days, they helped her to take her to closet when Aai was not at home. Aai remains extremely upset due to her Daughter's condition "the village women shared her grief. They made it their collective responsibility to cope up with Fatima" (Riaz, 2007, p. 33). Yet there was another field, the field of men "the men would see her [Fatima's] soiled clothes: they would laugh their obscene laughter point to her and look at other women meaningfully". This situation hurts and humiliates all of the women. Fatima's innocence was brutally dragged and defiled in wild reeds, she becomes pregnant twice. When it revealed to her mother and other village women, they

decided to abort her first pregnancy, but it was difficult for the second time when it had gone by seven months. Mourning and crying Aai and other women reach the landlady Shahbano's home, where Aai works, she tells Shahbano about Fatima's condition, which will be the matter of honour if revealed to men. Thus, with the support of the landlady Shahbano and some village women, Aai however, maintained to abort Fatima's pregnancy. The field at this point supported her, everyone knew that Fatima is innocent and insane who had no idea of her being molested; her mother had severely beaten her questioning who was he? Who did this? But Fatima only mumbled and smiled. Thus, the recognised field of Shahbano and the field of Aai and other poor village women managed to overcome Fatima's misery.

Field de/values Practices

Bourdieu explains the field is the multifaceted arrangement of society. Certain practices are valued for some and devalued for others in the same field. It intends certain prospects for some and put restrictions on others individuals. The driving force behind individuals' practices is judged from their accepted/ rejected field, which offers limitation and provides certain chances (Swartz, 2002). It is true in the case of villagers. The village men could afford to rape an insane, handicap and innocent girl, they laugh on her pathetic condition. But they could not bear a word on their honour if anyone does the same with their own woman. Aai mourns on Fatima's state, realising the intensity of matter that if men knew the fact of Fatima's pregnancy there would be a "matter of their honour, they would come out with their axes and there would be several murders" (Riaz, 2007, p.34). As it happened last time, when villagers found an illegitimate pregnancy, two tribes fought for a year, resulting in several killings, "leaving behind widows and orphans and prolonged court cases which drained the last rupee from the village" (p.34). Thus, the same field allows men to humiliate others' daughters but cannot afford the same for their own women.

The Site of Struggle

Field is villagers' site of struggle where they struggle for power and survival. Village women struggle to bring out Fatima from her state and make endeavours for her safe survival. It was during Fatima's second pregnancy, Aai got a secret message from Mumtaz Begum; wife of late Noor Muhammad Shah, neighbouring village landlord, to adopt Fatima's child.

After the death of Noor Muhammad, in fear of division of the shared capital i.e. land and houses, the first wife and sons of Noor Muhammad did not accept Mumtaz Begum and planned to withdraw her by calling her a mere mistress and the daughter of their poor tenant. The field supports the first wife and children of Noor Muhammad and values their practices. Since Mumtaz belongs to a dominated and unrecognised field, therefore, she is unacceptable. The first wife and children of Noor Muhammad plan to throw out her in order to save their property. Hence, the same field became a site of struggle for both the parties, where every individual was trying to get his/her position recognised claiming to be the owner.

In this juncture, Mumtaz's only hope lay in having a child from Noor Muhammad. Therefore, in her *Idaat*, four months and ten days of isolation, she pretended to be pregnant. Amidst, this she heard from her maid about an unwanted pregnancy of Fatima and sent a secret message to Aai to wait for her. Mumtaz's field could only afford her if she had a child, the child would be the owner of the share of property from Noor Muhammad. Therefore, she saw a ray of hope in adopting a child secretly and then pronouncing it as a child of Noor Muhammad. After her *idaat*, she meets with Aai and takes her and Fatima to an earby town; where she rented a house to live there till Fatima's pregnancy. Mumtaz registered herself as pregnant in the maternity home. When Fatima gave birth to a baby boy, he was registered as the "son of Noor Muhammad Shah and Begum Mumtaz" (Riaz, 2007, p.37).

Thus, both the ladies struggle to adjust in their fields. Mumtaz got a baby to remain in her husband's home. And Fatima needs to be free from the illegitimate child, so that she may be sent to an orphanage, otherwise, orphanage would not afford nuisance of childbirth.

Identical Practices in Identical Field

Individuals with identical situation and environment have similar choices, dispositions and interests, which they get hereditarily practised in their field, as an objective hierarchy of these practices. The frequent practice of interests and dispositions has authorised certain discourses and activities in their field (McClelland 1990; Cicourel, 1993; Reay, 1995). The poor villagers have identical beliefs in practising superstitions. They have staunch belief in *Peers*, *Allah Wallas/Wallis*, holy men and in the shrine of saints. Their field supports their superstitious beliefs; all the village men and women are strong advocates of these norms. When Aai was taking

Fatima to the hospital for her first pregnancy's abortion, she told villagers that she is taking Fatima to neighbouring village "to pray at the shrine of a saint" (Riaz 2007, p.34) and nobody raised any question for going there.

In the whole juncture in Fatima's life, the village women played a big role. After the child birth, instead of sending Fatima to an orphanage, to humiliate her again, they brought her to home calling her the "holy woman" who had "Djinn" and special powers. They built a seat of bricks and cement under Bunyan tree, where she sits all the day playing with children and cared by village women. She is now visited by men and women for solace and blessings; they bring her food and give coins as *nazrana*. Thus, she is believed as God's woman, *Allah Walli* who is beyond and above the reason, therefore, pure and sinless.

Earlier, the same field had not recognised her it had "so little to offer Fatima" but the same field now accepted her as a holy woman, in "old, superstitious one could still make room for her". The superstitious world is the accepted and identical field of all the villagers. They accepted Fatima as a saint, beyond the reason, serving her food and giving *nazran*. Thus, the women of the village have discovered a solution for Fatima.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed Fehmida Riaz's short story *The Daughter's of Aai* (2007) in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework "Field" (Bourdieu 1986, 1990) which is part of his Theory of Practice. Following the close reading method of textual analysis, this study focused the plight of women in their contextual field. The findings of the study show that there are two major fields in the canal village; village labourers' field (which is again subdivided into men and women's field) and landlord's field. The village women endeavoured for their survival in their undervalued and unrecognised dominated position. They save an insane and innocent handicapped girl, Fatima, in the name of accepted and identical practices in their field, which is to make her *Allah Walli* (holy woman). The collective efforts and accordance of village women helped to make Fatima a resourceful woman, which otherwise was not possible. Being *Allah Walli*, Fatima becomes resourceful, who blesses people in their problems and troubles and they in turn give her food and *Nazrana*.

The study also pointed out the "misery of position" of women. The village men could afford to humiliate and rape other's woman, but could not

tolerate the same for their woman. This type of situation resulted in years long fighting between tribes, killing many men and leaving their women widows and children orphans. Thus, to avoid such situation, the village women wisely planned an identical field for Fatima (to be *Allah Walli*) which saved her and many other killings in the village.

Mumtaz Begum had a strong field till her husband was alive, but the same field devalued her after husband's death, rejecting her share of property and home. Her field recognised her value only with a connection to her husband, but as a daughter of a poor manor as a childless woman was not acceptable in her field. Thus, she also had to struggle together position recognised in her field by bringing up a child in the family. Therefore, she secretly adopted an unwanted baby of Fatima. This is in accordance with Grenfell & James (2004) and Jenkins's (1992) view that each field is bound and is unlike to other. An individual is accepted in a field and the same is rejected in another field. Villager's field rejected Fatima's baby but the same baby was accepted and adopted by Mumtaz in landlord's field.

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