

A Comparative Analysis of the Freudian Theory of ‘Deferred Action’ and the Derridean Theory of ‘Defers-Differs’

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Abstract: *The present paper explores the similarities and dissimilarities between the Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ and the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’. The findings are obtained by implementing these two theories in Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel The Pakistani Bride. Freud advocates that the reasons of trauma should be analyzed and grasped so that the patients of neurosis and psychosis can be nursed successfully whereas Derrida lectures that every philosophical and literary text needs to be reinterpreted after a deferment to evolve new centres of thought. It’s concluded that the application of ‘deferred action’ theory in the selected novel helps finding reasons and ramifications of trauma whereas the theory of ‘defers-differs’ is used to breakdown the unified structure of linear systems and words to evolve the various meanings and interpretations of a word, a text, and the world.*

Key Words: *similarities, dissimilarities, ‘deferred action’, ‘defers-differs’, reasons, ramifications, revivification.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The research paper discovers the common ground and the areas of variation between the Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ and the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’. Firstly it has been explicated what the selected theories are mainly about. It’s been also been discussed how the other scholars, psychoanalysts, and critics have viewed these theories. Afterward, the researcher applies ‘deferred action’ theory in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Pakistani Bride* to evolve the reasons and repercussions of trauma. Finally, ‘defers-differs’ theory is applied in *The Pakistani Bride* to interpret the novel from the Derridean point of view which emphasizes that a text should be analyzed in the light of a maximum number of aspects, concepts, and theories. So, some of the situations in *The Pakistani Bride* have been interpreted from the vantage point of Jacques Lacan’s concept of repetition, Carl Gustav Jung’s concept of collective unconscious, and Alfred W. Adler’s concept of individual psychology for the better understanding of the novel.

2. METHODOLOGY:

The researcher applies the Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ and the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’ in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Pakistani Bride* to explore and corroborate the findings.

3. REREADING OF THE THEORY of ‘deferred action’ and defers-differs:

The German word *Nachträglichkeit* is translated into “deferred action” (1). It’s also been translated into “deferred effect” (2). Ivan Smith translates *Nachträglichkeit* into “deferred fashion” (2). Bistoën, Vanheule and Craps add the other translations of *Nachträglichkeit* such as “deferred action, après-coup, afterwardsness, retroactive temporality, belatedness, latency, and retrospective attribution” (3). A number of critics have interpreted the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* from their own perspectives. For instance, the critic Arnold H. Modell asserts that James Strachey’s translation of Freud’s word *Nachträglichkeit* as ‘deferred action’ is defective. Strachey states that memory is a record of the past experiences, but the critic Modell adds that “memory is not a record in the central nervous system that is isomorphic with past experience; instead memory is conceived as a recategorization of experience” (4). Modell interprets the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* broadly in terms of ego that is considered as “a structure engaged in the processing and reorganizing of time” (4).

The professor and critic Jean Laplanche states that *Nachträglichkeit* has been used in three situations. The first one is ‘subsequently’ or ‘secondary’ which is also the translation by Strachey and Masson. The second stands for “the direction of time from the past to the future, and the third usage inverts it from the future to the past” (5). Laplanche further remarks that Freud has always used *Nachträglichkeit* in the sense of time from the past to the future. Jean Laplanche uses ‘après coup’ and ‘afterwardsness’ as the correct English translations of *Nachträglichkeit*. The critic writes, “That’s why I propose a translation that is not interpretative: I suggest the term ‘après coup’ and ‘afterward’ in English. In all cases in Freud, it’s possible to use either ‘afterward’ or ‘afterwardsness’” (5).

The above-discussed interpretations are quite different from the viewpoint of Sigmund Freud. Freud lectures that a subject doesn’t recall the primary traumatic incident until he/she attains puberty or faces a subsequent

encounter. Freud advocates that a “deferred action” (2) transpires because of “infantile sexual experiences” (2). That’s a victim better cognizes the original painful incident when he leaves the stage of infantile sexuality. Freud notes:

During the interval between the experiences of those impressions and their reproduction (or rather, the reinforcement of the libidinal impulses which proceed from them), not only the somatic sexual apparatus but the psychical apparatus as well has undergone an important development; and thus it is that the influence of these earlier sexual experiences now leads to an abnormal psychical reaction, and psychopathological structures come into existence. (2)

After the proper growth of a human being, both the physical and the psychical structures attain apposite development and they help him/her understand the primary sexual experiences. If such experiences have been really terrible, they certainly traumatize a victim. It means ‘deferred action’ comes up when a victim leaves the stage of infantile sexuality and attains sexual maturity. In *Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, Freud and Rothgeb also state that “the sexual impulses cannot be utilized during these years of childhood since the reproductive functions have been deferred – a fact which constitutes the main feature of the period of latency” (6). That’s, due to the lack of fully developed sexual instincts and reproductive organs, the original traumatic event naturally gets deferred until the stage of puberty.

Secondly, if a subject is reminded of its original trauma or it witnesses a similar incident, it’s prone to go back to its original distressing incident. Freud explicates his theory of *Nachträglichkeit* regarding invocation in his work *The Interpretation of Dreams* by exemplifying a person who dreams about two boys bickering with each other. Actually, a man witnesses two boys fighting severely in a street and he visualizes the same scene in his dream. After having witnessed the abysmal scene of fighting, the man goes to a lonely place to micturate against a wooden fence where “a lady smiles at him in a very friendly manner and wants to give him her visiting-card” (2). The man amalgamates the scene of his micturition with that of a micturating woman. Freud writes that his micturition “tallies with her terrible look and the red flesh standing out, which could only relate to the gaping of the genitals caused by stooping. This scene, in his childhood, reappeared in later memory as ‘proud flesh’ as a wound” (2). Freud explicates through this example how human beings get connected to their childhood traumatic memories even if they undergo dreams. The same man, in his childhood, unintentionally used to gape his female classmates urinating in the secluded places but he psychologically ostracized the idea of looking at their vulvae. The man is still overwhelmingly occupied by the horrendous scenes of the “proud flesh” (2) of females. His traumatic wound gets refreshed by his dream.

Furthermore, Freud elucidates his theory of *Nachträglichkeit* ‘deferred action’ in his notes *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* exemplifying the psychic condition of one of his patients whom he has had treated through psychoanalytic techniques. The patient “was seized with his first attack of anxiety and giddiness while the Sun shone upon him as he was working in the garden with a spade” (2). The patient correlates the scene of sunshine with the staggering attitude of his father who threatened his wife with a sharp instrument while their son (now the patient) was working in the same garden. The patient associates the “sharp instrument” (2) used by his father with his own spade and it seems to him that he is still witnessing the turbulent argumentation, belligerent gestures, and violent fighting of his parents. Freud also records, “When I ventured upon a mild remonstrance, he gave an air of greater plausibility to his view by telling me that even in his father’s life time, he had compared him with the Sun, though then it had been in a satirical sense” (2). The patient becomes neurotic after his father’s death and the reason for his illness is not his deep-rooted love but his abomination for his father because the latter deteriorates the corporeal and the psychic condition of his mother. The patient becomes a dissident against the atrocities of his father. He procrastinates all sorts of his feelings for his father because an association of any type with his father upsets him. Freud notes, “As long as his father was alive it showed itself in unmitigated rebelliousness and open discord, but immediately after his death it took the form of a neurosis based upon abject submission and deferred obedience to him” (2). It is observed in the above incident whenever the victim works in the garden in the ‘sunshine’ holding his ‘spade’; these two signifiers take him back to the original traumatic occurrences and refresh his trauma through the mode of ‘deferred action’.

Freud proves through the examples of his patients discussed above how victims of trauma get connected with their stressful past in the light of present upsetting events or signifiers. Freud talks about the psychic flow of thoughts of victims who always travel between their past and the present because of disturbing dreams, invocation, or puberty. This is what Freud calls “deferred action in the mechanism of the psychoneuroses” (2).

Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, was influenced by Sigmund Freud’s theory of *Nachträglichkeit* ‘deferred action’ and the former developed his theories of defers-differs, deconstruction, phenomenology, and structuralism after getting inspired by the latter. Derrida relates basically his theory of “defers-differs” (7) with the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’ emphasizes on the “rupture” (7) of the centralized structure of linear systems and words to evolve different hidden ‘meanings’ of a word and the world (7). Derrida interprets his theory of defers-differs in the light of the Freudian theory of *Nachträglichkeit* stating that “everything begins with reproduction always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly, supplementarily . . .” (7). Derrida actually wants to interpret words/texts in accordance with the concept of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl who emphasizes on both –

retention (understanding of the present and the past of a word/text) and protention (understanding of the present and the future of a word/text) while analyzing texts. Harold Coward also states that in the Derridean concept of 'defers-differs' "Protention in the dialect of the present with the anticipation of the future. Retention is the dialect of the present with memory of the past. . . . In Derrida's rather complex thought, these two dialects of future and past are seen as implying each other" (8).

4. ANALYSIS of *The Pakistani Bride* in the light of the Freudian theory of 'deferred action' and the Derridean theory of 'defers-differs':

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Pakistani Bride* delineates the miserable condition of Pakistani young girls such as Zaitoon who are subjected to harsh and brutal tribal men and they have no escape afterward. But the researcher has analyzed some of the situations in the novel in the light of the Freudian theory of 'deferred action' to explore the reasons and ramifications of trauma. For instance, it's 'deferred action' of trauma that Moola Singh resuscitates his traumatic experience of witnessing the slaughter of all of his family members including his younger brother in Montgomery district when he is informed about another Muslim attack at the village. It's *Nachträglichkeit* that Moola Singh revivifies his primary harrowing experience as, "Oh, the screams of the women, I can hear them still . . . I had a twenty-year-old brother, tall and strong as a mountain, a match for any five of them. This is what they did: they tied one of his legs to one jeep, the other to another jeep – and then they drove the jeeps apart . . ." (9).

Another traumatic incident is witnessed by Qasim who observes the carnage of Muslims by the livid Sikhs. Sidhwa makes Qasim articulate the distressing scene as, "They are Sikh. Tall, crazed men wave swords. . . . Torches unevenly light the scene and Qasim watches the massacre as in a cinema. An eerie clamor rises. Sounds of firing explode above-agonised shrieks" (9). Qasim becomes too psychotic to reveal the upsetting scene. It's the impact of this traumatic incident that Qasim starts taking dreams of the disturbing scene. It's a 'deferred action' of trauma that Qasim gets connected to the scene of the massacre through dreams. He feels "horrified by the slaughter" (9) for rest of his life. It's another 'deferred action' of trauma that Qasim finds a wounded child (Munni) on his way towards Lahore but the child reminds Qasim of his lost own child (Zaitoon) whom he has had lost a couple of years ago. Sidhwa writes, "For a moment Qasim lost his wits. The child was the size of his own little Zaitoon lost so long ago. Her sobs sounded an eerie, forlorn echo from his past" (9). After holding the distressed child in his arms, Qasim notices "an uncanny flash of resemblance to his daughter" (9). It's 'deferred action' of trauma that Qasim connects the present plight of Munni with the miserable past of Zaitoon when he acknowledges that "I had a little girl once. Her name was Zaitoon. You are so like her . . ." (9). It's the impact of trauma that Qasim couldn't bear the separation of her own child Zaitoon and adopts Munni and renames her as his new Zaitoon (9). It's another 'deferred action' of trauma that Munni looks at several Muslim men and women at Badami Bagh (Lahore) but she probes for her own lost parents who get killed during the attack at their train to Lahore. Munni questions Qasim "Will we find my mother and father here? the child asked in sudden hope at the sight of so many" (9).

After the application of the Freudian theory of 'deferred action' in *The Pakistan Bride*, the novel is interpreted from the vantage point of the other psychoanalytical theories suggested by Jacques Derrida. The first interpretation of an incident in *The Pakistani Bride* is through Alfred W. Adler's theory of individual psychology which doesn't focus an individual but the entire environment and the people who traumatize the individual. It's broadly the political, social and cultural turbulence that create chaos in the lives of fictional characters such as Munni who consequently loses her parents when some hooligans from the Sikh community rape her mother and kill her father. Sidhwa writes about the scene of the rape and murder of Zohra and slaughter of Sikander as "A Sikh, sweat gleaming on his naked torso, is holding one breast. . . . More and more legs trample him until mercifully he feels no pain" (9). In this incident, both the environment and the perpetrators manufactured by the environment are responsible for pushing Munni into trauma. She spends her entire life just searching for them and questioning Qasim as, "You won't find my Abba?" (9). She starts running towards people in case they call their female family members by the name 'Zohra' (9) because it was her mother's name too. She becomes schizophrenic as she fails to distinguish between reality and imagination.

The second interpretation of an incident in *The Pakistani Bride* is through Carl Gustav Jung's collective unconscious that's defined as "a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience . . ." (10). To Jung, archetypes such as mother, father, child, tree, and water etc. establish the structure of the collective unconscious. Archetypes transcend personal traumatic experience to the universal collective unconscious. For instance, Qasim has had lost his own child (Zaitoon), but he adopts Munni as her new Zaitoon because he loses her nerves when Munni, being abandoned, calls him "Abba, Abba, my Abba!" (9). The archetype of 'father-daughter relationship' makes Qasim conscious of the excruciating pain of separation of a daughter from a father. This is how his Freudian personal unconscious gets transformed into the Jungian collective unconscious.

Lastly, the researcher has implemented one concept out of the four concepts "introduced by Freud as fundamental concepts namely *the unconscious*, *the repetition*, *the transference* and *the drive*" (11) in *The Pakistani Bride*. Lacan considers '*the repetition*' as the "more elaborate level of the real" (11) traumatic experience through

which a victim of trauma refreshes his/her painful wounds. The psychiatrists Sandra L. Bloom and Michael Reichert also document that “each episode of danger connects to every other episode of danger in our minds, so that the more danger we are exposed to, the more sensitive we are to danger” (12). Moola Singh just hears about the second impending Muslim attack at his village and it’s the Lacanian repetition that he resuscitates the brutal murder of his younger brother who was pulled apart by two jeeps (9). Similarly, a repetition of Qasim’s trauma has been observed when a mother calls her thirteen years old daughter named Zohra in Badami Bagh, and Qasim’s adopted Zaitoon runs towards the direction where the voice has come from (9), but Qasim revives the scene of the night of bloodshed when a man was calling his wife named Zohra and saying as “Run into the dark, Zohra! Run!” (9). The name ‘Zohra’ acts as signifier and it repeats Qasim’s trauma of witnessing the slaughter of Zaitoon’s parents (Sikander and Zohra).

5. FINDINGS AND RESULT:

After the implementation of the Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ and the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’ in *The Pakistani Bride*, it has been found that these theories share the common ground of deferral or deferment. The Freudian theory infers how a victim such as Moola Singh, Qasim, and Munni in the novel, gets connected to his/her turbulent past when a subsequent incident takes place whereas the Derridean theory implies that several meanings of a text are possible when it’s interpreted in the light of different theories or concepts and at a deferred time. But both the theories share ‘afterwardsness’.

In the Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’, the signifier such as the name ‘Zohra’ (9) reminds Qasim and Munni of the rape and murder of Munni’s mother, Zohra (9). But in theory of ‘defers-differs’, Derrida states that signifiers can’t be completely signified (7), but they constitute language. *The Pakistani Bride* is interpreted from the aspect of individual psychology, the collective unconscious, and repetition of trauma, but these are not the ultimate theories to analyze the novel. It can be further interpreted in the light of other psychoanalytical theories such as transference, drive, unconscious, and uncanny etc. Further, the theory of ‘deferred action’ is fundamentally a part of the domain of psychoanalysis through which victims of trauma are hypnotized, understood and treated whereas the theory of ‘defers-differs’ is just an analysis of a word/text to understand it completely.

Furthermore, the theory of ‘deferred action’ is an effort to know the reasons and repercussions of trauma. For instance, Munni’s trauma is because of the loss of her parents and consequently, she becomes uncertain and schizophrenic in her life. Secondly, Moola Singh’s trauma transpires because of the murder of his younger brother in Montgomery and he starts associating the murders of other émigrés with the slaughter of his own brother through the mechanism of ‘deferred action’ of trauma. Thirdly, the reason of Qasim’s trauma is the loss of his five years old daughter (Zaitoon). It’s the aftermath of his trauma that Qasim develops the feelings of safety, security, and sympathy for other children. Consequently, Qasim adopts Munni as her new Zaitoon. On the other hand, the theory of ‘defers-differs’ gives new versions of a text as it’s observed through the analysis of *The Pakistani Bride* in the light of the theory of individual psychology (Adler), collective unconscious (Jung), and the unconscious (Lacan).

6. CONCLUSION:

The Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ and the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’ are similar to each other as they deal with deferral or deferment, but they are dissimilar in the areas of signifiers and significations, reasons and ramifications of trauma, and analysis of texts. In ‘deferred action’ theory, Freud suggests that the reasons of trauma need to be understood so that the patients of neurosis and psychosis can be treated effectively (13). Derrida, on the other hand, opines that every philosophical and literary text needs to be reinterpreted after a deferral to evolve new centers of thought. The French philosopher corroborates that “all these differences in the production of the trace may be reinterpreted as moments of deferring (7).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Freudian theory of ‘deferred action’ can be applied in the texts written about Holocaust, wars, and partitions of countries to evolve more reasons and repercussions of trauma so that the treatment of the patients of trauma can be ameliorated effectively through psychoanalytic techniques such as forensic examination, school-based intervention technique, art therapy, humour, and virtual reality therapy (14). Secondly, the Derridean theory of ‘defers-differs’ should be applied to the philosophical, literary, and cultural discourses to break down their bricolage in the light of more concepts and theories because “every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage” (7) and it can be further broken down for better interpretations.

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