

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The issue of gender inequality is a long-standing problem that still occurs in many parts of the world. The belief that men are destined to be more dominant than women is reinforced by the patriarchal system which developed in almost all regions of the world (Nash, 2020). Some religious interpretations and cultural norms also strengthen the view that men are superior to women (Xu, 2019). The social dynamics of everyday life are ruled and formed by micro contexts of power and gender inequalities which allow different forms of violence against women to continue with impunity. The patriarchal values in everyday discourses and practices enable those various forms of violence against women to be reproduced and become something that is normal and acceptable (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). These discourses and practices fall within the concept of what Pierre Bourdieu (2001) called as symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence is the violence done in a way of imposing certain values to other people which its victims “approve” and normalize as it is legitimized through institutions such as religion, culture, education, etc (Bourdieu, 2001). Bourdieu (1990) stated that every social practice, including symbolic violence, is influenced by the habitus, field, and capital of people in society. People based their everyday decisions on assumptions about the probabilities in the field. These assumptions are parts of what Bourdieu (1990) called as habitus. Bourdieu (1990) argued that

habitus is structured and influenced by one's socio-economic background. Habitus generates one's perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about certain things. One's expectations, aspirations, sense of what is possible and reasonable, their perceptions of what better actions to take, are not natural as they were conditioned by their habituses (Bourdieu, 1990; Grenfell, 2014).

Furthermore, field or social arena is where the distinctions are to be contested. People 'fight' in the field with their capitals as their 'weapon'. Bourdieu (1986) introduced four types of capitals that people own; economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Groups of people who own more capitals and have a shared habitus can dominate a field, and they tended to exercise symbolic violence or impose their beliefs, perceptions, norms, or ideologies to the person who occupy relatively subordinate position (Xu, 2019).

Symbolic violence works by concealing the imposition of the dominant values believed by the society in order to make the victims of symbolic violence never realize that they are a victim. The dominant values imposed to the victim had been legitimized through culture, education, and religion so that they are regarded as how the things have always been. It can be argued that symbolic violence is an invisible violence that hides behind power relations (Bourdieu, 2001). Symbolic violence is accepted and normalized by its victim as it occurs in three different strategies; misrecognition, condescension, and consent/complicity (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Symbolic violence towards women concerned with the social practices in which the masculine domination exists and contribute to reproduce violence against women through certain stereotypes, roles, beliefs, and values that are imposed to women (Menéndez, 2015). Women who became the victim of symbolic violence will try to conform to whatever the society and the people around them defined as the 'musts, oughts, and shoulds' of a woman. These women will never realize that they are a victim and instead will consider that it is their fault if they failed to conform to those values that defined how a woman should be or should act that were imposed to them (Xu, 2019).

Furthermore, in the process of symbolic violence, women experienced alienation. Alison Jaggar (1983), in her theory of female alienation, stated that the alienation of women concerns with the way women in a patriarchal society lost their independence and agency as they are alienated and separated from themselves and their life aspects. Women are alienated in many aspects of their life, especially regarding to their body, motherhood, and intellectual capacities. Women are alienated from their bodies when it is treated as a mere object or appropriated through certain practices which against their will such as when their body is used to compete for men's wealth and power or when they do not get to say anything regarding to where, when, by whom and how their bodies will be used as it can suddenly be appropriated through acts such as male gaze, sexual harassment or even rape. On the other hand, women are alienated from their motherhood experience when their reproductive and child-rearing choices are decided by the others, and they are alienated from their intellectual capacities when their voices are silenced

and their thoughts and opinions are ignored and seen as irrational and products of mere emotion (Jaggar, 1983; Tong and Botts, 2018).

A woman who became the victim of symbolic violence and experienced alienation gradually loses her agency (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016) or the capability to act at her own will and make her own free choices (Barker, 2005). Later, this alienation from her own self also caused her to lose her resilience due to the psychological distress resulted from the practice (Zacchaeus et al., 2014; Hirani et al., 2016). In this respect, resilience refers to the ability to adapt well in the face of stress, trauma, and any life adversities (Werner, 1995). When the exposure to stress is overwhelming and unusually intense, one can fail to exercise resilience, and further can develop or exacerbate the existing mental illness (Poole et al., 2017; Shapero et al., 2019).

The issue of symbolic violence towards women is portrayed in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* portrayed Indian women that are submissive to the traditional values of Indian society which violated many women's rights. *Wife* tells a story about a young Indian woman, Dimple Dasgupta, who had to live a miserable life as she had to give up on her chances of continuing her education, had to go through certain beauty routines to make her body fit into the beauty standard of her society, and had to go through an arranged marriage which against her will.

After the marriage, Dimple was not just had to become an obedient daughter to her parents, but also an obedient wife to her patriarchal husband. The life after

marriage was way worse than her life before. Adjusting with her wedded state, moving to United States, and living with her in-laws bring its own challenges and make her life miserable. Dimple was forced to conform to values that were imposed to her, labelled by certain stereotypes, and obliged to certain roles to become a good Indian woman and an ideal wife for her husband. She became the victim of symbolic violence and were alienated from her own self and aspects of her life including from her own body, motherhood experience and intellectual capacities. This caused her to lose her agency and resilience. Later, Dimple's mental state became unstable, and she started to show a tendency towards violence and contemplated of killing herself. As she loses her sense of judgment and sanity, she ended up killing her husband.

Previously, there were studies who discusses similar issues of symbolic violence towards women and female alienation. One of the studies that discusses about symbolic violence was conducted by Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, Lotta Samelius and Gurchathen S. Sanghera. In 2016, they conducted a research entitled *Exploring Symbolic Violence in the Everyday Life: Misrecognition, Condescension, Consent and Complicity*. This research discusses how symbolic violence took place in everyday life practices in three different strategies (misrecognition, condescension, consent and complicity). Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, it is found that symbolic violence removes the victim's voice and agency, leads to other forms of violence, and become the reason why so many women stay in abusive relationship or returning to their abusers.

Another study about symbolic violence was conducted by Angeliqa and Billy K. in 2018. The study entitled *Symbolic Violence and the Effort to Silence Women in Their Positions as Leaders (Critics of the Women Leaders' Habitus in Advertising Agencies)*. This study discusses how advertising agencies put women in leader position to “silence” them in “comfortable” place. It is found that it became more difficult for women CEOs in advertising agencies, as a part of the media text producer, to recognize the violence they receive, and they rather mimic and duplicate the symbolic violence in texts they produce.

Furthermore, one of the studies about female alienation was conducted by BeiBei Tang from University of Nottingham in 2018. The study entitled *Feminist Translation Equivalence and Norms: Gender and Female Alienation in Chinese Translation of Chinese American Women's Literature*. Deploying the female alienation theory by Alison Jaggar and the feminist translation theory, this study analyses both of the original and translated versions of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* to see how the feminist thoughts on female alienation of the source text are represented in the target text (the translated version). This study found that both of the source and target text equally portrayed feminist consciousness and the issues of female alienation which caused women to lose their subjectivity and independence.

Besides the three studies above, there were also several previous studies that had analysed Bharati Mukherjee's novels. Shilpa Shukla and Niroj Banerji conducted a study entitled *The Theme of “Alienation” and “Assimilation” in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri: A Socio – Literary Perspective in*

2015. This study analyses the process of alienation and assimilation of the immigrant protagonists of both Mukherjee's and Lahiri's novels. Using the diaspora framework, this study found that the immigrant protagonists of both novels undergone assimilation process as a way of surviving in foreign land and coping with their dilemma of belongingness.

In the same manner, Dolly Sharma and Jaya Dwivedi in 2017 conducted a study entitled *Speaking Characters in Selected Novels of Bharati Mukherjee*. Using both diaspora and feminist frameworks, this study aims to see how the protagonists of Mukherjee's selected Novels such as *Jasmine, Wife, Tiger's Daughter*, and *Desirable Daughters*, positioned themselves as both women and immigrant in a foreign country. This study found that Mukherjee used the protagonists of her novels to voice out the varying struggles undergone by women, especially Indian women, including chains of expectations, conventions, and conservative norms regarding to women in society.

Differing from the previous studies, this study analyses the loss of agency and resilience of the symbolic violence victim that are portrayed in *Wife*, a novel written by Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-born writer who won the National Book Critics Circle Award (an award given to the writer with finest books and reviews published in English) in 1988. Bourdieu's concept of habitus, field and capital will be used in this study to analyse the factors that influenced the occurrence of symbolic violence in Mukherjee's *Wife*, while Bourdieu's concepts of misrecognition, condescension, and consent and complicity will be used to analyse the process of symbolic violence. Aside from that, this study also uses Alison

Jaggar's female alienation theory to analyse how the symbolic violence which leads to female alienation portrayed in Mukherjee's *Wife* caused its victim to lose her agency and resilience.

1.2 Research Question

1. How does symbolic violence which portrayed in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* causes its victim to lose her agency and resilience?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is:

1. To reveal the loss of agency and resilience of the symbolic violence victim in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*.

1.4 Scope of The Study

This study focuses on words, clauses, phrases, and sentences that indicate the existence of symbolic violence towards women in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* with the assist of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and Alison Jaggar's theory of female alienation to analyse the loss of agency and resilience of the symbolic violence victim.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study is expected to be useful for those who are interested in studying and analysing symbolic violence that are portrayed in novels. Moreover, this study is also expected to give a better knowledge and enrich the references of the readers, especially English Literature's students, who want to study about gender related

issues such as symbolic violence towards women and female alienation or other issues that are portrayed in literary works such as novel.

