

A Critical Analysis of Bano Qudsia's short story "Black Drongo" in the Context of Racial Discrimination

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Abstract: Critical race theory is an interpretive approach that intends to unfold the deeper and underlying meanings of the color discrimination or racism and provides a methodology to understand the racism, history, and related discriminative elements. The general meaning of racism is to divide people into different groups based on their biological makeup. According to this theory, people living in different regions have their hereditary structure or appearance, skin, hair, eye color, shape of eyelids, nose and have different identity from the people living in other regions. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic are known as key figures of critical race theory (CRT). Bano Qudsia, female writer has significance in the history of Urdu short story writing. Her short story "Black Drongo" is written in the post-colonial period of the sub-continent. The main theme of this fiction is social discrimination based on color. This article is a critical analysis of the short story "Black Drongo" in the context of racial discrimination.

Keywords: Bano Qudsia, Urdu Short Story, Black Drongo, Racial Discrimination, Critical Analysis

Objective:

The objective of this paper is to analyze an Urdu short story "Black Drongo" written by well-known short story writer Bano Qudsia through selected concepts of racial discrimination.

Research Question:

How to critically interpret the underlying meanings in the short story "Black Drongo" by applying selected concepts of racial discrimination?

Methodology:

The method used in this research involves textual and behavioral analysis of the characters in the short story “*Black Drongo*” by applying the basic concepts of Critical Race Theory.

Theoretical framework:

Critical race theory is an interpretive approach that intends to unfold the deeper and underlying meanings of the color discrimination or racism and provides a methodology to understand the racism, history, and related discriminative elements. Influential scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic are known as key figures for their contribution “Critical Race Theory: An Introduction”. This work was published by NYU Press. This work is being taken as the basic source of theoretical framework of this research article. Following are the five principles of critical race theory as mentioned by Nicholas Daniel Hartlep, *Critical Race Theory: An Examination of Its Past, Present, and Future Implications*:

1. The notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational.
2. The idea of an interest convergence.
3. The social construction of race.
4. The idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling.
5. The notion that whites have actually been recipients of civil legislation.

Introduction:

The general meaning of racism is to divide people into different groups based on their biological makeup. According to this concept, people living in different regions have their hereditary structure or appearance, skin, hair, eye color, shape of eyelids, nose and have different identity from the people living in other regions. Based on this identification, the genetic identity of a person can be ascertained. If racism is seen in a broad perspective, it includes the personality, intellect, moral and other physical traits of a person. That’s why some races are inherently superior to others, and some are inferior to them. Anecdotal references prove that in every era people of lower castes were confined to low-ranking jobs or positions and were deprived of equal power, economic resources, and unrestricted civil rights. People from lower castes also faced social isolation and acts of physical violence. Similarly, in some places, racist concepts have been so severe that the mixing of people of different races was prohibited.

However, this concept of racism was completely rejected by genetic studies at the end of the twentieth century and presented the concept that racism is related to social factors rather than biological and natural traits. Although there are no clear arguments about what the

facts behind this social formation are. Are these facts equally important in every region? For example, the standards of acceptance and non-acceptance of skin color, body composition and other physical characteristics in a particular region will differ in many respects from those standards in other regions.

“Critical Race Theory (CRT), [intellectual](#) and [social movement](#) and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the [premise](#) that [race](#) is not a natural, [biologically](#) grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of [human beings](#) but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of colour.” (1)

In regions where there is a clear difference in appearance and physical characteristics between the nations, these distinctions exist in their most severe form. Racism is considered normal in such regions and words like white and black openly describe these racial distinctions. In such regions the black nations pay a heavy penalty for their low status. Due to this discrimination, they face denial of loans and jobs. They are more suspected by the police or other security agencies than others. On the other hand, whites are more generous in providing education and basic facilities. In such societies, whites hold better jobs and are more successful in business than blacks.

This differentiation is common in societies where different cultures live. Racial differences are strongly reinforced in such societies. In these societies, black people are considered slow, less educated and have destructive mentality. Apart from this, black color is taken in the sense of low intelligence, ugly and bad culture. While white people are highly educated, civilized, and active in constructive work and white color is always recognized as the standard of beauty, intelligence, and merit. Most studies of racism rely on concepts that underlie preference and prejudice. In fact, the main attempt to create a strong theory of racism is called the "white color preference" theory, and psychologists and anthropologists have also argued that white people prefer only those who are white. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic are known as key figures for their contribution “Critical Race Theory: An Introduction” published by NYU Press. This work critically examined by Nicholas Daniel Hartlep in his work “Critical Race Theory: An Examination of Its Past, Present, and Future Implications,” Published in 2009. Nicholas Daniel Hartlep describe the five tenets of critical race theory:

“There are five major components or tenets of CRT: (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) the idea of an interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (5) the notion that whites have actually been recipients of civil

legislation.” (2)

A major cause of racial discrimination based on color is the establishment of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The colonial system has not only established racial discrimination but has also played an important role in promoting it to the extent possible. If the concept of racism is studied in the colonial context, it comes out that the colonial mentality enslaved the natives with their knowledge and development. They were also trying to prove that they were inferior to themselves in terms of both external similarity and intellectual superiority. As a result, the natives began to think of the colonizer as intellectuals instead of relying on their abilities. During the colonial period in the subcontinent, the local people were subjected to the feeling of inferiority through these psychological tactics. These psychological effects can also be studied in the context of the post-colonial situation, because even after the end of the colonial system, these nations are mentally and psychologically forced to acknowledge the racial superiority of the settlers. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic has discussed the racial discrimination in their book:

“Race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great importance interest to critical race theory.” (3)

Bano Qudisia short story "Black Drongo" is written in the post-colonial period of the subcontinent. The main theme of this fiction is social discrimination of color and race which tries to prove that black people are socially, economically, and intellectually inferior.

Discussion and Analysis:

The Black Drongo is a small chirping bird found in Asian countries. Its color is black from the beak to the tail. The writer has tried to describe the distinctions of human society regarding the black color by making this bird a symbol. This discrimination of color gives rise to prejudiced attitudes and negative thinking. The main reason for this is the discriminatory treatment that classifies a person as good or bad simply based on color without knowing about him. The author has described the racial differences in the world

of birds in the context of the differences in color between Black Drongo (black bird) and Swan (white bird).

The story begins with a dialogue between the birds, in which each bird seems to suffer from a sense of superiority or inferiority based on its physical characteristics. Further, the short story tells the story of an oriental family whose members are white in their skin. They consider themselves beautiful and civilized because of their appearance. The central figure of this family is elder sister, whose decisions are silently bowed by everyone. The elder sister is extremely prejudiced against black skin. This prejudice comes out in the story in this way: "Seeing a black man, they get a strong disgust, just like a pregnant woman vomits in the beginning of pregnancy for no reason."⁽⁴⁾ Later, a member of this family (Razzak Mian) marries Sajida, who has a fair complexion, after the death of his first wife. Sajida spares no effort in serving and honoring every member of this family, but despite this, she is suffering from non-acceptance attitudes in this family all her life.

“As soon as it was confirmed that Sajda's color was black, the whole family became her mortal enemy. Sometimes she vowed not to talk to Razak Mian, sometimes she thought how to secretly poison Razak Mian's bride. Once you get to Jhang, you should punish this person in such a way that it will lead to divorce.”⁽⁵⁾

The fiction writer has tried to explain the hatred and prejudice behind these differential attitudes. The character of Sajida in the fiction is aware of the difference of racial discrimination and she has accepted this social disparity. She does not show any kind of reaction or resistance to the discriminatory treatment meted out to her. Regarding the feeling of superiority of white color, another attitude can be seen in the story that people with this mental difference are also suspicious about their own color. Therefore, whenever they see people who are fairer than themselves, their self-confidence also starts to shake. Another important twist in the story is that a member of this family married a white Irish girl. Although the Irish girl (Maggie) is not familiar with the cultural traditions of this family, the whole family respects her just because of her fair complexion.

“Her welcome was grand like the VIPs. She sat on the back seat between aunty and elder sister. Marigold, Jasemine, gold, and silver wire necklaces around her neck went up to her skirt. Suddenly, Maggie started to feel jealous of her luck inside.”⁽⁶⁾

It is presented in the story that the supremacy of white nationalism is seen in Maggie's society. They socially ostracize blacks and are shown to value racial distinctions more than social morality and economic stability. It is not possible for a white person to accept a black

person in Maggi society. Maggie is also aware of the hateful attitudes towards blacks in her society. She also realizes that she will not be able to face the hatred in her society, so she is not ready to take her son who is a mixed-race character. In Pakistani society, he would be recognized as the son without parents, whereas Maggi's family would not be willing to accept him otherwise, as for them the standard of whiteness is conditioned by brown hair and blue eyes.

Study of this short story shows that the white race has an orthodox belief that these people are superior and that their economic status has nothing to do with their social supremacy. Based on this concept, the white nations, rich or poor, are superior to the black community in every respect. Therefore, the mixing of a black person with the white race is tantamount to undermining their racial purity. This concept of racism also exists in the nations where the black people of these nations are victims of social oppression at the hands of their white counterparts. These oppressed people become lonely and depressed after some time and later the feeling of "otherness" starts developing in these people. Thus, these people begin to imagine themselves as an "object" in the hands of the whites.

Due to racial discrimination, the black people are not provided with the same facilities as the white people, nor are they entitled to the same freedom. Socially marginalized, black women are more vulnerable to exploitation. They are deprived of basic human rights as well as treated with contemptuous attitudes by the society. Throughout the story, the society's attitudes of slavery, mistreatment and violence towards blacks are described.

“They had only one standard of decency, nobility, intelligence, and merit. And that was the whiteness of the skin. According to them, every white person was necessarily good-mannered, competent, virtuous, and chosen by Allah.” (7)

The short story not only deals with the rejection of a child for having an oriental complexion, but also describes the different standards of complexion in each region. The white complexion which Eastern society considers proud is not the standard of whiteness of the Western society. Their standard of whiteness is not only whiteness of skin, but they also have additional criteria of hair and eye color. On the other hand, the special treatment faced by people with dark complexion in the Eastern society has also been made a subject. These people must suffer from socially discriminatory attitudes, these attitudes make them feel inferior in their home, family and beyond in every sphere of life. As a result, such people become devoid of the feelings of moving forward and excelling in practical life as well.

In the short story, not only the sense of pride based on physical color but also the differential attitudes created by it in society is described. These differential attitudes are socially constructed. In the short story, Asif is completely unfamiliar with these standards

of color, he gets to know Sajida based on her personal qualities. He sees his affection in Sajida, so he stays away from all the other women in his family and goes to her to satisfy his every desire and stubbornness. Similarly, this social formation is also evident from the character of Nawaz. He is freed from the caste prejudices of his family when he decides to marry Sajida because of her good morals. After marrying Sajida, he feels that this color difference is just a deception, the personal qualities of a person are beyond all these differences.

In the colonial era, the sense of worthlessness that the colonizer inflicted on the people of the subcontinent has not been able to get out of the Eastern mentality despite the passing of generations. Perhaps this continuation of oppression continues in the subcontinent even today. Bano Qudsia has also tried to clarify this perspective in her short story. After Maggie's arrival, every woman in the family considers it her fortune to see her wearing her jewels and precious clothes. Moreover, everything Maggi wears is a blessing for these women, so they take care of everything.

“Maggie wore every woman's jewelry and fell in love with herself in the mirror. The iron of the East India Company was so everyone's necks bowed. Her old shoes, vests, hairpins, leather suitcases, lipsticks, fake jewelry, all used items were preserved.” (8)

A major theme in this short story is the social rejection of a child for having an oriental complexion. Along with this, different color standards are also defined in each region. The special treatment that black people face in Eastern society is illustrated in the story of how people with dark skin face social discrimination. Because these discriminatory behaviors are not created by nature but are created by society. The negative side of these attitudes is also that these are not limited to a single individual but take a social structure. These behaviors make people feel inferior in their home, family and beyond in every sphere of life. As a result, such people become devoid of the feelings of progress and excellence in practical life as well. Overall, the whole story describes the attitudes of slavery, mistreatment, and violence in the society towards the blacks.

Disclaimer:

The ideas about racism (characters, regions, race, colors) presented in this article are derived from the text of the fiction under study. The criticism presented in fiction is for its understanding in the context of fictional text. Researchers' personal opinions may be different.

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