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Unveiling the Sacred: Reading the Gendered Female Body in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The last few decades mark the emergence of *the body* in Western social theory and humanities, where it is being used as a theoretical model and a critical construct to study, analyse and interpret socially situated subjectivities. This research project takes the theoretical framework of *the body* and combines it with insights from postcolonial feminist theory to critically engage with the depiction of the bodies of South Asian (Pakistani and Indian) women in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, a feminist voice from Pakistan. Using the approach of *the body* as an inscriptive surface, the narratives of *The Bride* and *Water* are critically examined to expose patriarchy’s use of culture and religion as powerful tools to establish its hegemonic control over the bodies, subjectivities and lives of South Asian women. Questions of female objectification, marginalisation, socio-religious positioning and agency are the focus of this research, in an effort to highlight the corporeal and gendered existence of South Asian women in the context of Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels.

Keywords: Bapsi Sidhwa, the body, Pakistani literature, femininity
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Research Supervision Statement

Date: April 29, 2011.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to state that the research carried out for the Master's thesis entitled “Unveiling the Sacred: Reading the Gendered Female Body in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction” was completed by Shazrah Salam in the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, New Zealand, under my direct supervision. This thesis material has not been used for any other degree. I played the following part in the preparation of the thesis:

advising, providing feedback on writing, revising and editing.

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