

The Voice of the Marginalised Women: Reading Gender Discrimination, Patriarchy and Societal Norms in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel, Water

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Abstract: The novel, Water by Bapsi Sidhwa deals with the condition of Indian Hindu widows during 1938 who have been abandoned by the society after the death of their husbands. The superstitious and stereotyped society considers the wife to be responsible for their husband's death. As they are believed to be unfortunate and sinner, the widows are sent to the widow ashrams to spend the rest of their life praying to God. The paper¹ will deal with life of the widows who are compelled to spend the rest of their life deprived of all the charms and glory and devote totally to the worship of God. Child marriage, corruption and exploitation of the upper class Brahmins and finally the rejection of widows to accept such dominance are the major aspects to be highlighted. These will be represented through the female characters like Kalyani, Shakuntala, Madhumati, Bua and Chuyia who represent the sections of widows, who accept the corruption and dominance of the society and the other who demands change against the prevailing norms of the patriarchal society. The glimpse of British colonialism and rise of freedom movement will also be highlighted. In order to depict the condition of marginalised women and stereotyped society, the concept of 'Other' by Bhabha and the theory of Feminism are indeed applied. The study would help to recall and focus on the aspects of Indian history reiterated by Bapsi Sidhwa.

Keywords: abandonment, child marriage, corruption, patriarchy, widow

Gender discrimination is one of the important themes focused by the South Asian diasporic writers in their works. The female diasporic writers have to face the domination of both patriarchal ideology and struggle to establish their actual origin. Gender has been theorised as one of the key sites of the postcolonial studies. The study based on gender has given rise to varied contradictions and tensions intrinsic to the construction of a postcolonial national community play. Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the female writers who belongs to India, Pakistan

and the United States of America simultaneously. Betrayal, dominance, marriage, immigration, human relationships, identity crisis, patriarchy, imperialism, superstitions, discrimination and cultural hybridity are some of the important themes used by Sidhwa in her novels. It has been well mentioned that “Bapsi Sidhwa gives an insight into such deep-rooted violence and ill practices on Hindu widows in her novel, *Water*” (Khan, 50). She tries to expose the pangs of women in the male dominated society. In this way she wants to establish the voices of this dominated gender whose struggle in both household and societal activities are either ignored or unappreciated. As a literary artist Bapsi Sidhwa's works serve as a social and historical document. It is agreeable with Anita Sharma who underlines the central themes of Sidhwa's novels “These novels reflected the social, economic, cultural and political changes. Role of women and their struggle for self- emancipation became the most widely written theme along with other social issues” (2).

The study will highlight the pathetic condition of the widows in Indian Hindu society. The victimisation, abandonment and child marriage that lead to the pangs of the women after the death of their husband based on certain superstitious reasons are focused here. Indeed, in the contemporary situation still women are the victims of physical assault, injustice and domestic violence and the issue since then till now is not fully resolved is intended to be discussed here. The importance of distinct identity despite any caste or gender is yet to be appreciated in the contemporary society. The study would mainly focus on the Hindu tradition, its loop holes and the perspective of rectification that can still be done. The main objective of this paper is to explore the condition of the marginalised women especially the Indian widows of the Hindu community during 1938 in the novel, *Water*. While doing that it will explore the superstitious believes, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, class discrimination, patriarchal dominance and the pangs of widows during the 1930s in India. As a whole, it will deal with the hypocrisy and hegemony of the male dominating society towards the widows. In the study it is hypothesized that the work would focus on the gender discrimination, imperialism and hypocrisy of the society. The novel will explore the perception of a Parsi writer and her point of view towards imperialism and hegemony of the Hindu society. The research paper will be based firstly on the primary source of information, that is, the textual evidence. In addition the paper will be analysed based on the critical theories, specifically feminism. The concept of diaspora and othering will also be analysed . In case of feminist theory, the study will focus on the views of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, CT Mohanty and Simon De Beauvoir. The issue of identity and the multiple perceptions based on convenience on female body in the patriarchal and imperialistic point of view is also discussed here. The ideas of new historicists like Michel Foucault, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of otherness are discussed here considering the condition of the widows in the male dominating society. In addition to all these, Sidhwa's perception as a diasporic feminist writer is also noteworthy.

The novelisation of Water:

The novel *Water* by Sidhwa is her fifth novel that deals with the stereotyped mentality existing in the Indian Hindu society. The struggle of women especially the injustices towards widows are exposed in the novel. Before Sidhwa wrote this novel, it is presented as a film by Deepa Mehta. The film has touched Sidhwa in such a way that she decided to pen it down. Sidhwa chose to follow this rare trend in the motif of presenting an exaggerated description of the struggle of the widows in India in the name of tradition and culture. Rakesh Rana remarks regarding the novelisation of Sidhwa's *Water* from Mehta's film is that "It is a well crafted novel which lends beauty to the film from where it is sourced and not the other way round. The book certainly enhances the visual appeal of the film" (74). Through novelisation Sidhwa has elaborated the histories of various characters. These characters represent the condition of various women existing in the society during that time and their struggle irrespective of caste and class. She has not highlighted only a single woman but a group of women struggling in the same place but with varied history and background. She tries to fill up all the missing links and to unveil the opaque sides.

Water focuses on Hindu tradition and culture during 1938, the time when the superstitious colonial Indian traditions are challenged by the new ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, expecting a change in the orthodox society. Sidhwa has intended to raise voice against those orthodox hypocrites and so has created her characters like Chuyia, Kalyani and Shakuntala in *Water*. These three characters represent the voices of all the widows during that time who were tortured and regarded as ill-fated. Unlike Sidhwa's other novels, *Water* does not deal with any other religions except Hindu. It only deals with conservatism in Hindu society. Sidhwa has also raised a ray of hope through the inclusion of ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi in the novel. Mahatma Gandhi's rise for women empowerment, removal of untouchability and widow remarriage is shown as a source of light in the life of the women under the dominance of patriarchal society. The change that is required and that has even started to occur through the changed perspective of the youth like Narayan, Sidhwa has also presented the sight of hope for betterment.

The novel begins with Chuyia, a six years old girl who is busy in her carefree life playing with a puppy and roaming in the whole locality. But the devastating point of her life began after her father arranged her marriage with a forty-four years old person. Since the beginning Sidhwa has highlighted it considering a girl child as a burden to the family and marriage could only bring the ultimate sigh of relief. Another trending issue was the system of dowry. In the novel *Water* this has been focused when Somanth, Chuyia's father says to his wife "They don't want a dowry; they will pay for the wedding. She will be well cared for" (Sidhwa, 13). The caste discrimination in the society is indicated when during Chuyia's marriage "Only Brahmins were allowed inside the temple. Since the temple hall had no walls- just the tall pillars that supported the roof – everyone could see the wedding ceremony as it took place" (Sidhwa, 26). There was again another rule for the women passing through their menstruation cycle. They were considered to be impure and so in the novel it is mentioned

that “Since the presence of menstruating women would defile the wedding and pollute the temple, food would be left for them at their doors” (Sidhwa, 26). Thus, women were categorised under various norms in the society during that time. Considering women as objects can be glanced through Chuyia’s marriage rituals sindoor daan and kanya daan . It is explained by Sidhwa in the novel during Chuyia’s marriage when:

Hira Lal’s eldest sister brought the traditional Sindoor Daan on a tray. The groom applied the red sindoor to the parting in the bride’s hair and to her forehead. As a Hindu woman, the bride would wear this symbol from the time of the Sindoor Daan until her death. Of all the ceremonial gifts, the kanya daan, or bride- gift, is considered to be the holiest. Just as the giver can no longer lay claim to an object that has been donated, the parents of a traditional Hindu bride have no rights over their daughter once she has been gifted to the bridegroom (27-28).

Again, according to Hindu ritual when the husband dies leaving his wife behind, the society considers the woman to be responsible for bringing demise to her husband. Eventually, Chuyia was destined for the same and sent to widow ashram. She could not eat any fried stuff and had to spend most of the days fasting and praying. Even despite wearing white and unstitched saree, her head was shaved as it was believed that water droplets from a widow’s hair would pollute the surroundings.

Chuyia met Madhumati, Shakuntala and Kalyani in that abandoned widow ashram. From the first day after she entered the ashram she rejects to follow the rules she was asked to follow. As Shakuntala saved her from the attack of Madhumati on the first day, when Chuyia bite Madhumati. So she considered Shakuntala as Goddess Durga who saves people from destruction and torture. The sign of hope for going back home that she got was from Kalyani who believed that one day somebody would marry her and she would leave the ashram. However, Madhumati used Kalyani for prostitution. Irony in this case was that though widows were abandoned and considered as the reason of bringing bad luck, but at night the rich Brahmins used to enjoy them giving the reason that their touch would purify the widows and wash their sins. Fortunately, Kalyani met Narayan who followed Mahatma Gandhi’s ideologies. Narayana rejected to follow the societal conditions of untouchability, widow abandonment and caste discrimination. Rather he strongly supported widow remarriage, women empowerment and freedom of the widows. As a disciple of Gandhi, Narayan never judged widows to be threatened or ignored. Rather he fell in love with Kalyani and decided to marry her. Despite the blind beliefs of society Kalyani was optimistic enough that some day she would be relieved from all these hindrances. Her innocence was seen when she was on a ride with Narayan towards the British colony. Kalyani was at first apprehensive thinking about the consequences if anybody would see a widow moving there. To this when Narayan assured her that the British did not have such rules for widow, Kalyani innocently asked “Why? Don’t they have widows?” (Sidhwa, 154). This was the first time when Kalyani realised that treating widows as ill-fated was not the same in case of every widows in the world. Narayan’s company hints at her enlightenment growing from the

prevailing superstitious and stereotypical beliefs in the society. She started to look around the things through Narayan's point of view. Narayan made her realise that the rituals of widowhood and this sacrifice of widows were all societal norms set by the people living in the society. Her interaction with Narayan had helped her to understand the ultimate meaning of freedom and happiness. So, despite going through a huge turmoil between her previous beliefs as a Hindu widow and her new conscience that Narayan had made her believe, Kalyani finally decided to free herself from all the shackles and accept the marriage proposal of Narayan. Shakuntala though was also in turmoil regarding Kalyani's decision of remarriage but later she was informed by Pandit Sadananda regarding the new law of widow remarriage. She also got to know that even such rules were declared, those were ignored by the society. This had created her first doubt that questioned the ideologies set for the Hindu widows. Kalyani's relationship with Narayan was a source of enlightenment for all the widows in the ashram. But unfortunately their relationship could not meet a happy closure. Kalyani discovered that Seth Dwarkanath to whom Kalyani was sent mostly for prostitution was actually Narayan's father. It was her honesty and dignity that let her disclose the truth in front of Narayan. She refused to go to follow him further as she believed that her match with Narayan would not be possible. Although Kalyani returned to the widow ashram but she strongly rejected to go back to her previous life of exploitation. As a protest against the hypocrisy and hegemony of the patriarchal society, Kalyani committed suicide. This act of her had directly showed her rejection to follow any oppression. After the death of Kalyani when Madhumati sent Chuyia with Gulabi and was raped, Shakuntala decided to free Chuyia and so handed her over to Narayan. As imagined by Chuyia she has justified her image as Durga and thus fought for her with evils to bring enlightenment. Shakuntala has finally realised the ultimate source of happiness and satisfaction.

Sidhwa showed how the widows were abandoned and their struggle stories were never counted. The society considered the injustices done to them as their fate. Rather they were alleged for being bad omen. According to Stefano Mercanti the women characters in the novel "are constructed under conditions of subjugation and, although marginalised and muted, are seen contesting the discourse of patriarchy and projecting toward freedom" (165). Sidhwa has created the characters like Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntala and Bua who although victimised and submissively followed the traditional rules as widows but later directly challenged the patriarchal dominance. Again in the novel *Water* Chuyia after entering the ashram at Rawalpindi was told by Madhumati regarding the rules of widows "And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die" (Sidhwa, 52-53). Chuyia out of her innocence replied "Because she's half alive?" (Sidhwa, 53). Thus, Chuyia's innocent logical reply had broken the rigid ideology that judges a widow as a living dead and forget to consider her as a person. Chuyia had opposed to be enslaved by the patriarchal oppression. Chuyia could never find the reason behind the deprivation of widows for consuming fried dishes and sweets. That is why without caring the rules for widows she had managed to bring a laddoo for Bua. Her rejection to support any cruel deeds was also seen when she

killed Mitthu, the parrot of Madhumati. She wanted to let Madhumati feel the same pain that she had enforced on Kalyani. Moreover, Mitthu's death signifies the end of oppression. The character of Kalyani is portrayed by Sidhwa though different from Chuyia but with full maturity, sublimity and optimism. Kalyani's silent rejection to the society's norms was seen when she introduced the puppy Kalu with Chuyia. It was not allowed to keep any animal inside the ashram but Kalyani hides Kalu inside her room. Though Madhumati used her for prostitution and Kalyani having no other way out had to obey her but later she fell in love with Narayan. Her inner fight regarding age old rules for widows who are called to be responsible for bringing downfall to her surroundings is seen when she revealed her role of prostitution to Narayan. She feared that she might bring ill fate to Narayan. But, in her conscious sense she had devoted her whole life to the feet of Narayan. In this case her rebel towards society is also seen as being a widow she falls in love and has dreams of remarriage. In the response of restricting such injustices done to her and in the sign of refusal she had committed suicide. According to traditional norms committing suicide is a crime. Kalyani eagerly committed such crime in the response of her rejection to follow the oppression and bear the marginalisation. Kalyani's ending her life there signifies freedom, peace and purity. Water symbolises independence and power. Similarly Kalyani has evoked independence for herself refusing the social norms and ideas. In this regard, it has been perfectly mentioned that "Here Sidhwa invokes rich implications- the defiance of institutionalised segregation, the challenge to enforced oppression and the rejection of patriarchal demands on a woman's body" (Mercanti, 171). The character of Madhumati is however presented as cruel and selfish but Sidhwa has not left presenting the struggle of Madhumati that resulted in her cruel personality. Later with the intention of challenging the oppressors she had chosen the same path of cruelty.

Critiquing Water:

Considering the novel through the light of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of subaltern, the female characters can definitely be analysed. Spivak is a feminist critic, theorist and one of the most influential postcolonial writers. Spivak has discussed women as the subalterns and their pathetic treatment in the dimension of patriarchal society. Regarding the subaltern discourse Spivak states "I am thinking of the general nonspecialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum, for whom the episteme operates its silent programming function. Without considering the map of exploitation, on what grid of 'oppression' would they place this motley crew?" (78). Spivak being a postcolonial feminist theorist has discussed the condition of women in the postcolonial time. She has discussed the condition of the subaltern women who have been constructed as silent or voiceless lacking their identity. In this respect, Spivak has focused on the identity crisis of the women and they being dominated in the patriarchal society. In this sense, the widows like Kalyani, Chuyia, Shakuntala, Bua, Madhumati and the others in the widow ashram can be considered as subalterns who are not only marginalised but also abandoned from family. The death of

their husbands causes them to surrender fried foods, sweets, wearing colourful and stitched clothes and spend the rest of their lives praying and begging. They did not have any identity and even not treated as human beings by the privileged societal people. Rather they were to be blamed for the death of their husbands. It was alleged that their ill fate had brought darkness to the life of their surroundings including their husbands. So, they were destined to live rest of their lives after their husbands' death repenting for the sins so that their husbands could have resurrection. Another feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty has again presented a different perspective by discussing on the inclusion of a transnational approach while exploring the experience of female gender in the world. Her work as an influential piece discusses gender matters based on class, race and national formation of globalisation. She has pointed out the construction of women as 'other' through various narratives like scientific, linguistic, literary and many more. C.T Mohanty comments "This connection between women as historical subjects and the re-presentation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures" (334). In connection with this, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* can be considered as a reply to the hypocritical and hegemonic discourses.

In relation to feminist theory, the name of Simon De Beauvoir is worth mentioning. She is a radical French feminist writer who has mentioned about the rights of women. Beauvoir has articulated the discrimination of gender. The stereotype distinction within biological sex, the construction of gender in the society and the oppression of the women are described by Beauvoir. According to Beauvoir "There are female animals that derive total autonomy from motherhood; so why has woman not been able to make a pedestal for herself from it? Even in those moments when humanity most desperately needed births- since the need for manual labour prevailed over the need for raw materials to exploit- and even in those times when motherhood was the most venerated, maternity was not enough for women to conquer the highest rank" (97-98). Thus, Beauvoir has discussed on the condition of female body that has been represented in the male discourse. The females have been exploited based on the need of the stereotyped society. Hence, through the character of Kalyani and even Madhumati, Bapsi Sidhwa has represented women who were raped, mistreated. Here women body was initially shown as a source of their weakness but later their strong rebellion towards patriarchy proves them to be stronger ones. Bapsi Sidhwa has not intended to show women as weaker because of their body. Madhumati was raped by her brother-in-laws after the death of her husband when she asked for her share in the property. Later she turned to be the one who by whatever means ruled in the ashram. She might have turned to be a cruel woman but never allowed anyone to oppress her. Kalyani was initially a submissive character who followed all the instructions of Madhdumati. But after she viewed her surroundings through Narayan's perception, Kalyani got her enlightenment. This is why she became bold enough to free herself from the trap of Madhumati and the hypocrite society.

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, literary critic, political activist and a historian of ideas has also dealt with feminism. He has provided his view on the historical construction of the body. Foucault demonstrates the connection between the body and power. According to Foucault, power controls the minds of individuals in addition to their bodies and behaviours. Foucault states:

We, on the other hand, are in a society of “sex,” or rather a society “with a sexuality”: the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target. Moreover, its importance was due less to its rarity or its precariousness than to its insistence, its insidious presence, the fact that it was everywhere an object of excitement and fear at the same time. Power delineated it, aroused it, and employed it as the proliferating meaning that had always to be taken control of again lest it escapes; it was an effect with a meaning – value. I do not mean to say that a substitution of sex for blood was by itself responsible for all the transformations that marked the threshold of our modernity (147-148).

In the book through Foucault’s analysis of the formation of “sexuality” as a rhetorical object and distinct realm of existence, Foucault contends that the idea that each person has sexuality is a relatively new one in Western civilisations. Moreover, Feminism that draws its influence from Foucault focuses on revealing the specific shapes those relationships of power between genders take at the micro-political dimension in order to provide tangible avenues for rejection and social transformation.

Hence, the theory of feminism can perfectly be applied in the study. Through the actions of the characters named Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntala and to some extent Madhumati, Bhagya and Bua ,the feminist voice can perfectly be seen. Chuyia’s rejection to beg in front of temple, her disappointment to restrict her from seeing her mother, her hope to go back home, her queries regarding male widowers’ ashram, her consideration of widows not as half dead but half alive and her perception of following the rules imposed on widows as a stupid deed of acceptance depict her voice to fight against subjugation. In case of Kalyani, her desire to remarry, then her relationship with Narayan and later her suicide, all goes against the marginalised norm of the society. Shakuntala had also rebelled against society by helping Kalyani to go to Narayan and then by freeing Chuyia from the life of widow and surrendering her to Gandhiji. The character of Bua had also provided a glimpse of feminism through her desire to eat sweets. Finally with the help of Chuyia she was successful in having laddoos for which she was thinking so long. Being a widow, her consumption of sweet itself symbolises her rejection of following the stereotyped rules.

In relation to the stereotype concepts and discourse, Homi K. Bhabha has indeed presented his idea on the concept of ‘other’ and the colonial discourse. Bhabha presents the argument regarding the stereotyping ideas of colonial discourse. The impact of dominance and

superiority has been presented by Bhabha and this also has relation with considering the female gender as 'other' in the patriarchal society. His work can be related with both colonial and feminist discourse. In the novel *Water*, the females are neglected both by the colonisers and the colonised society. The novel is set at the backdrop of 1930s; so during that time under the British colonisers' rule all the colonised are marginalised. But, in case of women they are again marginalised by the patriarchal society. In an instance in the novel the myth of menstrual cycle of women is depicted. Sidhwa has dealt here with the Brahmin culture according to whom the women during their menstruation are not allowed to enter in the temples. They are also restricted to touch any one and so are shifted to an isolated room which is regarded as other room. Through this sequence Sidhwa has focused on the stereotypical idea of the society who considers menstruating woman as untouchable, dirty and impure. That is why she is shifted to an isolated room so that even her shadow can not bring any ill to any other members of the family. It is ironic to see a society where they offer prayers to Goddesses like Durga and Kali, but in real life it is just the opposite. The most ironic aspect is that the women accept the fact without even considering such norms as an oppression. The societal and cultural aspects are set in such a way that the women believe such isolation as obvious and necessary. Despite this, the widows are forced into a life without soul. They are othered not once, but multiple times. So the novel reflects the struggle and marginalisation of women especially the widows in the Hindu Brahmin society. Therefore, in the study of postcolonial literature the struggle of colonised people due to oppression is expressed from the colonised point of view. In this context, Syeda Samar Shahid Bokhari describes "Postcolonial by its subtext proposes an opposition to immense colonial clout which shaped the culture of coloniser. Moreover, the expression nubs upon the coloniser's discourse that distorted the personalities by imbuing their souls with atrocities" (378). This suggests that the intention of the postcolonial writers is to describe the struggle story of the colonised people from their angles, not from the oppressors. The concepts of identity, history and representation of indigenous forms of representation have been redefined by the postcolonial literature. Hence, it is seen that "Postcolonial theory explores how colonial ideology, strategies of representation, and racial prejudices are coded into the literary texts, and how these informed concrete political, military, and social 'operations' in colonialism" (Nayar, 18). Moreover, the condition of women during the colonial period is a very sensitive issue. The feminist issues highlight the deprivation of women's rights by the patriarchal society. In this regard it is well mentioned that "Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race and sexualities in the different contests of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality and rights (Rajan and Park, 53). The theory of new historicism is also applied in the novel as it helps to gather knowledge regarding the historical facts and incidents through literary works. The application of new historicism in the literary work appreciates the time of both the author and the readers' response. The novel *Water* can perfectly be studied under the lens of new historicism as it

deals with the condition of India during 1936. Sidhwa using the modern perspective of independence, freedom and feminism raised voices through the characters' rebellion. The inclusion of Gandhisim and his movement of Quit India take back to the history of India and the country's fight for freedom. Homi K Bhabha's concept of 'otherness' is also found to be applied in the study. From the surface level, the freedom struggle of Mahatma Gandhi and the repetitive concern regarding British colonies and their life-styles reflects the colonial period. Through the characters' expression while discussing about British colonies, the sign of considering them as superior is perfectly presented by Sidhwa. Moreover, in the main and deeper level, Sidhwa has shown the marginalisation of women and considering the women as 'other' by the patriarchal society. All the female characters like Kalyani, Chuyia, Shakuntala, Madhumati, Kunti, Bua and Bhagya are found to be over-burdened by the patriarchal norms. They are considered as inferior and muted and thus regarded as 'other' whose only duty is to provide a son to the family and complete the household work properly.

Indrani Atul Borgohain in the study "Diasporic Home: Existence of Widows in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*" describes Sidhwa giving voices to the widows who are marginalised, abused, stigmatised and alienated by the society only because their husbands have died (104). The study gives a detailed summary of the whole novel and presents an analysis based on widow remarriage, deprivation and victimisation of widows. The novel also helps to provide a historical account of India during 1930s and also depicts the prevalence of religion, culture and patriarchy. The widow ashram is presented as a symbol of abandonment, seclusion and subjugation. The study focuses on the importance of negating the predominant idea of widowhood that suggests wearing only white unstitched clothes, eating only boiled foods that too once a day and spending the whole day praying and begging. Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntala, Madhumati and other widows in the ashram are forced to leave their home after the death of their husband and are transferred to the ashram. The Hindu widows in the novel are symbolised as a reference of deprivation and abandonment who are from other land and ill fated because of the death of their husbands. Their livelihood is more traumatised than the death. All these rules are obligated to follow as these are structured on the basis of religious and cultural norms. The study also provides the idea on the concept of home and cultural identity. The study focuses on the struggle of the character of Chuyia who was an eight years old and was homeless after her forty- four years old husband's death. The themes that the study deals with are subjugation, patriarchy, alienation, struggles of widows and the dogma of socio- religious patriarchy. The study deals with the theories of cultural anthropology by James Clifford, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea on postcolonialism, Bhabha's work on diaspora and idea on cultural hybridity. The study can further be analysed on the basis of nationalism and freedom. A reference to modernization and transition is shown through the Gandhian movement and its repercussions depicted in the novel. So, in this context and relating this to the actual independence of women that rejects all the hegemony and stereotyped believes can be studied further.

Shaima Gul Hussain, Haider Ali and Muhammad Saqib in the article “Representation of Sexual Exploitation in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Novel Water” expresses concerns over the terrible crime of rape and also regarded it a gendered form of violence (59). The negative representation of the rape victims in the patriarchal society is criticised in the study. The study has thrown light on the ill practice of child marriage, widowhood and the struggle of women before Independence in India that has been represented by Sidhwa through the novel. Marriage plays the most important role in a girl’s life. The issue of dowry is also depicted in the novel. Chuyia’s father Somnath agreed with the marriage proposal of his eight years old daughter with a forty-four years old widower because the groom’s family had not asked for any dowry. However, the most saddening part was that after the death of Chuyia’s husband she was abandoned by her family and sent to the widow ashram to spend her whole life praying so that her husband could have a better after life. The study mentions Bapsi Sidhwa’s other works related to women’s rights and their exploitation. It also gives a detailed summary of the whole novel along with the detailed analysis of the character sketch of Kalyani and Chuyia and their struggles. The main objective in the study is to analyse the torture of women especially of the widows under the shadow of Hindu culture and belief. The widows are sexually abused, harassed and tortured for the sake of preservation of masculine culture. Sexual abuse disguised under cultural norms in the Indian Hindu Brahmin society before Independence is discussed here.

The themes that are highlighted in the study are sexual abuse, struggles of widowhood, culture, patriarchy, prostitution and dominance. Susan Brownmiller’s theory on rape is discussed here in relation to the rape of Kalyani and Chuyia in the novel. A glimpse of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory on existentialism and feminism is also presented here. However, the study can be further analysed with Beauvoir’s idea of feminism, Mahasweta Devi’s approach of women’s body as a powerful source to fight back and Spivak’s theory on subaltern feminism.

In the article “Gender versus Culture: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa’s Novel Water” by Muhammad Asif, Munazza Noreen and Muhammad Saeed Akhter deals with the stigmatised and hegemonic subjugation of the patriarchal society of women in the novel Water, by Bapsi Sidhwa (858). The stigma regarding the abandonment of widows for the sake of culture has been focused here by the authors. The article has described the pathetic condition of the widows who are forced by the patriarchal society to lead an isolated, colourless and abandoned life. In the name of norms they are compelled to live a life in poverty and to survive only by begging and praying. Sidhwa is renowned for her feminist approach in her works, but in this article the authors have concentrated more on the societal approach that establishes the permanent struggle of the Hindu widows during that period. In case of gender discrimination the injustices are found to be done with women. But in this article, through Sidhwa’s novel, the authors have depicted the discrimination done within the same gender based on marital status. Not only this, discrimination is also done on the basis of class and financial background within the same gender. The study

mentions the other works of Sidhwa and her expertise in establishing a clear feministic approach through her novels. It also describes the sufferings of the main characters named Kalyani and Chuyia in the novel. Their struggle resembles the pain tolerated by all the Hindu widows during 1930s in India. Sidhwa has not complained regarding the general Hindu norms. But she has highlighted the issue of dominance by patriarchal society in the name of preservation of culture. The illicit activities like prostitution committed in the widow ashram naming it as good luck is ironically presented in the novel. The rich upper class landlords established a hegemonic belief that their touch would reduce the sins of the widows. The study deals with the themes like cultural hegemony, patriarchal hypocrisy, subjugation, discrimination and struggle of widows. The study also focuses on the theories of Gramsci regarding cultural hegemony, C.T Mohanty's approach on feminism and Norman Fairclough's view on hegemony. Therefore, through all the analysis the study tries to showcase the various challenges that the marginalised section of the society has to face in their day-to-day life. At the same time it also presents the dilemma that the marginalised section has to go through as they lack proper information. They are bewildered whether to follow their conscience or act according to the societal norms.

Thus, the study deals with the sufferings of Hindu Brahmin widows during the 1930s. It reflects the colonised Indian society where at one side the people were struggling for freedom but on the other, they had created barriers among themselves based on gender, class and marital status. However, the study has focused on the theories of Gramsci, Mohanty and Fairclough, but Bhabha's concept of otherness can also be used here in the study. The study has discussed widow suppression, sexual abuse and many more, but can also be further explain the strength of Kalyani and Chuyia to challenge the cultural hegemony. Nevertheless, the study is a great source of creation of awareness among the women to raise voices against any injustices done to them on the basis of socio-cultural norms.

Numaira Hamid Khan in the study "An Intersectional Feminist Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's Water" mentions the representation of women in the field of literary studies is not only confined within the framework of European or American writings but also has explored the South Asian writers' approach on women identity and feminist ideologies (43). Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Water is based on Deepa Mehta's film having the same name. Sidhwa has presented an overview of the politics of the patriarchy within the same religion during the time when India was fighting against colonialism. Religion and cultural beliefs are used as a source of manipulation in order to maintain the hierarchy and hypocrisy. Power politics was the primary aspect to maintain authority and dominance. The backdrop of the novel was the period of British colonialism. So, in this context, the superiority of the western women in contrast to the colonised section is provided. Again, among the colonised section the women were categorised based on class, financial status and marital status. Sidhwa has given importance in the novel to show the power struggle and oppression of the Hindu widows during that time. The study discusses the role and importance of power in

interpersonal domain, in the domain of discipline, in the domain of culture and in the domain of structure and inequality. It gives a proper analytical view of the power structures of the characters in each of the categories. The dominance of the male irrelevant of class was seen to be prominent on women in the society. This is presented through the depiction of Chuyia's father Somnath who ignored his wife's reluctance regarding the marriage of Chuyia with an elderly person. Rather Somnath asked his wife to behave as a good Brahmin wife who never goes against the will of her husband and never argues. The study deals with the themes of power, feminism, victimisation of women, identity crisis, oppression, religion as a tool for manipulation and intersectionality. The study has highlighted the theories of C. T Mohanty on feministic and colonial discourses, Spivak's idea on subaltern and Patricia and Bilge's view on intersectionality.

Conclusion:

Hence, Sidhwa's novel *Water* is definitely a female-centric novel along with the deep-rooting patriarchal stereotyped traditions and customs. The widows in the novel are found to be forced into the world of discrimination without any fault. Before they could judge anything they are alleged as untouchable, source of bringing bad luck, misfortune and ignorable. Their widowhood leads them to struggle for survival with least dignity. Eiki Ohira in the article *Bapsi Sidhwa's Water: A Novel: The Widows in Subjugation, Revolt, and Jouissance* has perfectly stated that "Sidhwa gets to the heart of the problem of how a widow's sexuality is suppressed, or cursed, or abused for the convenience for men" (Ohira, 5). In addition, Chuyia has been portrayed by Sidhwa demanding change in the hegemony of the patriarchy. Shakuntala could realise her ultimate source of knowledge, freedom and purification of soul when Madhumati uses Chuyia in prostitution. The real meaning of freedom of soul has then been realised by Shakuntala that led her to decide to send Chuyia to Gandhi's shade. The transition of traditional women who accept the stereotyped ideologies to the modern women who spread the necessity of change and question the marginalised aspects of the society is depicted very beautifully through the characters of Kalyani and Chuyia. In relation to all these, Sidhwa has not neglected to reflect the freedom movement against the British colonialism along with the freedom of women especially the widows from the barriers of the Hindu Brahmin society. Thus, Sidhwa presented the voice of the abandoned of the society whose existence was ignored and voices were suppressed for the sake of man-made traditional superstitious and stereotyped norms and values of the patriarchal society. Therefore, the study will help to analyse the work of the diasporic writers and their contribution in the literary works based on the context of feminism, new historicism and 'otherness'.

The study brilliantly explains the politics used by the hierarchical section of the society. Religion and culture are the easy way of approach to manipulate the laymen in order to maintain the oppression of the oppressors. The study indeed ironically represented the period of India when the people were fighting against colonialism but were maintaining the

same oppression within the mselves for the sake of power. The aspect of inter sectionality is used clearly in the study while analysing the feminist point-of view.

End note:

The article is original and has neither been published nor submitted elsewhere. The authors received no funding for the preparation of the article; the writers also didn't use chat /GPT. Abhinanda Das wrote the article in consultation with Chandrima Sen and Pradip Kumar Patra. Patra designed the entire paper and guided Das for the whole lay-out. Patra also supported her theoretically. He gave the final shape to it. Chandrima Sen took care of language and MLA style.

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