

Victimization of Women: With particular reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's novels

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ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa is arguably Pakistan's finest internationally acclaimed English writer who has given distinct identity to Pakistani English fiction. It is mostly viewed with relevance to the creative representations of the traumatic incident of India's partition in 1947 in the writings of those first generation writers who paid attention 'to the human dimensions of this major historical event and to the huge human cost it entailed'. She could emotionally relate to the plight of those who suffered loss because as a child she had experienced the collective life-style of common Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in Lahore. No anthology on the English literary traditions in India and Pakistan, or for that matter on Commonwealth or World English literature can, therefore, claim to be quintessential if it overlooks discussions on Sidhwa works.

Sidhwa's novel "Water" can be seen as a victimization of women to break through the constraints of patriarchal society and discover themselves as human beings. They are shown as the victims of male world and the role that a traditional society forces on them. Sidhwa's fiction has in its backdrop of the socio-political condition of 1936 India, with Gandhi's freedom movement and his making people conscious of their equality, liberation against ignorance, superstitions and backwardness. It also reveals the inner consciousness of mind and feelings of women's hearts in relation to the outer world. A deeper insight into her women characters; who live in a widow ashram, reveals them not as different characters with lives interwoven, rather as five stages of woman's life in a circle that undergoes repression of emotions and desires of various degrees. Sidhwa has highlighted the victimization of women through two novels "The Pakistani Bride" and "Water".

Keywords: internationally acclaimed, identity, Pakistani fiction, topography and ethos, oppression of women, psychological, tribal society, traumatic life, victimization of women

Introduction:

Bapsi Sidhwa, born in Karachi and grown up in Lahore, Pakistan, has been widely celebrated as the finest novelist produced by her country. She now lives in Houston Texas but she frequently visits to the Indian subcontinent. She is graduated from Kinnaird College for women, Lahore and began writing in her twenties after birth of two children. Sidhwa has received several honours and awards. She is also recipient of the national award for English literature by the Pakistan academy of letter in 1991 and the putrasbokhari award for literature for 1992. Her most important and unforgettable novels include; "The Crow Eaters" (1980), "The Pakistani Bride" (1983), "Ice candy Man" (1988), "An American Brat" (1994), and "Water" (2006). Literature is the mirror of the contemporary society. Themes in fictional writings find their origin in the experiences and aspirations of the novelists. There exist innumerable potential themes in Indian fiction as are stars in the galaxy. Theme is essentially the subject of a piece of writing which means that theme is the subject matter of any literary work. The themes can be arbitrary or concrete. The theme of any novel provides meaning to the work or can be called the lesson or moral of the novel. It's the meaning running under the story's surface. It is significant to note that themes must be related to understanding of human conditions, which might include psychological, political, sociological aspects. The relevance of one theme from the other cannot be judged because its significance depends on the contemporary situation of the society, the current trends and readers' interpretation and perception.

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.

Various social, cultural, political and psychological factors have influenced our novelists in shaping their manuscripts. They narrate their experiences with truth and boldness. At the same time they demand equality in the male dominated society. They just don't criticize the systems but are fair enough to understand the male point of view a well. They truly expose some of the hypocrisies and irrationalities of patriarchy. Both our novelists hemmed in by the patriarchal structure of language and culture. There are various characters in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Arundhati Roy who want to live within the structure and some other who want to break the unsaid laws and bear the consequences of their actions. They in vibrant language give the glimpses of life of women in particular and their community and nation in general. The novels written by Bapsi Sidhwa and Arundhati Roy are extensively influenced by the various

psychological factors evidently reflected in their feminist writings. The image of women in the Indian sub-continent has undergone a change in the last few decades. This change is well exhibited in the generations of the women in the novels of Sidhwa and Roy. From the sacrificing Sita or Savitri, women have taken a modern avatar in the recent time and this modern woman is well aware of her rights and aspirations.

Objectives:

The objective and purpose of this paper is to attract the attention of the readers and lovers of literature towards the miserable situation of women in the society. The research scholar further tells that the family is completely incomplete without women but they are not given proper respect and regards by us. We forget that in our day –to –day life they are equal to men and they always help and care us to lead a happy and peaceful life. The present attempt is a pleasant gift to the readers and the readers of the world who think that women are not inferior to men and their contributions are also very important for all-round development of the nation.

The Practice of Purdah:

The gender segregation in Pakistan means that women and men can lead almost separate lives. This varies with region and class, but the general rule is that men and women live in separate quarters of the house, eat separately and spend as little time together as possible. It is the middle class that practices segregation most vigorously.

Women, who are under the control and protection of the men in their families, do still move outside the house. Punjabi married women in the novel hide themselves in burkhas when they go out to visit friends or go shopping. They are often accompanied by a male relative or a servant, or by a group of other women. Younger women, who are not yet married, but who have reached puberty, wear a shawl to cover their heads and, when necessary, their faces and upper bodies. The girls are also accompanied by friends or family. Normally, none of the women in the novel go far on their own: a short walk to a close neighbour is the farthest they may go alone. Women are not supposed to talk to male strangers, or find themselves in a place where they have no specific business. When talking to elders or to men outside the very closest family, the women cover their heads and faces with a veil or shawl to show modesty and protect themselves from the male gaze.

The practice of purdah means that women and men socialize to a very limited extent in the novel. In Western countries, women and men are more used to socialize and relate to strangers, friends and colleagues of the opposite sex.

The men were not overtly sexual: rather she sensed their sexual tension. Their desire for her carried a natural tenderness that was reflected in their behaviour to all women. They showed a surprisingly gentle consideration of her vulnerabilities, of the differences between the sexes that made her feel complete – and completed the men. (176-177)

Some men, like the men Carol has met, know how to control themselves and channel their energies romantically. The sophisticated circles in which she moves have so far only shown Carol these men. The segregation of the sexes can be said to reinforce itself in a circular manner. When there is little contact between the sexes, men and women do not learn how to deal with each other in a non-sexual manner. The seclusion of women prevents men from learning how to socialize with female strangers in a friendly way. This increases the danger of going outdoors, since some men will be prone to staring at or sexually harassing a woman who is walking alone. This again gives reality to the claim that it is too dangerous for women to go out alone, and the cycle starts over again.

Prostitution and the Virgin/Whore View of Woman: “Ice Candy Man” – Aaya.

“The pungent whiff of urine from back-alleys blends with the spicy smells of HiraMandi – of glossy green leaves, rose petals, and ochre marigolds. Silver braid hems blue dancing skirts; tight satin folds of the chooridarpyjama reveal rounded calves; girls shimmer in silk, georgette, and tinsel-glittering satin. Qasim, like a sperm swimming, aglow with virility up to the tips of the hair on his knuckles, feels engulfed in this female street”. (63)

As the evening goes by and the dancing girl starts her strip tease, the narrator lessens the focus on her talents in singing, dancing and conversation and the objectification of her body becomes more extreme. The narrator says ironically:

To Qasim enjoying the atmosphere and the girls in HiraMandi is a separate issue from the protection he is showing his own daughter. The youngest girls in HiraMandi are not much older than Zaitoon, who is at this point around twelve, but this does not seem to bother him. The narrative link between the dancing girl and

Zaitoon is made in the three-line quick transition the narrator makes between HiraMandi and Qasim's home. The men are sent home from the brothel in taxis early in the morning, and when Zaitoon finds her father sleeping drunkenly on the bed, she is frightened and runs to the neighbour and surrogate mother Miriam. The close approximation of Qasim in the brothel and Qasim as a father adds perspective to his double standard view of women. The fact that Shahnaz and Zaitoon are mentioned so close to each other in the text also works as a warning that, in this society, the road from being an innocent girl to being a 'fallen woman' may not be so long.

The Female Body as a Site for Sex and Reproduction:

The preoccupation that Qasim has with prostitution and the bodies of dancing girls can be explained with his state of sexual frustration, not having remarried after he lost his wife at the age of thirty-four. To Zaitoon, the city is not female, but her female world is the zenana, the women's quarters of the house. The narrator describes Zaitoon's experience of visiting the homes of the other families in their community. The zenana is depicted as one, or many, female bodies: 'Entering their dwellings was like stepping into gigantic wombs; the fecund, fetid world of mothers and babies' (55). The description of the zenana corresponds to Qasim's impression of HiraMandi in that it is compared to the female reproductive organs. The street of HiraMandi is the vagina up which Qasim imagines himself swimming like a sperm. In Zaitoon's impression of the zenana, the women's rooms are wombs in which babies grow. The zenana is described as dirty, claustrophobic and smelly, and, in contrast to Qasim's HiraMandi, there are no bells, flowers or glittering fabrics in sight:

Words like 'dim maze', 'odours', 'interminable' and 'unventilated' clearly shows what the narrator thinks of the zenana. In contrast to the claustrophobic and dirty atmosphere of the rooms is the hospitality of the women, the 'inmates' living in the zenana like in a prison.

Puberty, the Female World and Marriage:

This is the time when Zaitoon's own body starts changing. From this point in the novel, Zaitoon becomes the protagonist, later to be joined by Carol, and Qasim takes a place in the background. "You are now a woman. Don't play with boys – and don't allow any man to touch you. This is why I wear a burkha..." (55). She also refuses to tell Zaitoon 'how babies come' (55) with the excuse that she herself is childless, and thus cannot know how it happens. Later in the novel, after Zaitoon has been raped, a touchingly innocent memory from her puberty comes back to her:

"Miriam has for some time been trying to get Qasim started with arranging Zaitoon's marriage. To her mind, Zaitoon will "be safe only at her mother-in-law's... A girl is never too young to marry..." Now she convinces Qasim that Zaitoon should be taken out of school, so that she can stay at home and learn how to take care of the house in preparation for her marriage. Interestingly, it is a woman who most strongly reinforces the traditional values of Pakistani society and who is the most eager to establish Zaitoon as a wife and mother. Miriam, who has not had any education, does not see the value for a woman in knowing how to read and write. From experience, she knows that a woman needs to be good at performing domestic tasks. She also reinforces the view of women as weak, with stating the traditional view that Zaitoon is only safe as a wife in her future in-laws' house.

The focus on the female body as seen from the outside is very strong in the first half of the Pakistani Bride, with prostitution as the central theme. The looks resting on Zaitoon and Carol, both the wanted and unwanted ones, in the second half are outweighed by the deep focus on female sexuality in this part of the novel. Both the women's feelings about their own sexual and sensual feelings, as well as their experiences of sex are explored in this half.

Findings and Suggestions:

The need of the women empowerment in the society is very necessary because women are exploited, humiliated, oppressed and violated by their male partners so to defend the girls and women from the mentally and sexually harassment, sexually assault and also domestic violence in the male dominated society, we have to focus for women empowerment in our society. They should be given proper respect and support in our society. The study suggests us to improve the level and status of women in this society. Atwood raises her voice in the favor of women to give them full support and courage to get equality in the society between men and women. Women and girls should be given proper education and guidance for their further future so they can also get jobs in the society and they can earn money to make them economically independent. When they will be given proper guidance and support only then we can make a society where men and women can be classified as equal citizen in our society. When they will get job then they will

become independent in economical matter and they do not need to depend for economic matter to their male counter parts.

The present study focuses to make women free so they can have power to take decisions of their life without asking anyone. Women can take the decisions of their own life by without taking permission of anyone and Atwood also focuses the main point about to give women empowerment and they should not be asked for the decision of their own life. We see in the novels of Margaret Atwood that all the protagonists survive in their condition and they try to escape from the society because they feel their life as a victim of the society and they never get freedom from their male counterparts. That is the reason all the protagonists need to take some strict and unbelievable decision in their life after getting frustration in their life. They try to hide their true identity in the society and try to escape in the real world because there they face exploitation and humiliation in the society. Characters survive in their bad condition and try to make them away from the situation but when they do not get success to avoid their problems after then they decide to take some strict decision of their life and then they do not think about their male partners or the society. They make a distance from the society and escape from the reality of their life and they try to live in the fantasy world where no one can stop them for doing anything in their personal life.

Summing Up:

To sum up; the research scholar comes to the point that Bapsi Sidhwa is a great writer and she always tries to solve the problems of women in the society. In the twenty-first Century, women writers' works are considered as a powerful medium, which changes the social life of women. It makes to proceed further research in her novels. Sidhwa could have picked any historical period or geographical setting, including her own, and she would have found more than enough material about which to write. Like many Indian and Pakistani writers, Sidhwa chose the period before and after Partition for both *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*. The novels are set in different neighbourhoods of the large city Lahore, but also in tribal areas in the mountains and in Punjabi villages – perhaps to be able to show several aspects of the patriarchal society. The novels aim to show the readers how women were treated and how women suffered in those times. The situation for women, and especially for rural women, had, however, not changed much in the years that lie between the action of the novels and the time of writing. The choice of historical settings for her novels may be deliberate: Perhaps it was easier for Sidhwa to criticise the conditions of women's lives when she told her stories from a historical perspective.

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