

## A Study on the Struggle of Women Survival in the Select Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa

<sup>1</sup>D. Velvizhi, <sup>2</sup>Dr. P. Santhosh,

*1 Ph.D.-Research Scholar, Department of English, VELS University, (VISTAS), Pallavaram, Chennai-117*

*2 Assistant Professor, Department of English, VELS University, (VISTAS), Pallavaram, Chennai-117*

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### ABSTRACT

*Bapsi Sidhwa is arguably Pakistan's most acclaimed internationally acclaimed English writer, giving Pakistani English fiction a distinct identity. It is mostly associated with 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 the enormous human cost it entailed." She could empathize with those who had lost loved ones because she had witnessed the collective life of common Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in Lahore as a child. No anthology on the English literary traditions of India and Pakistan, or on Commonwealth or World English literature, can thus claim to be definitive if it ignores discussions of Sidhwa works. This current study is about gaining a deeper understanding of her women characters, which live in a widow ashram, revealing them not as separate characters with intertwined lives, but as five stages of a woman's life in a circle that undergoes repression of emotions and desires to varying degrees. Sidhwa's two novels, "The Pakistani Bride" and "Water," both highlight women's victimization.*

**Keywords:** identity for survival, Pakistani fiction, topography and ethos, oppression of women, psychological, tribal society, traumatic life, victimization of women

### INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa, who was born in Karachi and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, has been widely acclaimed as the country's best novelist. She now resides in Houston, Texas, but she travels frequently to the Indian subcontinent. She graduated from Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore and began writing in her twenties, following the birth of her two children. Sidhwa has received numerous accolades and awards. She also received the Pakistan Academy of Letters' national award for English literature in 1991, as well as the Putrasbokhari Award for Literature in 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. Themes in fictional writings are derived from the novelists' experiences and aspirations. In Indian fiction, there are as many potential themes as there are stars in the galaxy. Theme is the subject matter of any literary work because it is essentially the subject of a piece of writing. The themes can be broad or specific. The theme of any novel gives the work meaning, and it can also be referred to as the novel's lesson or moral. It's the meaning that runs beneath the surface of the storey. It's worth noting that themes must be related

to a better understanding of human conditions, which could include psychological, political, and sociological aspects. The significance of one theme versus another cannot be judged because it is dependent on the current state of society, current trends, and the readers' interpretation and perception.

The social, economic, cultural, and political changes were reflected in these novels. Along with other social issues, the role of women and their struggle for self-emancipation became the most widely written theme. Our novelists' manuscripts have been shaped by a variety of social, cultural, political, and psychological factors. They tell their stories with candour and bravado. Simultaneously, they demand equality in a society dominated by men. They don't criticise the systems, but they are fair enough to appreciate the male perspective. They effectively expose patriarchy's hypocrisies and irrationalities. The patriarchal structure of language hemmed in both of our novelists. In the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa and Arundhati Roy, there are characters who want to live within the structure and others who want to break the unwritten laws and bear the consequences of their actions. They depict the lives of women in particular, as well as their community and country in general, in vibrant language. Bapsi Sidhwa's and Arundhati Roy's novels are heavily influenced by various psychological factors, which are evident in their feminist writings. In the last few decades, the Indian subcontinent's perception of women has shifted. In the novels of Sidhwa and Roy, this change is vividly depicted in the generations of women. Women have taken on a modern avatar in recent times, and this modern woman is well aware of her rights and aspirations, as opposed to the sacrificing Sita or Savitri.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The essence of this paper is to draw the attention of readers and lovers of literature to the bleak situation that women face in society. The research scholar goes on to say that a family is incomplete without women, but that we do not treat them with the respect and regard that they deserve. We forget that they are equal to men in our daily lives and that they always help and care for us so that we can live a happy and peaceful life. The current effort is a pleasant gift to the readers and readers around the world who believe that women are not inferior to men and that their contributions are equally important to the nation's overall development.

## **THE PRACTICE OF SOCIALISM**

In Pakistan, gender segregation means that men and women can live almost separate lives. Men and women live in separate quarters of the house, eat separately, and spend as little time together as possible. This varies by region and social 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. Segregation is most vigorously practised by the middle class.

Women who are under the control and protection of their husbands and fathers continue to leave the house. When the Punjabi married women in the novel go out to visit friends or go shopping, they wear burkhas. They are frequently joined by a male relative or servant, as well as a group of other women. Younger women who have not yet married but have reached puberty wear a shawl to cover their heads, faces, and upper bodies when necessary. Friends or family members accompany the girls.

Normally, none of the women in the novel go very far on their own: a short walk to a nearby neighbor is the most they can go. Women are not supposed to talk to strangers, especially men, or be in places where they have no business. Women cover their heads and faces with a veil or shawl when speaking to elders or men outside their immediate family to show modesty and protect themselves from male gaze.

Purdah dictates that women and men interact only to a limited extent in the novel. Women and men in Western countries are more accustomed to socialising with strangers, friends, and coworkers of the opposite gender.

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 behavior 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 women, like the men Carol has met, have mastered the art of self-control and romantic channelling. Carol has only been shown these men by the sophisticated circles in which she moves. The gender segregation can be said to reinforce itself in a circular fashion. Men and women do not learn how to deal with each other in a non-sexual manner when there is little contact between the sexes. Men are unable to learn how to socialise with female strangers in a friendly manner due to women's seclusion. This increases the risk of going outside, as some men are more likely to stare at or sexually harass a woman walking alone. The claim that it is too dangerous for women to go out alone is validated once more, and the cycle continues.

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, raised 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 progresses and the dancing girl begins her strip tease, the narrator shifts her focus away from her singing, dancing, and conversational abilities and toward her body's objectification. Ironically, the narrator says: 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 three-line quick transition the narrator makes between HiraMandi and Qasim's home establishes the narrative link between the dancing girl and Zaitoon. The men are driven home from the brothel in taxis early in the morning, and Zaitoon is terrified when she discovers her father sleeping drunkenly on the bed. She runs to her neighbour and surrogate mother Miriam for help. The parallel between Qasim in the brothel and Qasim as a father gives context to his double standard attitude toward women. The fact that Shahnaz and Zaitoon are mentioned so close to each other in the text also serves as a warning that the path from innocent girl to "fallen woman" in this society may not be as long as it appears.

The Female Body as a Site for Sex and Reproduction: Qasim's obsession with prostitution and the bodies of dancing girls can be explained by his sexual frustration as a result of his failure to remarry after his wife died at the age of thirty-four. Zaitoon's female world is the zenana, or women's quarters of the house, rather than the city. Zaitoon's experience of visiting the homes of other families in their community is described by the narrator. 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) In that it is compared to female reproductive organs, the description of the zenana corresponds to Qasim's impression of HiraMandi. The vagina up which Qasim imagines himself swimming like a sperm is HiraMandi Street. The women's rooms, according to Zaitoon's interpretation of the zenana, are wombs where babies grow. The zenana is described as filthy, claustrophobic, and smelly, with no bells, flowers, or glittering fabrics in sight, in contrast to Qasim's HiraMandi:

Words like "dim maze," "odours," "interminable and "unventilated" reveal the narrator's feelings about the zenana. The hospitality of the women, the 'inmates' living in the zenana like in a prison, contrasts with the claustrophobic and filthy atmosphere of the rooms. Puberty, the Female World, and Marriage: Zaitoon's body begins to change at this point. Zaitoon takes over as the protagonist at this point in the novel, later joined by Carol, and Qasim fades into 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. Surprisingly, it is a woman who most strongly promotes Pakistani society's traditional values and is most eager to establish Zaitoon as a wife and mother. Miriam, who has never received an education, does not believe that knowing how to read and write is important for a woman. She knows from personal experience that a woman must be capable of performing domestic duties. She also reinforces the stereotype of women as weak by stating that Zaitoon will only be safe as a wife in her future in-laws' home.

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

## **FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The need for women empowerment in society is critical because women are exploited, humiliated, oppressed, and violated by their male partners. In order to protect girls and women from mental and sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence in a male-dominated society, we

must prioritise women empowerment. In our society, they should be treated with dignity and support. The study recommends that we raise the status and status of women in our society. Atwood raises her voice in support of women, pledging her full support and courage in the fight for gender equality in society. Women and girls should receive proper education and guidance for their future careers so that they can work in society and earn money, allowing them to become economically self-sufficient. Only by providing them with proper guidance and support will we be able to create a society in which men and women are treated equally as citizens. When they get a job, they will become economically self-sufficient and no longer need to rely on their male counterparts for financial support.

The current study aims to liberate women so that they can make life decisions without consulting anyone. Women can make their own life decisions without asking anyone's permission, and Atwood also emphasises the importance of giving women empowerment and the fact that they should not be asked to make their own life decisions. We see in Margaret Atwood's novels that all of the protagonists survive in their circumstances and attempt to flee society because they perceive themselves as victims of society and never receive freedom from their male counterparts. As a result, after experiencing frustration, all of the protagonists must make a firm and unbelievable decision in their lives. They try to conceal their true identity in society and flee to the real world because they are subjected to exploitation and humiliation there. Characters survive in their bad situations and try to get out of them, but when they are unable to get out of them, they decide to make a life-changing decision and stop caring about their male partners or society. They distance themselves from society and try to escape the reality of their lives by living in a fantasy world where no one can stop them from doing whatever they want in their personal lives.

## **SUMMING UP**

To summarise, the research scholar concludes that Bapsi Sidhwa is a great writer who strives to solve the problems that women face in society. Women's writings are regarded as a powerful medium in the twenty-first century, changing women's social lives. It's a good idea to do some preliminary research before diving into her novels. Sidhwa could have written about any historical period or geographical setting, including her own, and she would have found plenty to write about. For both *The Pakistani Bride* and *Cracking India*, Sidhwa chose the period before and after Partition, as did many other Indian and Pakistani writers. The novels are set in various areas of the large city of Lahore, as well as tribal areas in the mountains and Punjabi villages, possibly to depict various aspects of patriarchal society. The novels are intended to demonstrate to readers how women were treated and suffered during those times. However, in the years between the action of the novels and the time of writing, the situation for women, particularly rural women, had not changed significantly. It's possible that Sidhwa's choice of historical settings for her novels was deliberate: telling her stories from a historical perspective made it easier for her to criticise the conditions of women's lives.

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