

HOME IN EXILE: THE PRESENCE OF WIDOWS IN THE WATER BY BAPSI SIDHWA

Chitra Bajpai

Designation - Senior Research Fellow

Department - Department of English and Modern European Languages

University - University of Lucknow

chitra.bajpai25@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The novel "Water," produced in 2006, sheds attention on the controversial topics of patriarchy, widowhood, and child prostitution in pre-partition India. This study examines the process of widows adapting to life in Ashram, an often frequented place along their migratory paths. The primary focal character in the literary work Water, Chuyia, serves as an illustration of an immigrant who experiences a compulsion to relinquish all aspects associated with their own cultural background and embrace the prevailing societal norms within the host community. The author gives a platform to marginalised women, particularly those who have lost their husbands, and illustrates the stigmatisation and severe mistreatment experienced by these women, resulting in their feelings of isolation. In order to examine the identity crisis experienced by the diasporic character in the novel Water, a comprehensive analysis of the caste systems within the political and historical contexts will be provided. This analysis aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics inherent in male-dominated heteronormative discourses, which perpetuate male dominance and establish female dominance as an accepted cultural norm. I argue that the homemaking activities of widows involve an ongoing and dynamic process that involves constant consideration of their own performance and modifications, as opposed to being a fixed and unchanging reproduction of their previous homes. The utilisation of the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity development serves as a foundation for the endorsement of contemporary conceptions pertaining to the diasporic home. This study presents a foundational analytical method for examining widows

within the context of immigrant narratives. It offers a fresh perspective that challenges simplistic connections between domesticity and established social identities.

Keywords- *The focal points of this discourse encompass the concepts of alienation, diaspora, displacement, home, and Patriarchy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa's birthplace was India before the occurrence of the split. After the establishment of Pakistan as an independent nation, she embarked on her educational pursuits within the country before eventually moving to Houston, Texas. The novel portrays a group of widows originating from many parts of India, who are obligated by Hindu law to stay in an ashram. These institutions were established within a patriarchal cultural context, aiming to provide widows with a place of shelter and protection, as well as an opportunity for them to seek forgiveness through acts of penance. These developments occurred against the backdrop of Gandhi's Freedom Movement. The widows who reside in the ashram face notable difficulties and confront social marginalisation, suggesting a persistent condition of adversity. Research has established a significant correlation between the phenomenon of marginalisation and social isolation, and the subjective sensation of loneliness as well as the occurrence of homelessness. The occurrence of widows encountering feelings of isolation can be ascribed to a multitude of variables, encompassing the caste system, cultural hierarchy, and extraneous circumstances.

The novel *Water*, authored by Bapsi Sidhwa in 2006, is set in the 1930s and revolves around the protagonist Chuyia, an eight-year-old widow who is obligated to live in an ashram. Anita Sharma's academic research, titled "Victimisation of Women: With Particular Reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels," delves at the depiction of women as victims in traditional societies, with a specific emphasis on the impact of men and patriarchal caste systems. Unacknowledged manifestations of structural violence are intricately linked to occurrences of social inequity, resulting in diverse consequences for widows in accordance with prevailing

cultural norms and prohibitions. The aforementioned occurrence highlights the prevalence of patriarchal gender standards, political power systems, and cultural hierarchies. The book chronicles the experiences of widows within the context of Indian society, providing a thoughtful analysis of various approaches employed to contest established gender stereotypes.

The caste system in India develops a hierarchical framework within the society. In numerous dimensions, those affiliated with higher castes likely to encounter a superior quality of life in comparison to individuals from lower castes. The central focus pertains to the proclivity of upper castes to enforce limitations on women and widows. According to Hindu patriarchal cultural standards, it is usually believed that widows refrain from adorning themselves with vibrant attire. The preservation of individual autonomy and the maintenance of one's pre-ashram lifestyle are seen to be of paramount significance. The residence need to elicit a feeling of "domesticity."

II. INDIAN DIASPORA

The term "Indian diaspora" refers to persons who cross international borders or relocate inside different states and territories of India (2022, p. 222). There is a contention that individuals, despite being inside the boundaries of a particular nation, frequently travel from their accustomed surroundings, migrate to various states and territories, and experience a sensation of unfamiliarity. Chuyia, along with other widows originating from various states and regions, is mandated to reside in a widow's ashram, where they are required to spend the rest of their lives as a means of atonement (p. 222). Widows can be regarded as fulfilling Clifford's diaspora definition, as they experience internal displacement from one geographic region to another. As to James Clifford, the concept of "diaspora" involves not only the physical act of migrating to a foreign land but also encompasses the idea of transitioning from one region to another inside one's own nation, as long as it engenders a sense of cultural dislocation. Clifford's conceptualization incorporates a range of experiences, including but not limited to shared and ongoing dislocation, surviving adversity, adapting to novel conditions, and engaging in acts of resistance. The phenomenon of alienation arises from the interplay of yearning,

remembrance, and the act of disidentifying oneself. As Borgohain and Ammari assert in their publication titled "Between the Homeland and Diaspora," those who reside in their place of origin are members of ethnic minority groups and coexist with the prevailing culture, encountering difficulties in the periphery regions of the nation.

Widows serve as symbolic representations of both the state of deprivation and a deep yearning for an alternate place of belonging. Despite being in a state of exile, individuals possess an inherent longing to return to their original place of residence. In contrast to the idea put forth by Paul Gilroy in his article titled "Diaspora," Borgohain and Ammari (2022) suggest that the diaspora is not primarily defined by biographical links spanning many geographical areas but rather by the manifestation and articulation of divergences. Safran (1991) posits that the notion of diaspora has experienced substantial metamorphosis. The concept of "ghettoization," which pertains to the spatial confinement of persons inside limited urban surroundings, bears resemblance to the idea of "diasporic communities." The latter serves as a metaphorical depiction of immigrants, refugees, and marginalised racial and ethnic groups. As per the author's claim, the concept of "diaspora" comprises ethnic or religious communities that have established their presence in foreign territories.

The manifestations of diaspora can be characterised by emotions such as rejection, estrangement, and loneliness. In her 2015 publication entitled "Transnational Locality: Diasporas and Indentured South Asians," Movindri Reddy posits the notion that diasporas possess a dual positioning as both insiders and outsiders inside the framework of the nation-state. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are those who undergo relocation within the geographical confines of their own country, as opposed to crossing international frontiers. The persons in issue identify themselves as Indians; nonetheless, they encounter segregation from other ethnic groups. Motivated by apprehensions over racial tensions, religious disputes, political instability, and meddling in their own neighbourhood, individuals opt to disengage from these conditions. The displacement and enslavement of widows can be attributed to the enforcement of patriarchal norms when they traverse international borders. According to Clifford (1994), the phenomenon of displacement can be divided into two discrete phases: the

physical stage and the psychological stage. Due to the occurrence of physical or geographical displacement, widows are required to undertake the relocation process to a foreign nation, thereby resulting in psychological isolation. Diasporic migrants manifest a longing to establish Ashram as their enduring abode, however, they confront notable obstacles attributable to the stringent restrictions enacted by Ashram. As stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002), the concept of displacement encompasses the loss of an authentic and fluid sense of self due to a range of factors, including migration, coerced labour, transportation, or the intentional or unintentional marginalisation of indigenous individuals and cultures by a purportedly superior framework. Individuals face challenges in developing a solid and secure sense of belonging due to their vulnerability inside their indigenous territory.

III. THE CONCEPT OF "HOME"

The subject of cultural identification and study on "homes" has continually examined various significant issues since its inception. The notion of home comprises more than just a tangible living space where an individual resides. It also bears considerable importance in terms of one's identity and personality, a subject that is often examined by authors and critics. India is recognised as the geographical origin of widows, who hold a substantial historical recollection. The notion of "home" in India serves to emphasise its inherent duality, functioning as a space that simultaneously embodies resistance and confinement, including both tangible and intangible aspects. Within the context of India, the term "home" carries various connotations. By whom is the infrastructure for space exploration and residential housing constructed?

A comprehensive understanding of the influence of the notion of "home" on Indian society necessitates an examination of the multifaceted elements that contribute to its conceptualisation. The concept of "home" in the context of diaspora is commonly understood as a focal point of pastoral stability, communal ties, and emotional solace. However, this notion has been subject to critical examination and scrutiny. The conventional understanding of a home often encompasses the tangible aspects of a residential building, yet there is a strong sentiment among folks to perceive it as an emotional encounter. The sense of "home" as a tangible dwelling

holds deep psychological importance that surpasses conventional associations with comfort and security. This particular site serves as the setting for domestic conduct. The attributes of a dwelling contribute to the reinforcement and expression of social identity. The notion of a diasporic home does not inevitably emerge from an organic experience or identity.

The Water Diasporic home is subject to the influence of patriarchal social standards. The migratory options accessible to widows are limited by conventional Hindu patriarchal practices, thereby curtailing their decision-making abilities with regard to household management. The social and psychological orientation of the house exhibits similarities to the coping mechanisms and ways of life observed among widows residing in ashrams. The act of homemaking is fundamentally influenced by historical events, hence imposing limitations on the degree to which it may be subjectively characterised. The phenomenon of diasporic homemaking is shaped by the combined experiences and collaborative efforts of individuals within a diaspora community, which in turn are influenced by social pressures and the presence of guilt. The phenomenon of widows relocating from their established dwellings poses a disruption to the accustomed home regimen and presents difficulties in acclimating to their novel social surroundings.

Homi Bhabha's scholarly publication titled "The World and the Home" (1992) utilises Sigmund Freud's theoretical framework of the "uncanny" or "unheimlich" to argue that the concept of feeling "unhomely" signifies a constrained understanding of the progressively ambiguous boundary between the external realm and the domestic domain. Freud's theoretical construct of the "uncanny" or "unhomely" refers to the experience of feeling alienated when confronted with something that is both familiar and threatening within the individual's personal domain. This phenomenon emerges as a consequence of the psychological mechanism of suppression. In the article "The 'Home' in Homeland" by Thembisa Waetjen (1999), the author discusses the notion of "unhomeliness" as a state of exile or disconnection from a sense of belonging, rather than mere physical homelessness. Tyson (2014) asserts that individuals who have been subjected to colonisation undergo a profound sensation of displacement and disintegration, resulting in a pervasive feeling of being unhomely. The

displacement encountered by individuals results in a blurring of the boundaries between the domestic and exterior domains, hence giving rise to a multifaceted intertwining of the private and public spheres. The interweaving of many elements results in a fragmented and disorienting viewpoint, as evidenced by the utilisation of domestic spaces as locations for historical incursions. The film *Water* explores the profound impact of displacement on the entire state of well-being. Moreover, the widows residing in the ashram as well as those living in their own households undergo a significant influence on their perception of inclusion as a result of this forced relocation.

In the year 1938, India experienced the dominance of colonial rule during the period of Gandhi's ascendancy. The literary work being examined explores the experiences of Hindu widows within the framework of traditional Indian society. Sidhwa's narrative offers a satirical critique of the prevailing societal norms that govern the treatment of women, with a particular focus on widows. Additionally, it challenges the deeply rooted patriarchal structures within India's religious milieu. According to Borgohain (2020), women have been subjected to subjugation under patriarchal systems in different countries, a phenomenon that has endured over time. The voices of women frequently encounter neglect, insult, interruption, and verbal aggression.

The concept of patriarchy pertains to a societal structure that perpetuates male supremacy. The organisational structure being discussed in this context encompasses a comprehensive range of elements related to decision-making and relationships within the realms of society, politics, economy, and culture. More specifically, it focuses on aspects that are relevant to men or the male perspective. The existing cultural norms establish a hierarchical structure in which males are granted authority and dominion over multiple spheres, encompassing the realms of economy, politics, society, and culture. Consequently, this perpetuates the concept of female reliance on males. The institution of the family holds significant significance and plays a vital role as a socialising agent within the patriarchal framework of Indian society. In societies adhering to traditional patriarchal norms, it is widely accepted that men possess authority and control over their wives and children, assuming the responsibilities associated with the roles of fathers or husbands. Women, conversely, exhibit

respect towards the institution of marriage as a result of its substantial position within the societal structure. The persistent marginalisation and segregation of women leads to their absence from decision-making processes.

IV. CHUHIYA'S DIASPORIC HOME WITHIN HER HOMELAND

The novel depicts the trials faced by widows who endure displacement, alienation, and confrontations, as they navigate, negotiate, and resist the dominance and adversity they encounter in their daily lives. In Hindu society, widows frequently experience social ostracization as a result of the prevailing belief that they bear responsibility for their husband's demise. The desires of individuals are often overlooked by society. In the absence of male spouses, they evoke emotions characterised by a sense of unease and distress. Based on patriarchal ideology, the state of widowhood, commonly referred to as "Ashram," is perceived as a phase wherein widows are encouraged to form fresh social connections. According to Benedict Anderson, the emergence of modern imagined communities might be ascribed to a phenomenon he refers to as the "New Diaspora" (1991). Diasporic individuals who choose to reside in their country of origin encounter marginalisation as a consequence of their gender, leading to their social exclusion and being perceived as deviating from established societal norms. This study aims to examine the impact of Hindu religious discourse on the practise of widowhood, specifically exploring how it compels widows to partake in acts of self-deprivation.

The term "Chuyia" in the Hindi language denotes a female child belonging to the Brahmin caste and is typically six years of age. She participates in the activity of collecting gooseberries and litchis in conjunction with her two male siblings. The individual's carefree lifestyle undergoes a significant change when her father, identified as Somnath, a Hindu priest, orchestrates her union with Hira Lal, a 44-year-old widowed Brahmin. Sidhwa's work demonstrates the manner in which Indian patriarchal figures, who symbolise the families of both the bride and groom, organise marriages as contractual arrangements within the societal structure. Social conventions involve the custom of entering into marriages with older men, while concurrently imposing societal expectations on women to remain silent in response to instances of abuse. Somnath, Chuyia's father, adds, "A

girl must leave her parents' home early or bring shame to them. Her husband alone keeps her safe and happy (p. 7). As Somnath states, “a woman is recognised as a person only when she is with her husband” (p. 8), a woman's only useful work is marriage and childbirth. Brahmanical tradition reveres a lady only while she is with her spouse, says her father. She can then only become a sumangali, an auspicious woman. (p. 14). You are the daughter and husband of Brahmin priests, so you know our customs, which do not recognise wives outside of marriage, Somnath replies. Woman's role is marriage and sons. She was made for sons! Nothing else! In Hinduism, women's only role is to procreate and serve their husbands' families. It holds that girls are not entitled to parental affection and care like sons. She is devalued and cannot consent, interpret, or narrate. They prioritise their son-in-law's fortune over their daughter. Son-in-laws can be sick or elderly as long as they don't ask for dowries. Somnath states, “They don't want a dowry; they will pay for the wedding” (p. 7) to persuade his wife to marry Chuyia. Most Indian societies worry about dowry. The dowry, a large gift given to a bride's new in-laws, is a centuries-old Indian ritual. It also forces a girl's family to pay for her proper treatment (Ghosh, 2013). Luckily, Somnath doesn't have to collect his daughter's dowry. Marrying Chuyia to a non-dowry-seeker shows that “the connection with Hira Lal's family would benefit her household” (p. 21). Wealth and benefit are the sole factors in the girl's match, not her opinion or satisfaction. This shows how patriarchal societies dominate, oppress, and exploit women. Chuyia's marriage soon ends. After widowhood, women lose their social and economic integrity, which marriage provides.

A widow in Brahmin culture was no longer a daughter or daughter-in-law. She was considered a menace to society and had no place in the community (p. 24). In *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2018), Uma Chakravarti argues, “Once she [the widow] failed to be a wife, especially a barren wife, she ceased to be a person; she is neither a daughter nor a daughter-in-law. The ideal chaste wife would accompany her husband on the burial pyre, but if she did not become a sati, she was institutionally marginalised (Chakravarti, 2018). Since widows are social outcasts and dispossessed, their plights are worse. According to Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng in *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (1998), displacement includes

uprooting, in which a displaced person loses "place" due to systematic human rights violations or forced removal. They may be emotional displacement. After Hiralal's death, Chuyia is shunned and sent to a widow's ashram, away from her family, especially her mother, who advises her to stop living for them. Chuyia shouts, "Baba, Don't leave me!" Baba, stay! (p. 39), her mother-in-law "firmly shuts the door of the ashram on his daughter's fearful cries and on her life" (p. 39), illustrating gender stereotyping and patriarchy by restricting widows life choices.

The powerful social system makes her father weak, emphasising that everyone is a victim of violence: Somnath stared at her as if to imprint her image in his mind forever. Each wrinkle on his weathered face showed his anguish for her untimely widowhood and the approaching separation that plagued them. After lying his head on the stone, he cried out in half-stifled sobs, releasing the misery that appeared to have compressed his heart into something wrung-out and dry. Gayatri Spivak (1999) states that between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of a woman disintegrates into a violent shuttling that is "the third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (p. 304).

Somnath couldn't keep her at home due to Hindu patriarchal laws. A parent being so insensitive to his child to uphold patriarchal socio-religious ideology is heartbreaking. Since Chuyia is diasporic, she is doubly estranged and passively oppressed by patriarchy and religion. After moving to the ashram, Chuyia feels estranged because she wants to go home, where she feels at home: "I am not staying here. My mother will get me (p. 65). This bleak setting fuels her longing for home. Alienated and marginalised widows are socially dead. M.L. Riana argues in "Home, Homelessness, and the Artifice of Memory" (2007) that moving to a foreign country can cause dislocation. Eva Corbabacho and Sara Barrera write in "The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows" (2012) that Mohini Giri, a 2005 Nobel Peace Prize-nominated Indian veteran activist, says that widowhood is social death even among the upper castes, and widows are still accused of being responsible for

their husbands' deaths and expected to live a spiritual life with many physical and psychological restrictions. Sidhwa examines widow rites and symbolism through Chuyia.

The Hindu dominator system, which is hierarchical and authoritarian, views widows as unlucky, dirty, and a threat to society because they are linked to death. Widows can't wear the vermilion mark, bangles, necklaces, or shaving their hair to look less feminine. They wear a white sari to seem chaste and cannot socialise. According to Uma Chakravarti (2018), "the colour codes of red and white are systematically sustained in the widow opposition." White symbolises sexuality and death, whereas red symbolises fertility. (p. 76). Chuyia's teeth are on edge as the razor scratches her scalp, but she submits and feels powerless because widows have historically been enslaved by their societies, faiths, and cultures. The most painful thing is shaving your head, and Chuyia's first identity crisis is this. In Sidhwa, widows are socially ostracised in the name of religion, rituals, and customs, meaning that patriarchal tradition and religion dominate the Indian caste system and make widows "socially dead".

Chuyia befriends women from different states and cultures in the ashram, establishing a transnational environment used to explore liminal space. In his "theory of religious settlement" (Bouma, 1996, p. 7), Gary Bouma says the diaspora group wants to construct a welcoming and energising home away from home in that liminal area. In sadness, we are all sisters here, and this place is our shelter," Madhumati, the widow's ashram's gorgeous leader, tells Chuyia about widows' religious duties. According to religious texts, it is posited that a woman is regarded as an inseparable component of her spouse throughout his existence. Is the information provided accurate? Based on the author's assertion (p. 42), it can be observed that in the event of one spouse's demise, approximately fifty percent of the surviving spouses are female. This statement reflects the Hindu religious viewpoint characterised by patriarchal ideologies, wherein women and widows are metaphorically considered as "half bodies" of their husbands. Consequently, this perspective promotes the notion of women's unwavering dedication and subservience to their husbands.

The examination of water explores the objectification of widows within patriarchal Hindu society, despite their representation as symbols of absence, bereavement, and misfortune. In the ashram, Chuyia experiences a sense of displacement despite the presence of other widows, including Bua, Kalyani, Shakuntala, Kunti, and several others. The user's text is insufficient and lacks substantive content. The members of diasporic communities who live in their ancestral homeland encounter diverse manifestations of oppression, victimisation, and exploitation, leading to the silencing of their perspectives. The widows and Chuyia experience a feeling of marginalisation and underrepresentation within the society they have chosen to reside in (p. 224). The text examines how widows actively challenge patriarchal ideology and seek independence, despite experiencing rejection and oppression (p. 224). Chuyia consistently questions Shakuntala, a devout individual, about the justification for the gender-specific expectation for women to adopt renunciation, while male widowers appear to be exempt from such responsibilities. The inquiry concerns the justification behind the specific mandate for women to give up their occupations. What is the commonly used term for the dwelling place of males who have lost their spouse, she questions.

Chuyia's state of seclusion prompts inquiries regarding the societal norms and practises pertaining to religious widowhood. Chuyia's unwavering obstinacy demonstrates a profound influence on the widows' lives, leading to transformative outcomes. The book's diasporic nature presents a challenge to patriarchal norms through various mechanisms. Chuyia, while residing in the ashram, articulates her desire to leave, attributing it to her sense of not fitting in and the imminent involvement of her mother. Bapsi Sidhwa's literary works portray widows as individuals who are situated outside the cultural milieu in which they are placed. Within the ashram, individuals are bestowed with restricted privileges, predominantly concerning the observance of established norms and the enforcement of the practice of excluding widows from the premises.

The social, economic, and political frameworks in India are marked by the manifestation of patriarchal dominance and the exercise of authority over female sexuality. The experience of residing within the widow ashram is marked by significant hardship and severe economic deprivation, as widows partake in practises of

prayer, fasting, and ultimately yield to their penitential way of life. Widows experience a diminished sense of pleasure and are frequently perceived by their female counterparts as indicators or representations of noteworthy phenomena. As a result of the prevailing belief that widows are perceived as carriers of impurity and thus require ritual purification, individuals tend to exhibit a strong reluctance to interact with them. In Sidhwa's cinematic work, the characters Kalyani, Chuyia, and a married woman partake in a communal bathing ritual. Inadvertently encountering a married woman, widow Kalyani is reproached by the latter, who queries her actions by asking, "What is the intention behind your engagement in such conduct?" It is advised that widows abstain from displaying behaviours typically linked with adolescence. You have subjected me to the presence of harmful substances. The author articulates a desire to partake in the activity of bathing once again. Another scenario has a priest warn Shakuntala, "Watch it. Protect the bride from your shadow!"

Nationalist ideology promotes self-representation, which widows must deal with daily. To exalt religious purity and support patriarchal dominance of women in the name of religion. Indeed, Chuyia and the other widows gradually stop acting. They wait silently for their death to join their husbands after being humiliated for past misdeeds. Some die aged and hopeless, others unmourned. Sidhwa writes, "In temple halls, they sang for hours to earn a few pennies and a clutch of sweets, just like begging. Without aid, they'd starve (Water, p. 96).

Prostitution is being introduced to satisfy the upper classes, who think their touch will bless the widows' souls. Subeshini Moodley writes, "Religion and social rules governing Indian women's behaviour have ultimately resulted in their oppression and patriarchal control over their bodies" (2003, p. 73). So patriarchy encourages male domination in spiritual, physical, social, and personal worlds. Patriarchy's foundations in control and male supremacy make it hard to shift, resulting in gender inequity and women's marginalisation. Madhumati, a beautiful dictator, lectures the widows with the help of Gulabi, a eunuch, to maintain the ashram's repressive traditions. Madhumati, the ashram's head, has all the perks and rights widows don't, including the right to oppose religious conventions and say widows have always been marginalised. Prostitution is organised

with Gulabi to finance the colony. Invulnerable Chuyia opposes patriarchal customs and refuses to accept her fate. Cuyia kills Madhumati's favourite parrot out of love for Kalyani and resentment. Chuyia's actions show her opposition to oppressive religious criticism of widows. After the oldest widow dies, one widow asks where the cremation costs come from.

The patriarchal acclimatisation of widows like Shakuntala and Kalyani makes them more docile and widow-like. The attractive young widow Kalyani makes every man fall in love. She falls for a Gandhian revolutionist, Narayan, and a Brahmin, which threatens the ashram's dominance. A widow cannot remarry or fall in love because it challenges the ashram's sovereignty. Respecting her departed husband and being a saint is required. In the meantime, hypocritical and authoritarian Madhumati and Gulabi deliver Kalyani to rich clients. The widows' leader, Madhumati, names Kalyani the “jewel of the house” and says, “If you are happy, our clients are happy. Kalyani is forced into prostitution by Madhumati to pay ashram bills. Despite her complaints that “this is an ashram Didi, not a brothel” (p. 152), she has little options. Because of their economic weakness, widows must pay for their funerals. Kalyani refuses, but Madhumati locks her in her room and shaves her hair. Water reveals the double standard of sexual morality that encourages women to be modest while accepting the ‘men have needs’ philosophy that allows men to have premarital and extramarital affairs.

Bapsi Sidhwa reveals that a patriarchal society exploits the widow's body's sexuality. Ironically, a Hindu ashram forces widows who are isolated from society into prostitution to appease Hindu religious customs preservers. It implies that widows are victims and perpetuates their impoverished status. Kalyani jumps into the Ganges to resist patriarchal sexual oppression. She clenched her hands in prayer, then calmly strolled into the river till her short hair floated in an inky stain (p. 178). After learning Narayan's father was a Kalyani customer, she drowns. Kalyani's suicide solved all her issues and rejected religion. Kalyani realises that “cast out in the streets she would die, but to live without Narayan and return to a life of forced prostitution would be a worse kind of death” (p. 177). Heavily mistreated by Madhumati, she can no longer tolerate patriarchal oppression.

Her suicide defied patriarchal constraints on a woman's body. Thus, Water uses an identity to distance widows from society and concedes failure in the face of restrictive legislation.

Sidhwa shows widows' suffering and sexual, social, and economic exploitation through death.

Madhumati tries to force Chuyia into prostitution after Kalyani's death, claiming she might go home to her parents. Chuyia, a child, is unaware of adulthood, yet luck holds out. After seeing Gulabi abduct Chuyia in a boat, Shakuntala is furious. Gulabi runs away from Shakuntala's vengeance. Shakuntala saves Chuyia from prostitution and redeems her life by sprinkling water on her intoxicated face (p. 226). A lioness-like Shakuntala enters a crowd to meet Gandhiji at the railway station, pounding Chuyia in her lap and in pain. Finally, all of Sidhwa's characters live under diasporic situations, which typically involve animosity and non-belonging. Chuyia, Kalyani, and Shakuntala's identities suggest that upper-caste Hindu patriarchal discourses form and colonise vulnerable widows.

As new roots are developed and the colonised psyche gets displaced, alienated, isolated, and psychologically warped, “the space” becomes hybrid and mediated in the ashram's liminal space. Survival requires overcoming self-contradiction. The methods Chuyia, Shakuntala, and Kalyani communicate show how they overcome obstacles and fight for survival. After Kalyani died, Shakuntala changed. She drags Chuyia's fragile body to the train station, where Gandhi has been talking to his supporters. Her arms full of Chuyia, she pursues the Gandhian movement train and requests them to take her. Shakuntala gifts Chuyia's fragile body to Gandhi to give her a new life, escaping widowhood. Shakuntala gives Chuyia to Gandhi, giving her hope and new adventures.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, immigration and home are central to Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*. Despite their disinclination, the widows and Chuyia have moved to the ashram, changing their identities. The tale shows how widows cope with the challenges of remaking themselves. Despite adapting culturally, the widows in the narrative are still alienated and ostracised due to their ties and must comply to patriarchal standards and values to feel at home.

Chuyia and the other widows' "homemaking" gesture reveals their diasporic consciousness and their terrible experiences as widows in a patriarchal ashram. Widows in Bapsi Sidhwa aggressively assimilate and homemaker according to Indian patriarchal customs. The diasporic migrants may want homes like those built by mainstream society but are denied those rights, or they may build homes that are very different from the mainstream model due to mainstream society's restrictions. Relocating to a confined setting without freedom is difficult. It showed how the characters' identities changed as they faced the clash between Indian culture and widow patriarchy. However, Chuyia's journey from being an outcast to a liberated member of the Gandhian movement gives hope as she realises and escapes from the patriarchal societal claws around her.

VI. REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities*, revised edition.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H. (2002). *Re-placing language: textual strategies in post-colonial writing*. In Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H., *The Empire Writes Back*, London: Routledge
- Borgohain, I. A. (2021). *Breaking the Silence of Homer's Women in Pat Barker's The Silence of The Girls*. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(2), 10–16.
- Borgohain, I., & Ammari, D. (2022). *Between the Homeland and Diaspora: Identity Dilemma in Indian Literature*. *World Journal of English Language*, 12(1), p. 221.
- Bouma, G. D., & Baldock, J. (1997). *Many religions, all Australian: religious settlement, identity and cultural diversity*. Christian Research Association.
- Chakravarti, U. (2018). *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Sage Publications Pvt. Limited. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353287818>
- Clifford, J. (1994). *Diasporas*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365>
- Cohen, R and Francis M. D. (1998). *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

- Cooper Marcus, C. (1974). The house as symbol of the self. In J. Lang, C. Burnette, W. Moleski, & D. Vachon (Eds.), *Designing for Human Behaviour: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences*, 136-140. Stroudberg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross.
- Corbacho, E, and Barrera, S. (2012). *The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows*, Women's Media Center. <https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/theongoing-tragedy-of-indias-widows>
- Eisler, Riane. (2002). The dynamics of cultural and technological evolution: Domination versus Partnership. *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution*, 58 (2-3), pp. 159-174. DOI: 10.1080/02604020210684
- Ghosh, B. (2013). How Does the Legal Framework Protect Victims of Dowry and Domestic Violence in India? A Critical Review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18 (4): 409–16.
- Moodley, S. (2003). Postcolonial feminisms speaking through an 'accented' cinema: the construction of Indian women in the films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta. *Agenda*, 17(58), 66-75.
- Raina, M. L. (2007). Home, homelessness and the artifice of memory. In Singh, Manjit I. (Ed) *Contemporary Diasporic Literature: Writing History, Culture, Self*. (pp. 15-29), New Delhi, India: Pencraft International.
- Reddy, M. (2015). Transnational locality: Diasporas and indentured South Asians. *Diaspora Studies*, 8(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2014.957977>
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1.1, 83-99, from <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0004>
- Sharma, A. (2018). Victimization of Women: With particular reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 5(4), 464-468.
- Spivak, G. (1999). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Havard UP, Print.
- Tyson, Lois. (2014). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledg

Bio- Chitra Bajpai is a Fulbright Fellow and a senior research fellow at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, India. Her doctoral thesis “Water, Ecology, and Society: Reading Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement*, M.M Vinodini’s *Thirst* and, Neela Madhab Panda’s *Kadvi Hawa*” investigates the representation of water in those creative works. Her research focuses on delineating the issues of global climate change and disturbed water ecologies and their cause and effect on the Indian subcontinent.