



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

BAPSI SIDHWA'S WATER: MARRIAGE AS A MIRAGE OF HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a mirror to the society that reflects the spirit of the age. The fiction is born out of the society. It adapts the customs, traditions and culture of the society. It believes that a novel portrays an imaginative world. It also delights and improves the existing circumstances in society. Some writers give social message through their work. Some writers raise their voice against the old-age customs and traditions in the society. Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the successful English language novelists from Pakistan. She tackles the issues of feminism through her novels. Sidhwa uses her writing to propagate the issue of woman discrimination. She focuses on topics like marriage, prostitution, violence. She served society as social worker and hence she acquainted very well with the issues of contemporary women. She wrote five novels and one collection of short stories. Taking into consideration her constructive role in society, she is honored with "Sitara-i-Imtiaz" award in 1991 which is called Pakistan's highest national honour in Arts. Sidhwa is a Parsee writer who born and brought up in Pakistan. She moved to USA in 1983 and settled down in Houston, Texas. She started her carrier as lecturer of creative writing at University of Houston. The present research paper aims to highlight the important of marriage in the life of a woman. Girls dreamed about their marriage and life after marriage but in reality marriage is a mirage of hopes and wishes that can't be achieved. Sidhwa's novel *Water* depicts hallucination related to marriage.

Keywords- Marriage, Mirage, Discrimination, feminism, Hallucination

The novel *Water* (2006) describes the plight of Indian widows in Banares who largely stay at widow house. There was a Bollywood movie on this novel of the same title. Since the novel severally comments on the old Hindu customs, the film was banned by the government. "It is blamed that the film was disrespectful and offensive attack on Hindu culture and religion." (Prasad, 124) The novel *Water* discusses the most controversial issues including patriarchy, poverty, child prostitution, impact of customs and child marriage. The novel is based on an old aged traditions and customs. The novel shows the long-standing patriarchal practices that woman is marginal, subaltern and oppressed member in the society. Manusmriti, the ancient Hindu code -book portrays woman's status as subordinate. She is treated like animal or slave by man. Sidhwa being a part of the orthodox society is aware of the pains and sufferings of women existing in the patriarchal society. The predicaments of women are bound by the traditional norms and customs. Sidhwa describes her views during an interview with Francesco Mannoni, "Millions

of women in South Asia still have almost no control over their lives. They live in privation and their freedoms are restricted. I've told their stories in my.....novels.”(www. bapsisidhwa. com/downloads/QA-Water.doc.)

The novel delves around the life of women characters like Kalyani, Chuyia Madhumati and Shakuntala. Every women character has to suffer after their marriage. Death of their husbands brings widowhood and their lives turn to hell. Marriage is a social institution which provides legal authority to the bond between male-female. Generally marriage is called as beginning of new life. It is seemed to be the sole goal of girl's life. The parent and community don't see any merit in the education of the girl. In the novel Pakistani Bride the views about marriage is highlighted by Marriam. She tells her husband about Zaitoon, “Now that she's learned to read the Holy Quran, what will she do with more reading and writing- boil and drink it?.... She'll be safe only at her mother-in-law's A girl is never too young to marry.” (Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride*. 52) Woman's family elaborates her that the life after marriage will be full of happiness. Each young girl dreamed about her life partner and her cheerful life in future. Though marriage system is an important aspect of patriarchal society but it uproots the girl from her home.

The novel begins with the discussion of Chuyia's marriage with an old man Hiralal. Chuyia is the protagonist of the novel. She is only six year old innocent girl who enjoys playing with a clay doll. Sidhwa criticizes the old customs that girl child is burden and responsibility for her parent from her birth to her marriage. A father considers that she should be sent to her husband house as early as possible. She will be happy and safe only there. Somnath, the father of Chuyis decides the marriage of his daughter with a rich Brahmin man. He is satisfied that he doesn't need to pay dowry or to spend money on wedding. According to Hindu culture woman is called '*Sumangali*, an auspicious woman and *Saubhagyavati*, a fortunate woman' when she is with her husband.

On other hand Chuyia's mother Bhagya is worried about groom's old age. She said, “She is only six. I've heard Hiralal is grandfather”. (14) Somnath convinces her by saying, “Outside of marriage the wife has no recognized existence in our tradition. A woman's role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created: to have sons! That is all!. (15) This quote illustrate that girl child is used as an instrument and commodity to fulfill the purpose of family and society. An authority is given to the husband to control the destiny of wife. Sidhwa ridicules such views which paints woman as a marginal character of the society at any given point of time.

Chuyia's marriage with HiraLal brings an upheaval in her life. Marriage ceremony is organized in Brahmin way in the temple. Chuyia looks like doll in red *sari*. Hiralal applies red *sindoor* at the parting of Chuyia's hair and forehead. He offers a new sari to her which covers her head. The couple is considered officially married with all this rituals. After the marriage Chuyia lives in her parental home as she is immature. She has almost no memory about her marriage with passing years.

Author Sidhwa satires the wrong notion related to marriage. It is hammered on girl child from her childhood that she will receive all happiness at her husband's house. Then marriage becomes cheerful dream for her. Bhagya creates hallucination in front of Chuyia about her marriage. She elaborates that she will receive plenty of fish and milk at her husband's home. She even trains her daughter how to behave properly at law's house. When Chuyia speaks arrogantly she replied, “Hai, what a rude girl you've become. If you talk back to your mother-in-law like this, she will shame for mi.”(20) It is common practice in the patriarchy that a woman plays an active role in the oppression of another woman. Chuyia's mother plays the same role.

Sidhwa criticizes the issue of child marriage and its crisis on women. According to her child marriage is a curse for a woman and top of this is miss-match in their ages. Chuyia is immature girl to understand the important of marriage in her life. Generally it is said that couples are made in heaven and marriage is celebrated on the earth. But this type of ideology is not suitable for present world. Most of time marriage is conducted as a business deal. Sidhwa tackles with the same issue in her first novel *The Pakistani Bride*. Qasim's marriage with Afshan is nothing but a

business deal. Qasim's father laughed and said, "Resham Khan has promised us his daughter! The sturdy, middle-aged tribesman knew just how generous the offer was. Any girl- and he had made sure that this one was able-bodied-was worth more than the loan due." (Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride*.7) Chuiya's aunts are applying *uttan* on her skin before marriage. She said petulantly, I don't want a husband! I don't want to get married." Her aunt said firmly, "Marriage and death are not in our hands. They are in *Bhagwan's* hand." (25) Hiralal's death changes the life of Chuyia. She has to spend her life into the widow ashram expect her mother's love. She experiences widowhood even before she develops her sense of life. A woman doesn't have any role to be a widow. It is her husband's death that makes her widow

Madhumati is an antagonist of the novel *Water*. The story of Madhumati is pathetic that has a connection with her marriage life. She was born in rich family on the day of MahaShivratri. She is beautiful that is why her father called her Madhumati. She is brought up like son at her father's house. Her every wish is fulfilled by her father. She is kind hearted before widowhood. Her father arranges her marriage by offering plenty of dowries. But her marriage life ends with her husband's death. She is raped by her own brother-in-law. Her body is thrown in the ditch at jungle. She represents her anger for her dead husband by calling him 'Bastard'. It is an attempt by author that the marriage with old man brings crisis in the life of Madhumati.

Sidhwa lashes satire on the hypocritical nature of the society in which women are always treated secondary. Kalyani comes to the ashram at the child age like Chuyia. Her life story is pathetic and full of suffering. She is born in poor family having two elder sister and elder brother. She is the youngest daughter of family. Her mother leaves the world when she was a child. Her father has responsibility of three daughters on his shoulder. He wants to have relief from all his domestic responsibility. On the hand the news of Kalyani's beauty spread over villages. She received the proposal of sixty years old man from rich family. She is just six years old at the time of her marriage. Her marriage brings sadness in her life. Her husband becomes ill within a year and doesn't come out of from illness. The corpse is taken at Rawlpur *Ghat* for the last ritual and to get salvation. The family sends Kalyani to the ashram. She adjusts herself with strange environment of the ashram. Very soon her beauty becomes curse for her. She is forced for prostitution and her income is used to run the ashram. Her life is trapped into traumatic situation. Landlord used her to fulfill the sexual desire. Being a typical woman, she believes that Lord Krishna will come to rescue her.

Narayan's appearance enlightens hope in her. She dreams her marriage with Narayan. She believes that Lord Krishna came in the form of Narayan. Madhumati gets furious to receive the information about her secret love affair with Narayan. She locks her in the room and said, "Have you gone mad? Nobody will marry a widow. Shameless! You'll sink yourself and us! We'll be cursed. We must live in Purity, to die in purity." (169) It is so ridiculous to think that Madhumati isn't bothered about sin and purity when she send Kalyani at a client. She receives support of Shakuntala. She leaves the ashram while Narayan waits for her at the Ghat. Her dreams about marriage are shattered when she hears the name of Narayan's father. Now she loses all the option in her life. She does not want to return to ashram also. At last, she decides to commit suicide and drowns herself into the water of *Ganga*. This shows that for her marriage is a real mirage. She wished to be happy in life going through the marriage institution. Sadly, she could not achieve the same. On the other hand, the institution spoils her life and makes her life equal to hell. Her wishes are vanished as she reaches to the destination.

Shakuntala is another prominent female character from the novel *Water*. She is stable and conforms to her nature. Her childhood is sweet dream for her. She belongs to the wealthy family and is single sister of four brothers. The birth of Shakuntala was welcomed as Goddess Lakshmi. She is brought up like boy child. Her brothers involve her in every activity. She learns to read and gets knowledge of numbers. Her father is in search of suitable match for his skilled daughter. Her marriage is fixed with young widower from nearby village. His wife has just died and he is always lost in the memory of her. Her father offers handsome dowry for his single daughter. Her marriage has a huge arrangement with a grand feast. Shakuntala is fourteen years at the time of her marriage and her husband is nearby thirteen years elder than her. She has romantic ideas about her marriage life but her hopes are vanished. Again, the marriage institution simply spoils her life.

Shakuntala's husband gets lost in the memory of his first wife. He tries to open his heart to his new bride with passing year. She is bloomed from a girl into a beautiful young woman. They fall in love with each other deeply. Her mother-in-law treats her lovingly because she considers Shakuntala as a medium to produce children. Unlucky enough, Shakuntala was unable to conceive a baby. In her mother-in-law's eyes, she is a barren woman. Shakuntala

desperately longs for a child. She feels gloomy as she has to live with the logo of barren woman for whole life. She insists her husband for the third marriage. Her husband refuses and soon dies of a short illness. Her life becomes hell after the death of her husband. She becomes a widow at the age of thirty. She faces humiliation by her husband's family. Her brothers make arrangement of stipend for her which is given every month at ashram. She spends her most of time in reading sculpture and tries to gain salvation. Shakuntala lost her husband when she is a young woman. Her dreams and wishes are ruined with her husband's death. Once again, marriage is hallucination for Shakuntala. For her marriage does not bring any kind of happiness rather brings pathetic experiences.

Thus, the experiences of the female characters underline that the role of marriage institution is very crucial in women's lives. Sidhwa's novel *Water* is a tribute to the victims and survivors of those days. Her positive attitude is appreciable which motivates the women in the society. She handles the most intimate issue of marriage in the life of a woman. The story of Cinderella is used by the society to elaborate on illusionary life. The girl child dreams from her childhood that a prince will be came one day. He will take her on his horse to his kingdom and her life will happy one. Marriage is an important event in the life of woman but lots of time it brings crisis in woman's life. Sidhwa's women characters- Kalyani Chuyia and Shakuntala- face pathetic experiences that are brought by marriage institution. The women characters try to reach at a mirage of happiness after marriage but it is in vain.

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