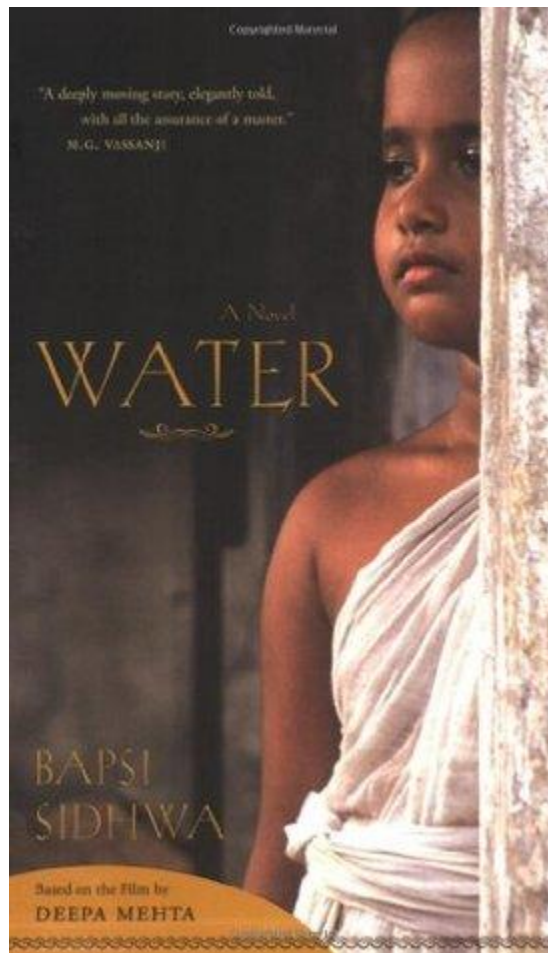


Post-Colonial Perspectives in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*

Dr. N. Geethanjali, and S. Jayalakshmi



Abstract

Post colonialism is a post-modern intellectual discourse, which is an analysis of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. The post-colonial direction was adopted as colonial countries became independent. Post-colonial powers came from foreign states and may

have destroyed a small part of native tradition and culture. They replaced them with their own ones.

Bapsi Sidhwa has been called Pakistan's leading English language novelist. The stories of her five novels take place in the homeland, exploring the post-colonial Pakistani identity.

Water is set in 1938, when India was still under the colonial rule of the British and when the marriage of underage girl children to older men was commonplace. Following Hindu tradition, when a man died, his widow would be forced to spend the rest of her life in a widow's ashram.

Post-colonial is a convenient critical term in current literary studies. It has come to replace terms such as "Commonwealth Literature", "Anglophone Literature", "New Literature in English", "Third World Literature", and "Literature of the Developing Nations". Each one is problematic in some way or the other. Even the term post-colonial has its own train of complexities. The very meaning and scope of the term is debatable. Its use can be narrowed down for the purpose of this study to an unequal relationship between the rich and poor nations in various domains - social, psychological, political, economic and cultural practices and patterns and the articulation of the same in literature.

Post-colonialism is an offshoot of colonialism; in whatever manner the post is interpreted. Post-colonial literatures come into existence, when the writers tried to create a new form of fiction within the English language by incorporating new images and above all new rhythms. The major features of postcolonial texts are concerned with placement and displacement, shifting of location and resulting in, "the crisis of identity into being". Often, the protagonists of a post-colonial work will find themselves in a struggle to establish an identity, feeling conflicted between two cultures - one their own native culture and the other an action culture. Therefore, a central theme in post-colonial writing is the transformation of the native into something other than herself - a classic native, or at least one who is in a crisis regarding one's own cultural identity.

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Key words: Bapsi Sidhwa, Water, struggle to establish identity, transformation of the native.

Parsi/Zoroastrian Minority

Sidhwa belongs to a microscopic minority community called Parsi/Zoroastrian which is nearing its extinction as a result of its rigid doctrines and intense exclusivity. Parsis were the originally natives of Iran and the followers of prophet Zarathustra, following the Arab invasion of Iran in the 7th century A.D. who undertook a hazardous voyage and settled in Gujarat in India. In the pluralistic Indian society, very quickly they flourished due to their diligence and integrity. They became a very prosperous business community.

In post-colonial India and Pakistan they had to lose their hegemony over business, politics and education and inculcated a feeling of insecurity and fear following the unprecedented political happenings and the increasing communal violence. Accentuated by the external threats and the plights of the dwindling community, standing on the verge of extinction, contemporary Parsi writers like Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Bapsi Sidhwa vociferously assert their ethnic identity and earnestly attempt to reconstruct their racial history in their writings.

Bapsi Sidhwa



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Bapsi Sidhwa

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bapsi_Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi in 1939. She was brought up and educated in Lahore. She had been a volunteer in many social work organizations. She immigrated to the United States in 1983 and became a naturalized American citizen in 1993. She has produced five novels in English which reflect her personal experience of India the sub-continent, the partition, abuse against women and immigration to the U.S.

She has published five novels, *The Pakistani Bride*, *The Crow Eaters*, *Ice-Candy-Man*, *An American Brat*, and *Water*. She was awarded the *Sistara-i-Imtiaz*, Pakistan's highest national honor in arts. She has also received a variety of grants and awards for her fictional creations.

Sidhwa's first three novels focus on Parsi families and the Parsi community. Her fourth and fifth novels deal with post-colonial writings which are based on Indian tradition.

The Novel *Water*

The novel *Water* is a brutal examination of the lives of widows in colonial India, is riveting from the word go. The potency and emotional impact of the story is probably why Deepa Mehta refused to let go of her dream of making the film. And one must add that there's great intensity and passion in Sidhwa's story telling that grips the audience.

Water is set in 1938, when India was still under the colonial rule of the British, and when the marriage of girl children to older men was so common, following also the Hindu tradition, when a man died, his widow would be forced to spend the rest of her life in a widow's ashram; These ashrams were the institutions for widows to make amends for the sins from their previous life that supposedly caused their husband's death.

A Useful Chronicle

The novel itself is a useful chronicle in understanding a certain stinging reality elevating it from a fictional level is the 8-year-old Chuyia. Between Sidhwa and Deepa Mehta, they've

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come up with a character rarely seen before; Chuyia is spirited, feisty, rebellious and daring to go. But as convention would have it, she is hurriedly married off and then widowed in a few months. Her in-laws send her to an ashram meant for widows, a sort of ghetto where they are supposed to lead pathetically austere lives.

Chuyia and Kalyani

Chuyia's befriend Kalyani who is forced into prostitution to support the ashram, Shakuntala, one of the widows, and Narayan a young and charming upper-class follower of Mahatma Gandhi and of Gandhism were residing in the ashram. There are fourteen women who live in the small, dilapidated two-story house, sent there to expiate bad karma, as well as to relieve their families from financial and emotional burdens. The ashram is ruled by Madhumati, a 70 year old fat and pompous lady.

Other Characters

Madhumati's only friend is the pimp, Gulabi, a sprightly hijra who not only keeps Madhumati supplied with Ganga, but also with the latest gossip. The two also have a side business. Gulabi helps Madhu to prostitute Kalyani. Now the second youngest of the widows, by taking her across the water to the customers.

Shakuntala is a quiet and reserved type of widow. She is caught between her hatred of being a widow and her fear of not being a sincere, dedicated widow. She is a very devout Hindu who seeks the counsel of Sadanada, a gentle-looking priest in his late forties who recites the scriptures to the pilgrims who throng the ghats of the holy city. It is he who makes Shakuntala aware of her situation, eventually giving her the necessary intellectual input to separate true faith from the hypocrisy and superstition that makes her and the other widows' lives a misery.

Shakuntala is attached to Chuyia, because deprived from her liberties and freedom of choices from a young age, she sees herself reflected in Chuyia and strives to give her what she lacked. Chuyia is convinced that her stay is a temporary one, and that her mother will come to take her away. With that thought firmly tucked in her mind while most other widows tolerate the

stubborn behavior in the young girl. She quickly adapts to her new life. Chuyia's feisty spirit never dulls until a very long time. Part of the reason for this is her warrior like attitude and die-hard optimism.

Ironic and Touching

Sidhwa goes on to survey and describe the impartial scenes, the child-like curiosity, thereby also dispelling some of its solemnity. Her ironic and touching words are seen when the 8 year old girls innocently asks, "Didi, where is the house for men widows". (110) Bapsi's racy style of writing ensures that there is not a single dull moment in the novel.

Madhumati sends Chuyia away with Gulabi, to be prostituted as a replacement for Kalyani for a waiting client (Narayan's friend's father). Shakuntala finds out and runs out to prevent the worst, but she only arrives at the shore in time for Chuyia's return. As a result of being raped, the child is deeply traumatized and practically catatonic. Shakuntala spends the night sitting at the shore. The fact that Chuyia manages to escape a life of drudgery and other ills associated with the widowhood in the ghetto, symbolizes a ray of hope even for those caught in the most helpless circumstance. And it is exactly this feeling of redemption, running throughout the novel, that prevents it from ever getting morose and depressing. She is supported by Narayan without whose effort her success could not have been possible.

Depicting the Post-colonial Survival

Sidhwa's *Water* is a post-colonial play that vividly presents the struggle of the post-colonial survival against the superstitious belief. But the humanistic playwright has opted to reiterate her faith in the female creative spirit, which protects itself from self-destruction. The post-colonial perspective of the play reveals that the post-colonial self assertions, struggles and survives in the girl Chuyia.

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