

**PLIGHTS AND AGONIES OF WIDOWED WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO THE MARATHI MOVIE KAKSPARSH****Prof. Raghunath Motiram Gavali**

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**Abstracts**

The genres of film studies represent, from its origin, socio-cultural, economic, political, religious, spatial changes in contemporary Indian traditional society. Specifically, the Indian film industry explores the varied dimensions of human geography while using different types of critical practices which affect the lives of ordinary human being. Also, most of the Hollywood and Bollywood movies represent the pathetic situation of the female subjects in Indian traditional and conservative society. There are many films those are represents the socio-cultural milieu through lives of characters from different background. Consequently, in dominant system of Indian patriarchal society suppress the voices of Indian women on the issue of gender, sex, class and marginality. Earlier, from the invasion of Raja Rama Mohan Roy's concept of 'sati' to the forceful oppression of widows in contemporary Indian society, it is found that female subjects are become the cause of exploitation and subordination in parochial hegemony. The said imbalanced position of women is reflected in multilingual films that connect with the issues and varied practices reflected in literature and literary studies. The present paper is genuine attempt to find out the issues that affect the lives of widows. The Marathi movie Kaksparskh provides the varied causes of female subjugation in modern but having typical conventional as well as dominant male centric society.

**Key Words:** *Widowhood, Socio-Cultural Milieus, Patriarchy, Prejudice, Cinema, Oppression.*

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**Introduction**

Art, literature and cinema reflect societal aspects of human life and science represents the varied domains of human beings. The cinema is an amalgamation of such tools that perpetually presents the human lives in society along with varied practices such as cultural, religious, traditional, conventional and innumerable aspects of human being in socio-cultural milieu. On the other hand cinema is considered as a social discourse that reflects the changes taken place in highly traditional society. Also, it projects the social gruesome practices, norms, social taboos and ethnic values which are existed from pre independent India till today's present scenario with its implications through religion, culture, tradition and convention. The feminist critic opines that the issues such as religion, rituals, cultural

and traditional practices act as a dominant conservative force to exploit women and similarly forces them to live in more constrained space. According to Simone De Beauvoir, religion promotes patriarchy through scripture, rituals ceremonies and practices and also support to frame the structure and power –relations of the religious organizations.

The Patriarchal social structure in Indian traditional and cultural society women have to live in more confined spaces. They maintain a kind of mentality that they are slaves and their husbands are masters to lead their lives in their marital space. From the ages women are considered as a subordinate object in their parental home and the marginal subject in their in-laws house. Generally, the traditional normative cryptograph of conservative society compels women to live suppressed life because of the unhealthy customs and traditions of conventional society. In their marital space, exploitation never leaves their life empty without domination of patriarchal society. Meanwhile, if woman lost her husband she has to constrains herself in an alienated place in her dead husbands house. The parochial society puts forth varied social, cultural, religious and traditional norms to live that woman as widow till her death.

From the colonial period the system of remarriage was prohibited because of the old beliefs and customs of Indian society. The widows were kept away from the religious and cultural ceremonies and festivals that celebrate in the family. Being a widow, the familial world of women is limited to their kitchen, closet, corner and courtyards because of their place and position in that family. The various practices were applied on women to place them in more confined space. Also, such practices of widowhood deeply rooted explored in many films to represent the status of widowed women. The film *Kakparsh*, directed by Mahesh Manjerekar and produced by Aniruddha Deshpande and Medha Manjrekar, set in Konkan of the period of 1930-1950. The film throws light on miserable condition of widow of that time where widows are obliged to adopt the widow system as the norms of society created by patriarchal system and how religion, social tradition, custom, rituals are interrelated to widowhood. It also focuses on socio-cultural aspects and its positive changes in that period. Also, the film reproduced the tactful connection of marginality of widowed woman from the particular religious upbringing. In the movie widow women are exploited and tortured physically, mentally, psychologically, emotionally, sexually, culturally, socially, economically and morally by the traditional society. The selected film demonstrates the varied positive and negative reformations along with multiple implications and dominations of male centric traditional attitudes.

Film is genre that having an immense avenues to depict the images of traditional parochial and conventional society. Also, the said genre makes awareness among the society while using various social repulsive practices which are already existed and deeply rooted in Indian society. Through this paper the researcher focuses on the plights and agonies of widows. The lives of widows have always been represented and projected through literature by novelists, short story writers and also film makers. The literary novel like *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa, published in 2006. In the novel, the writer focuses on the issues like child widow and early marriage. The writer explores that the lives of widows since they have to spent their entire life in ashram after their husbands' death. Also, Novel like *The Widow of Malabar Hill* published in 21 Feb 2018, written by Sujata Massey, which portrays the condition of widows in cultural milieus and constraints of women in Indian society. Recently published book, *Widows of Vidarbha: Making of Shadows* by Neelima Kota depicts story of 16 widows after the death of their husbands due

to the financial condition and invisible and miserable world of widow from farmers family along with their plight. Many thoughtful filmmakers also introspect into the accounts of pastoral Indian widows and covers controversial subjects like widow remarriage, rituals, custom, tradition, religious practices that compel women to live aloof from society and their own in-laws home.

*Kakspars* is an Indian Marathi film released in 2012 and based on a short story entitled, ‘Janm Gatha: Kakspars’, written by Usha Datar and represents the ideologies that function to produce and continue hierarchy of gender inequality. The film elucidates the hierarchy of masculine, dominant gender and feminine, the subordinate gender. Kate Millet articulates,

“Patriarchal society works to inculcate male supremacy through a variety of covert means: politically, women have negligible representation, the biological sciences legitimize chauvinistic beliefs in female inferiority, and social systems-particularly the family-entrench political and social inequality in the private sphere.”(Waugh 326)

Millet through the above cited example explores the subjugations that take place naturally in every sphere of the female characterizes in their lives. Also, she examines state of women characters’ lives through films. In the film *Kakspars*, the director explores the pathetic situations of women character with multiple angles. The heroine of the movie, Uma (role performed by Priya Bapat) and the central male character Hari (role performed by Sachin Khedekar) stating an account of woman from her child marriage to widowhood and to end; it is interlinked with family members entangled in traditions and customs observed in the contemporary society.

The prime plight of widow in the movie begins when newly couple Madhav and Uma try to take blessing from Namu Aathya (Hari’s widow aunt) she does not give blessing and mumbles, “Who ask us in the family as widow.” since, she ignores the couple and tells them to take blessing of other elders present in the house. This instance projects how culture inculcated ideologies, norms and code of conduct for widowed women in society. Even today such kinds of code of conducts and practices are prevalent in many parts the Indian conventional society. Hari saves Uma from shameful action and prohibits barber to shave hair. Namu Aathya, who actually calls Shantya a barber to shave Uma’s hair. This instance also reflects how norms and rituals untrue ideas are deeply indoctrinated in mind of widow woman. She also warns Hari that he should follow ritual otherwise they have to face its consequences and our religious will decline. But Uma is terribly frightened and she can’t sleep and she dreams that a group of Brahmin community come and run after Uma meanwhile she tries to run away but they follow and finally catches her and shaves her head. She cries and looks herself realizes that there is no hair on her head. This event also reflects fear of masculine and their ideologies in mind of widow. Luce Irigaray demonstrates in his famous essay, ‘*The bodily encounter with the mother*’ as, “The maternal function underpins the social order and order of the desire, but it is always kept in a dimension of need. Where desire is concerned, especially in its religious dimension, the role of maternal- feminine power is often nullified in the satisfying of individual and collective needs. Desire for her, her desire, that is what is forbidden by the law of the father, of all fathers: fathers of families, fathers of nations, religious fathers, professor-fathers, doctor-fathers, lovers-fathers etc. Moral or immoral, they always intervene to censor, to repress, the desire of/for the mother. For them, that corresponds to good sense and good health, when it’s virtue and sainthood!”(Lodge 432)

This quote fits to the events which are portrayed in the said cinema. For instance when Uma father comes to take

Uma to her mother's house that time Hari does not send her with his father. Hari says, "Uma is our responsibility, she is half owner of house and this is the house where she has to live." Here Hari puts condition before Uma father that Uma will take her own decision whether come or not. But Uma does not go with her father and confesses that now this my house and these are mine people. This event displays that due to the traditional Indian social, culture, religion false preaching women has to curtail their emotion, feeling, wishes, and everything for sake of family after husband death. She is not allowed to mingle with family; relative, cultural gathering and social occasion only stay in dark corner of house repressing all her feeling. Even Uma's father decides to keep Uma in Widow's shelter house. (Old Age Homes) Updhy spreads news that all Brahmin community boycotts Hari's family as he violates the rules of religion by protecting and not allowed to shave Uma's hair. Next the scene where Namu Aathya warns Hari that Brahmin won't drink water in hand of widow. None of them come for his child ritual, as he breaks the rule of society by protecting Uma. There is a minor widow character Manda Desai granddaughter of Updhay who seeks help due to her husband death. She comes to meet Hari who has started NGO to guide widows. This character depicts how women are economically handicapped after demise of her husband and can't to take further education and deprive from become self-sufficient. Namu Aathya next scene states to Uma when Uma is eating food alone in home. She says, "You are lucky woman, you get good and delicious food, Hari support you ....." This dialogue shows that widows forbid from eating meat, hot food and sweets; keep away from happy occasions such as nuptials and social gathering; and, in many cases and not allow to eat anything as Namu Aathya in the movie secretly chews tobacco and warns Uma not tell Hari even Hari is younger than Aathya. This scene depicts miserable conditions widows in patriarchal section of society. Namu Aathya warns Uma that male are wolves and they are always looking for prey (woman). They always want to consume widow woman and find opportunities to exploit them. If the woman resists them they always ready to tarnish their image before society by regulating the norms of culture and religious cues. Helene Cixous vocalizes, in famous essay '*Sorties*' "In Philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity, Every time the question comes up: when we examine kinship structures; whenever a family model is brought into play ; in fact as soon as the ontological question is raised; as soon as soon as there is a will to say something. A will: desire, authority, you examine that, and you are; led right back –to the father" (Lodge 283)

This instance shows that whenever question of existence and superiority and images of women and man come up, women always has to remain passive and exploited place while keeping mute on the basis of philosophy, scriptures, social, cultural and religious norms. Next scene in the movie depicts the placing of widow in the house; wipes lamp in corner of house not supposed to involve in familial discussion. Uma has to bear all the suffering and do not show her feeling as woman. Virgini Woolf, in '*A Room of One's Own*' argues, "Women have served all these centuries as a looking –glass possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its nature size" (Woolf 35)

The above instance of Virginia Wolf implicates Hari's attitude towards Uma in film as there is scene in which Uma hears the secret conversation held between newly married couple and arise her sexual feeling. Uma starts living aloof, while her health starts degrading. She starts sitting in corner of well and sewing some clothes and not pays attention to health. Uma opens her heart wildly and creamily burst out her feeling of sex which she suppressed

in her mind and asks Shanti what do girls do with husband in day of honey and as her husband dies before consummation of marriage and when Shanti suggests Uma to comb her hair. Uma says, “why should I pamper my body and how many times I should only pour cold water on body.” This instance showcases that Indian society always keeps women silent and not allowed them to express their sexual desire. De Beauvior states, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvior 301)

This illustration suggests no biological, social, cultural psychological and economical aspect constructs the images of society for their own purpose and advantage which is shown in said movie. Last scene Uma curtails her emotion even though she loves Hari and become ill and dies and sacrifices her life for the sake of Hari.

### Conclusion

The genre of film reflects the plights and agonies of widows in male centric traditional Indian society. Simultaneously, it directs how Indian society, cultures, traditions, customs, rituals, religion and other practices deprives the widows from their basic rights and needs as human being and compels them to live in more constrained and marginalized place. Also, forces them to suffer as a part of destiny by normalizing dominant patriarchal code and conduct of normative traditional society.

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