

REPRESENTATION OF WIDOWS THROUGH LITERATURE IN INDIA**Prof. Bhagwan Piraji Waghmare**

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Email Id: bhagwanpw123@gmail.com**Abstracts**

Since ancient times, the women in India have been regarded as one of the disadvantaged sections of the society. Indian society has been an instrument of torture for women and they are also human beings is forgotten all the time. The treatment that widows experience at the hands of the family members and friends differs. There have been instances when widows are not treated well by their family members and relatives. The different types of negative treatment that widows experience from their family members and relatives include: misbehaviour, verbal abuse, physical abuse, taunting etc. Widows normally lived in isolation and did not get much involved in social as well as in cultural activities of day-to-day life. But the women who have become widows because of their marriage with old men and are considered as one of the most unfortunate members of the society. Very diminutive has been done for their deliverance. Their better living is a concern for nothing. Leading a lonely life, though being a part of the social system, becomes unavoidable for them. But the deprived voice succeeds to reach to the literary writings. Perhaps the whole social system is dazed from within by their presentation in literature. The widows are seen from numerous perspectives in these days. Depending upon certain circumstances, widows are regarded as inauspicious. Therefore many authors have tried to emphasis on this isolated section of the society.

Key Words: Widow, Society, Inauspicious, Socio-Religious, Deprived, Ceremonies, Functions.

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Introduction

The historiographers and sociologists have taken a lot of efforts to reform the social condition of widows in India. If we observe the widows always have remained the greatest sufferers. Patriarchal supremacy has continuously been cruelled to them. In earliest India, women occupied a very significant position, a superior position to men. Nevertheless, it is an incontestable truth that the concept of widow stands a notion of negativity in this male-controlled society. Such long practiced ignored, deserted state of the widows marks them to be somewhat 'unwanted' in our so-called broad-minded society. In Indian society, when the husband of the woman dies, she is looked upon as a burden by the entire family and is forced to lead a life of the recluse. Rigid social abrogates, rituals and duties are imposed upon them, and they have to desist themselves from a number of other sectors. Their arrival in white sari and shaven head is outrageous but the mental annoyance they are forced to tolerate is more

terrible. The society celebrates the destruction of their desires. Through literature, in India these suppressed women characters are presented in different ways. In fact, all the widow characters in literature have been alleged of disloyalty. Opposing to this, some authors try to exhibit these widows in a different manner, embodiment of goodness and self-assurance to resist against the prejudiced social laws. Henceforth the present paper emphasises on how various writers have presented widows in their writings and how their individual attitude to these ill-fated beings is reflected. The paper will also show how both the patriarchal and matriarchal system of the society has become a punishing authority to widows.

Discussion

The widows have been always observed as a sign of misfortune and evil in patriarchal society, and have infrequently specified in ancient and medieval Indian literature. She came into abrupt eminence in the nineteenth century receiving attention not only from social reformers and leaders but also from ingenious writers all over India. The circumstances and challenges in a widow's life have been spoken in various ways through literary writings. The social and cultural background in which they are exposed changes from time to time. Always the widows are presented as mere obedient individuals who want to keep up with the social standards. Sometimes using their intelligence and bravery they try to voice against the injustice and misbehaviour through different ways. It was due to the efforts of Raja Rammohon Roy that Lord William Bentick abolished *Sati system* in 1829 by declaring it an offence. He advocated freedom of the press and condemned any restrictions imposed upon widows by the Society. He supported widow-remarriage and the education of girls by publishing various articles. But it is true that this brutal system continued for a long time even after this. Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar: The brilliant man who stood up for the women of 19th century India. He vigorously fought against child marriage, and took the initiatives and got the *Widow Remarriage Act (1856)* passed by governor general Dalhousie which allowed them to marry a man for their better living and protect from the wrath of religious convention. In modern times there have been some changes in their lives but the basic problem remains the same. These kind of social problems of such a magnitude are depicted in literature. Many literary pieces deal primarily with the issue of widows: Bharati Mukherjee's "*Jasmine*" (1989), Aruna Chakravarti's "*The Inheritors*" (2004), Adinarayana Reddy's "*Problems of Widows in India*" (2004) and Bapsi Sidhwa's "*Water: A Novel*" (2006), stated that the death of the husband has been made to signify the social death of a woman. The very first Indian novel on the theme of widowhood is Baba Padmanji Mulay's Marathi novel "*Yamuna Paryatan*" (1857), a novel which focuses on remarriage of widows as a practical solution to the several problems they face. In this book, through the analysis of the pre-Independence and post-Independence Indian novels, the author points out the everchanging attitudes of unbiassed society towards widows. Rabindranath Tagore challenges the offensive theme of widow's love and sexuality in "*Binodini: A Novel*" (1903). The main character is a widow who is outraged about the reality of a widow's life. She rebels against social conventions. Along with the male writers a number of Women writers have formed a site of resistance by documenting their own experiences as: Shanta Debi's *Jeebandola*, Swarnakumari Debi's *Snehalata ba Palita*, Ashapura Debi's *Dui Meru*, Bani Basu's *Shwet Patharer Thala*, Usha Devi Mitra's *Pia and Indira*, and Goswami's *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* have all focused on the miserable and wretched condition of widows in India.

In this research paper, the main focus is on Mona Verma's novel *The White Shadow* (2014), a novel set in the so-called city of widows that is Banaras and discusses how the five-year-old Brinda is widowed after getting married for a few hours. The child widow becomes an unwanted figure for her family and so-called patriarchal society, family declines to take her back and she is placed in Nirmala Ashram, a marginal place within the very centre of the city. Allied with a sense of metaphor, this marginalisation relegates Brinda in particular and the widows in general to be parasitic in nature, missing any individual identity. Vis-à-vis the slender position of widows in the society, Banaras becomes resonant with the voices of these silent widows. Mona Verma's *The White Shadow* is the newest addition to this list where the problems of widows are scripted by women. The novel opens with a natural disaster that terribly hits the village Ghurni:

“The villagers of Ghurni would be amassed into a heap and the funeral pyre will be lit. The back plumes of smoke would rise in soft swirls over the river and Ghurni would be forgotten. God had been unbending on his decision to destroy. There was no time to ponder on the macabre that they were to leave behind – the untimely death of unused lives.” (Verma 41)

Allegorically, the natural disaster strikes Brinda and her conjugal status becomes invalidated. The tempest that causes death of many villagers including Brinda's husband Bisbass, causes death to Brinda's childhood as well. In fact, the impulsiveness of childhood that remained even in the post conjugal days is abruptly forced into the maturity of widowhood. With a certainty, the birth of widowhood comes at the cost of the death of childhood as the novelist observes:

“The life she was to live now was to be just the crocheted trimmings of the idyllic childhood she was living just a few days ago” (Verma 66). It is the new world of restrictions where spontaneity is largely cabined, cribbed and confined. As far as long practiced social customs are concerned, widows have no right to enter temples or to even attend marriage ceremonies; even Kanta in the novel under discussion warns: “Showing those teeth does not suit a widow.” (Verma 79)

The development of the plot of *The White Shadow* is concerned, astonishingly enough, Brinda's own father declines to take his daughter back as the pradhan of that village guides: “She is a bad omen, ashubho lokkhon.... She brought misery upon a burgeoning flourishing village” (Verma 44). The pradhan's assertion clearly establishes the fact that female children are not valued as male children; rather they are often considered as economic and social burdens in this society. The novelist explains that the social status of the child widows: “decimated to a mere blotch of bad omen, they were relegated to spend their after years in Banaras or Vrindavan – begging and singing hymns outside temples” (Verma 48). Bibhuti father-in-law of Brinda sends her to Nirmala Ashram in Banaras. Instead of his preliminary determination, Bibhuti cannot preserve her in his own association due to his infectious disease. Symbolically this journey covers a journey of Brinda from childhood to widowhood. Her new world Banaras is normally considered to be a city of transition and transformation as we find in Verma's narration on the city space:

“The only city in the world with two cremation Ghats right in the heart of the city, the *Harishchandra Ghat* and the *Manikarnika Ghat*, Banaras still manages to retain its mystical beauty. Where death is feared in other parts of the world, it is currency in Banaras. The dead are evaporated in dark swirls of smoke and life's stories are forever

sedimented in the river’s womb. Entering into another world is everyday business here.” (52-3)

As far as the spatial dialectics are concerned, the ghats of Banaras might well be compared to the streets of Dublin or Kolkata. It will be thought-provoking to know how the future course of Brinda’s life would be transformed in this proverbial city of transition. At this point it would be appropriate to mention how the novelist warns the reader: “Child widows were ostracised, sent to ashrams in Banaras. It is clear that widowhood becomes an ‘industry’ in this city. *The Nirmala Ashram*, a shelter house for twenty-eight widows become Brinda’s new home – in fact, her new world. Bibhuti’s peeping into this world of widows discloses the pathetic, inhuman wretchedness of the dwellers:

“Bibhuti was shocked to see a ruinous hovel where the widows, no more than children themselves, sat hunched on their knees in a circle rolling cotton into long cylindrical wicks for the temples that ironically, they weren’t permitted to even enter. It would fetch them a measly sum for their frugal meal of boiled rice with just a pinch of salt thrown in for taste, each of them alone on the inside, bound by a common thread of betrayal on the outside.” (Verma 55-6)

This outside-inside duality continuously plays a role in the representation of the widows. Irony is very much part of the widows’ lives in this world: “Banaras was rife with widows being summoned for illicit relations and Vasanti had stoically resisted the intrusion of this infamy into her ashram” (Verma 61). Hopeless poverty and begging become an unavoidable truth of their life. Vasanti becomes an institution to safeguard the status quo of the widows in conventional society. But she gets no helping hand from this progressive society. Vis-à-vis the greedy landlord’s hunger for young flesh and several adversities and peculiarities in this city, Banaras does not offer nirvana. Thus, Vasanti’s uninterrupted reading out from Bhagavad Gita is a thoughtful strategy of the novelist to show the sarcastic clutch of the society. The impossibility of achieving nirvana in this so-called holy city and the ongoing marginalization within the very centre of the city. Verma, like other writers on this city, goes into the origins of the city. The ironic nature of the title offers us to read the unsubstantial shadows in which whiteness, the metaphorical colour of widowhood, is thrust upon a virtually meaningless existence of the child widows: “Brinda, a white shadow, always there but never realised – just like our karma, it may elude its presence, but never lets its significance fail. The consequences never miscarry” (Verma 260). Vis-à-vis the depiction of the ‘invisible’ widows and hidden problems in the landscape of Banaras, it is significant to note that the city forms a major strand in the novelist’s awareness. The interplay of the modernization of the urban space and the marginalization of the widow within a status quoist order of social relations clearly demands a reader-centric approach that Banaras is not a smart city. In this way Mona Verma through her novel *The White Shadow* (2014), tries to focus on various issues of widows.

Conclusion

To sum up, several authors have tried to reveal the truth of widows in different ways. Widowhood in India is a multi-layered establishment, in which women undergo limitless problems as well as provisions. In Indian patriarchal society, there have been many instances of how the widows were avoided and therefore, the only solution for a life without husband was to practice sati as it was considered to be the highest expression of wifely devotion to a dead husband. Widowhood is a part, which serves to separate a particular section of women from the

mainstream society. Boundaries are imposed upon their clothing, dietary intake, involvement in social functions and remarriage is prohibited for them. Widowhood discloses the opening between social and cultural realities, and between principles and practices. Widows are the part of our society and they should be given the same treatment like any other human being. Their life, dress, food and entertainment should be like any other person. This research paper throws a light on how authors have involved with the so-called women's question in Indian. Apprehended between middle-class conservatism and the urge for social reform. Indian writers addressed controversial issues of widows such as remarriage, education, socio-economic status, social acceptance and struggle, in their fictional and discursive writing.

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Cite This Article:

Prof. Bhagwan Piraji Waghmare, (2022). Representation of Widows through Literature in India, Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, XI (III) May-June, 161-165.