

Subalternity of Indian Widows Due to Patriarchy With Special Emphasis on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*

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Abstract

This paper explores the subalternity of Indian widows due to patriarchy in Sidhwa's novel Water. The study is conducted from the Spivakian perspective of subalternity enunciated in her canonical essay Can the Subaltern Speak? The study is qualitative-interpretive. In Indian society, widows are considered subalterns and inauspicious once their husbands are dead. They have no active role to play in the society. The male dominance in society hinders the social mobility of widows. The analysis and interpretation of the selected novel's relevant text show that the males' privilege to remarry is denied to females, fully endorsed by the Brahman religious dispensation. All the powers of decision-making lie with males. Similarly, the male members neither own the widowed women nor provide them with their due share in the familial property. As a result, they end up in ashrams and are excluded from mainstream society. This paper concludes that widows are rendered victimized, marginalized, and voiceless due to discrimination caused by patriarchy. They cannot speak for themselves, as per Spivakian's perspective. The oppression of the Third World widows through patriarchy needs to be highlighted, and there is a dire need for sensitizing the conscience of the public to alleviate the plight of the widows through the use of literature so that the voice of widows reaches the wider world.

Keywords: Water, Patriarchy, Subalternity, Widows.

Introduction

This study explores the negative impact of patriarchy on the lives of the widows of India through the textual analysis of Sidhwa's *Water*. The Spivakian lens of subalternity is used as the study's theoretical framework.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2023), patriarchy is an agent of discrimination, a "hypothetical social system in which the father or a male elder has absolute authority over the family group; by extension, one or more men (as in a council) exert absolute authority over the community as a whole." Similarly, Oxford Dictionary (2023) defines the term "patriarchy" as "a system of society or government in which the father or the eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line." The British sociologist and women's rights advocate, Beechey (1979) argues that "the concept of patriarchy has been used within women's movement to analyze the principles underlying women's oppression" (p. 66). The term subaltern means "of lower rank." Still, Spivak holds that the subalterns do not get a chance to speak for

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themselves and are always spoken for and represented by others. They remain marginalized and mute. She holds that subalterns cannot talk because they no longer remain subalterns whenever they get to say. She considers the women folk of the Third World under the patriarchal system as the ultimate subaltern group as she, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?, say*", "The subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 83). Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani novelist writing in English, has pictured, through her novels, the troubled lives of female folk under the grinding stone of patriarchy in the sub-continent.

Literature Review

Patriarchy has always been one of the foremost agencies causing the plight of women in society. Radical feminism is basing its very existence on the impact of patriarchy. Radical feminists ascribe the bondage of females to the dominant position of males in every sphere of life. Velvizhi and Santhosh (2021) selected two novels, *The Pakistani Bride* and *Water* of Bapsi Sidhwa, and show how women, here widows, are repressed and victimized in Pakistani society and the *ashrams* in Indian culture, respectively. Patriarchy is held responsible for the victimization of women. Amanat and Rahman (2015) concluded that in the novel *Water*, sexuality has damaged the lives of many widows, especially of Madhumati and Kalyani, beyond repair. Patriarchy is shown to be using the agency of sexuality as a tool for the exploitation of female sex. Sexuality is used as human commodification. Sujith and Narayan (2019) explored the trials and tribulations women, here widows, bear in the face of an unjust patriarchal system where women are ignored and cursed, ending up in *an ashram* for the rest of their lives, unheard and uncared for. The paper mentions their unanswerable questions, painful memories, unfulfilled desires, and the need for belongingness. All these things are depicted through the character of the protagonist of *Water*, an eight-year-old Chuyia, and how she faces innumerable problems in the Indian patriarchal society in the confines of the *ashram*. Bapsi Sidhwa has delineated a very pathetic picture of the widows to highlight their plight and sensitize the people towards their suffering.

Similarly, Alam (2020) applied Jean-Paul Sartre's existential-humanistic theory to the text of *Water*. Humans live by beliefs, customs, and traditions to put value in their lives. Still, sometimes, these values get so extreme that they even take lives and fundamental human rights from individuals, especially women. Bapsi Sidhwa has depicted a similar picture in *Water*. Traditions ruin Chuyia's childhood and Kalyani's life, and they are victims of the novel. The characters are living, but there is no meaning in their existence. Walker (2022) has given an incredibly unique turn to the traditional notion of misogyny away from the patriarchal hatred towards women by referring to Kate Manne (2017), who, in her *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, expresses views about misogyny. Walker (2022) describes not only what misogyny is but how it is enforced. She "examines misogyny from an intersectional lens, including its intersections with race, gender, and sexuality" (p. 01). She argues that the intersectional stance on misogyny will provide a launching pad for queer and feminist movements in times to come. She further holds that the best understanding of misogyny comes from looking at our lived experiences, not from theorizing in abstraction about misogyny.

The above discussion shows that the selected novel *Water* has yet to be researched from the Spivakian subaltern perspective. This study adds to the existing knowledge by filling the mentioned gap.

Methodology

This research is qualitative-interpretive. The relevant excerpts of the novel are analyzed through the lens of Spivakian theory of subalternity presented in her canonical essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Traditions, religion, superstitions (stereotypes), and sexuality are the agencies responsible for the plight, i.e., subalternity of the widows in the novel. However, the current study is delimited to patriarchy as a source of subalternity of widows in *Water*. The researcher employs Kelsey's (2013) model of textual analysis to analyze and interpret the text of *Water*. Belsey (2013) claims, "Textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism, where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts" (p. 160). She endorses the right of the researcher to interpret the text from a personal standpoint as she says "Meaning subsists in the relations between people, inscribed in signifiers, sounds, and images" (p. 167). Further, she remarks, "Meaning is inevitably plural" (Ibid), meaning that a researcher has the right to search for new meanings in the text already explored. The method and model employed for textual analysis and interpretation of the text put the researcher in a position to examine patriarchy, a phenomenon of radical feminism, as a factor responsible for the plight of widows in Indian society from a personal standpoint.

Analysis and Discussion on Sidhwa's Water

In *Water* (2006), patriarchy plays a significant role in affecting the subalternity of widows in Indian society. The following is the analysis and discussion of the data regarding patriarchy in the novel *Water*. The relevant excerpts from the text have been selected and analyzed to explore the element of patriarchy as an agent of subalternity of widows by employing the Spivakian lens of subalternity used as a theoretical framework.

In Indian society, patriarchy is found in every sphere of life. Consequently, the right to decision-making lies with the male members of the family, either the father or any other older male member. The female is to leave the house when married, and the male is to remain a usurper, even after marriage, and have the right to own property and other valuables. The presence of a woman is considered inauspicious and potentially a source of disgrace for the family. As Somnath says to Bhagy "A girl is destined to leave her parents' home early, or she will bring disgrace to it. She is safe and happy only in her husband's care" (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 6). The text shows that in Indian society, women are a scourge and a potential cause of blemishing the name of the family.

In Brahmanism, a woman is not a whole and independent being, always requiring the presence of a male for her as a guard. According to a Brahman tradition, "Her (woman's) father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (Manusmriti 9.3). A woman bearing children, especially male children, is considered auspicious and valuable. Such is the stronghold of patriarchy in a typical Brahman Hindu society. Sidhwa (2006), in *Water*, says "In the Brahmanical tradition" said Somnat, "a woman is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband. Only then does she become a *sumangali*, an optimistic woman, and a *saubhagyavati*, a fortune woman" (p. 06). Hence, a Hindu woman has no identity in her own right. Only upon marriage does she find recognition of her being and become a whole person.

Patriarchy has even permeated through the upper rungs of the religious Hindu caste system. Brahmins think women have no identity of their own, and men do. As Somnath lectures Bhagy about the position and status of a woman, i.e., of a wife in comparison to her husband:

You are the wife and daughter of Brahmin priests; surely you are aware of our traditions,” he said. “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! (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 7)

The analysis shows that woman is forced to believe that she is there just for breeding and that she has no identity in the face of failure to provide male children to their husbands. A woman, failing to produce male children, is not qualified to be considered an auspicious wife.

Narayan, the hero of the novel, and his friend Rabindra were in company, while the widow Kalyani, the heroine of the novel, was being sent to a “client” in a boat through the eunuch, Gulabi, by the order of the head-widow, Madhumati, in order to run the *ashram*. Rabindra knew the widow, but Narayan did not. Rabindra called the widow a whore to which Narayan objected by saying that Rabindra was a fool by calling a widow a whore. However, Rabindra knew the widows were treated by the male Brahmins as a source of quenching their lust, though the same Brahmins considered the bodies of widows as untouchable. There was a double standard from the male elite of Brahmins cheating on the one hand on their wives, on the other, going against their expressed religious dictates violating the sanctity of the bodies of widows. The word “unnatural concern” used by Rabindra implies the lust for which the “elite” went foul of the religious commandments. As does go the dialogue: “Does she look like a whore? She is a widow, you fool,” said Narayan, irritated. “I know she’s a widow,” replied Rabindra. “The gentry here have an ‘unnatural concern’ for widows” (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 63).

The above excerpt testifies that the heinous nature of patriarchy is evident from the casual manner in which the status of the widow has been mentioned, and the dialogue betrays the lusty minds of the elite stratum of Brahman culture.

The beautiful Kalyani was manifestly a total subaltern, but inwardly, a tumultuous storm struggled to keep her soul from getting polluted in this lusty business. She was not there out of her own sweet will; neither was she benefitting from this “business” of hers visiting the “clients.” Patriarchy is doing the damage, and the female sex is being pushed to the wall, having no other way but to surrender and retire to their speechlessness. Kalyani only surrendered her body, not letting her soul and emotions be “violated.” This helplessness and subalternity of hers is depicted by Sidhwa in the following pathetic phraseology, conducting the psychoanalysis of her feelings:

But then Kalyani remembered the nature of their nocturnal journey, and her eyes dimmed. Her body stiffened as she prepared herself for the rest of the night— she had learned to retreat to a place deep inside herself where her emotions could not be violated, despite what happened to her body (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 63).

The above para shows that Bapsi Sidhwa has been successful in delineating the innermost recesses of the mind of this troubled creature, and reaches to the core of the consciousness of this violated being, Kalyani. The female is rendered subaltern to the core being left with no other alternative but to surrender her body, only left with her emotions intact. She (Kalyani) only gives out her body to be lusted remaining emotionally aloof from this game of lust. Patriarchy has made inroads in the sanctity of the *ashram* and the souls living therein. And, to depict this, Sidhwa has been marvelous in the portrayal of the situation.

Epistemic violence has embedded patriarchy in the minds of the widows of the *ashram* that a slight derogatory mentioning of the male causes an uproar among the widows when by chance Chuyia happens to ask from Shakuntala where the *ashram* for the males is. A barrage of scorns, abuses, curses is unleashed on the poor creature from her own soul mates. Even the mentioning of the male

is considered to be profane and scurrilous. The showering of abuses and curses are phrased by Sidhwa in the following paragraph:

Chuyia asked, “*Didi*, where is the house for the men widows?” There was a stunned silence. Then pandemonium broke out. A chorus of scolding erupted from the shocked widows: “Good God!” “What a horrible thing to say!” “God protect our men from such a fate!” “May your tongue burn!” “Pull out her tongue and throw it in the river.” “I’ll do it!” they shrieked like harpies (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 70)

The excerpt above testifies that the depth of the subalternity effected through patriarchy is evident from the cathected lines smacked by the stunned widows. The widows are shown to be unaware of the fact that they are the victims of the same agenda they are pushing, and are striving hard for its fruition.

Once Chuyia put a *laddoo* in the mouth of Boa while she was asleep. Boa took not too long to pass away. Chuyia felt guilty for it. Upon which Shakuntala said: “Don’t worry,” she smiled. “After eating the *laddoo*, she’ll go to heaven.” She added wryly, “God willing, she’ll be reborn as a man!” (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 100).

It is evident from the above lines that female yearns to be born as a male not as a female. It is a privilege to be a male as patriarchy has a sway and is a source of social superiority, which in turn keeps one at bay from subalternity.

It is so pathetic, heart rending, and soul racking to be in an *ashram*. The doors of life are shut on an individual, and not once, but for life. Such is the picture of the poor widows shown by Bapsi Sidhwa through her pen. The widows are rendered inhuman as and when they cross the threshold of the *ashram*. In *Water*, many of the widows belonged to the well-off families as they all hailed from Brahman background. Several of the widows came from landed families, but the death of their husbands was like a bolt from the blue: all their relations ceased to exist, all their properties confiscated, all their basic rights went to dogs, all their lives got doomed. In short, all the windows of life were shut upon them, the only window open for them was that of the *ashram*, the confines of which were also only open to death and nowhere else. Widows had to wait for their deaths and till death they had to seek forgiveness for the souls of their dead husbands.

Women are mostly stripped of their property rights in Africa as well as in Asia. Izumi (2007) highlights the situation of widows inflicted with domestic violence and land-grabbing. The lack of social security and patriarchal traditions are the forces making the women especially widows the main victim of violence. Similar was the fate of the widow Bua in the *ashram* of Rawalpur in the novel. Bapsi Sidhwa portrays the picture very pathetically, as she puts it in the following words: The poor widow had rotted in an *ashram* even though, like herself, she came from a family of landowners who had hounded her out of her house when her husband died. His brothers most likely didn’t want her to have a share in the inheritance (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 103)

The picture shows that Boa, one of the widows, though belonged to a family of landowners, still what became of her? There was no one to cure her, no money to provide for the expenses to bring in a doctor, though it was not allowed. There was not even a cloth to wrap her dead body in it. She, when widowed, was expelled from her home by her brothers, usurped her property and such was the lot of all the widows, though belonging to wealthy families, but dying poor. This was the irony of the life in *ashram*.

Subalternity and *ashram* look synonymous for the poor widows. In an Indian society, to be a widow in an *ashram* is enough qualification to be a subaltern. They cannot claim their share in property, the only reason being they are not allowed to step out of the confines of the *ashram*. They are considered as a disposable stuff, fit for once use.

Similarly, the women, even if they are not widowed, are not eligible to have their say in the household affairs. Narayan, locked in a sweet conversation with Kalyani, opines that if his mother had her way in deciding to get Narayan married, he would have had a daughter as old as Chuyia. It is the case of a wealthy Brahmin household, let alone the poor slums where humans live the life of animals. Patriarchy permeates the minute aspects of life in the third world countries. The conversation goes like this, “And your mother?” “If she had her way, I’d have a daughter as old as Chuyia.” “Your mother’s right. That’s how things are,” said Kalyani reasonably” (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 107). The discussion shows that Kalyani knew that women had no say in the major decisions of the household and in those of the world too. That was why she said with total affirmation that traditions were always binding and swaying where the voice of the male was dominant, assertive and decisive. Therefore, she fell victim to the position that, “That’s how things are”.

Similarly, it was surprising for these widows ever to expect there would come a change in their destiny and they would come out of the confines of the *ashram*. They never hoped about that, as there was no silver lining visible in their lives, and when for the first time Kalyani heard from the mouth of Narayan that some of the traditions were then changing Kalyani was shocked. Kalyani expressing her surprise replied, “All of them?” Kalyani was hit to her core by the possibility that she and other widows of her lot would one day be able to live a life like other humans, free and of their own, in the out! The analysis shows that Kalyani still out of her deep-rooted servitude to the traditions spoke in favor of some of the traditions and wanted them not to be changed.

The above facts gives testimony that widows were living a life of dejection and despair, and patriarchy in the guise of traditions was responsible for the plight and speechlessness of the widows.

According to Hindu traditions, a woman upon the death of her husband had three options: (1) to ascend the pyre of her husband and burn herself as a sacrifice to show loyalty to her husband. As according to Hindu scripture Agni Purana: “the widow who burns herself on the same funeral pyre with her husband also goes to heaven.” (Agni Purana, 222.19-23), or (2) never to remarry and end up in *ashram* living till the last breath, and pray for the soul of her deceased husband. According to Hindu scripture Agni Purana: “The widow who practices self-control and austerities after the death of her husband goes to heaven” (Ibid), or (3) in rare cases to get married to the brother of her dead husband with or without her sweet will. According to Hindu scripture Rigveda, the husband’s brother says “Rise, come unto the world of life, O woman: come, he is lifeless by whose side thou liest (Rigveda, 10.8.8).

Similarly, Sidhwa (2006) reports: According to the Manusmriti, the foremost Sanskrit text in the orthodox tradition, a widow’s head is shaved, her ornaments removed, and she is expected to remain in perpetual mourning. She is to observe fasts, give up eating “hot” foods in order to cool her sexual energy, avoid auspicious occasions because she is considered inauspicious (for having caused her husband’s death), and to remain celibate, devout and loyal to her husband’s memory. The later Vriddha Hirata was more explicit. She should give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, taking food from a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying collyrium to the eyes; she should wear only a white garment, curb her senses and anger, and sleep on the ground (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 126).

The above evidences endorse that patriarchy is responsible for rendering women (widows here) subaltern. Almost all the pleasures of life are banned for them secluding them from the society and limiting to *ashram*.

Providing a full spectrum of the issues faced by female gender of the third world countries, especially of India, Khan (2020) approaches *Water* from the perspective of inter-sectionality to discuss various social issues faced by women folk causing their plight. Inter-sectionality is a holistic approach encompassing the experiences of people in various situations specifically social and political ones. Factors that cause concerns like inequality and discrimination are class, race, gender, disability, and working together to have an impact on the lives of the female folk. South Asian writers have also highlighted this issue through their writings. Bapsi Sidhwa, through her novel *Water*, has explored the various forces at work causing the marginality and subalternity of Hindu widows in their life after the death of their husbands. The main target of the paper is to bring to the limelight the sections of society responsible for the inhuman and unjust treatment meted out to the widows. Gender, caste, religion, and politics manipulate the norms of the culture for the fulfillment of the heinous agenda of bringing the silent and marginalized victims down. What she had read only affirmed what she knew and accepted—nowhere did she find anything that might redeem Kalyani; remarriage would condemn her husband's soul to hell and curse the karmas of all his family. Despite her unquestioning acceptance of the *Dharma Shastras*, that widowhood is the punishment for a sinful existence in the past, Kalyani's plight shook her belief in the laws (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 126-27).

The discussion shows that in *Water*, the nexus of patriarchy and religion is determined to raze the palace of the dreams of the widows to the ground, and all their expectations of a normal life end in the confines of the *ashram*. Widows, in *Water*, are perfect subalterns as far as religion comes to the abetment of patriarchy in toppling widows.

The impact the religious text is having on the poor creatures is being frowned upon by some of the educated widows like Shakuntala, doubting the humaneness of the text. Patriarchy is playing havoc with the lives of the women well before they get widowed. While they are brides but sterile, they have to face the music for not being able to bear children first, even if they do but not male ones, they still face the bluffs from their household especially the mother-in-law. Similar is the story of Shakuntal before and after she gets widowed. As Bapsi writes:

Her [Shakuntala's] mother-in-law, hopeful that Shakuntala would be the instrument by which her son would fulfill his debt to their forefathers by reproducing sons, treated her graciously and lovingly. However, as the years passed, Shakuntala's mother-in-law began to blame Shakuntala for her failure to produce any children. ... Shakuntala was disappointed to see the depressing evidence of her failed fertility. She desperately longed for a child (Sidhwa, 2006).

Similar to the role played by Bhagya in keeping Chuyia disadvantaged in the face of rampant patriarchy was the role of the mother-in-law of Shakuntala. She, though being a woman, was still fulfilling the agenda of patriarchy pushing Shakuntala to the wall, making her life miserable, despite the fact that Shakuntala had a loving husband and a happy conjugal relation with her husband. Upon the death of her husband, Shakuntala faced a hill of never-ending trials from the husband's relatives, the mother-in-law leading the way. She thought she would die of the grief, but it did not happen so. She was despised and looked upon as a filth. Her hair was shaved to cleanse her of the sin she was considered to have. All her belongings were confiscated, and she was limited to a single meal a day. Her bangles were shattered, *mangalsutra* stripped off her neck. All this happened to her due to the death of her husband, being held responsible for his death, and was looked upon like a potential threat to the family. All these trials and tribulations forced Shakuntala to leave, as Bapsi Sidhwa puts it:

After a year, Shakuntala knew she had to leave. Her brothers made arrangements for her to go to the ashram in Rawalpur, and she would receive a small stipend every few months. Her parents had died, and Shakuntala blessed her brothers in her prayers (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 129).

The discussion draws a picture of the plight of a wealthy widow in Brahmanism. Neither Shakuntala's husband nor her own family affords her to stay home. She is considered filthy and ominous for the family. Though hailing from a wealthy family, she is rendered penniless. She loses all her fundamental rights as a normal human being. She is sent to *the ashram* by her brothers, still praying for the safety and happiness of her brothers. This is the subaltern position in which the widows are lodged. This is the treatment meted out to them through patriarchy. The same is the fate of this lioness-like widow: a devoted, committed, and religious-to-the-core widow. That is why Shakuntala is at the *ashram* in Rawalpur. Patriarchy makes her subaltern to the core.

Asif et al. (2021) present a critical analysis of the discourse of the novel *Water* through Fairclough's model of CDA. The researchers explore the gender stigmatization of women, cultural norms and traditions being the reasons. The novelist has exposed patriarchy as a source of cultural hegemony; even Chuyia, married at six and widowed at eight, is not spared. The study reveals through critical discourse analysis how patriarchy has employed vivacious cultural tricks to imprison and exploit the widows in *ashrams*. Through the effective use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the concept of hegemony conceived by Antonio Gramsci, the oppressed lives of widows, women's identities, and contentious problems have been evaluated thoroughly. The study conclusively exposed the double-faced ideals and hypocrisy of Indian society. The study reveals that religious practices and social structures work in tandem to reinforce the heinous and vicious agenda of patriarchy for subjugation and exploitation of women, in this case, widows being doubly hegemonized in pre-partition India.

Likewise, Ohira, (2020) focuses on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water*, based on Deepa Mehta's film of the same name, dealing with the problematic themes of love and sexuality. The article claims that the novel has highlighted the sexuality of female widows from a variety of angles. The article affirms that the feminist novelist Bapsi Sidhwa has successfully exposed the double standards of patriarchy to their guidance. The men have exploited the female body according to their convenience; on the one hand, not allowing the widow upon the death of her husband to remarry and is considered untouchable, and to repent and pray for the soul of the dead husband. Still, on the other hand, the body of the same female is exploited as a source of their lust, not taking into account the social and religious norms.

The elite class in Brahmanism is playing a double game. On the one hand, the males send their widows to *the ashram* to pay tribute to the soul of the dead husband, but on the other hand, they do not bother to play with the voluptuous bodies even of the widows. The father of Narayan is one of such fellows. He invites widows as "clients" supplied by Madhumati through the agency of a eunuch, Gulabi. This heinous business also ruins Kalyani's life. The aristocracy of Brahmans "uses" widows. When Narayan shows his father his natural face and wants him to be ashamed of his behavior, his father expresses no surprise. He brushes aside the whole matter by telling Narayan to use Kalyani as a mistress as he comes to know that she is not a 'pure' widow. The father said, "So you've discovered she's not a goddess. Don't marry her—keep her as your mistress" (Sidhwa, 2006, p. 149).

It is evident from the above facts that the elite of Brahmans showed no hesitation to speak of widows in such a derogatory and slighting way. They had no respect for the widows as they thought that they were superior to Brahmans and males. They were considering widows as commodities

for their gratification, not paying any heed to what their lives would become after such a physical humiliation. They had such stonier hearts that they were never ashamed of speaking in the face of their children; even their wives were aware of their black deeds, but as they were males, they had the authority to do whatever they wanted to do. Patriarchy and religion in a nexus played havoc with the lives of the widows.

Conclusion

Patriarchy plays an influential role in the oppression and suppression of the female gender, as evident from the textual analysis of *Water*. Patriarchy has even permeated through the upper rungs of the religious Hindu caste system. Brahmins consider a woman's identity subject to her husband's identity. The lives of the widows at the *ashram* are unbearable, facing afflictions and confinement. They are not allowed to wear colored sewn clothes or eat fried food or sweets. They are not allowed to visit their houses, nor are their kith and kin allowed to see them. They cannot remarry. All the above restrictions are not meant for men. Neither their husbands' families nor their parents can afford them to stay home. They are considered filthy and ominous for the family. Though hailing from wealthy families, they are rendered penniless. Patriarchy is an entirely complete accomplice in their plight. Therefore, it is evident that the status of the female figure is too inferior to that of the male one. She is at the disposal of the male and is shown to be for him, not for herself. Hence, according to the theory of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, enunciated in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, the Indian Brahmin widow in *ashram* is a perfect subaltern, rendered voiceless and marginalized through patriarchy. She cannot speak.

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