

TRANSCULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAXIM GORKY'S *MOTHER* & BAPSI SIDHWA'S *WATER*

Dr. Syed Anwar Ali Shah¹, Hasina Wajib^{*2}

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Chitral

^{*2}Mphil Scholar, department of English, University of Chitral

¹syedanwar@uoch.edu.pk, ^{*2}hasina.msen2330@uoch.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20175414>

Keywords

Transcultural, Intersection, Patriarchal, Marginalization, Widowhood, Feminism, Resistance,

Article History

Received: 05 December 2025

Accepted: 15 January 2026

Published: 30 January 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Hasina Wajib

Abstract

This study discovers the idea of transcultural widowhood through a comparative analysis of Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (Russia) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (India). The term transcultural widowhood reveals different societal oppression, identities and resistance across boundaries in the lives of widows. By comparing these two narratives, this study shows how both the writers create widows into culturally different but thematically connected worlds of marginalization and empowerment. The study reveals although the texts emerge from different cultural and social settings but both employ characters, and narrative techniques that highlight the universal struggle of widows and their ultimate transformation. Finally, the analysis of transcultural widowhood enriches readers understanding of cross-cultural female oppressions along human experiences and builds connections between different literary traditions. Applying "Feminism without Borders" by Chandra Talpante Mohanty as a theoretical framework the analysis moves beyond Eurocentric or monolithic understanding of oppression on how race, class, political, religious systems intersect to constitute the specific realities of widowhood across cultures. This theoretical approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the universal and particular dimensions of women's marginalization, offering understandings into the difficulties of gendered social hierarchies and the potential for solidarity across cultural boundaries.

Introduction

The phenomenon of widowhood is experienced and constructed differently across political, cultural and historical boundaries (Singh & Haigh, 2015). The condition of widows are universally associated with grief shaped by specific political, cultural and religious contexts. In traditional societies widowhood has been seen as a state of loss and denial, wherein women are exposed to inflexible social traditions that often remove their independence. Widowhood is tantamount to damnation and in Asia it is equal to death. "Widowhood in Hindu society is often manifested by social death: the widow loses her place as a promising participant of the society, is exempted from rites, faces economic

marginalization" (Singh & Haigh, 2015). In the context of pre - revolutionary Russian society widows are extremely influenced by economic construction, social norms and religious practices with specific environments. They are passive, remain at home financially dependent their identity is associated with their husbands. (Zohaib amir *et al.*, 2023) adds that women wretched condition in pre -revolutionary Russia is equal to usable items rather than humans. Widows in the world although experiencing widowhood under different socio political and cultural constructions but show similarities in their struggle against patriarchal system. Both in western and Eastern literary traditions, widows have often been depicted as an agent of

grief, loss, and moral strength where they are controlled by patriarchy in different forms like religious subjugation, class or ideology. However, in the contemporary academic state, widowhood has changed into a critical place of feminist investigation that exposes the intersection of culture, power and gender. The idea of *transcultural widowhood* appears from this discourse, offering an outline through which experiences of females across different cultural regions can be studied and helps to understand the common struggles of widows against patriarchy across cultures. However, opposite to the conventional concept of widowhood in the world, that is related with agony and grief, the narratives under study examine how widowhood offers a certain extent of agency and resistance by the widow characters within their socio-political regions. To investigate further the study of widowhood norms, this study discovers that female activity should not be considered as a huge thought, but the intersectional changes, such as variances in religion, geography, ideology and class should also be taken into interpretation. To address these intersectional differences among the widows, the researcher tries to shed light on post Transcultural colonial Feminist criticism with particular focus to Chandra Talpande Mohanty's concept of "Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (2003)". This theoretical framework aids an examination of widowhood while challenging the western inclination to generalize the experience of non-western females as homogeneous victimized group. Instead, she demands for a transnational feminist practice that recognize the variety of commonalities and female experiences in their oppression.

The comparative study of the novel *Mother* by Maxim Gorky (1907) set in Tsarist Russia where the writer depicts the picture of the pre-revolutionary Russian working class and emphasizes on the women who played an important role on the eve of the revolution of 1905. The writer in the novel through the character Palagueya Nilovna alias mother portrays resistance and transformation of a Russian working-class Widow into a political revolutionary lady, by challenging both class hierarchy and gender norms. On the other

hand, the narrative of *Water* (2006) set in Colonial India in which age-old social agreements, oppress females.

Maxim Gorky the revolutionary writer whose revolutionary mission sets social realism a driving force for change. His novel *Mother* is an important piece of art on Russian revolution of 1905. It depicts the working-class revolutionaries particularly females who are motivated by the socialist ideology. (DS Maulindianingsih, 2008) articulates that, this novel *Mother* debates about the revolution whose chief character is an old woman.

(JA Manger, 2011) Research on Maxim Gorky and the Revolutionary Context with many female characters, its literary importance is the treatment of a "mother". Gorky's deviates with traditional literary custom, moral fight with the actual portray of Tsarist Rule's outrage and domination, plus a new breath in literary culture as well as in his fictional profession.

Likewise, (Chaudhary, N. K. 2011) *Techniques in Translation of Cultural terms: A Case of Novel 'Mother'*. states that mother is written by a famous English writer maxim Gorky.

The novel covers the story of a mother, who was simply a house wife of a labour. She was as same as the other hundreds of females. She worked hard in factory and made some money for her family. But when her son left simple living as other workers and became a revolutionary, his mother also helped him. She recommended each revolutionary to fight against the unfairness and violence. Gradually and with time in her request, all the revolutionary workers combined and large actions done against the tyranny. Because of mother's help, the socialist revolution was succeeded and dictatorship was defeated. As a result, Russia become USSR.

(Zohaib Amir, et al., 2023) led Existentialist Study of Nilovna in Russian novel *Mother* research Seeing Palagueya as the heroine of the novel, as an emerging woman who has uncovered her own personality as a free human being with the power to form her luck. Further, the discovery of the growth of Nilovna, in light of Jean Paul Sartre's notion of existentialism, examining how the narrative's woman central character discovers her way out of inactiveness feeling the existentialist expedition for determining the factual sense of her life. How

she has initiated the objective of her existence by her own free will and efforts for change, performing an important role in the revolutionary movement.

Similarly, (Meyer, A, G, 2025) conducted a study on Maxim Gorky's Illusionary Reformation of Human Nature and the Rise of the Soviet Citizen: Socialist Realism as a Constructive Force in *Mother*. Here the researcher concludes that the novel *Mother* is related labours and their fight for liberty also better values of existence based on Marxism.

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the important Pakistani American writers who has

changed the *Water* film of Deepa Mahta into a text which observes the struggle of Hindu widows of colonial India.

Alam (2020) practical usage of Jean-Paul Sartre's existential-humanistic theory to the novel *Water*. For example, people occasionally survey religions to make sense to their lives.

Furthermore, he utters that life has no sense, it is strange, but people attempt to make it expressive. Traditions decay the character Chuyia's and Kalyani's lives and they are victims in the text and there is no meaning in their existence.

Similarly, An Intersectional Feminist Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa *Water* by Numaira offers an understanding into the intersectional nature of the Indian Hindu widows in a patriarchal society. where diverse control areas grip and enact central orders. It displays how religion as an influential device to create its hegemonic control over these devalued widows. The study of current feminism inside an agenda of Intersectionality carries out orderly power constructions that allows women segregation on numerous magnitude (Numeiraahmad,2020).

(Hussain, et al., 2022) studied, Sexual Exploitation in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel *Water* mentions that Women in Hindu society are covered by male members such as their father, brother, husband, or son. They are not considered autonomous. Similarly, (Komath,2013) describes that In Indian society, being a widow means a curse, and are answerable for the death of their partners. In ashrams they were forced into prostitution for subsistence.

Thus, a bulk of studies has been conducted on Gorky's novel *Mother* and Bapsi Sidhwa's novel

Water applying diverse theoretical lenses and investigative viewpoints concentrating class conscious proletariat Russian society in their struggle for change along suffering of females in the term of religion, remaining isolated in pre independence South Asia. No research concentrates the universal suffering of women in Russian and Indian societies and their global struggle. Therefore, the ongoing research is embodied to fill the research gap conducting Transcultural analysis of two different narratives. The current study provides an insight of the universal suffering and common struggles of widows through the technique of comparison. Its main objective is to understand women suffering and subjugation globally, based on different social political backgrounds and their resistance to bring change in their lives.

In both the novels widows have been portrayed as a figure of transformation and resistance not only victim of marginalization. Therefore, this research places transcultural widowhood as an active and transformative site where individual sorrows unite with political awareness and where women's voices long quieted by patriarchal treatise, emerge as influential agents of ideological and social change. Through a comparative feminist analysis of Maxim Gorky's and Bapsi Sidhwa's Sidhwa's writings, the study aims to connect Eastern and Western perceptions, highlighting that widowhood when observed transculturally, is not only a form of suffering but a global metaphor of empowerment, resistance and freedom.

1.2 Objectives

1. To understand construction of widowhood in the Russian and Indian Cultures.
2. To highlight the broader socio- political and ideological situations in both the novels represented by the authors.
3. To explain the state of widowhood through transcultural perspectives in literature.

1.3 Research Questions

2. How widowhood is constructed culturally in the novels *Water* (Indian) and *Mother* (Russian)?
3. Why do both the authors criticize the broader socio -political situation using

widowhood as a tool?

4. How does a transcultural approach enrich our understanding of widowhood in literature?

1.4 Research Problem

Widowhood, is experienced across cultures differently as a socio-cultural construction which often reflects same pattern of subjugation. While Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* and Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* represent widows within different Russian and Indian settings but both the writers highlight the connection of patriarchy, culture, and social segregation. However, due to lack of comparative study of both the novels and understanding how widowhood transcends cultural limitations and becomes a common site of resistance. This research addresses this gap by exploring transcultural widowhood through feminist lens and

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's notion of *Feminism Without Borders*, aiming to recognize how culture outlines, restrict and changes the experiences of widows in both the narratives.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Theoretical framework

The study is based on Feminist Literary Theory and Transnational Feminist Discourse, mainly led by Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of "Feminism Without Borders" as expressed by her in "*Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003)". This theoretical framework aids an examination of widowhood as a transcultural and gendered experience across social, national, political, and covering boundaries of ideology.

This theoretical method extends beyond Western feminist models by supporting for a transcultural solidarity among women. Her account of Western feminism's inclination to universalize the "Third World woman" as a submissive target is vital in the comparative study. Mohanty claims that feminist investigation must be decolonial, context-specific and concentrating cultural variances. Application of the concept without borders, this research highlights how widowhood in Russian and Indian culture is shaped by unique ideological and historical contexts yet united by

common structures of resistance and gender subjugation.

The theoretical framework also based upon intersectional feminism, predominantly the idea that women's experiences are facilitated through intersecting axes of culture, religion, class and nation. Widowhood in both narratives is not only a gendered form but also a transcultural construct shaped by class and colonial history. Gorky's portrayal of Palagueya Nilovna in *Mother* appears from the working-class struggle in early 20th-century Russia, while Sidhwa's portrayal of Kalyani, Shakuntala, and Chuyia in *Water* shows the socio-religious order of colonial India. This cross-cultural examination highlights Mohanty's claim for feminist solidarity that appreciates diversity while struggling patriarchal control.

2.2 Research Design

Being qualitative in nature this research employs close reading technique for content analysis of the overall text of both the novels. The current study has used Belsey's (2013) model of textual analysis. According to Belsey (2013) "Textual analysis produces **such understandings** which are most probable in a given cultural context" (p. 160.)

Combining the theoretical notions of Chandra Talpade Mohanty with the textual analysis method Belsey (2003) the comparative understanding of the research, how Gorky's novel *Mother* and Sidhwa's novel *Water* address the intricacies of widows, their challenges and resistance involved in the existence of the third world females and their representation in postcolonial context. The research focuses on dialogues from both the novels for conducting comparative analysis of the main characters particularly widows by keeping in view the theoretical framework of Mohanty's feminism without borders as a benchmark.

3. Discussion

Widowhood portrayed in both the novels is deeply rooted within social and cultural constructs which shape women's characteristics and societal roles within their contextual boundaries. While both the narratives arise from different historical and geographical backgrounds of pre-revolutionary Russia (1905) and Colonial India (1935) and provide a

unique understanding to examine extracts from both the texts.

3.1 Widowhood through a Feminist Lens

Both text of the novels *Mother* (1907) and *Water* (2006) represent widowhood as a gendered condition designed by social ideology, patriarchal control and cultural restrictions. Through their widowed characters, the authors portray how females can move from silence and suppression to self-awareness making parallel with Mohanty's concept for "feminism without borders," which links women's struggles across countries and histories.

In the narrative of *Mother*, Pelageya Nilovna survives under the disgusting ethical instruction. In the memories of her son Pavel as he says that, "...he had scarcely been aware of mother's existence during his father's lifetime, so silent had she been, so fearful of being beaten" (Gorky, 1917, pg. 23). Her condition of widowhood separates her psychologically and socially. On the other hand. In *Water*, where religious patriarchy describes widowhood as a condition of social death. However, these widows try to resist in their ways. Feminist reading of both the texts portray widowhood as a cultural device of domination, yet also indicate a resistance from within the systems.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's notion of "Feminism Without Borders" bonds these two texts. The main argument is that women's subjugation cannot be understood within separate cultural

settings. It must be analyzed through universal constructions of class, and power and gender. Subjugation of widows in both the novels and their resistance represent transcultural widowhood, where females across borders regain agency and redefine colonial individuality through feminist solidarity.

3.2 Widowhood as a Social Construct

In Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* Palagueya Nilovna is depicted at the beginning as passive wife of a drunkard husband, belongs to labour community and poor. However, gradually she reconstructs her personality after gaining political consciousness. This exemplifies that widowhood is not a fixed genetic state, but socially forced boundaries which can be resisted

and redefined. On the other hand, in India, where patriarchy is functional in terms of religion. As Chuyia's father remarks reminds of that, "She is safe and happy in her husband's care" (Sidhwa, 2006, pg. 7). The writer criticizes Indian society saying that widowhood is not about mourning, but about social control over female sexuality, Labour and independence. In both the novels patriarchy is working in the name of religion, class and ideology. which clearly highlights Mohanty's point that third world women are generalized into an homogenic group by the westerners that universalizing their sufferings without considering their respective contexts.

3.3 Cultural Construction of Widowhood

In *Mother* Russian setting presents widowhood linking with class and ideology.

Palagueya Nilovna's transformation mirrors how culture and class construct widows as Weak, showing how Soviet revolutionary culture pursues to liberate lower class women from oppressive norms where they were double marginalized first in the hands of their husbands at home secondly exploited by the state.

Mohanty defining position of feminism says, it is the intersections of the various systemic systems of race, class, (hetero)sexuality, and state, that place us as "women"

(Mohanty, 2003, pg. 75). Mohanty arguments, that race, class and sexuality are linked together in oppression of women. This is how patriarchy controls female bodies in the name of religion, race and color and women individualities are made on the basis of these entities. And Mohanty's feminism argues that the essence of female solidarity means to recognize these intersectional systems. In the novel *Water* representation of Hindu culture where women are subjugated and unaware of real happiness. In Sidhwa's words and Somnath states "A girl is destined to leave her parent's home early or she will bring disgrace to it. She is safe and happy only in her husband's care" (Sidhwa, 2006, pg. 7). Because there are some set rules in the culture that they have to follow at any cost. Further, he utters that Chuyia is glad only with her spouse. He states, "a woman is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband. Only then does she become a sumangali, an

auspicious woman, and saubhagyavati, a fortunate woman” (Sidhwa,2006, pg.8). The utterance of these words show how harsh, hostile, irrational men Somnath is, in considering Indian culture. Even for widows’ religion is misinterpreted so that Characters like Shakuntala begin to question these norms, suggesting that such cultural constructions can be confronted.

Thus, in both the novels *Mother* and *Water*, widowhood is not a simple state of being single and deprived but a social and cultural construct designed to control females’ roles in the society. Through feminist and transcultural lenses, widowhood in these novels expose larger critiques of patriarchy, tradition, class and societal scenarios in

maintaining subjugation of widows across cultures. Mohanty mentioning Robin Morgan assumption, “undertakes world-wide sisterhood on the basis of women's common opposition to androcentrism, an opposition that, conferring her, cultivates directly out of women's common status as its sufferers (Mohanty,2003, pg.112)”. Mohanty’s referring to Robin Morgan idea points out the suffering of women across the world due to male dominancy or androcentrism meaning all around the world females are suffered by man.

Morgin concept of common suffering of women across the world provides a sense of sisterhood as they are experiencing marginalization or subjugation equally by the same source. Mohanty counters this assumption with the challenge that understanding universal sisterhood on the basis of only male dominancy is not useful. Because there are also other factors like political and geographical differences working in the oppression of women in the same way. Where in different regions race ,culture, color playing roles in females’ oppression. Mohanty calls as universalizing western experiences only on patriarchy is a “Colonial Move” in feminism means understanding the third world women as a single group of victims who needs awareness and saving. Mohanty’s understanding of feminism is that must be based on variety of factors in females’ oppression not only patriarchy solidarity amongst women as sufferers despite these differences. she identifies

the problem and says that such kind of solidarity or unity is being on victimhood. Her concept of feminism without borders builds on mutual understanding of differences and common struggles against various system of control, like race, color and gender in colonial India.

3.4 Bridging East and West through transcultural dialogue

Comparative Study of both the novels opens a new and meaningful dialogue between East and West. while understanding the practice of widowhood though culturally different but related on global magnitudes of sorrow, resilience, and struggle.

These narratives depict how women’s individualities are made and controlled by sociopolitical organizations. In spite of separate circumstances both writings interconnect on a moral and emotional level, representing women’s struggles against suppression as part of a global story of female strength.

Through this transcultural connection, widowhood transcends its exact meanings and becomes a symbol for women’s joint marginalization across societies. In *Mother*, Palagueya’s developing from a passive lady to a political revolutionary signifies the Western revolutionary example of freedom through class struggle and ideological emerging. Moreover, the narrative of *Water* places freedom within the context of divine questioning and human consideration, reflecting the Eastern manner of struggle through moral strength and solidarity. In spite of different patriarchal situations both the stories have same feminist objective that is the retrieval of action and pride in a world that rejects women both either in the form of ideology, class or religion.

The communication between these two cultural accounts demonstrates what Chandra Talpade Mohanty foresees as “feminism without borders.” The East-West dialogue between Gorky and Sidhwa pull apart the depiction of cultural separation and substitutes it with a universal feminist consciousness where women’s experiences, though shaped by local customs, are united by common struggles. Widowhood thus

becomes not only a personal state but also a sign of shared awakening that exceeds race, religion, and topography.

Eventually, the transcultural dialogue among *Mother* and *Water* sustains that the language of sorrow and optimism sees no borders. Gorky's revolutionary practicality and Sidhwa's sympathetic humanism balance each other, building a bridge between two worlds that appear diverse but are associated by the identical desire for fairness

and autonomy. This union between East and West expands the understanding of widowhood as a universal feminist subject and as a symbol of harmony through common struggle.

3.5 Widowhood and patriarchal Discipline

Bapsi Sidhwa Portrays a strong oppressive system shaped by orthodox Hindu patriarchal system in the novel. Where widows are treated as cursed entities impure and they are double exploited. Similarly in the novel *Mother* Nilovna condition is pathetic beaten by her husband and also being a woman. In reality, she is equal to the lower animal like dog. Opposed to abusing his wife, Vlasov can be seen returning home drunk "sitting down to supper, and giving "his dog to eat from his own bowl", never beating the pet" (Gorky,1907, pg.7).

It proves In *Mother*, that the social state of women is despondent they are **socially confined** and treated as lower, weak, obedient and inactive which shows the existence of **apatriarchal** culture. Pelageya Nilovna, represents all the females of the Russian society. she

is neither treated properly by her father nor by her husband Mikhail Vlasov. She always faced the domestic violence. Before her marriage once her father had told her that, "Nosense in making a face! If somebody's turned up whose food enough to take you to wife, grab the chance! All hens get married and they all have children who bring them nothing but a pack trouble you are no different from the rest" (Gorky,1907, pg.). Therefore, Gorky exposes how class structure and political ideologies control women's roles.

In both the texts, widowhood is ruled and strengthened by institutional structures like religious, political, and familial. In *Water*, the

widow ashram is managed under the construction of religious devotion, it functions as a system that explains the demotion and mistreatment of women, while in *Mother*, it intersects with class struggle and revolutionary ideology. Widowhood in *Water* is formed by caste, religion, and colonial gender customs while in *Mother*, widowhood is shaped by class and imposing ideology. Mohanty referring, Robin Morgan's text through specific assumptions " Universal sisterhood" about women as a cross-culturally singular, homogeneous group with the same interests, perspectives, and goals and similar experiences (Mohanty,2003, pg.110)". Mohanty criticizes this particular concept of universal sisterhood where women all over the world are suffered equally due to androcentrism and they are considered as single homogeneous group who need solidarity in their struggle against their oppressions while sustaining culture, racial and contextual differences.

3.6 Intersectionality; Religion, Class, And Ideology

In both the stories there is intersectionality of religion, race along the gender and class consciousness. This is something aligns with Mohanty's concept of Intersectionality, emphasizing that class, religion, race, and age interact with gender. Both the novels extant widowhood as a multi-dimensional form of oppression, which aligns with Mohanty's intersectional feminist analysis that women oppression cannot be understood through patriarchy or gender alone rather it is the intersectionality of gender, race, religion, culture, history and colonialism all work collectively with male dominance in females' oppression.

This is something again approve that institution like religious, political, colonial and capitalist systems work together in women oppression. Both the stories criticize the institutional powers control the female's body and emotions, prominence that patriarchy is structural and transnational not only cultural.

Both *Water* and *Mother* are fixed in different national, historical, and ideological places, both portray widowhood as a common site of pain, existence, and revolution. In this way both these

novels resist hegemonic stories like purity in Indian widowhood and the silence imposed on working class women like in Russia.

Applying *Feminism Without Borders* to *Water* and *Mother* support that widowhood is not just as a local cultural exercise, but as part of a global pattern of patriarchal constraint, changing in form but steady in function. Mohanty's theory aids to hint how women in India

and Russia despite vast differences in religion, history, and class are linked by the global reason of servility, and more importantly by their resistance to it. Their localized fights become part of a transnational feminist drapery that sounds for accord not in uniformity, but in political potential to justice, voice, and freedom. In the comparative study of Maxim Gorky's *Mother* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*, widowhood is not just a cultural or personal status. It becomes a socio-political identity, deeply rooted in the larger structures of patriarchy, class, religion, and colonialism.

3.7 Widowhood as a Site of Resistance

Both writings depict widowhood not only as a condition of loss but as a starting point for female struggle. Thus, widowhood becomes an illogical space both a site of destruction and likely freedom, shaped by different but connected cultural systems. Mohanty mentioning Valerie Amos and Prathibha Parmar in her essay *feminism without borders* "Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or label us 'traditional,' also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism. They need to be continually challenged" (Mohanty, 2003, pg.24). In both the under-examination texts struggles of widows are not on western ideals but based on religious and cultural intimidation.

In *Water*, widowhood is deeply knotted to colonial silence and nationalist dishonesty, where the abuse of widows is stabilized while the nation claims moral superiority. In *Mother*, widowhood reflects the tensions of a failing tsarist command, where even the most silenced figures (like widows) are exhausted into revolutionary change. These settings show how widowhood is politicized, often becoming a

metaphor for the state's condition of inactivity or the need for transformation.

Widowhood portrayed in *Mother* and *Water* shows that it is not a huge experience, but rather an active site of interconnecting oppressions like gender, class, religion, and colonialism. Both texts, though culturally ingrained, disclose how widows across the world are linked by systems of control, yet also by their capacity for resistance and redefinition. All these linked up with Mohanty's concept of transnational feminism where understanding the sociocultural changes widowhood become a world-wide issue and women struggles are combined by fight for self-individuality, independence and self-respect.

3.8 Transcultural Feminist Critique

Transcultural feminism struggles for universalizing woman experiences. When applied to literature this perspective depiction show woman across different cultures, subjected to intersecting form of subjugation. While also highlighting the strength of global feminist solidarity engrained in common struggle.

In examining *Water* and *Mother*, transcultural feminist critique lightens how widowhood is a common site of patriarchal control and provide a possible ground for cross border feminist conflict. In *Water* religious orthodoxy is tangled within a Hindu societal framework to construct widowhood. Here the ashram becomes a metaphor of gendered separation where widows are subject to guilt and sexual exploitation. The character of **Kalyani** and Chuyia signify the unclear character of widowhood. While in *Mother*, widowhood is formed by the oppressive socio-political system of Tsarist Russia. Pelageya Nilovna, though not neglected by religious principle, is silenced by her gender and class.

The patriarchal State expects her to remain passive and unpolitical, undervalued to a domestic sphere barren of agency. In the oppression of widows where they are discouraged and devalued either through religious complex system as in *Water* or class and ideological separation as in *Mother* where women are identified in relation to their man.

Chandra Mohanty, in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*, mentions **Beverly Lindsay**, who states that "linguistic and cultural differences exist between

Vietnamese and Black American women, but both groups are the victim of race, sex and class (Mohanty, 2003, pg. 3390). As Mohanty remarks that women's sufferings are different due to their locations and feminist must understand the differences and connection that women struggle interact due to universal structures of patriarchy, race and class differences. As in Indian cultures patriarchy works through gender, caste and religion as in Vietnamese and black American women also conform share suffering due to cultural differences. Similarly, Palagueya face the same oppression in the name of class and status even in different culture. This aligns with Mohanty understanding feminism without borders recognizing differences but all females united through shared struggles.

3.9 Global Solidarity

In both the stories the widows are connected not simply by their grief but by their ability to transform their suffering into resistance. In *Water*, struggle of Chuyia for escape shows the possibility of change, a symbol of hope and new generation who can change her life for the better and is untouched by religious patriarchy. Nilovna's will to peril her life shows how political awakening can release even the most tamed and suppressed figures. As Mohanty quotes from Irma, a Filipina worker in the Silicon Valley, "the only way to get a little measure of power over your own life is to do it collectively, with the support of other people who share your needs (Mohanty, 2003, pg. 168)." Mohanty means from Irma's quote that change in female condition does not come individually it needs collective working and solidarity with those who face similar oppression. Mohanty claims that feminist struggles should be based on shared struggle not on personal especially in a society where women are marginalized by race, culture and religion and their voices are not heard properly. As in Palagueya case collective working for revolution and in *Water* Shakuntala and Chuyia collective struggle brought hope for the liberty of widows. Both the texts confirm Irma's ideas that collective struggle brings strength and change in the society.

It is concluded that *Water* and *Mother* as not isolated cultural objects but a text in discourse identifying various and interconnected experiences of widowhood. Mohanty's concept of feminism repeats that solidarity among widows is not based on removing differences but building connection of oppression and shared struggles across the cultures. In spite of the differences, both texts disclose how widows challenge systems of power through either collective resistance or spiritual survival. This line up with Mohanty's idea of "feminist solidarity" knowing difference while building political influences.

3.10 Comparative Analysis of both the novels

The concept of Widowhood is generally associated with grief, loss and social dislocation. It takes different cultural procedures conditional on the political, and ideological, historical setting. Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (1906) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) these novels discover widowhood not just as isolated tragedy but extremely social and political miracle. Through their stories, the two writings present widowhood as a place

of subjugation, resistance, and change, allowing a transcultural dialogue on how women's individualities are controlled by patriarchal constructions across cultures. In *Mother*, Gorky positions widowhood in the setting of early 20th-century Russia, Pelageya Nilovna, a working-class widow, progresses from a passive, obedient figure into an active member in the revolutionary drive. Widowhood in her case represents both demotion and possibility.

By contrast, Sidhwa's *Water* depicts widowhood in colonial India under the rigid commands of Hindu orthodoxy.

In understanding the condition of widow's religion has a great role in India, through the sociological perspective it has a great role in isolation and marginalization of widows with various themes interpreting the doctrine of karma to rationalize widowhood sufferings in the ashrams and the formation of negative attitudes towards them. Sidhwa discloses how these religious manuscripts, operated by patriarchal forces, become ideological tools of widow's subjugation.

In spite of these differences, both texts meet on the theme of widowhood as a socially built individuality. In both Russian and Indian backgrounds, widowhood is less about the loss of a husband and more about the complete control of women's bodies, labor, and selections. Gorky settings of widowhood are within a revolutionary, materialist struggle. While Sidhwa borders it within a religious and cultural struggle. This transcultural perspective discloses how widowhood, though formed by different backgrounds, universally discloses the patriarchal mechanisms that limit women autonomy.

Sidhwa leaves readers with the lingering image of widows being victim of power, a sign of the continued weakness of widows within inflexible social orders. Where Gorky's widowhood story ends with empowerment. Sidhwa's underlines continuing subjugation, thereby generating a cross-cultural discourse on the rough routes of women's liberation.

Thus, widowhood in *Mother* and *Water* functions not as a particular experience but as a transcultural phenomenon formed by ideology, class, religion, and politics. While Gorky idealizes widowhood as a transformative power within social revolution, Sidhwa portrays it as a tragic symbol of rooted patriarchy. Both the stories illustrate widowhood as a tool of widows' oppression under patriarchy as Mohanty says in under western eyes "Men exploits, women are exploited (Mohanty,2003, pg.31)". Bapsi Sidhwa has shown solidarity amongst widows as an emotional and moral life while Gorky has shown as a political tool.

Conclusion

This study examines the notion of transcultural widowhood through Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* and Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. The main objective is to know how widowhood is a socially and culturally built experience, transcends national and historical limitations while still retaining its cultural specifications. Through the perspective of transcultural widowhood, the discussion exposes how widows are portrayed invisible in societal construction by religious, patriarchal and ideological hierarchies. And how they rebuilt their identity within the system of exclusion. In this regard *Chandra Talpade*

Mohanty's concept of Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (2003) helps as a guiding framework letting an examination of widowhood in the third world countries beyond homogenization or universalization while approving cross-cultural solidarity stating that women emancipation is not cultural but a universal exertion.

The comparative analysis discovered that widowhood is shaped by patriarchy differently in Russian and Indian settings. The study in comparison of these two texts has established that widowhood cannot be condensed into a singular account and the third world women cannot be considered as monolithic based on shared system of oppression by male dominance. The under-study texts reveal that systems of controlling the female bodies are different across geography and really based on social political backgrounds. But whatever is the reason of widow's oppression, in reality both are the sufferers. Suffering of widows keeps quiet potential of resistance and common fight against subjugation and suppression. Finally, the transcultural discourse between these two texts highlights widowhood as not static spirit but as historically reliant social skill of gender discipline that creates unexpectedly its own adversary.

References

- Chattopadhyay, S. (2024, December). Widowhood: A Cultural Study and Its Impact on Diasporic Female Identity. In *Collected Papers of the XXIII Congress of the ICLA* (Vol. 2, pp. 152-163).
- Akhter, J. Characterisation of Women in Maxim Gorky's Novel "Mother": A Marxist Feminist Perspective.
- Women in Gorky & Prose Fiction 1892-1911 (Doctoral dissertation).
- Pickle, S. E. (2014). *The form of learning is the learning of forms: Models of socialist aesthetic education in Gorky, Hacks, and Müller*. Cornell University.
- Amir, Z., Rasool, S. H., & Jalal, A. (2023). From Determinism to Volition: An Existentialist Study of Nilovna in Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 7(1), 253-262.

- Hussain, S. G., Ali, H., & Saqib, M. (2022). Representation Of Sexual Exploitation In Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel Water. *Global Language Review*, VII, 59-71.
- Khan, N. H. (2020). An Intersectional Feminist Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's Water. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 4(II), 43-55.
- Asif, M., Noreen, M., & Akhter, M. S. (2021). Gender Vs Culture: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel Water. *PalArchs Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(18), 858-868.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). "Under western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in culture and Society*, 28(2), 499-535.
- Carlin, M., & Federici, S. (2014). The exploitation of women, social reproduction, and the struggle against global capital. *Theory & Event*, 17(3).
- Roychowdhury, R., Singh, H., Kumar, V., Sharama, S., & Kumar, A. Healing through Faith: Psychological Impact, Spiritual and Social Resilience of Widowhood in Vrindavan.
- Farrugia, D., & Gerrard, J. (2016). Academic knowledge and contemporary poverty: The politics of homelessness research. *Sociology*, 50(2), 267-284.
- Gupta, A., Bhattacharya, P., & Priya, K. R. (2019). Revisiting the paradigm shift in trauma studies: Twenty-five years of Veena Das' 'our work to cry: Your work to listen'. *Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India*, 68(1), 70-84.
- Moscow, K. K., Gosudarstvennyi, R., & Akhmatova, A. (2021). A study on the struggle of women survival in the select novels of bapsi sidhwa. *Alam, N.* (2020). Analysis of Existential Perspectives in Bapsi Sidhwa's Water. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 4(I), 52-68.
- Singh, R. P., & Rana, P. S. (2020). Faith and place: Hindu sacred landscapes of India. In *The Routledge handbook of place* (pp. 75-87). Routledge.

