

**A PARROT IN THE CAGE: CHUHIYA AS A YOUNG
WIDOW IN DEEPA MEHTA'S MOVIE WATER**

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Abstract

*The Paper focuses on an important treatise on the heart – rending plight of widows in the Hindu society by taking the character of young widow: **Chuhiya** in Deepa Mehta's movie "**Water**" which is set in Pre Independence era in Varanasi, where Women is treated as weaker sex in the Patriarchal society. The sacred Hindu texts describe the widow as **long suffering until death, self – restraint and chaste**. **Chuhiya** is treated as classless, casteless girl united in her widowhood in the ashram like a 'Parrot in the cage' portrayed in the movie **water**. Mehta tries to question the gender discrimination between men and women in the film **water** and also between the two widows – **Kalyani and Chuhiya**.*

Key words: *Long suffering, death, self-restraint, chaste, gender discrimination, weaker sex, patriarchal society.*

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The scriptures portray the treatment of widows in the following way : A widow is denied the use of Honey, meat, salt, Pungent condiments, ornaments, perfumes, flowers, dyed clothes and all other clothes of life which are normally cherished by women .She is to eat only once a day, sleep on the floor, observe celibacy and numerous fasts . She is tonsured by a barber at regular intervals.

'The trailer at the beginning of the movie 'water' describes from,

"**The laws of Manu**", in chapter verse (15-16) Dharmashastras of Sacred Hindu texts describes that "a Widow should be long suffering until death, self restrained and chaste". A Virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband has died goes to heaven. A Woman who is unfaithful to her husband is reborn in womb of jackal.

Deepa Mehta narrates the plight of widows with the help of a girl child named Chuhiya who is married to a much older and sickly male when she should have played with dolls. As the luck has it , her husband dies soon after and she is returned unceremoniously to her parents house and from there she is taken to the holy city of Banaras and left in the care of a wide assortment of widows who live at "the widow's" house, shunned by the rest of the community .

This little girl who wish to fly like a bird and blossom like flower, doesn't have any awareness about the outside world, retors by saying that "she doesn't want to be a vidhwa, she's still half alive." which shows that her individual opinion is not taken into consideration and Madhumathi, the head of the ashram provokes Chuhiya to indulge in prostitution after the death of

Kalyani being a widow to lead the ashram, which describes the “ Role of Matriarchy against Patriarchy as “ two faces of a coin “ in the society .

It is this “ Patriarchal rule “, which has made the woman to suffer in the name of myth and has treated ‘her’ as ‘ Subaltern’ to man .They treat women just to quench their thirst and the products of Reproduction. She is made to blindly follow the myth, either to follow sati or marry his younger brother or become a vidhwa. *But when a wife dies will these conditions apply to men? No, her husband will not perform these duties instead; he will marry another woman and lead his life. So, then where is the Equality between Men and Women?*

Mehta describes Chuhiya as an innocent widow who does not know that according to holy Hindu scriptures she has been destined to live in the ashram the rest of her life because Widow remarriage was not popular at those times and which had to be framed .During those times, widows were treated as the burden on the limited economy, so they left them on the ashram.

Chuhiya who is a young widow is represented as a classless, casteless girl united in her widowhood in the ashram is represented as a “parrot in the cage “in the film water and her heart is like a ‘bee – hive ‘ which has so many sweet desires and feelings of honey had been sucked by the other bees “ by abstaining to chant “ Jai shrikrishna “ to make her adult in the young age which is just like “purifying Pearl which is already in the purified form “ and forced to lead a “life of committed unhappiness”.

Conclusion

Finally, Mehta portrays Young and active widow Chuhiya who was a flower, like Sunflower, had sweet desires and feelings of honey *like bee – hive* and at last droops down lifeless by both patriarchy and matriarchy because Kalyani who is elder than Chuhiya falls in love with Narayan, a Gandhian agrees to marry and drowns herself after having known that she had been

with her lover's father as a prostitute leaving Chuhiya alone in the ashram .

As, the movie is set in colonial era, it is showing the treatment of women where they were married at a early age and the rules were framed for widow remarriage. The main character Chuhiya is also married at an age of nine years and becomes a young widow, later has to face many obstacles in her life.

The trailer in the beginning of the movie shows that,

"A Widow should be long suffering until death, self-restrained and chaste according to the sacred Hindu texts. If these texts itself deny women then there will be no identification for women in the society, which can be proved by the following fact i.e., according to 2001 census, there are 34 million widows in India who are living in the conditions of Social, Economic and Cultural depression as prescribed 2000 years ago by the Sacred Text of Manu. So, whether a Man or woman, or both should be treated equally and given equal rights. A Widow Should build in *her self-esteem* to fight for all the obstacles that comes before her."

She should recognize in her **forty thousand energy** to kill forty people and in the same way if she makes her mind,

"A single woman can destroy all the evils in the society because each and every men Is Born from women".

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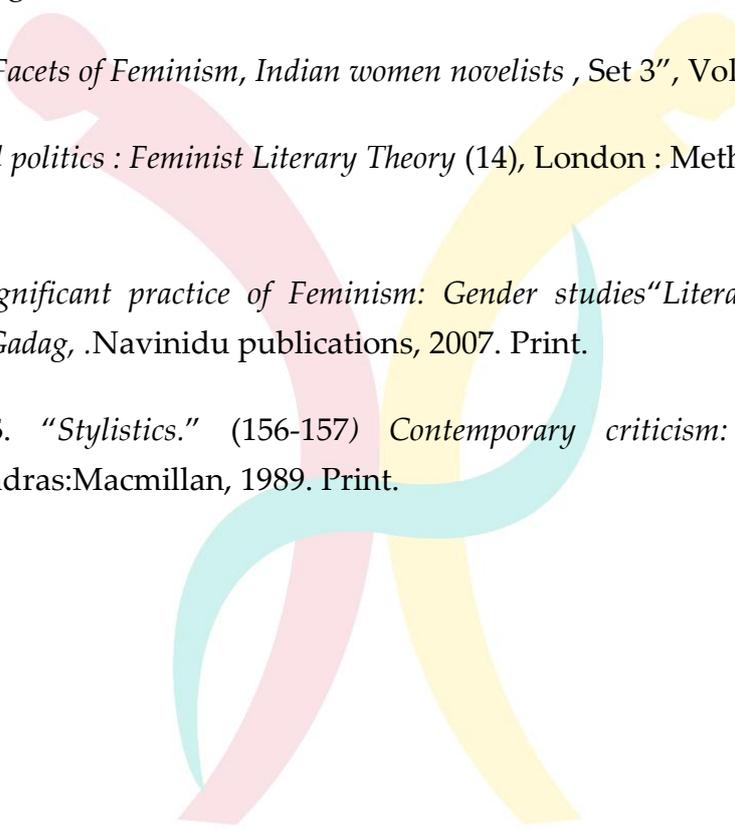
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