



Analysis of Existential Perspectives in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*

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Abstract

The great philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserts, "Man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains". It is a fact, since the very beginning, humans have always been captives in the hands of their cultures, , religions, laws, and norms. These constraints always confine human freedom. . Consequently, these ever injustices with humans pushed the philosophers of 20th century to raise their voices against such injustices which snatch humans' freedom. As a result, Existentialist movement came about , and started suggesting humans to get freedom from all constraints in society. This research aimed to analyze the dominant perspectives of Existentialism in Bapsi Sidwa's novel,

The researcher had to analytically study existentialism in the novel, and to study the contents of the novel under study through the lens of existentialist theory. The method in this study was qualitative in nature. The researcher has referred to the instances from the novel to bring forward the underlying theme in the novel. The text of the novel was taken by the researcher as a sample. The researcher has found that the novel is about the wretched lives of widows in the traditional Brahminical societies in India. Following their beliefs and traditions the traditional Brahminical societies, mal-treat their widows, and snatch their freedom even in modern times. Moreover, in the novel, the researcher discerned, that not only widows, women, but also men are doomed to sufferings, miseries, and traumas in the names of moribund, and obsolete norms and beliefs in such traditional societies.

Key Words: Existentialism, norms, traditions, India, Suffering, freedom, Brahmin, widows

1. Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophy that concerns the idea of an individual's existence, freedom, the choice to live his/her life, and self-responsibility. It asserts that humans must be free to make their own conclusions, and meanings in their lives. Moreover, they strive to make



logical verdicts while living in this meaningless and absurd world. Existentialism asserts to allow human thinking and existence to define itself. It rejects all the norms, beliefs, cultures, and traditions, it only emphasizes an individual's own choice of whatsoever s(he) makes of their life. This concept emerged during the late and mid-19th century. And reached its peak in France during the mid-20th century. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the pioneers of existentialism "Existence precedes Essence". This means first humans exist and then they try to make meanings of their lives. Humans try to find meaning in their lives by opting to do many things. For example, they sometimes follow religions to give meaning to their lives, sometimes, they follow different dogmas, traditions, and norms to make their existence meaningful. Moreover, he says life has no meaning, it is absurd, but humans try to make it meaningful. Besides that, in one of his 1946 works, he asserts, "Existentialism is Humanism". The pioneers of the theory of Existentialism were: Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl Franz Kafka, and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Bapsi Sidwa is a Pakistani- American novelist. She was born on 11 August 1938 in Gujarat Pakistan to Parsi family. She writes in English and resides in the United States. She is best known for her collaborative work with Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. Her most famous novels are the 1991 novel *Ice Candy Man* and her 2006 novel *Water*. Moreover, a documentary about Sidwa's life called "Bapsi: Silences of My Life" is currently in production and is expected to release in 2021.

Coming to the research, especially in India in Hindu societies, why something happens in a person's life without their consent, and when they don't want and need its happenstance at all?. What makes it happen?, can it be god?, or it may be assumed to happen as a result of the sins of past lives as a penance?. Such heart-piercing and thorny questions are frequently asked in the under study novel by Bapsi Sidwa. *Water* as the fifth novel of the writer, is based on the film 'Water' by an Indo-Canadian filmmaker, Deepa Mehta. The setting of the novel is India, and the year is 1938, that is nine years prior to India's independence from the shackles of colonialism. Moreover, it is based on the mal-treatment of Hindu widows in traditional societies. The novel is an account of the struggles of a kid of just eight years old, Chuya. Chuya is made to marry a forty four year old widower. More unfortunately, misfortune shortly and very quickly surrounds, that her husband dies of a disease. Consequently, by following the norms, she is left at a widows' ashram(a building in which widows are kept). In the ashram, Chuya is compelled to be devoid of any sort of activity which might arouse the guilty self in



her. However, the non-conformist, and resistive Chuya, gradually begins to accept her fate , however, at instantly she defies many thing there. Moreover, inadvertently, she also influences other widows in the ashram, and in a sense becomes a source of change in the lives around her. When the elegant prostitute, Kalyani, a widow falls in love with an elite class a young Gandhian, Narayan, the prohibited affair poses a dangerous threat to the Hindu tradition, and to the affairs of the ashram, and to its hypocrisy. For Chuya and Kalyan, to keep things normal and to get out of the quagmire of this place, they have to take steps and do something like a sacrifice beyond their imaginations and potentials.

1.1 Problem Statement

Life has no meaning in itself, to give meanings to their lives, humans try to find meaning in cultures, religions, and laws. Hindu Brahmin widows are not allowed to remarry for the rest of their lives. It does not matter how young they are. The study will focus on the grievances of the miserable widows in Brahmin societies in India, in the novel, “Water”.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To analyze the theme of existential humanism in the novel Water.
- To examine the contents of the selected novel in -- light of the theory of Existentialism.
- The major aim of this research is to analyze how in traditional, Brahmanical Indian societies widows, and women are doomed to sufferings, miseries, and traumas.

1.3 Research Questions

- How is the theme of Existential humanism depicted in the novel Water by Bapsi Sidhwa?
- Why and how cultures, and religions curtail human freedom?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The researcher will explore the concept of existential humanism in the novel. The selected theme is very paramount and crucial in modern times as well. One of the greatest tragedies of humans is that, they don't make decisions to live their lives according to their own ways, rather they follow the already existing obsolete and paleolithic traditional systems. We see that people are killing each other in the name of religion, culture, nationality, ethnicity, and norms. Even these days, the miserable Hindu widows are doomed to live the same lives as is presented in the novel. Owing to religious beliefs and other social confinements people are compelled and encumbered to live other lives, not theirs. Moreover, this research aims to assist the students



of literature in acquiring a complete knowledge of the philosophy of existentialism in general and existential humanism in particular, in the context of this work.

1.5 Delimitations

As existentialism is a very vast field, and has various disciplines like Agnostic existentialism, Existential anarchism, Atheistic existentialism, Cosmism, Feminist existentialism, Theatre of Absurd, and etc. This research analyzes Existential humanism through Sartre's perspectives in the contents of the novel 'Water' .

2. Literature Review

Sartre deemed that human beings live in constant anguish, not mainly because life is miserable, but because we are 'condemned to be free'. Since the circumstances of our birth and upbringing are out of our control, he reasons that once we attain self-awareness (and we all do eventually), we have to make choices —that define our very 'essence'.

Sartre's theory of existentialism states that "existence precedes essence", that is only by existing and acting a certain way, we give meaning to our lives. According to him, there is no fixed design for how a human being should be and no God to give us a purpose. Therefore, the onus for defining ourselves, and by extension humanity, falls squarely on our shoulders. This lack of pre-defined purpose along with an 'absurd' existence that presents to us infinite choices is what Sartre attributes to the "anguish of freedom". With nothing to restrict us, we have the choice to take actions to become who we want to be and lead the life we want to live. According to Sartre, each choice we make defines us while at the same time revealing to us what we think a human being should be. And this incredible burden of responsibility that the free man has to bear is what relegates him to constant anguish. Consequently, detailed illustrations of existentialist themes are more often drawn from the works of Sartre" (Olson, pg. 8).

This section of the literature review will provide some major works and articles related to this philosophy. The theme of existentialism is being discussed by different writers in their novels. . In his 1938 novel "Nausea", Jan Paul Sartre asserts that every person has entire freedom in life, he or she has the ability to choose different ways at different moments in their lives. He says the ultimate choice should be to choose to be- that means one's existence. And that means a person should value his/her existence above everything else. He further says this choice should be common to everyone. At the close of this novel, Roquentin prefers his choice for existence over nothingness. Through this novel, Sartre is trying to portray that life has itself no meaning, humans must be free to create meanings in their lives. Moreover, he says that one



should never wait for a God to help them because for him there exists no God. All in all, he requests people to have their responsibilities to make meanings of their meaningless and absurd lives on this planet.

In his journal, ‘Existentialism and Christian Humanism: Joseph Pieper’s Critique of Sartre Revisited’ (Richey, 2015) asserts, Sartre’s goal was “to draw all of the conclusions inferred by a consistently atheistic point of view,”.(77) that means Sartre believes in complete of humans without any influence of God and cultures. Pieper, in the words of Bernard Schumacher, “wanted to think through the ultimate consequences of the metaphysics of creation on the level of human nature, death, hope, love, leisure, the virtues, tradition, and philosophy.”(78) But in order to think through these ultimate consequences, indeed, in order to think about the world at all, Pieper believed, the fundamental Platonic concept of a nature or essence, capable of being known in some real (if not exhaustive) way was necessary. And such an intelligible nature, in turn, demands for its existence the Christian notion of a Creator(Richey, 2015).

A research conducted by (Amanat & Rehman, 2015,) sheds light on the status of the women in society especially on the pitiful life of the widows. It explores the various aspects of the men’s authority and the women’s subjugation. They used the theory of feminism to conduct this research in which the men marginalize women by various ways. There are various ways by which the men marginalize women and sexuality is one of them. The research further explores that the women are assaulted sexually but this assault does not let them suffer only physically, but also shapes their entire lives. Their present is determined by their sexual past. My research will explore not only women but also men suffer in societies, owing to their beliefs and cultures.

(Wshleman, 2011)elaborates the idea of Absurdism which is strongly attached with the philosophy of existentialism, in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Absurdism rejects every theological, scientific, and metaphysical answer to the meaning of human existence. According to the French writer, Albert Camus, when the human desire of order confronts the irrationality of the universe then the result is “absurdity”, although humans keep on seeking the meaning in this world, however, in truth, there is no meaning. In his famous philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” he portrays the meaningless labor of Sisyphus who rolls up a rock to the mountain only to roll it back down again, and it continues in an endless cycle. This task of Sisyphus entails the monotonous reality of an individual's existence. Sisyphus embraces



the “futility and hopeless labor” (Camus, 2017) Camus asserts that one must prefer to consider Sisyphus happy, indulged in the absurd activity of rolling the boulder. As he said, “All Sisyphus’s silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing” (Camus, 1942) Thus, according to Camus, in order to cope with the absurdity of life, one has to embrace it. (Nagel, 1971).

In her article ((Jabeen,2011) “A Comparative Feministic Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa’s Novels” has tried to unravel both the overt and covert forms of female exploitation within the patriarchal society as presented by Sidhwa in her fiction. This research project focuses mainly on Sidhwa’s three famous novels, namely Water, Ice-Candy Man and The Bride which present the subjugation and marginalization of women from 1938 till 1975. Sidhwa’s novel Water demonstrates the miserable condition of Hindu widows before partition. Water explores female suffering under unfair religious rules levied against widows as well as female oppression through forced prostitution. These widows were exploited in the name of religion and forced to live in the pathetic living conditions. Her novel Ice-Candy Man shows the huge massacres and destruction due to partition. It showed women as vulnerable targets during partition. Ice Candy Man highlights how female sexuality is targeted as the main source of exploitation and revenge during the turbulent times of the 1947 partition. The Bride shows the women’s suppression in the name of patriarchal traditions and shows the women’s enslavement even after the so called partition. The Bride gives a detailed analysis of male manipulation in the name of cultural values and the tribal culture of Pakistan. These novels illustrate the patriarchal system which snatches a woman’s right to live her life according to her own will. My research will analyze how men are also being suppressed in societies in the name of religion, and culture (Jabeen, 2011).

A study conducted by (Tan, Plowman, & Hancock, 2007) on Samuel Beckett’s play ‘Happy Days’ depicts the absurdity and mundaneness of life. There is a female character named Winnie in that play who’s entirely devoid of meaning in her life and stuck in the mud, which may depict people’s unavoidable monotonous life. This situation shows that how life has no apparent meaning and everything happening around is quite irrational. So, she accepts her position and believes that it is a valuable lifestyle despite being stuck in such a hopeless situation.

(Li, sun 2020) discerned George Orwell’s 1984, which depicts a character, Winston living in a fictional totalitarian state where screens and microphones track everybody’s actions. Winston begins to become cynical of society and its members and is therefore considered a “thought



criminal”. Winston keeps pursuing liberation, but all his efforts are futile. In the end, he is being threatened by rats, so he surrenders and becomes faithful to the state. “Thus, value lessness exists in the individual, and even though Winston has fought to prove the meaning of his existence, his efforts go vain.” (pg. 18)

Kierkegaard, in his book "The Sickness unto Death"(Kierkegaard, Hong, & Hong, 1980) depicts human beings as being shackled between two conflicting forces: the finite and the infinite. To get dominated by the finite, individuals become depressed and anxious because the course of life appears to be stuck in a particular position. Infinite, on the other hand, has multiple options on what one should become, but in truth no one becomes anything. Finding a balance between these two powers is a kind of path to “Selfhood” but it evokes anxiety and desperation as there is no standard way, and one must “walk without meeting one single traveler” (Fear and Trembling, pg. 76). One who manages the balance between finite and infinite sustains “selfhood”. Kierkegaard believed that if an individual goes through three stages, he can find the "true self": the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and the religious stage. He has emphasized the last stage, that is to have all faith in God, the highest standard of existence is this stage near Kierkegaard. (Rempel, n.d)

Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* represents the characters who wait in some sort of spiritual force, that is ‘Godot’, to come and enlighten their existence, though he never comes. This idea depicts the common human tendency to wait for universe to offer them meaning instead of creating their own. They just exist, ignoring the freedom of choice.

Friedrich Nietzsche, believed that religion is only a diversionary tactic from the actual fact that we are alone in a world where we have to develop our own beliefs. Nietzsche stated that “nihilism strongly asserts that the world and especially humans have no purposes. Individuals holding nihilism as their conviction believe in nothing, and have no purpose, and have an impulse to destroy his or her self.” (Barett, 2002)

(Nisa, 2017) explains how Ernest Hemingway, in his short story, ‘A Clean, Well-Lighted Place’ depicts his nihilistic world view by illustrating an old man, for whom life was meaningless. Hemingway suggests that life is meaningless and that in a great sea of nothingness, man is an insignificant speck. One major character of the story makes this idea more prominent by saying that “It was all a nothing and man was a nothing too.” (HEMINGWAY, 1933) He uses the word 'nada' in prayer to mean nothingness, which also



demonstrates that religion is also just nothing, to which many people turn to find value and meaning.

On the other hand, (Solihah, Winarko, Afiahayati, & Hartati, 2017) give us the Gregor's representation of nothingness in Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis'. Gregor's own characteristics such as less intelligence, laziness brings him in to the position of nothingness. The researcher has found out that his own pessimistic and negative characteristics caused him the feelings of being meaningless. So, he refused his existence and starts living in a locked room.

Moreover, the most relevant existentialist theme is death. "... death is just a fellow Existence." (Heidegger, 2014, pp 302). Martin Heidegger believed that knowledge of death indicates the meaning of life or existence. We indulge in trivialities of life and continue to avoid death which makes us feel "inauthentic" (Shariatinia, n.d.).

Albert Camus's existential protagonist, Meursault, in 'The Stranger' remains detached from societal standards, religion and exercises absolute freedom until his execution. After murdering an Arab he is imprisoned and asked to accept God's presence, but he refuses to accept what he is being told and chooses to die instead. For him, life holds no greater meaning, and death can liberate him from the insignificance of existence. (Md Islam, 2018).

In contrast with the philosophy of Camus, Sartre claims that although life has no established meaning, it can be created by the individual oneself. He states that "life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing" (Sartre, 1943). When a man discovers that he has no predetermined meaning and he is utterly liberated, this notion leads him to anguish. As he believed that man has no defined meaning so he should create his own values and choices and shape his life. "We are left alone, without excuse" (Sartre, 1946). Man will make what he really is by making choices instead of staying what he is now, this is often called "subjectivity." He believed that everything starts from the inside of a person, so there is no such "objective" thing about what a human being is or should be, "subjectivity" must be the starting point.

To conclude this part, it may be said that, all the above mentioned writers have one notion in common regarding the theory of Existentialism and that is, they all insist on an individual's to have his/her own choices in life. No man should be confined or forced to live at others' whims and wishes. People should create their own meaning of life through their own personal choices, actions, and responsibilities. However, they have all talked about human



existence generally, but they have not known the fact that in humans women are more prone to suffer, and become captives in the hands of this patriarchal and harsh society. This research will be more women-oriented, and it will focus on the existential crises women face. As it is said life is harsh for men, but harshest for women.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The researcher has used Sartre's Existential humanistic theory to analyze the contents of existential humanism in the selected novel. Existentialism is a movement in philosophy and literature that concerns the existence, freedom, and choice of an individual. It emerged in the mid-to-late 19th century, however it reached its pinnacle in the mid-20th century in France. It declares that humans try to create and define their own meaning in life, and strive to have rational decisions despite living in an irrational universe. It emphasizes the question of human existence and the notion that there is no purpose or meaning at the bottom of existence. It holds the conviction that there is no God, or any other transcendent force, the only remaining way to counter this absurdity (and hence to find meaning in life) is acknowledging and embracing existence.

However, the researcher has analyzed the contents of the novel through Sartre's perspectives of existential humanism. For Sartre existentialism is humanism. He asserted this in 1945 in his lecture at the Club Maintenant in Paris. By this he means that humans should be entirely free to live their lives. For him no culture, religion, and god exist. His philosophy is the philosophy of existence. As he claims, "Existence precedes essence". of teachings (p.26).

Sartre believes in complete freedom of human beings. For this he urges humans to free themselves from the doctrines of cultures, religions, and traditions.

3.2. Research Design

The research is qualitative in nature. It is from general to specific. It has analyzed the cases of chuya, Kalyani, and Narayan. The researcher for primary source has thoroughly studied the text of the novel and critically examined the selected theme in it. Secondary sources will be used in the form of online articles. By using the theoretical frame work of Jean-Paul Sartre's Existential Humanism, the researcher will explore the core perspectives of existential humanism in the novel Water.

3.3. Research Method



The method used for the study is content analysis. The researcher has referred to the instances from the novel to bring forward the underlying theme of the novel. By using this research design, the researcher will analyze the contents of Jean-Paul Sartre's perspectives of Existential Humanism in the very novel.

3.4 Sample

The researcher has read the text of the novel thoroughly and has analysed Jean-Paul Sartre's perspectives of Existential Humanism in it.

4. Content Analysis

Literature studies life and society; it also shows the relationship between humans and their societies and environments. The novel is one of the genres of literature, and it is a long, fictional narrative that depicts intimate human experiences. In novels, we come to know about lives other than our own with different norms, traditions, cultures, beliefs, and places. Above all, novels talk life of man and his concerns particularly related to religion, politics, economics, norms, cultures, and most importantly social issues.

Pakistani English Literature is very rich in depicting the lives of people in the country and abroad. Bapsi Sidwa is very vocal and bold when it comes to women's rights. All her novels do highlight the plights of women in societies. including her novel, "The Ice Candy Man", this novel is no exception. In "Water", the novel under study she too seems to be very much immersed in the wretched Indian widows and their horrible and appalling conditions. She leaves no stone unturned to unfold the injustices and cruelties inflicted upon the wretched widows in traditional Indian societies in the name of religion, culture, norms, and laws.

The questions which the researcher has highlighted have been answered with the help of selected data from the very novel by the very novelist, Bapsi Sidwa In. the novel 'Water'

The story is set in 1938 when the colonial India was against Mahatma Gandhi's rise to popularity. Back during those days, child marriages were considered common practice. Widows had a very dire and pitiable position in society where they were considered as half alive human beings. They were expected and forced to spend their entire lives only in penance, poverty, and in the worship of God. However, Widow-remarriages were legalized by the then colonial laws, but they were not practiced in letters and were considered taboos. The story of the novel begins with a six-year-old girl named Chuya, who resides with her parents in a small village on the Bengal-Bihar border. Her totally carefree life drifts to an end when she is married to Hira Lal, a forty-four-year-old widower.



Coming to analyze data from the text: “Hira Lal’s mother longs our Chuya to marry Hira Lal” (page, 5), he said. This line is asserted by Somnath to his wife Bhagya. He is the father of Chuya. This line shows that, at the very beginning of the novel, how much the society of Chuya was obsessed with the idea and culture of marriage-hood. As Hira Lal is a forty-year-old widower and the Chuya is just six at the moment. However, her father turns ecstatic that, Hiral Lal’s mother wants their daughter to marry her son. How pitiful the situation, is shown in the fact that instead of showing reluctance, Somnath is very thrilled to announce this news to his wretched wife, the mother of Chuya. After hearing this heart-wrenching news from her husband, Bhagya the mother of Chuya goes very sad, thinking that, her daughter is too young to get married. She deems this is Chuya’s playing time in her life.

However, all her objections go in vain. As she is a woman no one listens to her. The thing to be pondered on is, why have humans made marriage more than important in one’s life? We see Chuya is only six, she is not even able to know what is a marriage. Here we Chuya’s life decisions are made by her society, her tradition, and her parents, unfortunately, not by herself. Moreover, in her infancy, her freedom is snatched from her. This is sheer existential crises, and we need to be more existentialists here that, we should stop such brutal actions happening anywhere around us. We must speak against all the odds occurring in our societies. We must not leave the weak and powerless segment of our society at the mercy of moribund, obsolete, and palaeolithic traditions and dogmas.

“They don’t want a dowry; they will pay for the wedding. She will be well cared for. Hira Lal’s mother is a kind woman. She will be good to our girl”. (page, 5,6). In these lines Chuya’s father is addressing her mother, he is trying to get her convinced that, she needs not be worried. Because he says, no dowry is demanded from the bridegroom’s side. Moreover, he says to his wife that, all the expenses for the wedding will be met by the bridegroom’s family. Besides that, he says that Hira Lal’s mother is a very kind woman, and their daughter will be well taken care of. The irony here is that, if a father himself is not conscious of taking care of his daughter, then who else is even supposed to and expected to do so. It is seen that, just for having no dowry and being paid for his daughter’s marriage, Somnath is taking the crucial decisions of his poor little daughter’s life. And the hypocrisy and stupidity is that, to his wife, he is showing and trying to be sure that, their daughter will be well cared for in her new home.

“He’s not bad looking. The family is of noble Brahmin lineage. We should be honored”.(page,6) Here these lines from Chuya’s father show that how much their society is



driven by the illogical societal standards. Why marry people for their good looks and noble family origins?. Is it not injustice with poor little Chuya that, she is being married just to earn a name for her father at the cost of even her carefree childhood life and her freedom. The writer conveys the idea how cruelties are done in the name of man-made standards like marriage, honor, and family.

“ 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”. (page,6). Again Somnath, the father of Chuya seems to be much possessive with the idea of marriage. Why is it so?. Who sets such standards in our societies, that, even every human being(men and women both) is restless and anxious to follow and go by them. The point is that what makes Somnath think and believe that, his daughter will bring disgrace to his family if she remains unmarried..

In addition to that, he says that his daughter is safe and happy only in her husband’s home. The point to be noticed is, how his daughter can be safe and happy in someone else’s home if she is not so at her own home.

By giving a reference from Brahminical traditions to his wife, Somnath further says, “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” (page, 6). These lines from Somnath show , how cruel, unkind, and illogical men have turned while following their beliefs, traditions, and norms. It is evident from these lines, how desperate people in such traditional societies become when they don’t see their daughters getting married. And it can make us imagine what can be the conditions of unmarried women in such societies. From these lines, it is shown that unmarried women and unmarried little girls are not even considered human beings. This means they do not have any identity, or a life of their own.

How can women in such societies be free to make their own choices where even men are powerless, compelled, and encumbered before their norms, beliefs, and cultures. It shows how much people are driven by their socially constructed realities. They cannot imagine going against their traditions; it seems they value their cultures and beliefs more than they value human beings. It is absolutely pathetic. “You are the wife and daughter of Brahmin priests; surely you are aware of our traditions, A woman’s role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created to have sons! And that is all!” (page, 7) Somnath utters these lines when he is continuously resisted and disagreed by his wife on the idea of getting their daughter married. We see that every now and then he is trying to convince his wife with their



Brahminical traditions that, it is indispensable for Brahmin women to get married as quickly as possible. As if for them getting their women married is the most sacred job on earth.

Moreover, it seems from the remarks of Somnath that, in such societies, women are considered objects to produce babies. Likewise, in such cultures, marriage becomes the greatest aim and purpose of women. Consequently, they are tended to lose their individual identity, freedom, and responsibility. Furthermore, when Somnath says that, women are created to beget sons, how prejudiced he seems. Because why a woman is only expected to have sons. This shows extreme bias, resentment, and prejudice towards women in such societies. As we know it is not in a woman's power to give birth to sons or daughters.

"I don't want to leave you and Baba, I don't want to leave Mohan-bhaiyya and Prasad - bhaiyya or Tun-Tun. I will have no one to play with" (page, 14) These lines are uttered by poor six-year-old Chuya on her wedding day. It is utterly clear that what is being done to her is completely against her will. She is just a child who wants to play with her brothers and her cat. On the other hand, her father is quite proud and satisfied to see his six-year-old daughter marrying a forty-four-year-old widower. When such things happen existential humanism mourns. As we see the little Chuya's decisions are not taken by herself, but by her society and her father. She does not want to marry, she cries. But there was no one to listen to her. As this practice of child marriages was so common there, and her reaction before everyone there was quite commendable.

"Your Husband is dead. You are a widow now" (page, 27) These lines are addressed to Chuya by her father. In traditional Brahmin Hindus, it is a ritual that, girls go to their husbands' house after two years of their marriages. During the time after Chuya's marriage to Hira Lal, he becomes ill and dies. Now when he dies the real miseries and sufferings fall upon her. As she becomes an untouchable being, a widow. When she hears it, she does not even take it seriously. Because she did not know what awaited her. Now her father also turns sad and regretful. It seems they were entirely at the mercy of their cultures, beliefs, and norms.

"And when our husbands die, God helps us, the wives also half die". She paused for effect and sighed dramatically. "So, how can a poor half-dead woman feel any pain?" She asked, not really thinking and expecting an answer. Chuya, tears still slipping down her face, raised her head, and between snuffles, replied with a child's innocent logic, "Because she is half alive?". (page, 36). As Chuya is a widow now, she has been deposited to an Ashram (a building where widows are kept forever). When she enters the ashram, she cries so loudly, she



is utterly shocked to see other widows there. Meanwhile, a fat and robust lady, Madhumati appears and tries to soothe Chuya and everyone around. As she was the lady who was ruling and running the ashram. She started saying that, their holy books say, wives are part of their husbands when the husbands are alive. She further instructs them that, why to cry and feel any pain, when they are already half dead. To her assertions, Chuya replies they must feel pain because they are half alive. What nonsense is in believing that, women are half dead when their husbands are dead? These atrocities are done to widows even in these modern times.. It is absolutely against human dignity. why widows are treated that way. They have the same feelings, urges, instincts, and emotions as other humans have. So why to treat them with no compassion. These are the questions and realities Bapsi Sidwa is trying to bring to limelight in the novel.

“You cannot wear colors or stitched clothes”.(page, 28) When her husband dies, at the funeral party a hired woman pulls down her skirt and pulls her (Chuya’s) blouse up over her neck and says that she cannot wear any colourful clothes or any stitched clothes. She can only wear the specific white clothes of widows forever. Moreover, in the ashram, the widows have to have their heads shaved, as it is believed that, if a single drop of water falls upon their hair, it pains their husbands' soul. Besides that, the widows are given two times meal, and the food to be eaten must be cold, not hot, in order not to arouse sexual desires in the windows.

“Ma, caste does not matter to me. You should know that by now”. (page 118) . Kalyani was one of the young widows in the ashram. She was very beautiful. An elite class Gandhian man Narayan falls in love with her. So much so that, he wants to marry her. Now, when he reveals this fact to his mother, his mother asks questions like, if the girl is Brahmin or not, to her surprise Kalyani was a widow. On her assertions, Narayan rises up as an existentialist character who goes against the traditional ways and thoughts as he says caste does not matter to him. It shows that not only women are suppressed in societies but men are also restricted to do anything of their own choice and will. They also have to grapple with the moribund norms, beliefs, and cultural values.

“Your father will not like this insult, It is smack to our faces, we have done everything for you, yet you do not trust us to make the right choice for you?” (page,118) Bhagwati, the mother of Narayan tells this to Narayan when he says he will marry a non- Brahmin girl. How harsh society is towards both men and women?. His mother clearly says that they will make the right choice for their son. We know that marriage is a personal matter, it must be taken



personally. Why to make other people's choices, where will their choice go?. This is a sheer existentialist situation that, someone's life decisions are made by others. This is how traditions, norms, beliefs, and cultural values control and confine people. both men and women, altogether.

“Hai Bhagwan! You are serious! How will we show our face to the world, Gandhi has turned you into a lunatic! Marry a widow? How can you even think of it? It is a sin! You should know that!” (page, 119). When Narayan reveals the fact that he is going to marry a widow, his mother bursts out with surprise, and rage. as it was most unexpected to hear such a thing, that was unimaginable for the family. Consequently, she blames Gandhi that, it is the influence of him that, her son has grown lunatic and thinking of doing such a forbidden thing. As Mahatma Gandhi was the harbinger of peace and was struggling hard to free the widows to get them remarried.

Oh, God! What will happen to your sisters? Have you thought of that? Who will marry them? No one wants a girl whose family spits on tradition and religion (page, 119). Narayan takes his flute and begins to play, It was usual-of Narayan, and his mother quickly reaches and snatches the flute from him..and says, it is a belief of traditional Brahmins that, music is forbidden and it should not be played at one's home. And it is also believed that if a family is not religious and traditional it is despised and frowned upon by other families. Resultantly, girls of such families are not sought for marriages. Consequently, the whole family has to suffer. Through the analysis of the contents of the novel, it is evident that, existential humanism is depicted in it by Bapsi Sidwa. It is also evident through the characters of Chuya, Narayan, and Kalyani, how cultures, traditions, and religion snatch and confiscate their individuality, existence, and freedom.

5. Conclusion

Human beings have always been captives in the hands of their beliefs, traditions, norms, and values. So much so that, these values sometimes become more valuable than human lives. These values snatch freedom and existence from humans. Bapsi Sidwa in this novel has shown the same picture of an Indian traditional Brahmin society, how cruel societies have grown that, they forget the basic human rights. Through the characters of Chuya and Narayan, she the author has beautifully portrayed that societies are atrocious not only towards women but towards men as well. That's why the researcher has taken the theory of Existential humanism from the perspectives of Sartre to look into the matter more profoundly. As existentialism



asserts, to allow human thinking and existence to define itself. It rejects all the norms, beliefs, cultures, and traditions, it only emphasizes an individual's own choice of whatsoever s(he) makes of their life. It focuses on an individual's freedom, his/her own choices in life, his/her existence, and his/her personal responsibility. As Sartre puts it, "existence precedes essence".

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