

Mimetic Representation of Female Characters in ‘Their Language of Love’ by Bapsi Sidhwa

Shujaat Ali Khan
TEVTA Secretariat Govt. of Punjab Pakistan
E.mail:shujaatalikhan@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Arfan Lodhi
Higher Education Department College Wing Punjab, Pakistan
E.mail:samaritan_as@gmail.com

Hina Naveed
Visiting Lecturer at TEVTA
Email:engineerhina@gmail.com

Abstract

Females always have been the topic of discussion under different aspects discussed in literature. From some last decades there have been some debatable titles in writing especially postcolonial literature. There are many female writers in this period of postcolonial. In Pakistan, the persons who have a name on the conversation of feminism; Bapsi Sidwa is a good name in them. Feminism is a broad topic to mentioning but it would be interested when telling about particular comparative analysis with the male author representing the society. It is very perceptible when the relation between them is like a master-slave relationship as Hegel believes, or having a balance between them. It depends upon many factors like the cultural effect of the society. Pakistani society has a patriarchal building block in it so its criteria of debate and the way the others take it, are different. This study helps to enhance the space for a female in a society described by Bapsi Sidwa. Life depends on the thought of society and it varies the representative style of the authors.

Key Words: Feminism, Societal effect, Relationships, Memetic representation

DOI: 10.7176/JLLL/66-10

Publication date: March 31st 2020

Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa started writing during the 1980's, a time when women were not only supposed to be confined to the private background of homes but a time when there were almost no female postcolonial writers. Her writing gave a voice to females of the subcontinent and Sidhwa continued to write as an advocate for the female population of Pakistan. She is a prominent female activist and has even represented Pakistan at the Asian Women's Congress in 1975. Bapsi has not had much of a critical reception, although what has been written about her is favorable on the newspaper, reviews and interviews front, though Bapsi has been written about extensively and her work. Sidhwa successfully represented females who could remain within their houses while also having their individual voice. She represented a new type of female who created their own voice while not striving to overturn societal norms. This is exactly the type of female that Sidhwa has depicted in her collection of short stories, *Their Language of Love* where "Each story intricately places the protagonists in a cusp of several cultural worlds where they must negotiate differences of language, class and creed" (Goodyear xiii).

"Ruth and the Afghan" which is about a white American as been reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement, The London Review of Books and New York Times and so on. Sidwa's works are timeless and tell of the culture conflict in the movement and migrations of people. (Sanga 263)

It is significant that Sidhwa's novels revolve around women and their circumstances. However, her collection of shorts stories entitled *Their Language of Love* is centered on women of another caliber. These women are neither defined by the male characters nor are they subjugated or oppressed by the male characters. The female characters are active movers of the stories.

Each of the stories in this collection is about a woman, some of the stories are written in first person while others are written in the third person. The title story of this collection, *Their Language of Love* is about Roshni who is a newly married bride and who arrives in USA after her marriage. The story is about Roshni's physical as well as psychological journey. After her arrival in USA she gains a confidence that she did not possess before as Sidhwa writes, "Roshni could scarcely believe that she, the ugly duckling of her family in Bulsar...she's show off all this splendor to her relatives when they visited. She yearned to see the expression of wonderment on their faces"

(171). In “A Gentlemanly War” protagonist, Zareen is depicted as a distressed female during the 1965 war between Pakistan and India. However, at the end she comes to a realization about the underlying significance of the unfulfilled war that the male figures of the story do not acknowledge much less understand as she thinks “Going against the cynical logic of war, flying in the face of its brutal ethos, I believe that the underpinnings of strange miscalculation was an unacknowledged compassion” (28). “The Trouble Easers” and “Sehra-bai” is about mother-daughter relationships. “Defend Yourself Against Me” revolves around the story of female rape and how the female must be the forgiving entity at the end.

Bapsi Sidhwa presents an ‘imitation’ (as all art is essentially imitation) of women which is quintessentially well rounded and compelling. The female characters in Sidhwa’s stories not only range from elitist to middle class but they also are varied in the roles that they occupy ontologically as daughters, grandmothers, wives and girlfriends. The combining factor is their strength and fortitude.

Methodological Framework

The objective of this study is to analyze the female characters in *Their Language of Love* and to discuss how the representation of these women is an ‘imitation’ of real women. Therefore, Sidhwa has succeeded in conveying a portrait of real women which is both realistic and balanced. The ideas that objects are not copies of any reality that is presumed to exist independently of mind” Nothing at all we say about any object describes the object as it is in itself. We are not capable of attaining pure knowledge of objects in isolation from human modes of perception: we always perceive an object in terms of some one of its aspects (Gebauer 158)

Literature Review

Any given objects can be made “similar” to each other or as Putnam expresses it, “in fact everything is similar to everything else in infinitely many respects”. For this reason it is not possible to find a theory of truth on the quality of similarity. In attempting, albeit on the basis of untenable theory opened the way to a future solution to the problems. What they are concerned with is an objective relationship between ideas and external objects. (Gebauer 158). Mimesis entails an identification of one person with another. People identify themselves by means of their mimetic abilities when they see themselves in the other and perceive a state of mutual equality. There is a complementarity of perspectives in mimesis: a person regards the other as equal and assumes the other to be doing the same. (Gebauer 5)

Mimesis is used as a label for manifold social processes summarized conceptually. We have no language with which to illustrate original mimetic processes. Our investigation begins with Greek antiquity, where the concept arose and where its first meaning evolved. A distinction is to be made between a pre-platonic usage of the term oriented towards everyday meanings and Plato’s “discovery” of mimesis and Aristotle’s condensed use of the concept in his aesthetics.

According to Plato mimesis is the force that creates images and therefore underlies aesthetics. Plato sometimes designates even the works of philosophers as mimetic and calls for the creation of a society related mimetically to the eternal world of the ideas. Representation is not the act of an autonomous mind but the product of a practice: the practice of the hands in the formation of materials, painting or writing. Mimesis has also a practical side. It is an interpersonal activity, which is to say that others are always included in it and that it makes use of a material medium and occurs in situations that can be interpreted in material terms. (21)

The power relations between the male and female characters of *Their Language of Love* will also be highlighted in this thesis in order to emphasize how Sidhwa has been able to concretize the image of a woman who is not only strong but is able to keep within the perimeters of what ‘home and hearth’ require.

Discussions

Mimetic representation, with reference to Sidhwa refers to how realistically Sidhwa has portrayed her female characters and entails the balance she creates in their characters while at the same time conveying her feminist stance. Sidhwa ensures a balance between her male and female characters. Her feminism is not radical in which the male characters are completely overlooked and portrayed as either weak or ruthless and oppressive. Her male and female characters coexist in harmony. Nevertheless, her female characters are stronger but they do not ignore the male figures rather they mutually coexist with them. From, a psychoanalytic point of view, this existence highlights the fact that they are able to recognize the other consciousness without feeling threatened by it. The realistic nature of Sidhwa’s art of characterization is supported by the realistic backdrop of Lahore and Pakistan.

Hegel's theoretical framework of the master-slave dialectic is important with reference to the female male power dynamics as it ensures a sense of equality. Although, the very term master-slave in itself seems diametrically opposite to equality, Sidhwa's portrayal of the dynamics between her male and female characters show an equality that exists between the male and female characters. Her characters are neither antagonizing one another nor do they feign ignorance of the 'other' (in terms of gender). Her female characters acknowledge the presence of the male characters but they are not involved in the struggle to 'kill'.

Hegel presented a theory grounded in how two individuals' interact with each other. He has analyzed this interaction through psychoanalysis. According to him, when two individuals interact there is an innate master-slave interaction between both of the individuals. One of the individuals is more dominant than the other and thus becomes the master, while the other individual becomes the slave. With reference to the male and female dynamics, especially in the framework of Eastern dynamics, this becomes more complicated as the male figure is not only expected to dominate, due to the patriarchal framework, but the female is expected to quiescently comply.

Sidhwa succeeds in allowing her female characters to establish their own being as if not masters, at least equals rather than merely being concomitant passive agents. Hegel's master-slave dialectic revolves around the contention that the self-consciousness is related to a struggle for recognition. Therefore, an individual does not have a monad logical existence but one which is because of its interactions with others. Hegel contends that when two individuals communicate or connect with each other, they are reflected in one another and this is where the contesting natures arise. Since the other person/individual looks at us we 'are. Therefore, our identity is contingent upon others. Robin Williams has taken further as he says, "The confrontation with the other is experienced as an abrupt self-transcendence, a plunge into reality and otherness that is a loss to the self" (74). The female characters depicted by Sidhwa are very much grounded in reality and are cognizant of the 'other' consciousness; nevertheless they do not wallow under a loss to the self.

Hegel portrays the 'self' as an entity which needs to negate the other in order to establish its own independence and self-identity. According to Hegel, the severity of this struggle leads to a desire to kill the other in order to assert domination and independence. Even the act of killing the other is a moot point; since paradoxically once the 'other' is dead there would be no entity to provide recognition. Consequently, instead of fighting to the death one of the consciousnesses will instead of retaliating, surrender and acknowledge its dependence upon the other; therefore acquiring the position of a slave. This paradigm is further propounded by Simone de Beauvoir who questions the very construct of the 'other nesses.

As de Beauvoir contends, why is it that one of the genders (the male) is considered to be the norm while the female is considered to be the 'other'? For Hegel's master-slave dialectic to work it is imperative that one of the consciousnesses work as a master, the provider or the one who can fulfill the desire and the other one be the slave, the one who desires something. It is because of the desire that the slave realizes his own consciousness as being contingent upon that of the other. Nevertheless, this battle of the two consciousnesses takes on different connotations when the female and male element is introduced. In most literature, the male is the norm while the female is the other.

This is where Sidhwa has been quite successful in conveying a female image which is both strong but at the same it is not controversial. For survival and as Hegel contends, the male consciousness needs to be acknowledged; however according to the master-slave dialectic, this would then render the female consciousness to be the slave. The female becomes the consciousness which acknowledges the other despite the 'death struggle'. The struggle between the male and female in Sidhwa's short stories is not combative as in the female can only acknowledge the other if they denigrate themselves. The female protagonists in Sidhwa's short stories not only acknowledge the other but they are also aware of their own dependence upon the other, without being involved either in the death struggle or rendering themselves subordinate to the male characters.

The balancing element presented by Sidhwa is a prominent feature of her short stories. There is a balance and even to some extent a harmony between the characters presented by Sidhwa. JaquesLacan has presented the 'gaze' which is an important proponent of the psychoanalytic symbiotic mutuality. Sidhwa mentioned in her article "Why Do I Write",

I read out what I'd written and his reaction, the surprised expression that often crossed his face, the way he raised an eyebrow, and sometimes looked at me, fortified me. I could trust his judgment. Prone on the bed, hands beneath head, he paid me tribute of attention. He rejected what he found tedious by abruptly

saying so and pointing out why- or by falling asleep. He responded to the humorous passages with gratifying glee. (28)

As can be seen from this quotation, the female not only is not disturbed by the male gaze but she accepts and in fact desires it for her improvement and image formation. It seems as if the gaze is symbiotic in nature and rather than rendering the female consciousness superfluous it supports it and provides reinforcement. This same phenomenon is presented in “A Gentlemanly War”,

I am shy of appearing in the nude. Yet, after our lovemaking, I sometimes slowly rotate before the mirror and imagine my body voluptuously posted on the centerspread in Playboy as Cyrus would have it. Propped up against pillows Cyrus gazes at me in the mirror. Then, even the hated bump on my nose enhances the contours of my cheeks and chin and full mouth and I feel confident of my good looks.(7)

This quotation becomes significant from another aspect, namely that of Lacan’s mirror stage. According to Lacan, when a child views himself in the mirror he becomes aware of himself because of that reflection. The reflection in the mirror is essential for the child’s development, because it allows the child a semblance of control since the child is able to see himself as an ‘I’. However, as Lacan points out this ‘I’ is overcome with the ‘omnipotent other’, which in the child’s case is the mother. By analyzing Zareen’s quotation above, it can be seen how Sidhwa presents the construction of the female. She succeeds in commingling the gaze and the ‘I’ of the mirror stage. Zareen is cognizant of the ‘gaze’ that she feels exerted upon her via Cyrus and at the same time she uses this ‘gaze’ to create her ‘I’. Nevertheless, she is not overcome by this gaze, she uses it to gain the confidence that she desires, “Yet, in the sweep of his eyes and the low timbre of this voice, I had seen myself reflected; and the glow from the strength of his feelings spread a reassuring sensual warmth within me and submerged my doubts” (7). Zareen does rely to Cyrus’s gaze to some extent but rather than being discomforted by his gaze she is reassured by it. The same male gaze is presented in “Ruth and the Hijackers”, as Sidhwa writes, “Ruth lost her breath when she first met him... He had looked straight at her, and amber glint of admiration... Ruth’s... gaze absorbed an aquiline nose, cleanly etched lips and a firm jaw framed by trim side-burns” (57). Therefore, the female becomes both the object and the subject of the gaze. She receives an admiring gaze and in turn she gazes upon the one who had initiated the gaze. In fact, Bapsi Sidhwa subverts the patriarchal not into the matriarchal but the adolescent as she writes, “Feroza’s unambiguous, hazel-eyed stare embarrasses him further. I have seen the effect of that stare... it’s unnerving. ‘Feroza, run into granny’s room and get me a tissue,’ I say, coming to his rescue” (17). The power and in fact hereditary dynamics behind the gaze are interesting as Zareen, belonging to the older generation, relied to some extent on her husband’s gaze to create the ‘I’. Feroza, on the other hand, embodies a furthering of the mother’s independence through dependence by becoming the perpetrator of the gaze. Zareen did rely on the gaze but Feroza is adept at using the gaze for her own aims. Lacan emphasizes how the object of the gaze needs to realize that he/she is being looked at. Lacan brings in the uncanniness of realizing that the object of the gaze is capable of also gazing back. Sidhwa’s female characters are not only aware of being gazed at but they gaze back at the initial producer of the gaze; therefore creating a balance in the power dynamics of genders. The female characters are both gazed at and they themselves also gaze upon.

Laura Mulvey in her essay titled “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema”, published in 1975, and contends that the audience and viewer of cinematography is presented with events from the perspective of the male gaze. She employs Sigmund Freud’s theory of scopophilia which revolves around how a controlling gaze is exerted on other objects. She contends that women in cinema are presented from the perspective of a heterosexual male; they are objectified and sexualized. The same is true for South Asian literature as well, most women presented in literary texts of the subcontinent present women who are either oppressed or subjugated and if not either they are overtly feministic. In either case, there is no balance. Where Mulvey talks about the male gaze and how women are portrayed in order to cater to the male gaze, the writers of the subcontinent not only cater to the male gaze but also to some extent the female gaze. Females are supposed to be submissive and obedient, they should not have their own identity since their identity is irrevocably bound with that of their male family members. However, Bapsi Sidhwa presents an image which is neither that of the male gaze nor is it that of the female gaze. Where the male gaze requires a subjugated/oppressed image and the subversive female gaze requires strength through subverting the class order, Sidhwa presents a balance between the two. Other writers of the subcontinent, Pakistan in particular, usually have presented females as ultimately losing their identity, both figuratively and literally (for instance, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, in which the protagonist, suffers from an acid attack) but Sidhwa presents an image which is both balanced and realistic. It is because of the balance in the portrayal that her representation of females is realistic as well. Throughout her collection, the female characters are not oppressed. They are allowed to move about whether it is Ruth’s friends, who belonging to the elite class, are “savvy, educated women: lawyers and journalists-married to politicians, business tycoons, doctors, feudal lords, CEOs of multinational companies” (71) but they do not attempt to subvert the moral order or the class order. Ruth, herself, in spite of being a foreigner

realizes that she is bound by certain unwritten rules as she thinks, “Acutely conscious of the gatekeeper’s presence on the landing, Ruth led Raj perfunctorily through the two guest bedrooms. Her voice sounded unnaturally loud in her ears” (98). Ruth does lead Raj through the bedrooms, thus doing away with the perceived sanctity that the male has surrounded the bedroom with but in keeping with the unwritten parameters she does not allow anything unseemly to happen. The male gaze is present in the novel but it is balanced by the female gaze. The female gaze is again presented by Mulvey, who in collaboration with Alina Marazzi, who does not only show a women’s individual story but also highlights female cultural marginalization. It is as Gerda Lerner says, to highlight and emphasize, “what would history be like if it were seen through the eye of the women and ordered by the values they define” (67). This is why the thematic concerns of Sidhwa’s short stories revolve around the Pakistan - Indian war in 1965 and how a woman would view the incidents during the war. Sidhwa uses the sub-continental male gaze as the backdrop to present the neo-postcolonial female gaze.

The balance of Sidhwa’s writing serves to create realism in her writing. Sidhwa’s writing is focused on an unembellished representation of her characters, one which includes both the male gaze and the female gaze. Realism as defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory is the movement which “broke with the artistic conventions of the times and challenged the accepted view of what art should be, namely the pursuit of the beautiful, the moral, and the improving, and instead claimed that it should try to record and, where necessary, indict what is... in literature it was achieved by exploring the inner motivations of the characters, who were drawn from everyday life” (def. 1). Inner motivations of characters are not the only equipment that Sidhwa uses to present a realistic picture of female characters in her novels. Sidhwa paints a picture which is not only realistic from the point of view of the human psyche but also realistic with reference to the realistic nature of the details. Sidhwa not only presents the psychology of her characters, especially the female characters but she also highlights the mundane. Sidhwa presents her stories of life not through rose tinted glasses but through glasses which are transparent and see things in their realistic settings.

Her characters as well as the details that she employs all serve to ensure that the picture Sidhwa presents is neither too romantic in the sense that it is embellished and ameliorated nor does it have a Dickension air of poverty and squalor. It is both representative and realistic. Sidhwa shows the mundane as well as the glamorous. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Sidhwa’s varied setting allows her to present women from all walks of life. This varied presentation also helps imbue her short stories with a realistic edge. She also uses details such as “her buoyant bottom solemnly skimming the oblong brick, Mother diligently mops the bedroom floor. She closes all the doors and disappears into the bathroom” (131). It is these minute individualized details which serve to create the true ambience of the Eastern world. This paired with the collective details which establish the atmosphere of Lahore. As Sidhwa writes,

Half an hour later our little, furiously tooting Mazda jostled amongst the honking, blaring brigade of cars, trucks, scooter-rikshaws and bullock-carts that jammed Durbar Road... The driver got out to buy paper bags filled with rose petals and garlands from the flower-bedecked array of lean-tos lining the path to the shrine entrance ... The dust churned up by tramping feet had spread over the whole area and hung in the air like a mist... huge vats of streaming rice by the parking lot, the thick-set man we usually dealt with spotted us. Roughly shoving away the other salesman, pulling his stained vest down over his massive stomach, he led us to his stall. He slid back the immense copper lid from a vat of aromatic rice... It was three quarters full of lightly browned long-grained rice with a smattering of chickpeas. I nodded my approval and also selected a vat of sweetened yellow rice. Feroza and I stood to one side as a rapidly forming line of beggars and villagers, many of them refugees from the war-torn borders, held out their shirt-flaps and veils for the ladled rice. Covering our heads with our dupatta-shawls, carrying the newspaper bags filled with rose petals... (9, 10)

The paragraph given above shows exactly, how Sidhwa employs words in order to paint a true picture of Lahore. It is evocative of the spirit of ‘Lahore, Lahore Aye’. She uses words which are related to the senses in order to depict Lahore and its nuanced presence. The auditory sense is treated to typical noises on a street in Lahore packed with cars, rikshaws etc. This is both unique to Lahore but at the same time it is very realistic. Scooter rikshaws and bullock-carts are only present in the subcontinent and by mentioning their specific noise Sidhwa succeeds in presenting the noises which are specific to Lahore. Although she does not use onomatopoeic words but she does use words which creates sounds in the reader’s mind. Similarly, she also uses visual imagery to show the Lahori locale. The newspaper bags, sweetened yellow rice, dupatta shawls, use of rose petals etc. all create the essence of Lahore. These myriad details give a realistic picture of Lahore which in turns serves as the perfect backdrop for the realistic picture of Pakistani women that Sidhwa presents. In keeping with the spirit of the realistic representation the women are ones who say “ ‘Allah is merciful,’ a woman sighed and other women echoed her words” (11). These lines depict the usual attitude of Pakistani/Lahori women who go a saint’s shrine to pray and

present supplications at these shrines. The realistic portrayal of the female characters is supported by the realistic portrayal of even the male characters such as, “My brother leans forward, with all the ceremony of a courtier at a Mughal Darbar and mumbles something that sounds like a greeting, and then something appropriate about the gift we bear” (24). This servile attitude is quite typical in Lahore and Pakistan. Even with trivial details such as the “reed jharoo” (64) does Sidhwa create a realistic Pakistani atmosphere. The realistic presentation of Pakistan and Lahore works as a perfect backdrop for the realistic presentation of women in the short stories.

Sidhwa’s realistic portrayal of women can also be seen in the way she writes about women from all walks of life. She does not only impart beauty to the glamorous elite class or the foreigners, rather she also highlights beauty in places which the modernized elite do not pay attention to. Ruth, as an outsider, pays attention to the sweeper’s beauty and acknowledges it as Sidhwa writes,

At unexpected moments like this, Grace’s loveliness caught at Ruth’s heart. It astonished her that none of her Pakistani friends noticed the exquisite cast of her face unless Ruth pointed it out. She was a sweeper and as such largely invisible in other respects—her beauty of little consequence except to other sweepers and, if they could lay their hands on her, pimps. (62)

It is interesting to note that Sidhwa shows this realization through Ruth, who is a foreigner. This subtly highlights the snobbery inherent in the Pakistani culture. Ruth as a foreigner, an outsider acknowledges and accepts the sweeper’s beauty because she is a foreigner.

The women that Sidhwa presents seem human and realistic rather than either being too oppressed, without any real character of their own, or being too glamorous and caught up in a quasi-surreal world of wealth and glitter. These women exhibit realistic emotions as Zareen in “A Gentlemanly War” says, “I’m sounding garbled and unreasonable and hysterical, but it’s all right- I’d be insane not to be hysterical and I trust Cyrus enough to know that” (15). Zareen depicts heroic qualities such as taking her daughter to safety during the war and travelling to another part of the country alone but she does not turn into an Amazonian woman caught up in her own strength. She exhibits apprehension and fear as well as courage and bravery. Not only are the emotions realistic but the mind frame and psychology of these women is also quite realistic. As Sidhwa writes about Ruth,

A sense of relief seeped through her. She remembered the merciless gossip that had erupted when it became known that a woman of her acquaintance was having an affair. What was she thinking? Behaviour that might be condoned back home would be unforgivable in the culture; frowned upon even by her closest friends. (99,100)

Ruth likes the seductive allure of an affair but she also understands the repercussion of an affair. She is both grounded in reality and sagacious enough to realize that an affair would have unchangeable consequences. It is also interesting to note that Sidhwa has written this about a foreigner, not Pakistani women. This presents another dimension to Sidhwa’s portrayal of women. Not only are her women grounded in reality but even the women who belong to a liberal Western background are also cognizant of how an affair affects their social image. Where people in the Eastern hemisphere think that the West is too liberal and does not frown upon adulterous relationships because they have no morality, Sidhwa succeeds in presenting a woman who despite being an American realizes the moral and social implications of having an affair.

Sidhwa’s depiction of her women is not unbalanced in the sense that it deals with women and is written by a woman but it is not only the female sphere which is presented. Cynthia Griffin Wolff in her article “A Mirror For Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature” writes,

Unlike the masculine problems, these feminine problems are very seldom the principal subject of interest; and when women’s problems are discussed, the discussion is virtually always limited to problems of courtship and of accepting the private sphere as the proper one. Of course there are exceptions, especially in the twentieth century; the important thing is not, however, that there are exceptions. Rather it is that there are so few, and that this “feminine” literature balances so significantly against that massive body of literature which is dominated by masculine dilemmas. (206)

The ‘feminine’ paradigms that Sidhwa presents does revolve around courtship but this courtship is not the stereotypical kind which marginalizes the strength of the female in order to fit into the format of the typically demure, helpless heroine. Rather, the courtships in her collection of short stories revolve around the equality of the sexes during the courtship period. In addition to this, her short stories also include the private sphere, i.e. the

house and domesticity but it is through domesticity that Sidhwa relates her female characters/heroines to the outside world. The women presented in the short stories are involved in wars, migration, religious undertakings and even the reconciliation of cultures and natures. This may be one of the ‘exceptions’ that Wolff mentions but these short stories pave a way for equality and balance so that literature has to be neither exclusively masculine nor exclusively feminine. They are neither focused on exclusively masculine themes, ie. the rites of passage for a male, the wooing of a female, establishment or conflict with authority nor do they focus on exclusively feminine topics such as the rearing of children, courtship, conflict with the mother figure etc. These short stories narrate both the yin and yang, namely the masculine and the feminine. The rigors and brutalities of war are highlighted, motherhood is emphasized along with the masculine themes of the rites of passage for instance in “Defend Yourself Against Me”, it is shown how Sikander Khan has overcome the brutality and aftermath of war, he is one of the victims as well as the survivors. His description is both given in terms of strength and vulnerability, “I glance obliquely at the back of Mr. Khan’s head. It is as well formed as the rest of him and entirely covered with strong short black hair. My one-time playmate had a raw pit gouged out of his head that couldn’t have grown hair in a hundred year...He sits back and, turning his strong man’s body to me...” (213,214). This simultaneity of vulnerability and strength helps portray the male characters as being real, rather than dominating stereotypes. The themes that Sidhwa presents are both realistic and balanced in terms of being feminine and masculine.

The balance found in masculine and feminine concerns is also found in her portrayal of women. There are a few stereotypical images of females which resound in literature; there is the seductive femme fatale, the woman with the sharp tongue and manner, the mother or the spinster. Sidhwa, however, succeeds in broadening the sphere of female characters. Her female characters do of course include all of the above mentioned stereotypes but she also presents women who are compassionate diasporic individuals, there are also benedictory figures who paradoxically have been the victims and there are also femme fatales who are actually victims themselves such as Sehra-bai who was a revered beauty in her day but had a philandering husband. All of these characters provide variety to a tradition of female characterization which relies on stereotypes and strictures. In fact, Sidhwa uses the stereotyped characterization of women and gives it a more realistic and relatable color. For instance, Wolff writes, “Childbirth (its, rewards, its terrors) exists in literature primarily as a convenient plot device for eliminating extraneous young women...the genuine happiness and difficulty of mothering doesn’t exist in literature” (206). Nevertheless, Sidhwa does use the stereotypical platform of childbirth and childrearing to present the difficulty and fear of mothering. In fact, it is through this fear and apprehension for the children that the female characters are able to relate events which are considered to be exclusively masculine. For instance, in “A Gentlemanly War”, Zareen thinks, “What those armed men would do to the women? To Feroza, who was only six and tall for her age? The thought of victory-drunk thugs laying hands on my daughter was unbearable.” (6). Zareen thinks of her daughter’s safety as a mother, but his fear and apprehension is what later on brings her to the realization of the reality of the war. As she thinks “What then prevented the Indians from occupying Lahore, sparing it the butchery, rape, and looting that were bound to follow?” and she comes to the realization that “prescience informed their reckless attitude when my husband and his friends scurried aboard rooftops to watch dogfights” (27). Mothering therefore, is no more a frivolous topic rather it is one which needs to be described as it helps engage the females in thoughts about war, its repercussions and its underlying message.

The world that Sidhwa creates is one in which the males and females are synchronized and live in harmony. There is an equality of the sexes but not one which becomes ‘anti-male’ rather it is one which is pro-male as well as pro-female. In her short stories, the male figures are of course the stereotypical saviors but they are not saviors who save because of merely the female’s vulnerability rather it is in order to establish their own identity that they save. In “Ruth and the Afghan”, Chicks and Jasmine cruelly humiliate and taunt Abdul Abbas, an Afghan. Two American military officers come to the rescue of Abdul Abbas. This subtle introduction of male bonding balances the paradigm of female bonding with of male bonding. In fact, Ruth tries to ward off Chicks and Jasmine’s attacks but it is eventually the American men who save Abdul Abbas.

Similarly, the subversion of stereotypical roles can also be seen in “Defend Yourself Against Me”, where Ammi-ji a victim of rape during the Partition, becomes the forgiving entity and the two Sikh cousins are the supplicants. This is the subversion of the male god and the female supplicants which can be found in every religion. Ammi-ji becomes the goddess, the only one who can grant redemption while the Sikh brothers become the ones who need the redemption. Nevertheless, her portrayal as a forgiving goddess is not which is unrealistic, as a goddess on a pedestal. It is translated into terms which the human mind can understand and accept. The goddess here becomes one who has been wronged but has the power to forgive and forget the wrong committed upon her. Where women have often been portrayed as the ones who need to be forgiven, here it is the men who need to be forgiven, “The men reach out to touch her slippers and they lay their heads at her feet in the ancient gesture of surrender demanded of warriors” (248). The body language of the Sikhs is one of humility and servility. They are no longer the

dominating male figures in a patriarchal framework, rather they are men in need of redemption and peace of mind. The vulnerability inherent in Ammi-ji as a female paradoxically gives her the power over the two Sikh cousins. As Sidhwa writes,

The fruit of victory in the unremitting chain of wars is the man's relentless history. The vulnerability of mothers, daughters, granddaughters, and their metamorphosis into possessions; living objects on whose soft bodies victors and losers alike vent their wrath, enact fantastic vendettas, celebrate victory. All history, all these fears, all probabilities and injustices coalesce in Ammi-ji's terrible face and impart a dimension of tragedy that alchemizes the melodrama. The behavior of the Sikhs, so incongruous before, is now essential and consequential.

The word 'history' is significant in the quotation given above because it through history that the present is formed and history serves as the building block of the present. Sidhwa takes the history, the past, of the subcontinent and Ammi-ji and welds it into the present, but not the present of the subcontinent rather the present of the sub-continental people. Sidhwa subtly weaves the exploitation of women against an incongruous background. The Khans, including Ammi-ji and the Sikhs have all migrated to America, which is neutral ground. Therefore, the female as the one who forgives becomes even more significant. Sidhwa displaces her in order for her to be shown against the backdrop of a non-patriarchal community, one which would allow the female to forgive and forget.

This process of forgiveness which needs to be sought by the male from the female leads to another aspect of mimetic representation, namely that of history. History, has always been subjective, specifically when it comes to patriarchal narrative, it has always been 'his-story'. Sidhwa, on the other hand, presents her story, not by presenting atrocities and brutality exhibited by the men but by presenting how the females were able to cope with the incidents. In "Ruth and the Hijackers", Sidhwa describes the incident which took place in Lahore on September 30th 1981, when Sikh separatists forced an Indian Airline flight to land in Lahore. Ruth, as a foreigner, presents an unbiased and objective view of this highly politicized event. She does not participate in the event but she does see the repercussions. In fact, the way Sidhwa presents this historical fact is to have it relegated to the background and other inconsequential details have been brought to the forefront as she writes, "But the cause, for the moment at least, appeared to have been relegated to the background, and the sinister machinations of the hapless granthi were of more immediate concerns" (91). It seems as if Sidhwa is trying to highlight the fact that these political machinations are not as insurmountable and important as they seem. Similarly, in "Defend Yourself Against Me", Sidhwa presents the Partition that took place in the subcontinent from a female point of view rather than a male one. Joy Joshwa, the narrator, highlights how the women were affected at the time of partition and the horrific memories that linger in the minds of the rape victims, "'Leave me! Let go!' Ammi-ji shrieks, in her shaky, altered voice. She raises her arms and moves them as if she is pushing away invisible insects. But she looks exhausted and, her knees giving away, she squats before the men. She buries her face in the chaddar" (248). This reliving and recalling of the past horror gives Ammi-ji closure and peace to the Sikh men. Therefore, Sidhwa creates balance in the 'his-tory'; the females are able to forgive and forget while the male members also need to realize their mistakes and seek forgiveness, albeit the mistakes of their forefathers. Similarly, in "A Gentlemanly War", the war between Pakistan and India is presented from a female point of view, one which neither exhibits male bravado nor does it exhibit excessive female shyness and apprehension. The females are naturally scared but not to the extent that they tend to give up all independence, the women are scared but they are also strong enough to fend for themselves. Nevertheless, the presence of history is not in which only women or men feature but it is a combination of both male and female characters. The females are given support and at times victimized by the male characters. However, the victimized nature of the females is balanced by the fact that the male characters have also been victimized and treated cruelly.

The semiotics of various incidents in the short stories concretizes the balance between the two sexes. If the female is the one who moves the narratives, she is supported by the male characters. There is a symbiotic relationship between the male and female characters. For instance, both Nav and Roshni recognize each other's dignity and strive together in a world which is different than their own. In fact, at one point Roshni expresses admiration for Nav's knowledge of America, she does not need to contest his identity since this is not a competition between the male and female rather it is a relationship based on equality and mutual respect.

Sidhwa writes about women and places female characters in the limelight in her novels but she does not completely overlook the male characters. In fact, it is through their realistic portrayal that she concretizes the realistic representation in her novels. As Randhir Pratap Singh writes, "In contrast to Salman Rushdie's magic realism, Sidhwa's is a realist linear narrative. In her novels, she tells stories naturally, easily..." (86). Not only does she employ realistic descriptions of Lahore and the milieu but she also presents the psyche of her male and female

characters in a balanced and realistic manner. The realistic representation of women helps her concretize the overall thematic objectivity of her short stories which rather than revolving around female oppression and subjugation focus on a realistic portrayal of Pakistani females and how they actually live in Pakistan, a region which is supposedly fraught with injustice against the female sex. Sidhwa presents a world which is composed by personal experience as Singh writes, “In making her stories open-ended, Sidhwa seems to follow the course of real life but like Jane Austen, she confines herself within the field of her first-hand intercourse with the world and never allows herself to stray beyond it” (85). However, Sidhwa provides variety to her portrayal of the world and life that she has known and conveys. Her world is presented in realistic terms without any attempt at making it overly oppressive or glamorous. Her portrayal is synonymous with balance and harmony.

CONCLUSION:

Sidhwa has presented a collection of short stories, *Their Language of Love* which revolves around women in different settings and backgrounds. The characters are varied as are the stories. Sidhwa does present the women in different circumstances and situations but there is one common strain throughout the short stories, that of balance between the male and female characters. She succeeds in presenting male and female characters who harmonize with each other and this harmony helps to eradicate the myth of Eastern suppression and subjugation of woman. The East, in the current post-9/11 scenario is always viewed with dislike and mistrust due to propagation of suppression of women. Sidhwa, however, helps to clarify the unrealistic nature of some of these assumptions. Through a realistic portrayal of male and female characters she shows how things in the East are not as deplorable as media and even other writers portray.

Kirsten Holt Peterson in her essay, “First Things First” writes about Chinua Achebe’s female characters that “his traditional [Ibo] women are happy, harmonious members of the community, even when they are repeatedly beaten and barred from any say in the communal decision-making process and constantly reviled in sayings and proverbs. It would appear that in traditional wisdom behaving like a woman is to behave like an inferior being” (253). This is where Bapsi Sidhwa succeeds by giving female characters who are ‘happy, harmonious members of the community’ but they are neither ‘repeatedly beaten and barred from any say’; they are strong women who are not ‘constantly reviled in sayings and proverbs’. Although the Pakistani mentality does revolve around the inferiority of women and their supposed ineptness and frivolity, Sidhwa presents women as strong characters who are able to harmonize with their community but not at the expense of their own strength and rectitude. This is exactly where Sidhwa is successful as Showkat Hassan Dar writes,

An essential difference between a feminist text and a male discourse is that in the latter it is the male who is invested with the qualities of heroism, sacrifice, justice and action while generally the female protagonists remain the recipients of the male bounty and chivalry, in a feminist text, it is the woman who performs and controls and promotes the action by her active involvement and concern and in the process it is she who acquires the attributes of heroism and glory” (31)

Sidhwa highlighted the true picture of the men and women of the society and focuses on the “essential” characteristics of them rather than the “accidental” characteristics. Where male discourse focuses on the bravery and courage, whether physical or moral, of the hero most feminist texts rely on the foregrounding of the female at the expense of denigrating the male to the background or formatting him to the role of the villain. Sidhwa, however, shows female characters who do take the narrative forward and are actively involved in the collection but they do not overtake the limelight, they in fact share it with the male characters. The female characters in Sidhwa’s text do benefit from male bounty and chivalry but they do not necessarily require it, the females are capable of fending for themselves, but they allow the male members to do so in order to smooth the masculine ego.

Sidhwa’s feminine texts do include and empower the female characters but not by excluding the male characters. Her male characters are part of the narrative and support the female characters rather than merely serving as the negativity factor. Even from a psychoanalytic framework, the characters achieve a balance and harmony which does not cause a rift between the characters but rather harmony and similitude. The underlying principles behind the various incidents suggest a mutual recognition and sacrifice for each other’s needs and desires. The women that Sidhwa presents in her short story collection, *Their Language of Love*, are both strong but their strength is such that they do not need to subvert the social order so as to establish their character and independence. It is not necessary for female writers and females to be engaged in misandry in order to advocate female independence and strength. As Emma Watson recently put it in her speech at the UN,

...the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that fighting for women's rights has too often become synonymous with man hating. If men don't have to control women won't have to be controlled. Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong. IT is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum instead of two opposing ideals. (n.pag.)

Feminism as put forth by Bapsi Sidhwa and advocated by Emma Watson does not necessarily involve misandry rather it is for women and by women. This is exactly what Sidhwa depicts; her female characters do not have to be controlled because the male characters are not unduly oppressive. Sidhwa succeeds in presenting the complementary nature of the two genders; they exist in harmony rather than opposition. They are not 'opposing ideals' but complementary parts of a whole. This marks a new era in postcolonial female writing. Where most postcolonial female writers have highlighted the plight faced by women and how women in Pakistan are continuously oppressed, Bapsi Sidhwa has presented a new image of women in Pakistan. Her presentation is based on the subtle strength of the women and how these women do not unduly combat the males in order to establish their own character.

References

- Ali, Ahmed. *Twilight in Delhi*. New York: New Direction Books, 1994. Print.
- Brown-Guillory, Elizabeth. *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Twentieth Century Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. Print.
- Da, Veena Nobel. "Feminist and Literature". *Indian Women Novelist*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991. Print.
- Hanif, Mohammed. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. London: Random Books, 2011. Print.
- Haque, Syrrina. *Sand in the Castle: A Collection of Short Stories*. Lahore: Mavra Publishers, 2011. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Mothers and Daughters". *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 200-222. Print.
- Montenegro, David. "BapsiSidhwa: An Interview". *The Massachusetts Review* (1990): 513-33. Web. 20 May 2014.
- Naqvi, Maniza. *Stay with Me*. Van Nuys: Tara Press, 2005. Print.
- Paranjape, Markand R. "The Early Novels of BapsiSidhw". *The Novels of BapsiSidhwa*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan and NovyKapadia. New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. 88-106. Print.
- Shamsie, Kamila. *Kartography*. Oxford; New York; Auckland; Capte Town: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.
- Sidhwa, B. *The Ice Candy Man*. London: Heinemann, 1986.
- Sidhwa, B. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. Print.
- Sidhwa, B. *The Pakistani Bride: A Novel*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2008. Print.
- Sidhwa, B. *Water*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Eitions, 2006. Print.