

Child marriage in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*

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Abstract

Child marriage is a formal marriage or an informal union entered into by an individual before reaching a certain age, specified by several global organizations such as UNICEF as minors under the age of eighteen. The legally prescribed marriageable age in some jurisdictions is below eighteen years, especially in the case of girls; and even when the age is set at eighteen years, many authorities permit earlier marriage with parental consent or in special circumstances, such as teenage pregnancy. In certain countries, even when the legal marriage age is eighteen, cultural traditions take priority over legislative law. Child marriage violates the rights of children; it affects both boys and girls, but it is more common among girls. Child Marriage has widespread and long term consequence for child brides and grooms. According to several UN agencies, comprehensive sexuality education can prevent such a phenomenon.

Child marriage is related to child betrothal and it includes sexual commerce and court approved early marriages after teenage pregnancy. In many cases, only one marriage partner is a child, usually the female. Causes of child marriage includes poverty, bride price, dowry, cultural traditions, laws that allow child marriages, religious and social pressures, regional customs, fear of remaining unmarried, illiteracy and perceived inability of women to work for money.

Child marriage are common throughout history for a variety of reasons including poverty, insecurity as well as for political and financial reasons. Today, child marriage is still fairly widespread, particularly in developing countries such as parts of Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, Latin America and Oceania. However even in the developed countries such as the United States legal exceptions mean that seventeen US state have no minimum age requirement. The incidence of child marriage has been falling in most parts of the world.

The child marriage restraint act 1929 was passed during the tenure of British rule on colonial India. It forbade the marriage of a male younger than 21 or a female younger than 18 for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and most people of India. However, this law did not and currently does not apply to India's 165 million Muslim population and only applies to India's Hindu, Christian, Jain, Sikh and other religious minorities. This link of law and religious was formalized by the British colonial rule with the Muslim personal laws codified in the Indian Muslim Personal law Application Act of 1937.

The age at which India's Muslim girls can legally marry according to this Muslim personal Law is nine and can be lower if her guardian decides she is sexually mature. Over the last twenty years all India Muslim personal law board and other Muslim civil organizations have actively opposed India-wide laws and enforcement action against child marriages, they have argued that Indian Muslim families have a religious right to marry a girl aged fifteen or even twelve. Several states of India claim especially high child marriage rates in their Muslim and tribal communities. India with a population of over 1.2 billion has the world's highest total number of child marriages. It is a significant social issue, as of 2016 the situation has been legally rectified by The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

According to national plan of Action for children 2005, published by Indian government's Department of Women and Child Development set a goal to eliminate child marriage completely by 2010. In 2006, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 was passed to prohibit solemnization of child marriages. This law states that men must be at least twenty one years of age and women must be at least eighteen years of age to marry. According to national plan of Action for children 2005, published by Indian government's Department of women and child Development set a goal to eliminate child marriage completely by 2010. The countries with the highest observed rates of child marriages below the age of eighteen are Niger, Chad, Mali, Bangladesh, Mali and Ethiopia are the countries with child marriage rates greater than 20% below the age of fifteen according to 2003-09 surveys.

Water opens in pre independent tumultuous India in 1938, Gandhi is shaking the Indian people out from their complacency urging them fight against British rule and alongside to relinquish archaic Hindu traditions such as child marriage the caste system etc... Eight years old

Chuyia little mouse has just become widow after her forty year old husband succumbed to the deadly Typhoid. Chuyia hardly even remembers being married to the man but as tradition demands she has to accompany his dead body to Varanasi, where he will be cremated at the Holy Ghats after her husband's death. She is expected to live in a widow's Ashram in Varanasi.

Nujood is a fun-loving, free spirited ten years old, who loved school and drawing with her colored pencils. Like any ten year old. She loved playing with her siblings and the neighborhood children. Then, Nujood is forced by her father to marry a thirty years old man whom she does not meet until after the marriage contract is signed.

When scandal hit his family they were forced to leave the village and all their animals and possessions behind. They moved to the big city of Sana'a where their home life continued to deteriorate. After Ali lost his job sweeping streets he began spending his days with other men in the neighborhood, chewing Khat and gossiping about their neighbors. One of the men in the group a thirty year old named Faez asked Ali to agree to a marriage between him and one of Ali's daughters.

Two of his daughters were already married and ten year old Nujood was next in line. Ali readily agreed to the marriage. It would be one less mouth to feed. Ali met with the men in his family and everyone gave their consent for the union. Her mother was sympathetic but didn't protest. In Yemen the men decided everything. No one asked Nujood her father just told her that she was getting married. Nujood was very naive. She didn't even know how babies were made. She also didn't understand what marriage meant.

According to Gandhi the problem of early widowhood for Hindu girls is closely connected to the problem of child marriage. He points out that girl children left widowed shall be considered widows in the true sense of the term because they have never experienced married life. Gandhi refers to the prohibition of remarriage for child widows as a senseless and cruel custom which should be abolished forthwith. The unhappy girls should be given every opportunity to find mates. Gandhi's opposition to enforce widowhood of young girls goes so far that he publicly called upon young college men to take a vow to marry none other than a girl widow. Gandhi believes that the Hindu concept of faithful widow who remains chaste and devotes herself to good work in her husband's memory is a worthy idea for women to strive for salvation.

However enforced widowhood which is the result of social pressure rather than inner conviction is merely a charade which far from encouraging morality may have the opposite effect.

The novel is based on a true story narrated to Sidhwa when with her family; She stays at an army camp. The novel reflects conflict among man, women, nature. The central story is of Zaitoon's. Carols story is its foil. Nikka's story of his rise from a Panwalla to a strongman of Lahore is also captivating. The reader encounters some smaller stories of Sikandar, Zohra and Qasim earlier in the novel. In the novel, the girl is not killed; she safely crosses the bridge. It shows tension among different cultures as well. Sidhwa's strong character are women. The Bride deals with the repression of women in Pakistani society. She criticizes the brutality of the tribal code of honors and the ruthless customs of their daily existence.

The term 'wife' in our society, Sidhwa reveals is not a fixed and closed term. The women of the household have an unfixed, unlimited, ambiguous and always changing set of rules to observe. Men either they are husbands, fathers or brothers are the generators of those rules. Words of 'shame', 'honor' and 'social position' have meanings only for women. Men are free of such moral and religious bonds. Zaitoon is a symbol of human spirit which struggles against all odds but exists with integrity. She is a representative of the strength of a women in faitable, Unyielding and irresponsible. The Pakistani Bride is a stunning novel based on passion, lust, cruelty, murder, power and sensuality written in a highly engrossing manner to keep the reader glued to the very end.

In 2006, The Prohibition of child marriage Act 2006 was passed to prohibit solemnization of child marriages. This law states that men must be at least twenty years of age and women must but be at least eighteen years of age to marry. Some Muslim organizations planned to challenge the new law in the Supreme Court of India. In later years various high courts in India including the Gujarat High Court the Karnataka High Court and the Madras High Court have ruled that the act prevails over any personal law including Muslim personal law.

In Pakistan according to two 2013 reports over 50% of all marriages in Pakistan involve girls less than eighteen years old. Another UNICEF reports claims seventy percent of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of sixteen. As with India and Africa the UNICEF data for Pakistan is from a small sample survey in the 1990s. The exact number of child marriages in

Pakistan below the age of thirteen is unknown but rising according to the United Nations. Andrew Bushell claims rate of marriage of 8 to 13 years old girls exceeding 50% in northwest regions of Pakistan.

Why does child marriage happens, Child marriages are symptomatic of gender based discrimination against girls and cultural norms that value girl less than boys. In some cases Child marriage is just the norm. In southern Ethiopia marriage is just the next place of womanhood following FGM and menstruation but in most cases, cultural beliefs and poverty. According of Human Rights Watch report, "global data shows that girl from the poorest 20 percent of families are among the richest 20 percent" . Money plays a big prevalence of child marriage.

work cited

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