

Study of Woman Breaking Stereotypes in Diksha Basu's Novel

"The Windfall"

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Abstract

The research study aims to highlight the breaking of stereotypes in the novel through the lens of the character Mrs. Ray. The analysis shows that women in modern India have achieved significant progress in every sector of life, but they still face deep-seated patriarchal mentalities. In her novel "The Windfall" (2017), Diksha Basu shows the hypocrisy of society for a widow and portrays the stereotypes existing in India. The Windfall examines the ramifications of generational, gender, and social class differences. Basu paints a complete picture of a community's existence in contemporary India with her comprehensive descriptions of family meals, dusty floors, and showy clothing. She refutes stereotypes about Indian culture by writing about characters from various backgrounds. In terms of social, economic, political, and other elements, the condition of women in India now is significantly better than in ancient and medieval times. This research paper attempts to study and propagate Mrs. Ray, a character in Diksha Basu's novel, as a mirror to the society that moves on to a new life by breaking stereotypes of Indian culture.

Keywords: stereotypes, patriarchal mentalities, generational, contemporary India.

Introduction

Women are the most important contributors to the development of any country or community. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said a beautiful quote for community development: "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress women have achieved." This statement also demonstrates women's important role in a country's progression. Women's roles in literature have evolved, but until recently, most writers were men, and the depiction of women in literature was undoubtedly biased. Women's roles in literature are frequently quite diverse. Women were often portrayed as secondary characters to the larger men who

carried the storyline forward, with females merely playing a supporting role amid the action. However, during colonization and through contact with occidental philosophies and movements, the strength of female characters has been gradually but steadily emphasized in the writings of some authors, which was clearly in contrast to the traditional picture of literary damsels.

In a patriarchal society, women are considered weak and restricted to cooking, eating, and caring for children and family. However, we find many female writers who change society through their writings. Famous authors from the post-independence period include Kiran Desai, Kamala Markandya, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Rai, Amrita Pritam, Anita Nair, and many others. These writers have shed light on important issues in India, and their writings have influenced social change. Diksha Basu's novel also sheds light on a widow's journey to a remarried woman. She portrays the structure of the patriarchal system and how the widow struggles in a male-dominated society.

Women are born free, but in the patriarchal society, they are in chains. They were considered wives, mothers, and sisters and were always considered inferior human beings. Women are not as safe and free as men and must live in a male-dominated system. From ancient times, men occupied superior status, women were considered less than men, and their primary duty was to bear children and care for their families. They have to live according to their husband's choices. They have tried to explore the idea of the suppressed widow in a male-dominated society based on the novel Diksha Basu's *The Windfall*, where the main character 'Mrs. Reema Ray' plays the role of those widows who struggle within the male-dominated system. Mrs. Ray, who has the opportunity to be a daring widow, finds the noose of reputation and decorum so tight around her neck that she has to make excuses for purchasing a liquor bottle. Social supervision is a recurring theme in the novel, whether in Mayur Palli or the endless landscape of Gurgaon.

Human civilization depends on social interactions. Humans have developed certain norms or codes of behavior that are considered socially acceptable to aid communication. These govern how groups interact and are also inherited from generation to generation. Individuals are expected to follow these clearly defined codes of conduct. The infant is exposed to the culture in which they are born and unconsciously absorbs societal traditions and mores. Male and female members comprise families, and each has well-defined societal roles. Virtues associated with the masculine are higher in patriarchy than those associated with the feminine. Patriarchy is a social or political system in which the father or eldest male is the head of the family, and descent is calculated through the male line; thus, the system promotes male privilege. The attitudes and expectations on this basis rank men above women, resulting in a social structure granting men indisputable authority.

According to sociologists, socialization is more responsible for gender differences than biological traits. Gender-specific behaviour is an important part of who we are, how others respond to us, and how we respond to them. It is a critical aspect of the socialization process. Surprisingly, the sexes are referred to as the 'opposite.' Parents play an important role in this gender awareness process. Boys and girls are taught gender-specific behavior from

birth. Girls are raised to be submissive, obedient, tolerant, and generous. Conversely, boys are taught to be aggressive, domineering, daring, and outspoken. Boys are taught to hide their emotions because crying in public is considered undignified.

Centuries of socialization processes have typecast women into specific gender roles. Women's victimization and marginalization concern feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and Virginia Woolf. Radical feminists such as Kate Millett elaborated on women's subjugation and oppression. She sees the family as the fundamental patriarchal unit in which sexually differentiated roles are reinforced. According to Millett, the family encourages and perpetuates this to ensure women's subordination. The oppression of women is linked to modes of production by Marxist feminism. The feminist psychoanalytic theory describes how a child is initiated into a culture and acquires femineity or masculinity. Juliet Mitchell, a well-known psychoanalytic critic, connects patriarchal culture to Freud's theory of the unconscious.

Feminism brings change for man-woman equality. However, still, some dogmas do not remove by these theories. Diksha Basu's book 'The Windfall' analyses various social stigmas and customs, ranging from 42 years old-woman widowhood to new married life. There are snippets about arranged marriages and religious objectification that need due diligence. The writer portrays her character, Mrs. Ray, who has the opportunity to be a daring widow. She finds the noose of reputation and decorum so tight around her neck that she has to make excuses for purchasing a liquor bottle. Social supervision is a recurring theme in the novel, whether in Mayur Palli or the endless landscape of Gurgaon.

The novel sets in the Mayur Palli in East Delhi for middle-class people whose life slackens in this boundary. This area is covered by four buildings having five floors high. The writer gives a glimpse of the area, "Four buildings, each five floors high, were built around a dusty courtyard small enough for everyone to be able to peer into their neighbour's window." Mrs. Ray is the widow in this book who lost her husband five years ago when she was thirty-seven. The first phase of widowhood forces her to look suddenly more aged, but she is glowing day after day, which makes her friend Mrs. Jha envious. Basu satirizes patriarchal norms through Mrs. Jha and Mrs. Ray's conversation about beauty tips. Mrs. Ray reveals the beauty secret of prenatal supplements and then describes how difficult it is for her to buy them. She says, "I feel so crazy when I go to the chemist to buy it; I make up some excuse each time as if I am buying it for my niece or a friend or something. Imagine a childless widow getting prenatal vitamins." ⁸

Mr. Ray died as a result of an aneurysm. Reema's life has become more difficult since she lost her husband. Other women consider her a bad luck charm or a seductress, but Mrs. Jha only becomes loyal to her.

Although social rules differ on a vast scale, all cultures and traditions have rules that govern widows' lives. Across various cultures, widows are subject to male domination in customary and religious laws and confront biases in certain rights. Even in countries where legal protection is more inclusive, widows suffer from the loss of social status and marginalization. The conditions of widows in India are miserable; they do not take pleasure in

carrying out the activities required for their daily existence. They experience problems carrying out the household chores, maintaining the entire housework, and forming connections and communication terms with others. They experience issues and are hesitant to participate in functions and ceremonies. The same is true of Basu's novel character with Reema Ray. Every last Sunday of the month, a monthly meeting is held in a small multipurpose room on the first floor of A block in Mayur Palli to share their grievances. Mrs. Ray raises her complaint of stolen yoga pants during this meeting, and when she does, the other women in the society rather scold her than solve her problem as they say, "You do not need to yoga pants to do yoga, you know. Those tight, tight pants are not in our culture. You can do yoga just as well as in salwar kameez." 33 The difference between her complaint and the rest is that she is a widow.

Even though she is a widow, she begins living on her terms. She refuses to follow the rules of widowhood and decides not to play the role of widow. She prefers to live on her terms rather than according to societal norms. She enjoys trivialities such as listening to music on her speakers and smoking occasionally. She watches American afternoon talk shows, which inspire her to live for herself, a concept she incorporates into her life. She sees Ganga, her maid, as her companion because she has no other relatives to share her joys and sorrows. Her Mayur Palli neighbor and friend, Mrs. Jha, has shifted to Gurgaon. She is happy for them and goes to meet them. Mr. and Mrs. Jha and Reema go to Big Chill for snacks and cake one day, and then Mrs. Jha goes to the adjoining market liquor store to buy some whiskey. She drinks to feel happy and cheerful and to avoid loneliness. When Reema buys whiskey on the counter, Basu explores the words and says, "Black Label is all my husband will drink. It is just too expensive, but what to do?" 114 Here, she has to pretend to be a happy wife obeying her husband.

Widows generally show less interest in remarrying. This viewpoint must be interpreted, considering the effect of the undesirable social attitudes towards widow remarriage and the lesser opportunity for conjugal happiness in the second marriage.

Indeed, given the predominant social attitudes, a man who approves of marrying a widow has largely unattractive characteristics; for instance, he may be too old, physically challenged, economically disadvantaged, or looking for a second wife. The issue of widow remarriage in India is not just a question of the incidence of remarriage but also of the worth of second marriages and the independence that widows have to remarry in positive circumstances (Chen & Dreze, 1995).

On the other hand, Reema Ray goes a step further by finding her new company in Upen Chopra. She remarries and settles down with Upen Chopra. As she enjoys her widowed life, despite the hardships, she decides to remarry to find stability and feel free of the stigma of widow norms. Basu satirizes the opinion of Mr. Jha on her remarriage as he says, "She is too old to be getting married." Moreover, he further says, "It is a mockery of the whole institution." 269 These words show a glimpse of typical patriarchal society, but Mrs. Jha is the opposite of this and becomes the best companion as she replies to him, "And there is no

such thing as too old to be getting married. We should be happy for her. I am sad she is moving to Chandigarh, but it is very exciting for her. Reema deserves this." 269

She is criticized in society and by her friend's husband, but she chooses the path that makes her happy and cheerful. She transitions from a childless widow to a newly remarried life with grace, dignity, and on her terms.

Conclusion:

Basu's detailed descriptions of domestic life paint a complete picture of a community's existence in contemporary India. She writes about characters from various backgrounds to challenge stereotypes about Indian culture. The research aims to highlight the novel's breaking of stereotypes through the lens of Mrs. Ray. According to the analysis, women in modern India have made significant progress in every aspect of life but continue facing deep-seated patriarchal mentalities. Diksha Basu depicts the duplicity of society for a widow and the stereotypes that exist in India. The *Windfall* investigates the consequences of familial, gender, and social class differences. Mrs. Ray gracefully and dignifiedly shifts from a childless widow to a newly remarried life as Mrs. Reema Chopra. Despite living in an orthodox society, she demonstrates to others how she chooses happiness and follows her own life rules. This research paper examines and perpetuates Mrs. Ray, a character in Diksha Basu's novel, as a mirror to society that moves on to a new life by breaking stereotypes of Indian culture.

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