

### **Interrogating Patriarchy in Shanti Mishra's *A Widow's Gift***

This research paper explores the underlying suffering of women in Shanti Mishra's Fiction, *A Widow's Gift*. Earlier our society was guided by patriarchy, women were compelled and suppressed by different social evils. The main focus of this paper is to analyze the main female character Radha. It tries to explore the challenges of her life, how she struggles in her life, how she defies in the patriarchal society, and finally how she able to bring change in the society? This fiction is the reflection of oppression of patriarchy on women in Nepalese society, especially in Hindu orthodox community. Further, it examines the capacity and strength of the protagonist Radha, who not violently rejects and defies the stereotypical feminine images of powerlessness, passivity but slowly and gradually discovers herself as a courageous woman. Her home's environment, friend's experience as well as her own experiences motivate her to resist the patriarchy. She asserts her capacity with the oppressed environment. She imparts knowledge to others. Her inner capacity comes through her calmness, self-respect, and consciousness, and finally able to bring change in the society. Radha establishes herself as a courageous woman, as well as try to show that change and transformation is possible. However, it is a time taking process.

In patriarchal society women should live under the conventional social norms and values. Females were taken as burden in the society, the innocent girls were compelled to die in womb. A girl is not given chance to choose her future husband. Parents decide to whom, when she would marry. Girls get marriage at early age in Nepal, especially in rigid Brahmin community, when a girl even does not know the meaning of marriage. Parents taught their daughter how to make her husband and family members happy in order to make her position safe in groom's house.

Similarly, Radha, as a girl child, born in conservative Brahmin family is born to face challenges in the society. Her family deeply believe in religion. Her parents and grandparents were not that happy at her birth. Later as she grows up, compelled to marry in her childhood without seeing her groom. Radha's grandparents were eager to look for a prospective groom for her. Radha had lots of queer questions regarding all rituals performed at home but no one paid much attention to her. Everyone else in the family of Radha became caught up in preparation for the marriage, "Radha knew nothing about what was going on in the house" (14). Radha herself was unaware of its significance. Not only Radha, her two friends were already being given in marriage. Meera, friend of Radha shares her experience, "He's twenty-seven, and I'm just twelve. Right after the marriage I always felt like his daughter. So I called him Buba. My in-laws got mad at me and sent me back to my parents early" (15). The boy and girl who were to be married were never consulted in those days, especially not the girl, who was likely to be five, seven or at most nine years old. And they were forced to do household works. Meera further expresses, "I used to be so bored and tired of helping my mother-in-law the whole day having no time to play" (15). Especially, the age of eight, nine is the age of beginning phase of their school. But they are compelled to marry with an unknown person, and forced to do household works. No one understands about their child psychology. Not only Radha, most of the girls were forced to marry at the age of seven, or eight. So, Radha is the representative of that society.

Radha, the protagonist of this novel, is the representative of all women who are suppressed by patriarchy. There was a deep rooted gender biasness in Hindu society. Where a boy is regarded as an asset to his parents, who expect him to look after them in their old age and to perform rituals on their death, Radha born in a

Hindu Brahmin community is the cause to face obstacles in her life. Radha's mother Shakuntala, also followed strict rules and regulations of Hindu culture. She never gets chance to express her pain. Radha's mother did not want to continue the custom of early marriage, "Looking at her daughter, she almost burst into tears at having to send her away, and cursed the awful custom of child marriage" (24). But she did not raise question against it. She was also suppressed by family. As a daughter-in-law, she had to wake up early in the morning, and went to bed late night. "Radha's mother was still busy massaging the legs of her mother-in-law, who was now murmuring to herself as if she was dreaming" (17). Shakuntala's husband snatched to look at her state, but being a traditional son did not dare to voice protest against it. She never shares her pain with others. Shakuntala always struggles to give happiness in the family, for that she sacrifices her freedom. Radha observes all the activities of her house. And such activities also force her to resist the patriarchy. She is externally silenced, but spiritually strong and constantly searching the way of her re-awakening. Her consciousness is also a potential site of her life. The stereotypes of depicting females as more victim, powerless, and weak have been altered in this fiction through the portrayal of Radha as an agent. Through the character Radha, Mishra tries to encourage those oppressed women to raise voice against the social injustice of the society.

This is a qualitative study based on library research and textual analysis. The first Nepalese woman lecturer Shanti Mishra, tries to expose the painful suffering as well as hidden reality of Nepalese women, especially in Hindu Brahmin community through her fiction *Widow's Gift*, which was published in 2008. It is said that, a writer cannot be isolated from the society. We can assume that as a female, Shanti Mishra too have faced challenges in the society. Mishra communicates experiences of her life

through her literary writings. And her writings have become agency for those suppressed women. Everyone wants to bring change in such system but openly no one dares to go against it. Author Shanti Mishra tries to reflect the reality of society, and advocate for change by presenting Radha as an agent in her fiction *Widow's Gift*. She conveys the message that literary writing also plays vital role to bring changes in the society. Mishra's writing helps us to see how literature can be used as a very efficacious weapon to fight for social evils.

The researcher argues that women are dominated through suppression, oppression, and evil practices of traditional Brahmin community, and explores how it has changed in contemporary times. In theory, there is no existence of discrimination, but practically it is very difficult to find. Theory and action have to go hand in hand for change to come, but reality is totally different. They are not treated as human beings. Being a widow is difficult to exist and establish identity in the society. This paper aims to explore the suffering and painful struggle of women, as well as the researcher shows how they struggle to establish their identity in society. By presenting Radha as the main character of this novel, Mishra tries to encourage to speak against social injustice and inequality. Indirectly she expresses that, it is the time of changing, women are in the position of decision making. They know about their rights, and duties. Mishra tries to give the message, it is the time to unite all such suppressed people and raise voice against injustice of the society. She also imparts an important message it is time to bring change from within ourselves.

Being a widow is very difficult to survive in the society. Traditional Hindu culture has imposed criteria on females that even though when they want to play and enjoy their life, they have to force themselves in doing household chores. In the novel, Radha is compelled to marry at the age of nine. After a year, she loses her

husband and tagged a widow. She is not allowed to participate in any ceremony. She wants to live free life but confined within private space. Her inner self began to raise questions against the social injustice of the society. But later on her growing consciousness, self-struggle establishes her as an active woman. This paper further seeks how Radha exercises to bring change in the society. Living in a conducive environment, how she expresses the challenges of the society, what motivates her to resist the patriarchy. Is it possible for women to rise above the boundaries set by patriarchal society? It also explores how Radha defies societal norms regarding the gender? Is it possible for women to raise question on patriarchal society?

Obviously, this paper hypothesizes how Radha challenges such conventional patriarchal society. At first Radha has been portrayed as passive, innocent but gradually she is presented as an active and courageous woman. Radha's grandfather-in-law plays a vital role in establishing her as an active woman, because he encourages Radha to get educated. After getting some education she knows that she is under suppression of patriarchy. Her growing consciousness, self-respect, and struggle encourages her to interrogate the patriarchy. To challenge patriarchy, she proves that change and transformation is possible. She breaks the images of powerlessness, passivity and establish as a courageous woman. Radha tries to show the evidences that, women can have as much capacity as men and one should voice out against all the injustices and inequalities if parents and society are supportive.

Radha, main character of this novel, shows a very pathetic life story of women. She is the representative of all victimized women. In the beginning she is submissive, passive and innocent. She does not challenge anyone. But society forces her to do very hard works, which she takes as a challenge. No one supports her. She is tamed to be calm, innocent, passive etc. In Radha's home her grandmother has always

taught her to be calm. Her family never worried about her education, instead of gotten married when she reaches nine. So, in the beginning, she is so passive and innocent. No one encourages her to speak. But later her growing consciousness, self-respect, and struggle shed light on her journey. There are many female characters in the novel, who are also victimised of the patriarchal society. But no one could dare to speak against it. Some of the females support Radha to eradicate such evil practices, but want the tradition to be continued, because the society tamed them to follow the rigid customs. They do not want to change easily.

This fiction contains a number of references from the Nepalese society, places from real world, and events that closely resemble with the events that are variously practiced in that time. Implicitly, it has continued in even contemporary times. This is a work of fiction, that is supposed to present an imagined world but it seems to be very close to real world. Mishra tries to reflect the reality of the Nepalese society through the fictional way. It intends to reveal the real situation of women, by criticizing those bad customs, and tries to establish change in the society.

The basic research method is the textual reading, close reading of the text, textual analysis, reading the primary text, and secondary text, research articles, visiting library and discussion with supervisor.

Therefore, to deal with this issue the researcher uses the theoretical framework of third world feminism as methodological tool for the research. The famous third world feminist Chandra Talpade, et, al *Third World Women and The Politics of Feminism*, and Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures, Identities, Traditions and The Third World Feminism* are the main methodological frameworks for the analysis of the primary text of this research. Along with these ideas, other third world feminists' ideas also have been used as a supportive tool to further clarify the text. Third world

feminism raise the issue of marginalized people of day to day life struggle. And their writing are as a tool for self-empowerment. Mohanty argues in her theory, “Third world women as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications” (7). It clarifies that, third world feminism advocates the social, familial and minor issues rather than racial issue. And it gives agency to the suppressed women. So, this theory will be applicable to analyze this paper.

In order to review the related literature, I start by looking at different critics and what they have to say about the novel and the novelist. While doing so, I will also pay attention to different third world feminist theorists’ ideas, which helped me to understand the primary text in a better way. Shanti Mishra’s novel *A Widow’s Gift* is considered as one of the prominent works in the field of Nepalese literature. It has received various criticisms and is reviewed from different angles by various critics. The reviews of Mishra’s *Widow’s Gift* varies in their opinions. Mostly have applauded the careful portrayal of its characters. Most of the reviews are based on the role of the character Radha.

Regarding this novel Don Messerschmidt quoted the line from the book, “Widowhood was like a contagious disease” (75). Widowhood is taken as a disease. They are not taken as human being. Women of widowhood lies in the category of double margin. On the one hand they are female, and on the other hand they are tagged as widow. Society always treats them negatively. In the name of religion, patriarchal society always compels women to follow very rigid customs and rituals. But Mishra tries to speak against those very dangerous practices of the society and gives agency to the oppressed women. In the article about Mishra’s book by Shreeya Joshi includes her speech, where she expresses, “I have seen Tribhuvan University

grow into the University that it is now, when I started teaching there, the place was very small, and we only had a handful of students” (ECS Media). On the basis of above mentioned lines, we can easily assume that those handful students were only males. Because that was a time, where girls were not educated. They were confined in private space. In some of the remote areas, such practices still continue, but such reality is rarely exposed.

*Widow's Gift* is the means and medium to reveal the social realities during Mishra's period. Writers and thinkers in the field of literature try their hands in reforming the status of women, and Mishra is one of them. J. T. F. Jordens in *Hindu Religion and Social Reform in India* highlights that:

We find in Maharashtra ample evidence of a growing awareness about social religious reform. Many local reform groups and societies were started.

Gopal Hari Deshmukh, and Jyotiba Phule did pioneering work in their field.

They bitterly attacked the social inequalities of traditional society, the caste system and the abject condition of women in their writings. (36)

As literature and society are interrelated and inseparable the social issues of the time entered in making of the literature. Literature is the mirror of the society, studies the life of people and expresses the changing situation of the society. According to W. H. Hudson, “We have to investigate the literature of any given movement in connection with the existing society” (1). It is because a writer is the product of the age in which he or she lives and works. For them society's activities are the subject matters to write. A writer who revolts against the tradition does not mean to destroy it, rather wants to bring certain changes in it. Mishra is doing the same.

Radha's family deeply believes in religion. Her family members, especially male members began to quest groom for Radha. Radha's family decide to marriage of

Radha with young man Vasu. He is also the member of Brahmin family. Radha's mother and grandmother are unknown about the decision of Radha's marriage. They are not allowed to participate in family decision making. While making decision of the Radha's marriage, they are in the kitchen. No one calls them to participate such an important decision. Author writes that, "The mother and grandmother had by then drawn themselves like turtles into the shell of their kitchen, since women were not supposed to participate in such matters" (2). This shows, women were not in a position to decide, they are only confined in private space. They were suppressed by the man-made society. As a female character, Radha faces obstacles in her life. She is compelled to marry at the age of nine, without even seeing at once her groom. After a year of her marriage, unexpectedly her youthful husband dies. Messerschmidt writes that, "Radha is fundamentally redefined" (2). Her earlier identity is taken away, and she is tagged a 'widow'. Not only earlier identity, but her dress, culture, custom, happiness most of the things are taken away. Radha is forced to follow very pathetic manmade customs, rules and regulations in the name of religion. "She would not be permitted to wear ornaments or colored attire, take part in any amusements or attend family festivals" (46). Radha is suppressed by patriarchal society.

Radha as a widow does not want to follow such cruel rituals, but is unable to express. She does not show any reaction. Females themselves are not happy with this system, but no one dares to oppose it, because they are tamed by the society to follow as their duty. Messerschmidt expresses that, "On seeing the young girl wearing her long life white dress for the first time", after seeing Radha, "her grandmother could not control herself and burst into tears, knowing her grandchild's dark future" (49). Here, tears of Radha's grandmother indicates that, women themselves are not satisfied

with this system. They want to change the system, but openly no one can challenge it.

Radha's grandfather further explains that:

She has no option but to resign herself to her fate. Even she married, she would remain a widow, and that is why even an old Brahmin as poor as a beggar would feel indignant at the very suggestion of marrying her. Though she might be beautiful". (49)

Such kind of patriarchal notion is deeply rooted in the society. They thought that females' identity is constant. They have no any options doing other things or second marriage. They are forced to spend whole life in the name of their death husband.

Here Don Messerschmidt, and Shreeya are inclined to explore a society treated with a very discriminatory role between male and female in the society. They are not treated as human beings. Women's participation in social interaction is forbidden. By arguing such views, Messerschmidt appreciates the character of Radha who makes her attempts to overcome the traditional notion that girls are burden in the society.

'Theory of Third World Feminism' is taken as a methodological tool to critique on the representation of patriarchy through the suffering faced by female characters in the play. Feminism is a movement that can be defined as a political cum literary movement which advocates for the equality of women's position in culture and society. Feminism concerns issues related to gender equality and women in various fields like politics, education, religion, sex, economy etc. Moreover it is a discipline which refuses to accept the traditional male centered culture and cult of masculine chauvinism which reduces women as object, second sex, inferior and submissive. And feminist theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. However, the Third World

Feminism deals with the life of third world women particularly who live outside the industrialized west and also women of color within western countries.

Geographically, the nation states of Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, China, South China, South Africa constitute the parameters of non-European Third world and a group of feminist theorists who acquired their views and took part in feminist politics in so called third world countries are called Third world feminist. They talk about real differences between race, age, and class of women in different societies. Third world feminist try to give response to the problem faced by Third World women like domestic violence, sexual harassment, early marriages, dowry, murders, polygamy and other social discrimination.

The portrayal of Third World Women as passive, voiceless, uneducated, empowered, dependent are seen through critical lenses by Third World Feminists. They develop strategic skills to counter the Western stereotypes and also develop feminist analysis of problems which the women of Third World face. In the beginning, Radha seems innocent, and pathetic character, but later on she establishes herself as an active woman. She is so calm, and never defends violently. Silently she observes the daily activities of the society. Sometimes she regrets not being able to wear colorful dress like married women of her age. And thinking about the manmade customs for widows in the society, she prayed to God to give her more strength to slowly overcome them. So, she looks always calm, smiling and loving. She imparts knowledge to others, even at the last condition of her life. At the end of her life, she gives a message by saying, "Remember" from her death bed, "don't cry when I leave you all behind. My role in the worldly theatre is over" (165). This indicates that it is our turn to break the hierarchy in the society, and make this society a paradise. So

Radha is not a pathetic character, instead she is courageous. In the beginning she is passive, but struggle of her life, growth of age, and self-respect make her very strong character that towards the end she easily accepts death. So, Radha becomes the source of encouragement to the oppressed women in a sense that, she reflects pain and suffering of women. She conveys the message to treat everyone equally, without any discrimination. And also encourages women to raise voice against rigid social practices to reform the society.

This research focuses in its exploration of the active role involved where female protagonist endeavors resisting gender norms of patriarchal convention and succeeds in asserting her agency through the active involvement. Though this study foregrounds the inner strength, courage, and consciousness of Radha, who alters herself from the inactive to an active woman at the end of the novel. Nature has given some different features to male as well as female. Not truly religious scriptures differentiate between sons and daughters. But society creates its own rules and imposes on women. The feminist philosopher Uma Narayan expresses her experience, “I remember minding particularly that the injunction to be silent came from my mother” (6). Females are not free to speak and do other things what they want. They are observed an every particulars by the society. In the same way Radha’s grandmother is always busy teaching her Radha by saying “When you get married you will have to behave just like your mother- always gentle and quiet, and ever providing all the needs of her family” (16). These mentioned lines show that keeping silent is not a birth feature of women, but the family and society have made them silent and calm. Uma Narayan further asserts, “That innocence, that silence indicated she was a good wife, a good daughter-in-law, well brought up a good Indian woman, matter of pride” (7). This shows that, if women tolerate their pain and suffering, it is taken as good by

the patriarchal society. And women of the societies are compelled to follow such system. The earlier women are habituated of following that system and tries to impose and transfer the same practice to the next generation.

In Nepalese society, females are dominated, and the case of widow is more dangerous than females. Society sees widow as a disease, and helpless things. The practice of early marriage is deeply rooted in the society. Radha's family were also brainwashed by the same mindset of that culture. They never think about Radha's health and education, instead of, they were busy to search a groom for Radha. Mr. K.C., a matchmaker arrive at Radha's home in order to talk about her marriage. He is welcomed by Kancha, servant of Radha's house. Kancha is very kind hearted and helpful man. Mr. K.C. is impressed by his good manner. Mr. K.C. teases Kancha by asking if he was married or not. He replies that, he was already married. Kanchha Says:

Kancha scratched his head, been forward and replied with an innocent smile that he was the father of two daughters. His parents lamented their birth so much that he had to live home so that he would not be forced to marry another woman in order to have sons, he loved his wife very much. If he could earn enough, then he would bring his wife and daughters to Kathmandu. (4)

These above mentioned lines reflect the reality of earlier Nepalese society. How Nepalese society takes the birth of girl child. Here, Kancha seems to be happy having two baby girls but his parents are lamenting for their birth. Despite of caring they are crying over the birth of two innocent children. They even force Kancha to get married again just to have a male child. Here we can clearly assume, how females are marginalized. They are taken as objects and also considered as burden for the family. People also have the wrong belief that if more girls are born in a family, it creates

economic burden because parents have to give more dowry. But if a male child is born many things came to their home. Such kind of wrong belief is deeply rooted in their mind. Therefore, Kancha's parents are also contained with the same mindset.

As the society is male dominated women have been suppressed under the male ideology, and supremacy. The ideology of the society, norms, values, tradition, religion etc. are the main determinant for the oppression of women as they are patriarchal in nature. A woman has to suffer just because she is a female, and the position is always weak in comparison to male. Mr. K. C. and Pandit Shastri, father of Vasu, goes to the astrologer's house in order to fix the suitable day for the wedding. They see some men, women and children waiting to consult an astrologer.

A sickly men, women and children were waiting for their turn to, Rishi Raj consults Joshi; who was wholly absorbed in his science, studying as he was a horoscope placed on a small table. A gloomy couple was waiting to hear him pass judgment on their future. They already had eight daughters and were still hoping for a son... (10)

These lines show very measurable life of women. It is very touchy line, "They already had eight daughters" (10), and still they are hoping for a son. No one worries about women's health. They are treated as an inferior creature, and also taken as child bearing machines. She has to function as a reproductive unit of the family. Women are victimized more if they cannot give birth to a baby. Society never sees a man as responsible to giving a birth of a child. The feminist philosopher Ketu Katrak in her book *Politics of The female Body*, expresses her views by saying "Wifehood and marriage are portrayed at times as fulfilling and at others as enslaving" (127). Here, mother of eight children has no right to her own body. She is forced to give birth to a number of children with taking risk of her own life. The sole duty of woman is to

make the male members happy and prosperous to give birth of son. There is no personal happiness and free will. Women have to think of their husband and family only. It is female's responsibility to give birth of son. If they do not, their life is incomplete. Such kind of wrong beliefs are imposed on women.

A patriarchal society wants a woman to be religious, custom oriented, follow the rules and values of the society. In the same way Radha is forced to follow all customs. She is compelled to marry at the age of nine. Before her marriage, she is uncertain what is going to happen in her house. "Radha herself was still unaware of its significance, but everyone else in the family caught up in preparations for the marriage" (14). Radha does not know anything about her marriage. "The boy and girl who were to be married were never consulted in those days, especially not the girl who was likely to be five, seven or most nine years old" (14). At that time, marriage was the total concern of the parents. Even female members could not participate to make decision about their daughter's marriage. Radha is interested to play with rag dolls and animals with friends. But one day Radha's grandmother disclose the news of Radha's marriage. Her grandmother tells Radha, "you are going to marry next month" (14). After knowing this, Radha is shouting with excitement. Radha goes to her friend and shares that news with excitement "I'm so happy, I'll have lots of saris, blouses, shawls, ornaments and anything I want. You must come to my wedding and me to dress well" (15). For her, marriage means just a game. Radha does not know the real meaning of life. Even she does not know the name and age of her groom. She is unknown about the responsibility of married woman. Rather she is attracted by ornaments, and beautiful clothes which is given to a bride.

Family and society is first step to make female calm and silent. Radha is always taught by her grandmother. She never teaches Radha to be confident and brave

rather, “Radha was still being tutored by her grandmother about how to walk with her friends to the courtyard” (20). She does all rituals for her grandmother’s sake.

Nothing appealed to her except the new dresses and jewellery she had been given.

Feminist philosopher Uma Narayan states, “Both our mothers and our mother cultures gives contradictory messages” (8). In the same way, Radha’s grandmother forces to bow down her head, and not allow to look here and there. Because her grandmother comes from such a culture, and tries to continue the same culture to the next generation.

The practice of child marriage is beautifully presented in the novel. After marriage, Radha’s earlier happiness are gone away. She is compelled to perform rituals almost the whole day. There would be no honeymoon for Radha and her husband Vasu. After the wedding, Vasu has to leave home for Banaras to continue his study. Vasu did not have a word with his wife. For him, marriage was nothing more than a ritual. He is forced by his family. Radha performs her duty of bowing down for a week, in a total silence. Everyone in Vasu’s family was in grief when he was leaving for Banaras. But Radha was indifferent to all this because she had no love, affection and attachment towards him. Instead she missed her home and friends:

She felt like a bird in a cage. Though she was given good food and much attention, she did not feel comfortable, since she had to abide by certain traditional customs, such as bowing down to all the seniors every morning and cover her head in front of her in-laws. (28)

Radha is confined within limited space. She has no any friends to play. Though her grandfather-in-law loves her, and gives her good food. Even she misses her family and friends. She wants to play with her friends, and not do household works. No one

understands about her child psychology. Marriage often serves a means of oppression in third world countries. Uma Narayan in *Dislocating Cultures* argues:

I would argue that my sense, that marriage is an oppressive institution for any women is something that predates my explicit acquisition of a feminist politics and is something I initially learned not from books but from women in general and my relatives in particular [...] women are subjected to within their marriage. (9)

Though the suffering of female characters, it can be clear that how patriarchy have oppressed them as females in Nepalese context. There is no any personal freedom and happiness. Marriage as a controlling factor made by patriarchal society often makes women's condition miserable. After first return the home of Radha, her friends asks her about her married life. She replied to them, "Married life was okay for a few days. I hate to observe all those use customs every day, very boring and at times distressing" (32). In Hindu culture, especially in Brahmin family wife has to confine herself in the chains of societal norms and culture. "Radha was hungry, but could not ask for food. She had to eat last- a rule for any daughter-in-law" (30). She was not supposed to ask for food and had to wait till all her- in-laws had eaten. Radha is forced to follow all the traditions, though she was not interested.

However, after a year Radha's husband Vasu returns from Banaras, but Radha has no excitement, because she has no any attachment towards him. Radha's husband suffers from malaria and unfortunately some days after he dies. All family and friends lament, but Radha is silently observing the lamenting cries of women. "She had had no feelings at the death of her husband, and yet to understand the significance of such a death in Hindu society" (43). Radha has no any deep connection with her husband. When she is in pain, she sees her mother, and tears automatically roll down from her

eyes, “tears streamed from her eyes, which moved Radha so much that she too wept for the first time since the death of her husband- not for him but for her mother” (48). After seeing tearful eyes of Radha, some of the women began to criticize for not demonstrating grief at the death of her husband but showing tears while seeing her mother.

After the death of her husband, Radha fears even more to think of her own death. She wants to revolt but she cannot. She had been trained to suffer within herself. She did whatever was ordered. Her earlier happiness, and identity is gone away, and she is tagged as ‘widow’. Not only that, “She would not be permitted to wear ornaments, or colored attire, take part in any amusements or attend family festivities, such as annaprasan, upanayan, and marriage parties” (46). Every place she is restricted to participate. The feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her book *Third World Women and The Politics of Feminism* explains “Women as an already constituted group, which has been labeled “powerless”, “exploited”, “and sexually harassed” (69). Society treats women as inferior in comparison to male. When Radha is in miserable condition, many women and relatives came to Radha’s house. They show sympathy to her, which makes Radha more powerless. At that time women are confined within limited space, and not free to work what they want. In Patriarchal society, males create their own rules, norms, values, and different cultures in order to control females.

In patriarchal society, women do not have free will and individual identity. Similarly, Radha’s identity is also not constraint. Rather her identity is changeable. For her it is very difficult to create her own identity. Her earlier identity is taken away, and is now tagged a ‘widow’. She is not allowed to wear colorful dress, rather white sari is given to her. The colorful dresses “were just to be touched, not to be

worn” (48). This expression shows the rigid culture and society of that time. A woman is expected to be patient, meek, obedient, submissive, and faithful and is conditioned to subordinate her will and desire under patriarchy and male dominated society. Women have no option of second marriage. They are not free to choose their personal life. As Mohanty argues, “Women are powerless, unified groups” (84). She also states, “ Women are always seen in opposition to men, patriarchy is male dominance and the religious, legal, economic, and familial systems are implicitly assumed to be constructed by men” (83) In the same way Radha is taken as a powerless woman, and is imposed all the manmade custom in the name of religion. The male generate certain ideologies that define male as superior, whereas negative references such as other, innocence, passive, inferior are used to define females.

Eventually, Radha establishes herself as a courageous woman. After getting education, she knows she is under suppression, and began to raise voice against it. She has a belief that education is eternal light which brightens everyone, leads them along a right path and gives them the courage to speak the truth. It also helps to distinguish well from bad and right from wrong. She realizes that, education helps to understand life in a better way. Education plays a vital role in the society. Her grandfather-in-law is very helpful and always supports her for education. So, “News of Radha’s attainments spread throughout the neighborhood quickly. Every one wondered why a widow as being given this opportunity” (62). Widows are restricted in every place, not allowed to participate in any ceremony. Even they are restricted to gain knowledge within their own home. It reflects the oppressive society of that time. One day two ladies of the society came to Radha’s house to enquire about their intentions in educating Radha. They challenge the grandmother-in-law:

Bhauju, your grandson was really gem. That was why death snatched him up

so quickly. It's nice to hear your praise your granddaughter-in-law, Bhauju, but be careful not to break tradition, she should follow all the customs prescribes in all religious books to be followed by widows: otherwise your son will have no peace. (63)

Another woman, Harimaya adds, "I agree, if you continue to educate your granddaughter-in-law, she will raise many unnecessary questions about our tradition and become a great disgrace to our society (63). These phrases expose the rigid practice of Hindu Brahmin society, where taking education of woman is taken as breaking tradition. Patriarchal society creates different stereotypes and imposes on women. The third world feminist Katak Ketu develops her ideas, "Tradition itself is a historicized and regarded as fixed, timeless and unchanging. Women must pay severe costs for confronting tradition" (190). Though tradition is not constraint, rather it changes according to time and situation. Katak further states, "Tradition is gendered, so that the same elements of tradition, such as religious belief, education, dress codes, freedom of movements are enforced very differently on males versus females" (192). But people do not understand positively. Even women themselves are not ready to accept changes, because society creates false ideologies and imposed on women.

Although Radha establishes herself as an active woman, but she faces numerous obstacles in her life. Those obstacles give lesson to her life. Radha has one brother-in-law Banu, whom she loves very much. Banu got married with Bani. As soon as Bani entered the home, she shows scornful attitude towards Radha for being a widow. Later on her Bani starts doubt about their pure relation. She poses question to her husband by saying, "Oh so you love her more than thought, what is there between you and that widow" (68). They are always treated as innocent, passive and docile. But Radha does not react violently, rather she remains calm and quiet.

Radha dares to resist the patriarchy. She does not care about what other people says. Her grandfather-in-law supports her in education. She tries to prove that it is education which helps woman to bring change in the society, and speak against social injustice. Radha eventually matures from her efforts to cope with problems in gaining her life goals. She exchanges silence for speech. Her self-struggle, growing consciousness, maturity, and education shed light on her journey. Another feminist philosopher Uma Narayan also gives agency to oppress women by advocating about education. In *Dislocation Cultures*, she exposes:

I was raised saw education as a good thing for daughters, encouraged us to do well at our studies, saw it as prudent that daughters have the qualifications necessary to support themselves economically, saw it as a good that we learned to master tasks in areas of life that had been closed to women of my mother generation. (48)

Education plays a vital role to bring change in the society. Every moment of her widowed life had become a challenge for her. But she never runs away from that. Education enlightens her, and understands about her problem. Slowly and gradually she is able to bring change. Being so young, she has many natural desires but she never shows her discontent. She has a high sense of morality, so openly no one dares to challenge. Radha wants to reform the society from herself, for that she has had to sacrifice many things. Radha has no any source of income. She decides to rent a flat to Master Shiva from which she receives some the source of her income. It is a very challenging task of that time. For a widow, to keep male person at home is not easily accepted by society. People started to criticize Radha to connect her name with Master Shiva. In traditional society, if a widow is seen talking with others, people become skeptic of their relation though this is far from reality. Society did not take

positively. Master Shiva has two daughters. But, Shiva's school was only for boys. Radha pleaded with him by saying, "try to convince the headmaster to open the door for girls" (75). There was no schools for girls. But Radha creates ideas about education for girls. "She viewed girls as future mothers, bringing change as the first teacher of everyone" (77). Though Radha has had no formal education, she understands about the importance of female education. Her experiences give lesson in her life. Radha has a belief that educated mothers can play a key role to reform the society if they are given the right tools.

The patriarchal belief is deeply rooted in the society. People accept wrong concept in the name of tradition and culture. When Radha decides to promote co-education, traditional women begin to criticize by adding different stereotypes. One group of traditional women starts to criticize:

Our society has been moving wrong ways. Who is going to do something if we don't? Just see how Master Shiva and Radha are breaking tradition by sending Gita and Sita to school instead of arranging marriages for them. Shame, shame! (80-81)

Women themselves do not easily want to change. Giving education to the woman is taken as a breaking tradition. They have a belief that education leads people astray. Instead she is always busy to impart knowledge in the society. She is strong, her own experience gives lesson in her life. Radha realizes that, to reform the society she has to struggle and sacrifice many things of her life.

A patriarchal society wants women to be religious, custom oriented, follow the rules and values of the society. A woman has to be loyal and faithful to her husband but there is no such restriction to men. The patriarchal structures are based on male based authority. Women are not taken as heir to the family property. When Radha is

suffers from cancer, her relatives do not want to help, rather her friend Dhana helps Radha to take hospital. Despite of caring Radha, her aunty “Surya Kumari’s family were still in deep discussion about how to get at Radha’s property” (136). Her auntie is busy to collect fake documents to get property of Radha. But Radha’s wish was different. She wants to donate half of her property for the welfare of widows and the other half for girl’s education. Radha wants to bring a new change to the society. By doing so she is challenging the traditional established values. Radha tries to challenge such a biased system of the society. In “Dislocating Cultures”, Uma Narayan States:

Feminist movements in various parts of the world develop when historical and political circumstances encourage public recognition that many of the norms, institutions, and traditions that structure women’s personal and social lives, as well as the impact of new developments and social change, are detrimental to women’s well- being, and enable political contestations in which the status quo is criticized and alternatives envisioned. (13)

However, traditions and cultures are not stable. It is necessary to change according to time and context. It does not harm anyone rather it unites people in the society, if we use it properly. Uma Narayan further asserts, “We need to redescribe, and challenge this picture of “unchanging traditions” (25). This reflects that, if tradition creates discrimination, and dissatisfaction instead of harmony, then we need to rethink about it. Traditions are not made by God, rather it is made by human beings, and it is necessary to change according to time and context. In addition, Radha challenges earlier established notion and tries to eradicate from the society. Being a widow, she faces many challenges, and tries to break the limitation. Her experiences make her strong and it further opens the way for her resistance. Moreover, this displays her understanding that she should fight and raise her voice against the injustice of the

society. Radha wants to reform the society by eradicating such bad customs of the society. She transforms herself from being inactive to active. She also encourages us to raise question on such rigid customs of the society. And also inspire us to question against the status quo, which helps to bring change in the society. Radha not only fights for her freedom, but she also fights to save other women from being victimized. Radha also reflects that women are passive, emotional, meek, and docile have been false. A woman does not have basic rights and also can not enjoy their life in total freedom due to dominant patriarchal culture and tradition. Overcoming such traditional stereotypes as well as the feminine ability, Radha proves that real transformation and change is possible. She empowers herself through the protest against the patriarchal notions.

Radha transforms herself from passive to active, silence to vocal, meek to powerful. She proves herself as a powerful woman by challenging traditional established notions. She donates her property to the social work, which is very challenging task of that time. She defeats different evil practices of the society. At first, she is silenced, but spiritually she is strong and searching the way for her re-awakening. Her silence stands as the metaphor of maturity, where as her voice serves as a metaphor for female agency. Her consciousness is also a potential site of agency. The stereotypes of depicting female as mere victim, powerless, and weak have been altered in the novel through the portrayal of Radha as an agent. Radha finally succeeds in articulating her role as an active woman who does not live as a passive rather participates to make her dreams true.

Through the fiction *A Widow's Gift*, Shanti Mishra conveys the moral message that, by projecting Radha as the main character, she is trying to raise her own voice against social injustice, and inequality of the society. She dramatizes the sufferings of

women through the critical angle to reveal the extent of patriarchy and its domination. As a female author, Mishra seems to suggest that women should be more courageous, determined and assertive in dealing with their problem. Being a widow, she faces many challenges in her life, but she never runs away from the problem. People took widowhood as a curse, so they never had a good outlook towards them. Society was completely brainwashed with such ideologies. But Radha dares to challenge such kind of established values of the society. For this she sacrifices many things of her life. She fights not only for her own freedom, rather she fights for all the victimized women of the society. And she also establishes the trend to transfer the private property to the social work which was very challenging task during that time.

Moreover, this study foregrounds the inner strength, courage and consciousness of Radha, who presents herself from passive to active woman at the end of the novel. She interrogates by rejecting traditional gender roles to find her own position. Radha tries to prove that, women can able to bring change, and one should voice out against the injustice, and equalities if parents and friends are supportive. Radha wants to establish equality in the society where no one is inferior; everyone has the same authority. This also rejects that, women have low authority, and men are higher in the power structure. She proves herself by constantly involving herself in finding her dignity and works for self-respect. Her self-respect, patience, struggle, confidence leads to achieve her goal. She exchanges silence for speech. She finally establishes her own position in the patriarchal world.

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