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**Unveiling the Sacred: Reading the Gendered Female Body in
Contemporary Pakistani Fiction**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

in

English Literature

at Massey University, Manawatu

New Zealand.

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2010-2011

ABSTRACT

The last few decades mark the emergence of *the body* in Western social theory and humanities, where it is being used as a theoretical model and a critical construct to study, analyse and interpret socially situated subjectivities. This research project takes the theoretical framework of *the body* and combines it with insights from postcolonial feminist theory to critically engage with the depiction of the bodies of South Asian (Pakistani and Indian) women in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, a feminist voice from Pakistan. Using the approach of *the body* as an inscriptive surface, the narratives of *The Bride and Water* are critically examined to expose patriarchy's use of culture and religion as powerful tools to establish its hegemonic control over the bodies, subjectivities and lives of South Asian women. Questions of female objectification, marginalisation, socio-religious positioning and agency are the focus of this research, in an effort to highlight the corporeal and gendered existence of South Asian women in the context of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels.

Keywords: Bapsi Sidhwa, the body, Pakistani literature, femininity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am highly grateful to Dr Maria Celina Bortolotto for her unfailing support, guidance and patience from the start of this project. Her insights have been invaluable and working with her has been a fun learning experience. I am especially indebted to her for going an extra mile with me towards the end of the project.

I am also thankful to Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, whose financial support has been instrumental in enabling me to undertake this research project in New Zealand.

I would also like to thank Amber Faisal, Sadia Sattar, Sadia Tahir and Saima Ijaz for their generosity, support and encouragement, which kept me going in tough times.

Lastly, a very warm and earnest note of thanks goes out to my family, especially my parents, without their unflinching love and encouragement I would not have been able to make it this far.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Chapter 1	1
1.1 Skeleton in the Closet: <i>the Body</i> in Western Philosophy.....	5
1.1.1 <i>Re-emergence of the Body in Western Social Theory</i>	5
1.1.2 <i>The Body in Traditional Western Philosophy</i>	9
1.2 Women, Bodies and Philosophy.....	16
1.3 Women Writers and Pakistani Literature in English	27
Chapter 2.....	33
2.1 Sidhwa, Mehta and <i>Water</i>	33
2.2 The Religious Tradition	39
2.2.1 <i>Shakti, Prakriti and the Indian Woman: The Mythical Connection</i>	40
2.2.2 <i>Dharma, Purity and Marriage</i>	43
2.3 Caught between <i>Dharma</i> and <i>Karma</i> : An Analysis of <i>Water</i>	47
2.3.1 <i>Kanyadaan—Marriage as Transaction</i>	49
2.3.2 <i>Constructing Hindu Womanhood</i>	52
2.3.3 <i>In Grip of Bad Karma—The Inauspicious Widow</i>	65
Chapter 3	80
3.1 Marriage and Women’ bodies	87
3.2 <i>Zenana</i> and Honour- The Social Identity of Women.....	93
3.2.1 <i>The World of Zenana</i>	93
3.2.2 <i>Women and Male Honour</i>	105
3.3 Sexual Repression and Women	120
3.4 Feminist Awakenings.....	123
Conclusion.....	127
Works Cited.....	145

Research Supervision Statement

Date: April 29, 2011.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to state that the research carried out for the Master's thesis entitled “*Unveiling the Sacred: Reading the Gendered Female Body in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction*” was completed by Shazrah Salam in the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, New Zealand, under my direct supervision. This thesis material has not been used for any other degree. I played the following part in the preparation of the thesis: advising, providing feedback on writing, revising and editing.

Thesis Supervisor

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