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Exploration of Womanhood and the Assertion of Self:

A Comparative Study of Meghna Pant's *One and a Half Wife* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

The images of women in South Asian novels have undergone a change in the last three decades. Earlier women were conceived as a symbol of self sacrifice and suffering. In due course of time women writers affected by Western Feminism have explored the alternative ideal of self assertion. From the suffering women in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai et al. to the recent subversions of the traditional image in the works of Chitra Fernando, Anees Jung, Bapsi Sidhwa and Taslima Nasrin, the women have come a long way. The recent writers explore the wonderful consequences of Indian women renaming self and experience. Individually they have gained a name collectively an identity. Their new strength stems from personalities defining their own terms lending grace to living. To voice a pain to divulge a secret was consider sacrilege, a breach of family trust. Today voices are raised without fear and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept a woman protected and also isolated. The feminist writers have emphasised a new perspective of woman. They have rebelled against stern patriarchy and male chauvinism.

Meghna Pant's *One and a Half Wife* reveals the struggle and circumstances faced by a woman, Anara Malhotra, entangled in the Indian orthodox culture. Being the only girl child of her parents she always dreamt of American education and also of a prince like groom to support her the rest of her life. Though she migrated to USA alongwith her parents, she could not be able to assimilate that American culture and mentality to that of Indian beliefs. The novel has also highlighted the effect of divorce on the life and honour of women is general and Anara Malhotra in particular. The victims stood against the old orthodoxy and degraded mentality of the society and ultimately succeeded to discover themselves.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* throws light on women's zest for life, their adaptability and indomitable courage. All the women, be it Zaitoon, Carol or Afshan though they, become victims in the patriarchal social set up, they are very much conscious of their preservation of the life. Sidhwa thinks that life must be preserved at all cost by women since one can fight oppression only when one is alive.

The present paper intends to present a comparative stance of two South Asian novels – Meghna Pant's *One and a Half Wife* on the one hand and Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* on the other. Both the writers have tried to depict the inner psyche of their women characters in their own way. While Pant has focused on her characters coming out of the Indian orthodox culture and establishing their identity in the patriarchal set up, Sidhwa, through her marginalised characters has tried to give voice to hitherto silenced women.