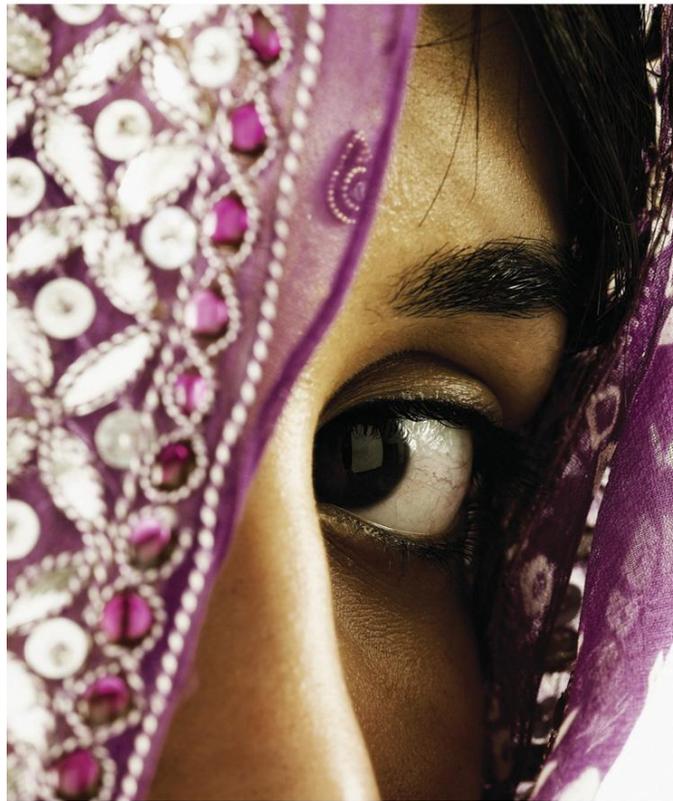


Struggle and Resistance in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

J. Sharmila Devi and Dr. G. Arputhavel Raja

The Pakistani Bride



BAPSI SIDHWA

a novel by the author of *Cracking India*

Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani American Writer who belongs to Parsee community. Her novels mainly focus on social themes such as partition crisis, Parsee milieu, marriage, migration, women, love, pain, identity. This article traces the Parsee and Zoroastrian women conflict in

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. As a Parsee woman, Sidhwa witnessed the communal issues and expressed it through her writings along with her personal experience. She portrays the contemporary society and its problems in this novel. These problems are presented through various women characters like Zaitoon, Carol, and Afshan. As a Pakistani female writer in English, she highlights the struggle of women within patriarchal Pakistani society. The emphasis of this paper is to explore and analyze the struggle and resistance of female figure against patriarchal structures as presented in the novel *The Pakistani Bride*.

Keywords: Partition, Women, Identity, Subaltern.

Bapsi Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the most successful English-language Pakistani novelists. She is distinctive among the writers of English language fiction in Sub-continent because of her sharp wit, humor, and reliable observations of human behavior. Through her individual voice, which is unique indeed, she represents Parsi ethos as well. Her writing reflects the cultural complexities of post -1947 eras in Pakistani society. As a women writer, Sidhwa observes the struggles and their Resistance of the Pakistani women in her novel. The major themes in *The Pakistani Bride*, are marriage, culture, tradition, and partition. In this novel Sidhwa, discusses the tribal people's culture and their customs. Sidhwa explicitly showed as the power of patriarchal society which forced the women to obey the man in all walks of their life as it is mentioned by Rebecca West (British critic) that "feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in patriarchal culture, a culture organized in favor of men" (253).

The Pakistani Bride

The Pakistani Bride deals with the oppression of women in context of psychological and sexual by men in the conservative tribal society. In the novel, there are three major women characters Zaitoon, Carol and Afshan, who represent different aspects of the struggle faced by women in a patriarchal world especially in the place of Kohistani hill. These different types of problems become symbols of painful life of reserved women. The lives of women become struggle and complicated in the tribal society which everything happens because of their own family and surrounding.

The novel is based on a true story of an orphaned girl which was narrated to Sidhwa. She visited a remote area of Karakoram Mountain and the girl narrated the story of her marriage with her nephew in the tribal land. One month after her marriage, her life became hell in which she could not sustain and survive. This story tempted Sidhwa to write the novel *The Pakistani Bride*. It revolves the resistance and the struggle of the protagonist, Zaitoon who struggle to escape from the cruel Pakistani tribal society where she has been married and suffered. Ashok Kumar's "A Feministic Approach to Bapsi Sidhwa's: *The Pakistani Bride*" explains it as:

... I felt I had to tell her story. I had not written before. I had a compulsion to write the girl's story and the story of the tribal hidden away in this beautiful part of the world. I started writing a short story about this girl, without my really being aware of it; it was developing into a long story. It was an obsession. (1170)

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Tribal Society and Women

In the very first chapter of the novel, Sidhwa shows how the tribal society regards women as valuable commodities. Afshan, the woman to be Qasim's wife, is fifteen, five years older than Qasim. Yet she has no choice but to accept him. Qasim's father generously decided to give the girl to his son as, "To begin with, he had thought of marrying the girl himself. He had only one wife, but in twinge of parental conscience, he had decided to bestow the girl on Qasim" (8). Before the marriage is consummated, Afshan is nearly raped by a stranger when he sees her bathing, protected by Qasim who is only a boy. Qasim hits the man with a large rock and escapes with his wife. Women are like commodities in the tribal society to be bartered and traded. They are considered as part of her husband's property of their husbands by the contemporary society. In some countries like India, Pakistan, and Arabia women did not have the freedom to choose their groom. They were bind in the name of their culture and tradition. Afshan is the good example given by Sidhwa in the novel. Women have to accept her family choice and marry the man selected by them. The picture of oppression and degradation of hapless women which emerges is strengthening by numerous other images of violence and subjugation of women.

Carol, a Lady from California

Another character is Carol, a lady from California, who falls in love with a Pakistani soldier and eloped with him. She goes to Lahore in Pakistan wherein on experiencing the over possessive attitude of her husband and decides to go to her native place. Carol after her marriage with Farukh, gets too much attention from him whereas on their arrival to Pakistan the situation changes as their society has a strong segregation of genders. In this society "a man may talk only with unmarried women his mother, his sisters, his aunts and grandmothers" (113). Carol fails to understand this distinction of genders. So she follows her western ways. The unexpected attention from Pakistani men flatters her. Being open minded and due to her western upbringing, Carol likes this attention and feels attracted towards every friend and relative of Farukh. He always criticizes her as, "You laugh too loudly, you touch men" (10). Once she became afraid and asks Mushtaq, "Do you think Farukh would kill me? Mushtaq replies, "Who knows? I might, if you were my wife" (224). These words reveal the exact condition of women's struggle. During the ages women have been subjugated, tortured, tormented and then killed at the hands of their male counterparts in the name of honor. If a woman deserves punishment for adultery then why not man, he is also equally responsible for the crime. She said to Farukh, "I think I'm finally beginning to realize something... Your civilization is too ancient...too different...and it has always hurt me...really hurt me" (229). Carol fails to survive with the dual standards of society and decides to go back. Finally, she understands the double standards of the Pakistani men in Pakistan itself.

Zaitoon

The third and the most important character of the novel is Zaitoon. At the age of five she loses her parents during the partition of the subcontinent. The border group of Sikhs attacked the train and murdered Zaitoon's parents along with other passengers. In that Qasim managed to escape and in turmoil he saved the little girl Zaitoon. She clings to Qasim's legs calling him, "Abba, Abba, my Abba!" (29). Earlier he wanted to neglect but after a while he accepted her

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because she reminded him of his dead daughter, who was also five years old at the time of her death. He adopts and named her Zaitoon, his dead daughter's name. Five-year old girl shows her self-determination and the capability to adjust herself according to the situation. In Lahore Qasim brings up Zaitoon with the help of Miriam and her husband Nikka, the childless neighbors of Qasim. Sidhwa gives a very clear picture of the discrimination practiced against the women behind the four walls of the house.

Men Should Follow Women - Sakhi

The decision making is always attached to men. Whatever men decide women are supposed to accept it without questioning it. Qasim decides to marry Zaitoon to a tribal man, Miriam opposes it and she forces Zaitoon to reject's her father decision. Zaitoon neglects her suggestion by mentioning, "I cannot cross my father" (98). Women are not supposed to trouble their lives and expected to leave it at the hands of patriarchy. Women are considered as burden and throughout their life should depend on some men. In the same manner when Zaitoon loses her parents, she is brought up by Qasim and married to Sakhi, to take care of her. Throughout her life male domination was inseparable from her life. Women, unlike men, are expected to be silent and should follow words of their fathers, husbands and later sons. Women's silence, deny their individuality and identity. Zaitoon's father Qasim shows his domination by naming her and marrying her to Sakhi without bothering how a girl brought up in the town will adjust to live in the hill with tribal. There too he bothers about his daughter. "I've given my words on it depends my honor. It is dearer to me than life." (93)

After marriage Sakhi shows his domination by beating and torturing her. He tortures her both physically and mentally. Her husband used to beat her severely on the smallest pretext to show his manliness over her. As a result the marriage turned into hell. The situation became agonizing for her to stay with her husband any longer under one roof. She decided to run away to escape the cruel experience of marriage and unbearable sufferings of life given by her husband. In the Karakoram, the world's most Rocky Mountains, where there were no vegetation and habitation, she survived for some days. This was considered as a dishonorable act by the tribes and their punishment for a runaway girl was usually hunted and murdered by the husband. But in the case of Zaitoon was different because Sakti saw her dead body in the end. She was already killed.

A Patriarchal Society

Thus, in *The Pakistani Bride*, presents the patriarchal society of Pakistan and women's position in particular society. Sidhwa was attracted by the young girl's courage to struggle against the patriarchal norms. Her courage to vision her future away from the society's manmade laws has fascinated Sidhwa. The true story is tragic Sidhwa presents it with a tentative note of future happiness. Sidhwa allows her heroine to run, to fight and to survive all odds laid down against her by. The critical study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*, has finally culminated with an insight into the position of womenfolk in the male dominant egoistic and primitive society.

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