

**THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN IN BAPSI SIDWA'S  
*THE PAKISTANI BRIDE***

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This paper focuses the plight of women in Bapsi Sidhwā's *The Pakistani Bride*. The heroine Zaitoon, is completely despondent in her marriage and is planning forever about the ultimate escape – the one from which there is no return. She loses her parents in a communal riot at the time of India- Pakistan partition. Qasim, a junglewalla adapted her and named her Zaitoon. He has left his native and moved to the plains to make a fortune of his life with her. Though he settles and leads a decent life in Lahore, there is an increasing nostalgic about his life in his native. He promises a tribesman to marry her without thinking about her future in mountains. She obeys the promise of Qasim and suffers lot in her marriage with the barbarian husband, Sakhi. He humiliates her lot from the first day of their marriage. At the end she boldly decides to run away from the tribes though she knows that the punishment for this act is death.

Bapsi Sidhwā, a renowned novelist is a freelancer and an active social worker. Her works always deals with the empowerment of woman, social investigation and immigration. She is acclaimed by *The Times* as 'a powerful and dramatic novelist' and the *New Statesman* has described her as 'an affectionate and shrewd observer....a born story teller. In *The Pakistani Bride* she finely portrays the cruel nature of the male society of the mountains over the women.

*The Pakistani Bride* depicting the themes of marriage, honour, partition and the position of women in Asian subcontinent is worth mentioning. In this novel Sidhwā has powerfully and artistically portrayed the scenes of torture and screams of pain through the life of an orphan protagonist namely Zaitoon.

*The Pakistani Bride* is a damning indictment of the Kohistani community in particular and the Pakistani society in general in its brutal treatment of women. The major female characters like Zaitoon and Carol and even minor characters like Miriam and Afshan are restrained within the constricted framework of rules forced by the predominantly patriarchal society and also the male representatives in the household. They are not even allowed to think and expect to play any key role in decision making whether it is small or big in their life matter.

Afshan, many years older than Qasim, becomes his bride, shows the immorality which comes to the fore, in giving away daughters in marriage, which exists in many societies. She marries Qasim because her father could not pay a loan he owed Qasim's father. It is horrible to know that bargain takes place that Qasim's father first considers marrying Afshan but later gave her away to his son as a symbol of love. This makes clear that she is isolated forcibly from her family, home culture and dislocated to a completely alien society. None of them in her family ask her opinion to lead a meaningless life in a host culture with a young boy. She gets shocked when she sees the young boy in her bed room at first night.

"She stared in amazement at the childish, frightened face..."

Was this a joke?

Are you my husband? She asked incredulously." ( The Pakistani Bride, p9.)

She does not know whether to laugh or cry. She began to laugh, while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks. She faces unexpected problems in her marriage life in a different soil. Unlike other female character of Bapsi Sidhwa, she is flexible and adapts to host culture very quickly and lives with that culture as her home.

Miriam another important character in the Pakistani Bride is responsible for bringing up Zaitoon. She fulfills totally with the unwritten rules of society and changes completely to suit her husband's rising status and honour; she segregates herself from the general public to keep intact her husband's 'izzat' with his new financial stability.

"Miriam, reflecting her husband's rising status and respectability, took to observing strict purdah. She seldom ventured out without veil" (The Pakistani Bride p. 51)

In Sidhwa's works, the women are just like a doll in the hands of men. They control women by imposing their unwritten rules in the name of honour and social status. Thus they dominate and exploit women by following the patriarchy structure. They consider that the women's social status and spiritual worth is valued based on their practice of preservation of chastity. There are no social, economic and political developments in the women's life because of intervention of patriarchy. This is the pathetic condition of all women character in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel.

Sidhwa skillfully tackles a character's conflict between identity and location through the character of Carol. Carol leaves her job as a shop assistant in a departmental store in San Jose and the drudgery of American life, and opts to stay in Pakistan, with its alien and sometimes claustrophobic culture. Yet all throughout her stay she feels isolated and unable to adapt to the alien culture and surroundings. Though by choice she segregates herself from her home and culture in America, Carol is torn apart by the strange customs and traditions, which are definitely inferior to her civilized way of life.

Sidhwa defines the status of women in Pakistani patriarchal society as they are supposed to follow the rules forced by their husbands, brothers and fathers. At first, Zaitoon loses her parents after partition and is brought up by Qasim , a Kohistani from the Himalayas. Though, she is looked after properly by him, she is denied any opportunity of education though she is living in Lahore where access to education is not a big issue even in those times. It is thought that education is not going to do anything in her life as

"She's not going to become a baboo or an officer!....

She will get married and have children" (The Pakistani Bride p.52)

This distressing line shows the limited role which is assigned to women in Pakistani patriarchal society where education is considered necessary for men only. It is unsafe if Zaitoon goes outside for education but gossiping with others is not a crime.

Qasim fixes Zaitoon's marriage with his tribesman named Sakhi. She is not given any chance to think and decide her opinion of her marriage. Qasim assures that she will never disobey his so called "words" though Miriam makes him to realize that

"They are savages. Brutish, uncouth and ignorant!

she will be miserable among them. (The Pakistani Bride p.93)

But he turns a deaf ear to Miriam's words and says that he promised his Cousin, Misri Khan's son to give his daughter. His "words" of promise is more important than Zaitoon's future. He knows that he has taken a wrong decision in her marriage life and could not think rationally since his patriarchal system tied him. Miriam tries to explain the life in Mountains to Zaitoon, but she is beckoned by

" visions of the glorious home of her father's forefathers

And of the lover her fancies envisaged, merely lowered her head

And said shyly, 'I cannot cross my father.'" (The Pakistani Bride, p98)

This statement of Zaitoon clearly informs the reader that she cannot poke her nose in her father's decision though she is not interested in marrying a tribesman. Only thing she has learnt is she should not be dishonest to her father. Nikka blessed her and says

"God be with you, child, remember you are our child as well.

If you're not happy, come straight back to us." (The Pakistani Bride, p98)

Zaitoon's journey begins to the romantic Mountains as planned by her father. She enters into the entirely different civilization from the one that she lived in Lahore. He talks to Zaitoon incessantly,

'Bibi, you will like my village.

Across the river, beyond those mountains,

we are a free and manly lot.' (The Pakistani Bride, p100)

It shows that freedom is not for the women but for the men only. He continues,

"You'll see how different it is from the plains.

We are not bound hard and foot by

government clerks and police.

We live by our own rules – calling our own destiny!

We are free as the air you breathe!" (The Pakistani Bride, p100)

These lines make clear that the tribal people are not following the rules and regulations of the government and they live with their own rules. Zaitoon does not know the inner meaning of these words and how she is going to face her marriage life with an uncivilized man.

After a long journey they reached the mountains where tribal people are eagerly waiting to receive them. Zaitoon sees that she cannot adapt and survive in this uncivilized life as these tribes live in mud hut and eat dirty maize bread dipped in water. She sobs to Qasim

" I don't want to marry. Look how poorly they live;

how they eat! Dirty maize bread and water!

My stomach hurts." (The Pakistani Bride, p157)

But he simply laughs and replies that he too ate the same bread and nothing was happened to his stomach. She cries and begs

"Abba, take me back. I'll will look after you always.

How will you manage without me- and the food?

If I must marry , marry me to someone from the plains.  
I will die rather than live here.” (The Pakistani Bride, p157)

This doubles Qasim’s anger to push her to the floor and warns her

“Now understand this.....I’ve given my word.  
Your marriage is to be a weekfrom today.  
I’ve given my word. On it depends my honour.  
It is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it ,  
I will kill you with my bare hands.” (The Pakistani Bride, p158)

Zaitoon gets shocked of listening these words from her father whom she believes lovable and affectionate. Finally she could not do anything and things that it is her destiny to obey him.

The marriage is solemnized; the feast served, and amidst laughter and cheering the groom was led to the room where his bride awaited him. The first night of Zaitoon’s marriage exposes the animal nature of Sakhi, her husband to have sex with her. He drags her like an animal and quenches his sexual thirst. She was helpless beneath the animal retraction and thrust. She screams in pain.

Zaitoon is not happy with her marriage because of her husband Sakhi who humiliates, illtreats, exploits her even for trivial matters. He does not have the feelings of love and emotion but always very callous and cruel on Zaitoon. When Sakhi beats the Ox furiously his mother tries to stop him. But he beats her and his wife who has come to save both her mother-in-law and Ox. He strikes her and shouts

“you are my woman! I will teach you to obey me!”.(The Pakistani Bride, p172)

This line represents the status of woman in a patriarchal society. Woman is treated as slave by men whether it is her father, husband or son.

“Woman is shown as a territory to be conquered by men. The relationship becomes one of colonizer-colonized type wherein the colonizer as if on an imperial offensive tries to possess and extend his powers so as to use and abuse this occupied territory” (Ahmad,2013,P.3).An Indian critic Makarand Paranjape states, “it would seem that entire code of honour of the tribe rests on the notions of sexual superiority and possessiveness” (Dhawan, 1987).

When Zaitoon escapes from mountains her husband Sakhi is only worrying about his honour not about the security of his wife. He never thinks about the humiliation he poured on her. In the beginning of his marriage life he shows little bit affection on her but his brother Younus spoils his mind and asks him to control *“His woman”* and these words were enough to provoke Sakhi. It shows another picture of our society as how people interfere in the lives of others and make it a hell for them. In the end, Zaitoon is raped in the forest by two tribesman. This is evident that how much worthless this creature is before the eyes of men and how they take advantage of helplessness and weakness of women.

Sidhwa describes the plight of Pakistani women through the eyes of a third person. She introduces two brides, Carol and Zaitoon, but both are in the clutches of the same destiny. Both are humiliated and exploited mentally and physically by men. The stories bring into focus the violence, degradation and oppression faced by women in an episode in The Bride the woman is shown as a commodity, “ any girl....was worth more than the loan due” ( Sidhwa, 1984)

In the climax, the readers are left to think about the future of Zaitoon. It is not sure what she will do. Will she go to USA with Carol and Farukh? Or Will Ashiq marry her?.

Her struggle to get back into civilized life is simply remarkable. She wanders in jungle for ten days, only with few slices of bread where she never loses courage. She successfully escaped from the brutal society. Her self-confidence, incessant endeavor, courage and

revolutionary nature is a proof for her escape from the clutches of the Patriarchy and a significant footprint in the women's society. Trusting life again, she is eagerly waiting to see the new sun to rise in the new environment.

### **Workcited**

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