

Women's Submissiveness in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride

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Abstract

Postcolonial literature approaches to expose the colonial philosophy by feminine gender, social exclusion and degraded punishments as the 'other'. The author of the novel emphasis on the difficulties of deformed identities of fictitious characters, dislocation, gender biasness, subjugation and the predicaments of the citizens existing in colonized societies. This research paper concentrates on the predicaments of the colonized women, their dislocation, and isolation due to acts of cultural conflict and dominance of politics. The novel *The Pakistani Bride* is drawn upon the basis of an original event which displays story of a girl named Zaitoon and to emphasis on Bapsi Sidhwa where she initiates a harsh attack of patriarchal society on Women. In the colonial times, women were treated as a subject of lust and with no social status. To begin with, it is a story of Zaitoon's life struggle for survival and also men live under a burden of honour protection to dismay women. Bapsi Sidhwa gives a picture of gut wrenching incidents of inhuman barbarity, unclothed women howling for relief, and endorses the unfair treatment within the house against women. This gut wrenching incidents does represent the most barbaric action in the theological and cultural aftermath in the novel *The Pakistani Bride*.

Keywords: Cultural conflict, Disfranchise, Inhuman, Gender bias, Subjugation, Social identity crisis

Introduction

Postcolonial theory or Post-colonial theory is a branch of theories in literature, history and philosophy that deals with the aftermath of colonial rule. As a literary approach it addresses with the literature formed or created in the countries that were once colonies of powerful countries, in particular the European colonial powers such as, Britain, France, and Spain and among others. It may also cope with the literature written that colonizing countries may take colonized natives as their area under discussion. Aftermath of colonialism addresses the problems for societies that suffer barbarity of colonialism: the perplexities of establishing ethnic identity to regain consciousness in the colonial world; the writers of the colonised countries have focused their writings on repercussions of colonised cultural identity; and, the colonial influence is to rationalize colonialism all through keeping the metaphors of the colonised as lower-rank. By the subject matter, the significant issues of Bapsi Sidhwa in this novel are patriarchal attack on women in society who encounters emotional suffering in their search of modern approach as it absorbs isolation from their households and ethnic background. She concentrates on the imbalances for rising consciousness, and not for destructive or fault-finding critique of mountain way of living, but for setting up rational utterance. Young says, "Postcolonial Feminism is certainly concerned to analyze the nervous conditions of being a woman in a postcolonial environment, whether in the social oppression of the post colony or the metropolis. Its concern is not in the first place with individual problems but with those that affect the whole communities".

Female biasness is deeply ingrained in the society. Women have undergone numerous misdeeds on the pretext of gender disparities. Every society is gender-based i.e., male or female. Male dominated society is called as patriarchal society which further portrays culturally or socially composed features. The centre of attention of this manuscript is to investigate the understanding of female prejudice in comparing the male characters in the novel. Simone De Beavoir says, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (De Bevoir

295). The suitable function executes in identifying the gender inequality of male and female are on the basis of qualities, shapes, approaches and deeds. As Simon De Bevoir said in her book *The Second Sex*, "The fact is that woman has always been men's dependent if not his slave. The two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (De Bevoir, 20).

Bapsi Sidhwa's narrative engages equally with pre-and post-colonial period of time. In basic, her writings is based on two approaches, firstly, Parsee community and secondly her national identity. She writes about important confrontations from her own life experiences or the other parts of society to bring it down to piece of paper with a larger view of fiction to read. Elaine Showalter, in her book *A Literature of their Own*, "If women lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writings, they would have had a literature of their own" (Showalter 3). According to Showalter, she says that women's way of lifestyle are completely different as compared to that of men. The intensity that she gives about women literature is that they had literature of their own.

Bapsi Sidhwa is well-known writer who articulated about the unvoiced women in the society. She further goes into the subconscious minds of women fictional characters and writes about their sufferings in the society. The fiction, *The Pakistani Bride*, has been prepared on the basis of actual narrative to the author while travelling to Karakoram Mountains. Bapsi Sidhwa confesses,

"The girl's story haunted me, it reflected the hapless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but also in the Indian subcontinent. Telling it became an obsession. I thought I'd write a short story; after all it had barely taken minutes to narrate. Before long I realized I was writing a novel. It became *The Bride*, or *The Pakistani Bride*, as it is titled in India" (Dhawan & Novy Kapadia 28).

The story revolves around a female named Zaitoon who is also a victim of circumstances. She is a woman of strong will and immense courage. K.Nirupa Rani in "*Gender and Imagination in Bapsi Sidhwa's Fiction*", says, "Sidhwa's men have distinct personality traits but her women are not extravagant- they are ordinary, devoid of feelings. In their limited orbits they are socially active and lead only a superficial existence. Even though they are active, they are flat characters. In a novel like *The Pakistani Bride* where there is ample scope for the writer to explore, Sidhwa could not go deep into psyche of her female protagonist, allowing methodical narration of events in sequential order." (Dhawan & Novy Kaadia 123).

The Pakistani Bride from Sidhwa is a novel that talks about domination of men on women in the society. Zaitoon, in the novel is a Punjabi orphan girl who was adopted by a man from Kohistani tribe because she reminded him of his daughter, who he lost to small-pox. This disease spread to all his family members and later he moved to the plains with the intention to overcome the pain that he suffered by losing his family. He took care of orphan Zaitoon like his own daughter and when she grew older, he decided to get her in an arranged marriage with a man from his tribe named Sakhi, even though he knew Zaitoon will never live a happy life with a man from tribe in mountains. Sidhwa describes, "Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get unfortunately impregnated, beaten up, bullied and discriminated, it was an immutable law of nature" (226).

Women's individuality is disapproved in the society and they are merely treated as sexual objects at the hands of men in society. *The Pakistani Bride* explains how Zaitoon was forced in a marriage, she tries to balance it. For every little issue, she is threatened to be murdered and her life is full of miseries.

Justifying the novel through Furrugh Khan's remarks, "*The Bride* is a damning indictment of the Kohistani community in particular and the Pakistani society in general with regard to its brutal treatment of women. The women are marginalized and have, in a number of cases, no say in decision making processes or actions, which may ultimately seal their fates" (Dhawan & Novy Kaadia 142).

This fiction revolves around three brides, namely Zaitoon, Afshan, Carol. Afshan was a fifteen year old girl who was married to a ten year old boy as her father was unable to pay his debt and hence to compensate for the loss

caused to Resham Khan, he gets Afshan in marriage with Qasim. Such incidents revealed the sad status of women and exposed how they were objectified at the hands of men for their several needs. Any woman's needs and desires were of no importance, even while making important decisions like marriage. Afshan was in awe when she first saw her husband. Sidhwa states:

The girl did not know whether to laugh or cry. She had been told that her groom was very young but she had thought that he would be like herself, at least fifteen. She began to laugh, while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks. She laughed uncontrollably and Qasim stung to the quick, rushed for the door. (10)

Zaitoon was married to Sakhi without her will and at the first sight she was in love with beauty of the mountains. She was ill-treated by her husband and he hit her uncontrollably. To justify "Sakhi struck her on her thighs, on her head, shouting, 'you are my woman! I'll teach you to obey me!'" Zaitoon stumbled and sprawled face down" (172-173). Sakhi looked for reasons to mistreat Zaitoon as she was raised by Qasim in a liberal environment of Lahore and Sakhi could not take her lifestyle and felt jealous of her, which was not understood by Zaitoon.

In the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, the women are treated as slaves by the men in the family and mistreated so much that Zaitoon wished death over the misery given by her husband on daily basis. Makarand R. Paranjape writes in *The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, "It would seem that the entire code of honour of the tribe rests on notions of sexual superiority and possessiveness" (Dhawan & Kapadia 99). She (Zaitoon) knew within herself that if she tries to flee, she shall bring dishonour to her husband and that it is impossible to escape from the hills as she is unaware of the routes in the mountains. Sidhwa writes:

Zaitoon knew that somewhere in the serpentine vaults of the ravine and in the glacier- river valleys she has lost her direction and that she river gorge could be hidden anywhere in the myriad furrows between the mountains darkness fell and with this came fear (197).

Though the soldiers rescued her, she knew she cannot go back to her husband's home as she would be treated mercilessly by her husband and the other men of the tribe. She (Zaitoon) also knew that she cannot even go back to her father's house as society never welcomes a woman that has eloped from her husband's house. Sidhwa states that the societal rules have become rigid than the humanitarian grounds. Major Mushtaq justifies the tribal nuptials customs, "A wife was a symbol of status, the embodiment of a man's honour and the focus of his role as provider. A valuable commodity indeed and dearly bought" (137).

Another bride in the novel, Carol also suffers at the hands of her husband. She hails from California and considered Pakistan as a land full of romance and did not realise it was also a land of veils. She flirts with Major Mustaq, a friend of Farukh in his absence. She was amused to know that men in Pakistan marry their own cousins. Major Mushtaq was attracted to her but never wanted a relationship with his friend's wife. Neither did he intend to abandon his wife and children. Mushtaq further politely rejects her offer and states:

In spite of what you hear about our being able to have four wives, we take marriage and divorce very seriously. It involves more than just emotions. It's a social responsibility. For one thing at the very least, my wife's life would become unbearably confined, drab and unhappy. And we are cousins, you know (181).

In response to Mushtaq, Carol feels betrayed, she reminds him saying her, "Of course. I will marry you, sweetheart, if that's what you want" (179). When Mushtaq pacifies and kisses on her disappointed face tells her to smile, but in return she slaps him in face and gently whispers, "All right, now you smile!". (181)

Post rejection from Mustaq, she (Carol) returns to Farukh and imagines having children with him. She (Carol) even intends to travel to tribals and educate them. All her intentions are shattered and she faces the reality of life. She then acknowledges the cultural difference between the two countries- America and Pakistan. Carol encounters the environment of subdued sexuality,

“Slowly Carol had begun to realise that even among her friends, where the wives did not wear burkas or live in special, women’s quarters, the general segregation of the sexes bred an atmosphere of sensuality. The people seemed to absorb it from the air they breathed. This sensuality charged up every encounter, no matter how trivial. She was not immune. Her body was at times reduced to a craving mass of flesh... It was like being compelled to fast at a banquet...” (111-112).

She (Carol) finds solution to all her issues only after she accepts that her marriage has failed and she returns to her homeland. Sidhwa wrote about two brides – Zaitoon and Carol who met with a similar fate. Both the women were ill-treated, exploited at the hands of men both physically and mentally. Zaitoon “unlocked a mystery affording a telepathic peephole through which Carol had a glimpse of her condition and the fateful condition of girls like her”(84).

Women by men in the novel are considered as their property that they have conquered. The relation between men and women looks like that of a colonizer and colonized, where colonizer extend his powers to use the resources and territory of the conquered colony. To Qasim, the Hira Mandi is a delusion reality,

The pungent whiff of urine from back-alleys blends with the spicy smells of Hira Mandi – of glossy green leaves, rose petals, and ochre marigolds. Silver braid hems blue dancing skirts; tight satin folds of the *chooridar* pyjama reveal rounded calves; girls shimmer in silk, georgette, and tinsel-glittering satin. Qasim, like a sperm swimming, aglow with virility up to the tips of the hair on his knuckles, feels engulfed in this female street. (63)

There is an incident in the novel where a woman is covered by men on the streets of a brothel, called Hira Mandi that depicts the sadomasochistic mentality of men. “Now and again, a man standing with her in the enclosure shouted “*Naach Pagli!*” - dance, madwoman –and jabbed her with a cane” (65). The thought and opinion of men that women are their property in this novel has been clearly expressed and so is in the case of Zaitoon’s life. She is objectified by her husband and she is used by him to satisfy his animal like desires and her father’s wishes against her will to marry a tribal man. Robert L. Ross, *The Search for Community in Bapsi Sidhwa’s Novels* remarks

A region where men were heroic, proud and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honour that banned all injustice and evil.... Their women beautiful as houris and their bright rosy-cheeked children, lived besides crystal torrents of melted snow. Zaitoon’s escape from this rigid, traditional tribal community is considered by Fawzia Afzal-Khan as a spirit of defiance...“endorses a challenge to the strictures of patriarchy” (Dhawan & Kapadia 74).

The very first day of her marriage, she is physically exploited by her husband that takes her in the state of shock. She pleads to her father, Qasim to take her along with him because “she had gauged the savage subjugating will of the man she was married to. His uneasiness and his efforts to calm her were a desperate comfort” (169).

The novel defines how a woman experiences the pain in wedlock or a gender discrimination and violence in a male dominating society. The marriage alliance is generally decided by the elderly men of the family and is purely based on the benefits and profits that it brings along to them socially and economically. “The female body is controlled by patriarchal morality and by the roles of wifehood and motherhood” (Jain 119). It clearly depicts how everything is decided by the patriarchal society just for their selfish motives without thinking what the women might go through in her life. This depicts how men subdued lives of women around them.

The novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, shifts from a patriarchal domination to female challenges and then back to male domination. The readers get to understand both male and female perspective. The first section of the novel depicts how men objectify women, with bringing attention on purchasing of brides and using them as sex objects by throwing them in brothels. The attention is drawn to the needs of women, their hopes, dreams and desires. In short, the female experiences of their own sexuality are also discussed. The story shows how women face challenges in a male dominated society and how they take charge of their own lives. After an animal like treatment given to Zaitoon, she decides to run away from her husband’s home knowing all the consequences, this incident gives a hope that women can stand up for themselves in the most odd situations, if they want to.

The novel gives a pessimistic vision on the future of women in Pakistan but it does not suggest anything to women in order to improve their conditions as the protagonists in the novel are finding solutions till the end for their freedom and survival within a patriarchal structure.

In the last section of the novel, the novelist puts a stop to the worst experiences of the women and also her strengths but show how rebellious women even though they are put down by men by either rapes or murdering them. They give a message to the women of the society that it is they who are in charge of their lives and it is men who decide whether are worth living or not. Zaitoon would live a life but a worst life than animals. Carol takes a decision of returning to United States after a failed marriage with Farukh but she still says that she might change her mind when she gets back to Lahore with Farukh. Despite Zaitoon's fearless decision of eloping or Carol's decision of abandoning her husband there are no changes that came in the lives of these women. These women begin their lives completely dependent on their family males and end it at their hands and will.

The male domination wins over the rebellious women by disrespecting their bodies and soul. The novel's challenges are based on resistance by males than any rational action. Afzal-Khan says, "*The Pakistani Bride* challenges the "patriarchal culture and values of India-Pakistani society", and sees the novel's ideological stance as a strategy to set free "the female life that remains marginalized within the system" (Dhawan & Kapadia 73). The truth that Zaitoon decides to run away is in an unpleasant incident which shows the struggle of women in the society. Zaitoon is raped on the edge of the river. When she comes to her senses, she is completely shattered, "The men had kept her hostage for two hours. When Zaitoon regained consciousness, her body screamed with pain. She wept, putting her trembling legs through the shalwar. Her brown skin gaped through new rents in the cloth" (230).

Many women may submit to their fate and if they run away, they would probably be caught, raped and murdered. But Zaitoon still takes a risk with a hope to bring changes to her life and she safely escapes the mountains. The physical and mental torture is so fresh and radically explained by Bapsi Sidhwa. Zaitoon's love for herself and her better life is in itself a unique action in the national literature. The experiences and decisions of the women leading characters of the novel depict their determination and zeal to live a good life on their own terms.

The novel also explains the oppression of female as 'an immutable law of nature' and depicts male dominating community taking over control as the novel ends. Bapsi Sidhwa kept the ending close to reality and does not give readers something impossible to take. For instance, Zaitoon dreaming and marrying the man she loves could have been a nice vision but her culture would not allow her to do so. Her novel shapes up readers and it is a bell ringing for the society to know where it is heading in context with treating its women. Via the story of Carol, the novelist puts hope in female community that they support one another. But via Zaitoon's end she explains how women can also resist a male dominating society and this opens a room for discussion on the topic that has not been addressed in her national literature. Bapsi Sidhwa, via her novel *The Pakistani Bride* has tried her best to invoke emotions of people and wants to shake the souls of people so that they openly address women issues in the society and give importance to the women's right and emotions at equity.

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