

Predicament of Woman in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride***Dr (Mrs) Anita Juneja****&****Miss Khushboo Chawda**

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Abstract

...there was no such thing as 'femine nature'. There was no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men, and yet, throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second-class citizens. Even when worshipped and adored, they have had no autonomy and received no recognition as rational individuals, any more than when they have been abused and denigrated

Patriarchy is practised in most of the places all over the world. It is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. In this system fathers have authority over women, children and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privileges and is dependent on female subordinate. The males have prime power and dominate in roles of political, moral, social and every other sphere of life. This results into frequent attacks on the dignity and self-respect of women which has compelled today's women to think and act against the ideology which gives men the satisfaction of ego and disturbs the female psychology. Sylvia Walby it is "...a system of interrelated social structures which will allow men to exploit women."(). A woman is always ill treated as a member of the minority group which doesn't have any hold in society. Male uses violence as a weapon to control a woman. The feminist writers try to highlight this issue in order to create awareness among women. The Pakistani woman writer Bapsi Sidhwa also tries to unveil the stereotypes of patriarchal society of Pakistan through her writings. This paper is an earnest attempt to delineate the predicament of woman in Sidhwa's debut novel *The Pakistani Bride*.

Keywords: Society, Patriarchy, Victimization of Women, Culture and Self-Assertiveness of the new Women

Bapsi Sidhwa one of the most prominent English fiction writers of Pakistan was basically a women's right's activist who used to hold writers in awe and "...never thought of the writer in human terms but almost as disembodied power that automatically produced books"(Dhawan 15). A turning point in her life came when she was on vacation with her second husband in Northern Pakistan. There she heard the story of a young Punjabi girl who was married to a boy who belonged to kohistani tribe. After a few days of marriage she was tortured by her husband and in-laws. Due to this she ran away but was hunted down by her husband. He abused her physically so that he could show his male dominance over female. Sidhwa wanted that the girl's story should be known to everyone so she decided to write about her which grew into her debut novel *The Bride or The Pakistani Bride*.

"The Pakistani Bride is dedicated to the incredibly simple, deprived and courageous women of this magnificent country"(Dhawan 94) In the novel we can see how three brides named Zaitoon, Afshan and Carol struggle for their survival in the brutal and primitive patriarchal set up of the kohistani tribe in Pakistan. Zaitoon is the chief protagonist of the novel and the story revolves round her. She is a Punjabi girl who has lost her parents in India-Pakistan riots and is adopted by Qasim belonging to kohistani tribe. Qasim has already lost his family due to the epidemic of small pox. He fixes the marriage of Zaitoon when she is hardly fifteen to his tribesman's son named Sakhi. Qasim uses Zaitoon as a gift to the tribesman so that he can again be included in the tribe and develop his relations with them with the purpose of her marriage as soon as they reach the mountains Zaitoon urges him that she doesn't want to marry and wants to return to the plains. She says to him quietly "But, Abba, I am not of the hills. I am not of your tribe. I am not even yours"(140).

As Qasim doesn't pay a heed to her request and pleas she is very much depressed and horrified by thinking how she would spend her whole life among the people whom she doesn't know nor about their culture. All her dreams are shattered:

Standing by the river, admiring its vivid colours, when a hand had come out of the ice-blue depths and dragged her in, pulling of the people their poverty and what the harshness of their flight for the survival had made them. Her mind revolts at the certainty that to share their lives she would have to become like them. In her desperation she urges her father to take her back with him, for she feels that 'I will die rather than live her'. (157)

Within a week Zaitoon is married to Sakhi which is like a torment in her life. Sakhi recalls his first meeting with Zaitoon when he saw an army officer Asiq Hussain holding her hand in order to save her from falling down in river. Out of this jealousy Sakhi beats her brutally to show his male power over her. But the urge to rebel can not be suppressed in her. Slowly she starts adjusting to the cruel environment of the family. The only bonding she has in the family is with Hamida, Sakhi's mother. Zaitoon is fully aware that she cannot live in these mountains so one day somehow she manages to run away. She remains hiding in the mountains for ten days because she doesn't find the right route to get out of this place. On the other hand Sakhi continues hunting her like a wounded animal. Many times she apprehends that her husband will find her and will cruelly slaughter her for this crime. All of a sudden she feels-

... him move and her destiny is compressed into seconds. She hurtles in a short-cut through all the wonders and wisdom of life unlived. Instantly old, her tenure spent, she is ripe to die. She feels so tired. Sakhi's hand bites into her fleshless shoulder. Allah, let it be swift. I can't bear any more. She sees the blade flash, and in her terror she leans against Sakhi. The support of his hard body is almost tender. The steel is glacial on her throat (235).

Finally after her painful and disastrous journey she somehow manages to reach the Durbair bridge where Major Mustaq Khan helps her by convincing her husband and other family members that she is dead and later on hides her in a jeep so that she can go far away from the place and her cruel husband. Here the bridge has been used as a metaphor one side of the which is life and the other side death.

Another female character who is discussed in the novel is Afshan, Qasim's wife. She was very young when married to Qasim. At that time she even didn't know the meaning of marriage. On the night of her wedding she "...didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She had been told that her groom was young, but she thought that he would be, like herself, at least fifteen. She began to laugh, while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks" (10).

Being a member of the same tribe Afshan accepts her destiny without questioning it because she knows that the society in which she lives is dominated and controlled by men. Her love for Qasim is maternal and is not like the love of a wife as he expected. "He loved her vivacious, girlish way and was totally won by her affection. He teased her and played pranks, when he was particularly unkind or obdurate, his wife and his mother combined to give him a thrashing. Then Qasim would shout, 'I am your husband. How dare you!' and he would hate her" (10). Once beaten by his wife Qasim never dares to beat her again. Thus in spite of living in the patriarchal society Afsana does not allow her husband to treat her brutally like an animal. Her protest against the illtreatment of her husband is a positive sign in her character.

Carol, another female character of the novel, is from California and is married to Farukh who is from Pakistan and works in army. Initially she is very much fantasied by the new culture and religion and in a letter to her friend she writes, "...sometimes I still think if I can't get away by myself I'm going to scream, but nobody understands that! You can't plan anything and have it come out the way you expect. Things happen, and you roll with them. But the most wonderful thing here is I don't feel programmed!"(108).

Carol enjoys the parties and is very much adored by the other men who attract towards her due to her white skin and American origin. Due to this her husband becomes jealous and possessive. The suspicious nature of Farukh creates marital discord. Carol finds it very difficult to adjust in the society which is governed by the male environment where females are repressed. Just after a year of marriage she realizes,...the repressed erotic climate was beginning to affect her. In the States, what she had thought was a unique attraction for Faurkh, had in fact been her fascination with the exotic, and later the attraction has disconcertingly extended itself to include his friends and relatives- and even acquaintances"(176).

Frustrated by her relationship with Farukh she attracts towards Major Mushtaq Khan and develops her relationship with him. As the time passes she compels him to divorce his wife and marry her. For her it will be a revenge on Farukh. Though Major Mushtaq Khan is happy with his extramarital affair with Carol yet he can't even dream to divorce his wife and leave the children. Carol gets very much irritated by the rejection and decides to give second chance to her marriage. She thinks,

As an American married to a Pakistani she was allowed much more freedom than a Pakistani wife. She could say things and get away with behavior and dress that would have been shocking in a Pakistani and even in American. Cut loose from the constraints of her own culture, she did not feel restricted by the new. She had become used to moving, thinking and speaking with an increasing sense of freedom. (218-219)

Carol fantasizes to have happy married life with Farukh and have children. Her dream is shattered when she notices the head of a young tribal woman bobbing in the river. Whereas she is very much horrified by the scene her husband Farukh remains very much calm. For the first time she starts thinking that two cultures can never meet. Her perspective is totally changed after this incident. She starts thinking as a pragmatic woman and decides to return to America leaving Farukh. She recalls Farrukh's words, "Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten-up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable law of nature....Whoever said people the world over are the same, was wrong. The more she travelled, the more she realized only the differences" (228).

Sidhwa through her novel tries to show the victimization of women in the society which is governed by the males from the ages. Another thing she realizes that two cultures can never meet viz plains vs mountains and Pakistani vs American. One thing which is very common in Zaitoon, Afshan and Carol is that they don't run away from the hardships of their life, infact they fight against the injustice done to them by the patriarchal set-up of society and win in their efforts through their self-assertiveness. These new women have set an example to the other women of society that they can no longer be dominated and driven like dumb cattle by the so-called landlords of patriarchal society. They are on the march for their bright future.

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