



RESEARCH PAPER

Gender and Sexuality in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*: An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

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The female body has long been a target for commodification within myriad cultural settings. Various cultural and economic factors are involved in the suppression of women in Asia. This study deals with the issue of women oppression in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. The author shows the three strata of women in the Pakistani society: first, there are women from city; second, women from tribes; and third is of American women. The cultural segregation of male and female has assigned certain roles and duties to women known as gendered roles. The wide range of perspectives in this society converge on a single point that females are considered as tool of sex and the source of reproduction; besides, the upkeep of in-laws and the next generation is their obligation. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Bapsi Sidhwa advocates the suffrage of females as regardless of the relation. She has no right to speak for her rights neither at home nor in society. The selected work was analyzed in the light of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Cultural Feminist approach in the qualitative mode to expose how women suffered from the pangs of being second rate citizens in a patriarchal society.

Introduction

This study shows that the female protagonists of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* are devastated under societal misogynist pressures and they have no right to opine in the matter of their own marriage or to express their sexual desires. Sidhwa being a prominent writer has pursued a persistent conflict in her writings against delusion, restrictions, suppression and other unpleasant facets of Asian life. In her writings Sidhwa attacks social injustice. In her writings, especially *An American*

Brat and *The Pakistani Bride*, we examine strong characterization and cultural conflict. Sidhwa's characters do not portray the specific condition of a particular era, but it has global reach. She is considered a writer with concrete aims who writes for the betterment of society and its members. In *The Pakistani Bride* the Pakistani culture is revealed as male-dominant, severe, contributing benefits to manhood and its unforgiving behavior towards women which is supported under various self-interpreted on cultural practices. Her writings show that in this culture men are brought into the world with difference and nobility while women have been considered as disregarded. A woman is continually made aware of her physique through the comments she obtains by the outsiders when she walks out into the public. The novel is inspected in this research to uncover male utilization of ethos and faith as an incredible asset to make its hegemonic control over women's bodies.

In the work under study, Zaitoon, Carol, Miriam and Afshan belong to different stratifications of society, but they face the same issues. These three characters, performing different roles, are maltreated by the male members of their family. Zaitoon as a daughter is forced to marry Sakhi just to fulfill his father's promise to his cousin otherwise she will be killed by her stepfather. She tolerates the physical and mental torture from Sakhi, her husband, who beats her on trifles. "He tore the ghoongat from her head and holding her arms in an unfeeling grasp he gasped unintelligible scorn into her face" (p. 112). The commodification of women is also seen in the marriages as at their wedding night Sakhi touches Zaitoon a way too intimate that hurts her. On the spontaneous hesitation of Zaitoon, he says, "Why not? It's my cunt!" (p. 162). These words come as a forceful declaration out of possession not out of love. This selfishness is proved later when he wants to teach obedience to Zaitoon by beating her up. He says, "You are my lady. I will explain you to follow me!" (pp. 172-173). The effect of this disobedience is fatal on the life of women from the mountains.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a feminist and ladies' lobbyist, acknowledges that the social setting misuses women. She battles against Darwin's thoughts of development which represented only the male part as useful to perform in the development of human advancement. Her debate was that sex and nuclear family issues were unified mostly which made women reliant upon their sexual things to be significant for the people and life partners as male members would financially bolster up their families. Men are considered significant to set them up for motherhood, but Gilman opines those women and men share a typical "humankind". She also contends that ladies' fundamental nature is better than that of men – all the more supporting and agreeable.

Literature Review

Keeping in view the key strains of the study, this chapter is a thorough review of the related critical writings in the areas of Feminism and how various writers see female body in their works. The review of Cultural Feminism includes the Socio-economic related issues of females in Pakistani culture.

Durde Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science, with special focus on gender studies in Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions and the Internet mentioned that "Women's activist development resembles the ocean: It comes in waves and can't be halted" (2013, p. 29). Through different verifiable changes, Western woman's rights have experienced changes in light of a legitimate concern for women. This change happened in three waves. The main women's liberation wave started with the battle for the financial and political privileges of women and concentrated on the privilege to cast a ballot of women in the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century.

Byers and Crocker (2012) in *Feminism and Culture Study on Feminism* demonstrated that every single feminist concern is gone for communal expansion obtaining privileges for women from community. Holding this beneath thought, it can be contended that woman's rights in Pakistan are a delusion. Since its independence, Pakistan has been combating exploitative dealings (on justification of their male partners); moreover, the communal, fiscal and political situations make it hard for women to establish and battle for their civil liberties. As per Barkty (1990), "Female exploitation under masculine control not just encompasses of exclusively in negating females of political but also legitimate moralities..." (p. 9).

Chaudhary in her studies "Stowing away and Seeking Identity: The Female Figures in the Novels of Pakistani Female Writers in English: A Feminist Approach" found that little girls of the growing post-provincial country, the Pakistani women, were observed with numerous difficulties. Pakistan being an Islamic nation was established on the premises of Islamic philosophy so the women's activist thoughts of uniformity for women were viewed as Western motivations. Resultantly, they were rejected as hostile to Islamic teachings and deluding and urging women to desert their domestic obligations. In short, females in Pakistan found their bodies as the battleground for males to conquer (2013, p. 49).

Singh calls attention to Sidhwa's female characters in their stories who do not show any resistance as "resistance isn't in their inclination. They attempt to change as per the parental and social loads all over their lifetime as much as they can at any rate when they find their life and character are undermined, they lose all confinements and fight with all capacity to frustrate the profane undertakings of their adversary" (2005, p. 89). Additionally, Sidhwa, as a Parsee, discusses minutely her divine and social traditions; nonetheless, as a female, she gives careful consideration to the existence of women for the most part particularly in Pakistani society. Her books *Ice Candy Man* and especially *The Bride* delineate Muslim Pakistani characters. This component connects her with Qaisra Shahraz whose works center upon Pakistani Muslim womanhood in her books.

After reviewing literature and research works, the researchers can say that not much work has been done specifically on gender study of *The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa. The female issues in Pakistani culture have remained unexplored so this research work is one of its kind and it will be very helpful for the future researchers.

Material and Methods

This research is done on Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* in qualitative manner. Qualitative research is employed to locate the observer across the world. The arrangement of interpretive and material practices is presented in this sort of research worldview to make it recognizable to the world. These practices are basically used to change the world.

As an essayist and speaker, Charlotte Perkins Gilman promoted new thoughts regarding women rights. Her book *Women and Economics: The Economic Factor between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898) collected global consideration. In the discussion over the balance between both the genders of male and female, Gilman's perspectives were fairly rebellious. Feminism is arguably the most popular political mode of reading popular culture and representation of women. It did not begin as a critical theory, but it originated as a political movement. It begins as a demand for equal wages, voting rights and equality in social structure, domesticity and family matters. Feminist perspective within social studies develops links between idealistic representation of women and the real-life stereotyping of female in the world. Feminism can be read under five premises: first, its movement against patriarchy, it is clear distinction between sex and gender, cultural stereotyping, commodification & objectification and language & gender. Roles, system of manners, clothing and education have nothing to do with the biological foundation but those are socially or culturally constructed. Cultural process's primary act is to interpret the body, anatomy and physiology to suit its purpose.

In the patriarchal set up, reproduction and nurturing have been associated to females and physical strength and certain sporting activities have been associated with masculine gender by the culture. "The stereotypes are cultural interpretations and placing the values upon the biological attributes upon certain biological conditions. These are acts of interpretation that are not natural" (*Feminism and Cultural Studies*, 2015). Female's status, somehow lesser than men, is used to legitimize men's power over women. The women are treated like princess in their parents' homes. However, after marriage, they are utilized as a way to satisfy the sexual and social needs of men. Since they are harshly controlled and manipulated by men, they are just like the decoration pieces in the homes of their spouses. Moreover, women do not have their own choice and identity in the male-dominant society. They are simply controlled like puppets and considered as ornaments in the society.

Gilman expresses that there is no spiritual angle of marriage as they are carried out only for the satisfaction of financial and sexual needs. The economic status of young men and women choose the eventual fate of their marital life. She expresses that wedding is a significant fragment of the partial financial and social construction of society. Her views are additionally legitimized by Shen who believes that marriage is simply another method for women exchanging and also used to manipulate and control females in a possible distinguished way. Females are

controlled by men through satisfying their sexual and social needs since this implies marriage is a social exchange rather than a lifelong bond between two genders. Imran Ahmed believes that "Marriage is like a business transaction of body and it is quite different from a relationship between married couples" (2019, p. 20).

Sidhwa badly criticizes the old notion of marriage. Both Sidhwa and Gilman believe that there is no spiritual angle of marriage as they are carried out just for the fulfillment of economic needs. The economic status of boys and girls decide the future of their marital life. Both of them believe that marriage is an important component of the economic and social structure of society.

Analysis of Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride

The researchers have analyzed Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* under the following five thematic concerns:

Suppression of Women by Culture

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is of the view that the females of the society are not only suppressed by their opposite gender but also by the culture. The male members of the family use culture to suppress the female characters. The female sensibility of their feminist rights in the novel is represented by three main characters namely Zaitoon, Carol, and Afshan. These characters represent the main soul of the novel as they depict the current issues of women at every stage of life represented by a wife, a mother and a daughter etc.

The Pakistani Bride can be used to understand the real plight of Pakistani women and how bad treatment they are getting in Pakistani patriarchal culture. Carol represents the main issues faced by the women in Pakistani society. These problems are significant portion of the lives of the females living in the Pakistani culture. For instance: Carol can be easily distinguished from Zaitoon. She has studied in Berkeley where Carol meets a Pakistani engineer named Farrukh and that meeting totally changed her life since she fell in love with him and decided to accompany him to Kohistani hills.

It was believed by her that:

Throughout the world, women face suppression and harassment. Women have to face these kinds of behaviors throughout their lives. These issues are mainly caused by badly timed marriages and relationships. She asks from us that what is the fault of tribal women who fell in love with the erroneous man, since she was just a prey of revenge. (p. 46)

Carol is really suspicious of the expected treatment of Farrukh and Mushtaq; they both are the same kind of men who treat women very badly. The only job for females in their married life is reproduction and to look after their husbands' families. Gilman asserts that male dominant society never allows women to be

economically independent. They have to bear their attitude just for the sake of their livelihood and shelter. Further, she expresses those female activities are composed by men. In her views, these sexual differences have directed the masses to an unusual circulation of authority which have been harmful for both the genders. The same thing is observed in the novel. Through every female character we see how the male characters dominate them by making them economically dependent. Sidhwa seriously annihilates the old school thinking about the marriage and provide examples to prove Gilman's thoughts about the female domination by the society through male members of the family. She thinks that marriage is not a relationship in which two souls come together and take a spiritual view of the marriage.

The cases of Qasim, Afshan and Zaitoon are the best examples of devalued and berated image of women in Pakistani society. Afshan's marriage is just like a trade between two families, and it is quite different from a normal marriage of love interaction. These kinds of marriages don't share equal partners as they are presented as degrading objects with low self-esteem and value. Qasim once calls her "more than a bitch in heat" (p. 157). The marriage between Afshan and Qasim became a representation of low position of females in the Pakistani society. They are just treated like commodities which are used to gain monetary benefits in return. These commodities are mostly exchanged for getting some monetary benefits.

In addition to that, women also become the property of husband who are controlled by their husbands. If they refuse to be directed by their male partners, they can be prosecuted by other people and that can be very uncomfortable for the husbands and their families. The unjust principle of the patriarchal society controls the marriage ceremonies of people like Afshan and that is very unfortunate fact of our society. The ultimate fate and destiny of women is decided on her birth as the parents decide what to do with them at the time of their birth.

Use of Female Body for Sexual Intercourse

Charlotte Perkins Gilman asserts that the only job for females in their married life is giving birth to their children and looking after their husbands' household. Female bodies are associated with the sexual satisfaction of their husbands. Male culture has changed female bodies into the objects of male want and they are treated as a thing of sexuality and male excellence. Male members of the family use culture and religion to justify female oppression by ascribing sexual power to them, which men should then rigidly control to maintain their power. Females are constrained by men through fulfilling their sexual and social needs. These all activities retard the capabilities of females by confining them to "sex work" only.

In the novel, we see how things are described in sexual terms and are associated with the female bodies. In the portion where it was narrated that Zaitoon and Qasim were roaming in the city of Lahore, Qasim gives a thought about the city and thinks about it as the body of a female whore or in the shape of a prostitute:

Qasim sees the city as a B-grade prostitute; someone who is attractive, but her age has surpassed. Someone ready to grant her luxurious pleasures to people who would want her to be their courtesan while providing her with royal and enchanting awards. (p.139)

Being seen in context with the scenario with Qasim and his views on Hira Mandi, this means that he symbolizes Lahore with prostitutes, and considers Hira Mandi as her essential organ: vagina. Since Qasim was unable to remarry after losing his wife at the young age of thirty-four, he does have a sexually frustrated mind and an intervening engrossment with prostitution and dancing girls. But then generally for all men who would visit the area, this is the evident virgin-whore mentality that was mentioned earlier. This absurd comparison between a city and a prostitute has been repeated more often later as well. At one point, Farukh comments that Lahore gets "more virginal the further one travels" (p. 97).

Gilman asserts that females are suppressed by the society and male members of their family as they have to rely upon them financially. In this case Zaitoon was considered as a doll to fulfill the physical needs of men like Saki. Females have always been thought to please the sexual needs of men in married life. The same is seen in the relationship of Saki and Zaitoon.

The commodification of women is not only seen in the examples of marriages. On their wedding night, Saki touches Zaitoon a way too intimately that hurts her. On the spontaneous hesitation of Zaitoon, he says, "Why not? It's my cunt!" (p. 162). These words come as a forceful declaration out of possession not out of love. This selfishness is proved later when he wants to teach obedience to Zaitoon by beating her up. He says, "You are my lady. I will explain you to follow me!" (p. 172-173). The effect of this disobedience is fatal on the life of women from the mountains.

Adolescence, Wedlock and World of Women

Gilman asserted that a female's secondary association with a male had desensitized the feminine sex. She credited this state to culture's importance of lady's disposition as lady relatively than humanoid. For all the girls who have entered the age of puberty, wedding festivities are like a test for them that how they work, participate in the wedding festivities even how they dress up. It is more like a place where settled women can show their young daughters to offer for marriage, 'the wonderfulness of their structures'. Events of wedding festivities are considered for match making where Zaitoon is also presented for marriage, which is the main concept of the novel. With other women, Zaitoon feels calm and easy just as she is comfortable in her skin and her style.

Zaitoon plays an important role in this novel. She occupies a central position, and she was married to Saki against her own will. She has to go through all the miseries of the married life that create lots of problems for her. She was never consulted by her father about the decision of her marriage with Saki. She begged her

father for cancelation of her marriage, but her father blackmailed her for death. She was continuously tortured by her husband on minor mistakes. The story of Afshan and Zaitoon was quite similar to each other. Her marriage was arranged in the tribal society where women don't have any freedom of speech and their own willingness. Zaitoon did not want to get married with a person to whom she doesn't know but her father was not ready to hear her logics. Zaitoon's father is ready to kill her if she wants to force her will on her father. This blackmailing tactic is often used by fathers to force their daughters in this kind of affairs in tribal societies.

"I've given my declaration. On it depends on my respect. It is dearer to me than life. In the event that you be-smear it, I will slaughter you with my revealed hands" (p. 158).

In this novel, two very extreme sides of Zaitoon are depicted. This describes the role of women in this rigid society. Zaitoon, when surrounded by other women of her society is quite open and talks about her dreams; however, when she is around Qasim, she is shy and obedient to his decision. Zaitoon without any hesitation obeys her father like an obedient daughter, until one night before the marriage, that is when she sees the tribal life and realizes that it would be very hard for her to survive in that surrounding, and she begs her father to marry her with someone from the region of Punjab. Her father told her that she has to follow what he directs her to do otherwise she will be responsible for the bleak consequences.

Gilman expresses the culture hypothesis that female bodies are associated with sexual satisfaction of their husbands. Male culture has changed female bodies into the objects of male hunger. Male members of the family use culture and religion to justify the female oppression by ascribing sexual power to them.

Sexual Feelings and Privacy of Women

Charlotte Perkins Gilman demands equal rights for women whether these are economic or sexual. She is of the view that females in society abide by the cultural norms associated with the female gender. The female desire for sex is considered a shameful act that they try to hide from the opposite sex. Women are not allowed to fulfill their sexual desires openly as men do. They are just supposed to act according to their partner's demand or requirement. Their bodies are used in Hira Mandi to satisfy the sexual desires of men of the society. Women have to surrender themselves before men's advances, but they cannot talk openly about their needs and desires. The first half of *The Pakistani Bride* focuses mainly on how the women's bodies are viewed from the outside. The other half of the novel emphasizes upon female sexuality. In it, all the physical and sexual feelings of women are talked about, along with their experiences of intercourse.

Carol is practically ten years elder and more settled than Zaitoon. She has been hitched for a year, but she has been with more than one man earlier. Unlike Carol, Zaitoon's occurrence of sexuality is not discussed very openly, and it is

suspense for the readers to discover it. What makes her conversion from a girl to a lady is her consideration of sex as a non-subject. Being surrounded by the maleness of her stepfather Qasim and his friend & Zaitoon's uncle Nikka made her really happy, and her happiness could be seen on her face; this was a sign of her love and affection, knowing that she had always delighted Qasim and Nikka with her obedience.

Since she was raised in the surrounding which can be termed as sexual vacuum, so she had neither a positive nor a negative idea of sex in her mind. Nobody including Miriam, Qasim or even the other women she visited talked about sex with her. She struggled to learn about this. Once she tried to get closer to Miriam and stunned her bums in innocence and Miriam bashed, "Stopover it!" leaving Zaitoon astounded and hurt, she felt neglected.

Description of Purdah in Sidhwa's The Bride

This novel creates a tussle about both physical and representative purdah, allowing them to discuss the confinement and abuse of women. It also permits you to realize how purdah interacts with women's sexual relationships to provide two guidelines for women of purdah and non-purdah. Sidhwa's Pakistani wife shows Purdah's multifaceted stances against women in Muslim societies. Sidhwa points out that the real reason for the purdah of women is doubled in Pakistani society.

It incorporates the repercussions of this technique on the human capacity and involves female characters to conquer the purdah point represented by the man. By becoming aware of life in a Muslim society, Sidhwa applies her ideas to characterize the trend and the delayed consequences of sexual restrictions in Islamic societies. As Niaz Zaman (1995) noted in a survey of the Pakistani priest of Shizeward: "On the positive side, purdah is encouraged in some kind of research, family". The bond between Zaitoon (adopted child) and Qasim is much more affectionate than it seems in the earlier chapters of the book. But in the cramped living conditions, they rest in a room, something which is in a general sense against the rules of purdah delineated previously. Zaitoon scouring Qasim's feet may give off an impression of being unnaturally close to home for a Western pursuer, yet this is truly not unusual in a South Asian setting. What is disturbing, be that as it may, is the most recent night Zaitoon spends as an unmarried young woman, resting in the cave with Qasim. Furthermore, the inner rooms are given to women in a house so that they cannot be seen by any strangers on the street. The lives of most of young women are depicted inside the four walls of home cooking food, looking after kids as well as elders and having a female world in the home. Sakhi also gets furious when he sees Zaitoon is touched by a soldier to balance her on uneven mountainous paths even when she is not his bride and scolds her innumerable times once they get married as it was against the norms of purdah.

Conclusion

This research traces the reasons for women's suppression in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. Sidhwa has written *The Pakistani Bride* apparently for two observers based on main female characters: Pakistani characters (Zaitoon, Afshan & Miriam) and a Western evaluator (Carol). In Pakistan, the patriarchal setup supersedes the Western lifestyle as Carol has to perform her domestic duties according to the Pakistani culture.

Considering the circumstances of women depicted in the work under study, it has been explored how the female characters are supposed to obey their male family members because of their cultural norms. *The Pakistani Bride* demonstrates reflection to the general populace and displays how inflexible and rigid communal codes have been turned into confinements and impediments for females. The novel has been studied as a doctrine against the social codes which celebrate female oppression through male control in every walk of life and shows how society has been mishandling women for a wide stretch.

The prevalence of male supremacy in *The Pakistani Bride* can be viewed through the representation of the circumstances leading to sex, race, and ethnicity. The plot of the novel moves from the male perspective depicting their power over females achieving their sexual drives. Qasim's decision to marry her daughter Zaitoon to Sakhi, a tribal boy, is evidence of the cultural impact. On the other hand, Zaitoon's refusal to marry a tribal boy and her preference for a Punjabi boy presents the feminist perspective. The cultural differences are not only seen in their personalities but also in their behavior with females are seen from this episode of Qasim and Zaitoon. A huge portion of the novel deals with the male perspective on the female body.

Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the issues of female rights in the patriarchal society. Females not only are supposed to keep quiet against the oppression of their male family members but also have to act according to the cultural setup. Zaitoon's experiences demonstrate that women can refute man-driven control. Through the depiction of female sexuality, Sidhwa gives female sexuality a remarkable authentic closeness. This study shows that females are not only the tool of pleasure, but they also have their personalities and willpower. Our cultural backgrounds and inherent thoughts have been taking essential part in the suppression of females. It is the cultural mindset that allows a man to control the females associated with him.

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