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DISCIPLINING THE FEMALE BODY: A STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHIWA'S THE PAKISTANI BRIDE

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ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa is a noted Pakistani born Parsi writer living in America. She came into limelight with the publication of novel *The Bride* which is later retitled as *The Pakistani Bride*. Her other important novel are *The Crow Eaters*, *Ice Candy Man*, and *The American Bart*. Her novels reflect a distinctive Pakistani yet Parsi ethos. Her four published novels mainly deal with themes like Partition crises, expatriate experiences, the Parsi milieu, the themes of marriage, the problems of Asian women and the complexities of the language. The present paper studies *The Pakistani Bride* from feminist perspective and explains how disciplining of the female body stands as one the highlights of the novel.

KEYWORDS :picture of Indian and Pakistani societies particularly, closeted society.

INTRODUCTION

The *Pakistani Bride* successfully presents the picture of Indian and Pakistani societies particularly the Orthodox Muslim society. The novel deals with theme of marriage and its ultimate failure besides dealing with theme of partition in the beginning. There is enough space for feminist discourse as Bapsi present a graphic description of closeted society and the lives of women in such societies. The women characters like Afsan, Miriam, and Zatoon are subjected to unfair and illogical disciplining in the families. Carol, an American woman married to a Pakistani presents a contrast to these characters. Bapsi's first novel also deals with the repression of women



in the patriarchal Pakistani society. This novel is based on the true story narrated to her during her stay in the in a remote area of Karakoram mountain range. She was told about this sad tale of woe and strife of a girl by army engineers and doctors. A girl from the plains of Pakistan was taken across the Indus for marriage by local tribals after her marriage, the girl ran away. She was continuously chased by her husband and his men. She was caught while crossing a rope bridge on the Indus River. Her husband severed her head and threw her into the turbulent waves of the Indus. But Bapsi Sidhwa has made some departure from the real story her narrative, the girl does not die but escapes to the other side. In her fictional presentation of the story, Sidhwa has introduced the tribes of the Karakoram with customs and beliefs. The novel *The*

Pakistani Bride "Provides an incisive look into the treatment of women. It is the most contentious of Sidhwa's novels, the most critical towards unjust traditions that undermine the trained as an obedient Muslim girl, is captivated by the fantasies observes Dhawan. Fawzia Afzal Khan calls the Pakistani Bride a challenge to "The Patriarchal culture and values of India-Paki-stani society".

Afsan, the wife of Qasim is shown as the voiceless human being in the family. She had to marry Qasim who is much junior to her not because she loved him but because of her father's debt. The Nikka was performed mechanically and her aunt said thrice 'yes' to the marriage. She was married to a ten-year boy, whereas she was sixteen. All her imagination of her future husband was broken into pieces. She accepted her lot and adjusted her desires with the desires of the Man's society. Like a proverbial women having given birth to six children who are later succumbed to the deadly disease.

Zaitoon, the titular character of the novel, is a remarkable woman character of Bapsi Sidhwa. She is the daughter of Zohra and Sikandar, who were killed in the communal violence, erupted during partition. She was later adopted by Qasim, a Kohistani tribal who had lost his daughter and wife to an epidemic. He brings her to the bustling, decadent city of Lahore. Amid the pungent bazaars and crowded streets, Qasim makes his fortune and a home for the two of them. As the years pass, Qasim grows nostalgic about his life in the mountains while his hopelessly romantic teenage daughter, Zaitoon, imagines Qasim's homeland as a region of tall, kindly men who roam the Himalayas like gods. Impulsively, Qasim promises his daughter in marriage to tribesman, but Zaitoon's fantasy soon become a grim reality of un-questioning obedience and unending labor. She is subject to wild disciplines of her and quits the place. The novelist narrates in this breath taking story, Zaitoon's horrible journey back into the hilly region.

What is more important in the novel is how women in general are subjected to Man's law and some strange taboos governing the orthodox Muslim society in particular. The women charters drawn by Bapsi are realistic representations of problems and predicaments of woman in closed society. Miriam, the wife of Nikka, though she is the part of liberal Lahore society is not given any importance either by Nikka or Quasim when the latter decides to take Zaitoon to marry her to Kosistani. Her words are taken lightly by Quasim because his tribe does not approve such teaching from women.

Zaitoon's journey into the hills and her marriage with Kohistani tribal Sakhi takes us to the tragic story of Zaitoon. The young and innocent Zaitoon is handed over to Sakhi in marriage. She had a romantic view of Kohistani men. She soon realized the falsity of romantic world when she becomes the part of the treble after her marriage. She is at first suspected for she came with a young soldier. Sakhi had her seen her holding his hand while walking down the river.

Sakhi surveyed his different bridge with mounting excitement. Here was a woman strangely thick lashes large black eyes that had flashed in one look her entire sensuality. But, even as he thought this, the corroding jealousy of the past few days suddenly surged up in him in a murderous fusion of and fever.

The men do not like the interference of women in the matters they consider their exclusive rights. Women are opinion. A silly incident of beating of an ox leads to domestic violence. When Sakhi starts beating the ox, his mother stops him which makes him very angry. He starts beating her fir advising him:

'I'll teach you meddliling women. You think you can make fool of me? Do you?' Hamida cowered under the rased stock. The blow caught her shoulder. She scrambled like a crab down the sloping terrain. Sakhi skidded after her, wielding his staff. She tried to run, but a blow hit her legs and she fell forward. (1720

When Zaitoon came running to save her was fiercely hit by Sakhi. Infact his real anger was

directed towards Zaitoon. 'For God's sake stop it' she shrill remonstrance of the women close behind. She tried to take hold of the swinging stick. It knocked painfully against her knuckles but she caught it and tried to wrench it away. Sakhi stuck her on her thighs, on her head, shouting, 'You are woman! I'll teach you to obey me!' (172-73)

Sakhi in a mood to discipline her continued to treat her badly. His tribe hardly allows any extra talk from women. Zaitoon found a huge difference between the Lahore and Kohistani society. All her dreams are shattered into pieces.

She also grew immune to the tyrannical, animal-trainer treatment meted out by Sakhi. In his presence she drifted into a stupor, until nothing really hurt her. He beat her on the slightest pretext. She no longer thought of marriage with any sense of romance. She now lived only to placate him, keeping her head averted unless it was to listen to a command. Then her eyes were anxious and obsequious like those of Hamida' (9175)

When things grow intolerable, Zaitoon escapes into the unfamiliar hills. It is like Nora's slamming the door behind and she goes out. But Zaitoon's journey is hazardous. She was mass raped. In a hair-raising narration Bapsi describes traumatic experiences of Zaitoon. Finally was able to cross over the river, the area which was controlled by army and where some sort law and order existed.

The novel successfully delineates the character of Zaitoon. And it also describes how she bound by the man's law. Bapsi presents a realistic picture of tribal and city societies.

Bapsi Sidhwa writer of enormous talent, capable of endowing small domestic occurrences with cosmic drama and rendering calamitous history deeply felt personal meaning. The Pakistani Bride is ambitiously conceived and skillfully plotted and beautifully written.

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