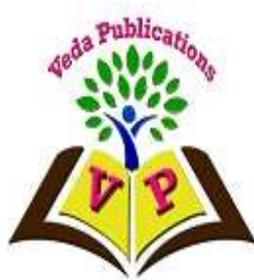


**STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE***Dr.M.Kavitha^{1*}, P.Usha²^{1*}(Associate Professor, Dept of English, Jai Shriram Group of Institutions, Tiruppur.)²(Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Jai Shriram Group of Institutions, Tiruppur.)

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ABSTRACT

Bapsi Sidhwa's is one of the most prominent women writers in English. Her fictions are an exclusive paean to women's zest for empowerment. As an activist, she gave a new dimension to the feminist consciousness. She is an energetic advocate of women. She utilizes her position as a writer to help foster an awareness of their rights. This paper attempts to explore the struggle for survival in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. It aims to investigate the marginalization of women and their struggle for survival. The novel provides insight into the treatment of women in the patriarchal society. To Dhawans, "The 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 structure of community" (16).

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INTRODUCTION

In "The Pakistani Bride", Sidhwa pictures the lives of women who are the inhabitants of harsh mountainous region. The novel pictures a way of life that is completely alien to the western reader. It exposes the smothering rules of a repressive religion, their tribal code of honour, the harshness of their daily life, their cruelty and revengefulness. By picturing the real condition of women Sidhwa raises the question, Is marriage a social contract? If so, are married women content in the man made and tradition bound society?

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Bapsi Sidhwa through her novel "The Pakistani Bride" articulates the pain and sufferings endured by women in the hands of age-old barbaric traditions made by men to be followed by women. It highlights the female protagonists' vigorous effort to overcome their difficulties and zest for life in the male-dominated and tradition bound society, where they are worse than slaves. All the women characters discussed are part of the larger design of repression in the novel and their individuality remain suppressed.

Sidhwa gives a flamboyant sketch of how discrimination against women is practiced in the patriarchal society through the character of Zaitoon. Brought up in muslim seclusion, Zaitoon lacks the free and easy ways of communication. Even as a young girl, she is prepared for the role of bride for which she is destined. She is allowed to attend school only for five years. Then her schooling is stopped as a mere waste of time. It is apparent in the words of Miriam, who says, "Now that she's learned to read the Holy Quran, what will she do with more reading and writing – boil and drink it? ----- she'll get married and have children"(PB 52).

Sidhwa observes the primary consideration at the time of a girl's marriage. She is barred from pursuing higher studies as her only purpose is to satisfy the sexual instinct of man. It is considered that a woman's life should not be wasted in studies and the girl should be married sooner.

Qasim, Zaitoon's father promises her when she is sixteen in marriage to Sakhi, a man of his tribe. Though Miriam and Nikka warn Qasim of the vast cultural difference between people living in the cities

and tribal areas, Qasim sticks to his unilateral decision. Miriam and Nikka, Carol and Ashiq try to dissuade Zaitoon from going to hills, but she being a girl of weak physical structures and patriarchal social system obeys her father and goes with him like a sheep taken for slaughter.

Sidhwa zooms in the internal struggle of Zaitoon, when she steps into the closed world of mountains. She senses the awaiting danger, "I cross this spot and my life changes, she thought with sudden reluctance. But the step into her new life had been taken a month back and she was moving fatefully on its momentum"(PB 153).

Sidhwa traces the result of forced marriage. If a wife is raped by her own husband, she has to live with him and has to subject herself to such sexual violence constantly. She is almost raped by Sakhi with "proprietary lust and pride"(PB 159). Her torture begins on the very next day after their marriage. Sakhi's sense of insecurity turns him to be a tyrannical animal-trainer. His murderous instinct treats her cruelly and punishes her even on the slightest cause.

Zaitoon who cannot think of marriage with any sense of romance becomes obedient and lives only to placate her husband. She undergoes violence physically, sexually and verbally. Sakhi beats her not only with a stick but with stones, sometimes kicks her until she faints with pain. The murderous jealousy and hate of Sakhi frustrates her when she mentions the offer of Major to seek employment for him. He hisses, "I saw the Jawans hold your arm all the way down to the river..... you laughed together as if you were lovers"(PB 165). Zaitoon is severely battered. Blindly following the rules set by his ancestors, Sakhi humiliates and suspects her integrity even though she is a pure woman.

When his atrocities go beyond limit and when she comes to the conclusion that she might not live any longer with Sakhi, she runs away, knowing that "in flight lay her only hope of survival"(PB 186). When Sakhi learns that his wife has absconded, he only feels that he has invited the disgrace that now affected his entire clan. He sets out to hunt and kill her along with his clans' men as the punishment for such an act is death.



During her flight, she struggles to the extreme for survival. She encounters dangers and attacks from animals and men. Through her perseverance, she raises high against all the difficulties. Through her flight, Sidhwa portrays the struggle of mankind for survival against the cruelty of Nature. Bhatt observes, "Zaitoon's struggle is at one level a struggle of man against nature but it is also at another level the struggle of a woman against both man and nature" (155). Though she does not know where her journey would end, she merely feels that if her attempt to escape from the tribal men and cross the bridge, she may possibly be saved.

Her experience in the terrific claws of death gives her spirit, life of strength and makes her plight meaningful. Bhatt views Zaitoon's struggle for survival thus: "Zaitoon's odyssey from the plains to the Snow Mountains and back to the plains is symbolic of the inner journey of the young woman from the fantasy world of love, romance and heroes to the harsh and hostile realities of life" (157).

Carol is yet another significant character. Sidhwa portrays Carol as a western upper class girl who suffers in the hands of men in the male-dominated society. Sidhwa through Carol – Farukh relationship portrays the fact that not only the illiterate women are victimized but also the literate women are destroyed by men.

Carol sick of her husband's petty jealousy starts hating his sadistic, possessive and screwed up love. She decides to make his husband's jealousy true and when she meets Major Mushtaq, who appears to be an easy-going man, felt attracted towards him and yields to his desire and makes love with him while her husband has gone out. Carol who is so infatuated with Mushtaq, realizes her humiliation and oppression when she proposes to marry him.

Sidhwa by portraying the sad plight of Zaitoon and Carol, recognizes the life of women as playthings in the hands of men. In Carol's case, Major's refusal of marriage makes her understand that for the Major it is merely a passing affair. Unwilling not to admit failure in life, she decides not to go to the states and contemplates the ways in which Farukh's jealousy will subside.

The novel unfolds the harsh realities of men over their women. She portrays the life of young Zaitoon and other women characters in a dull and cruel atmosphere. She focuses on the harsh realities of men in the tribal area, where women are a piece of property given to men. They impose different rules as their code of honour which gets upset, if a woman crosses it.

Sidhwa's protagonist, Zaitoon lives in a society where women are expected to remain silent, depending on their father, husband and son. Individual identity is being denied to them. Even Zaitoon is denied education and freedom, but unlike others she possesses 'Khudi', who dares to struggle against the patriarchal norms. When the suppression of her husband and family goes beyond limit, in order to save her life, she escapes from the violent and harsh life and is able to envision a future for herself.

Though the worst fate is assigned to her at the age of sixteen, and given as a "gift" by her father to re-establish his relationship with his tribe, she suffers all alone in a totally alien and hostile atmosphere. Though she tries to adapt herself to the new atmosphere, Sakhi's expectations of a man's role, makes him inflict frequent brutal treatment in order to tame his wife.

When Zaitoon realizes that she is a virtual prisoner, who would be killed in the name of abstract code and honour of the society, determines to get away from Kohistan, which other women dare not think of.

Her decision of flight is her first and only choice she makes. Though she is brought up as a docile, affectionate, obedient, humble girl, her resolution to get away is being thrust upon her. She is not a revolutionist or one who opposes male domination but an ordinary girl who desires to live serenely. Moreover it is her spiritual struggle for emancipation. Her desperate struggle displays her will power, resolution involved in an act and eventual achievement of liberty.

The life of the protagonist does not end in tragedy rather it ends with the victory. Her characters do not give up their spirit but resolve to live against overwhelming odds. Sidhwa gives credence for Zaitoon that she will be either helped by



Carol or married to Ashiq. She ends with the ultimate tribute to Zaitoon's struggle that:

Heighten your 'Khudi' to such majesty,
That before every turn of fate
God himself asks man –
Tell me what do you wish? (PB 229)

To Sidhwa, the restrictions are perhaps created by the society to enforce subordination and it has no purpose with morality. She also suggests several possibilities for the transcendence of the situation through identifiable goals like education, which plays an important role in the eradication of ignorance and improving self-image, persuasion and unidentifiable goal of realization on the part of men and society towards woman. She does not suggest the idea of creating an alternative world without the male presence but the importance of women attaining selfhood as the only way to retard oppression.

Sidhwa tries to bring a note of hope among women through her "young girls' defiant spirit which can overcome the oppressive shackles of a conspiracy of men" (Abrioux 70).

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