Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa’s second novel The Pakistani Bride describes traumatic experiences of an orphaned girl named Zaitoon before marriage and the aftermath in the male dominating society. The novel also describes the various problems faced by women in a patriarchal society. These problems are presented through various women character like Zaitoon, Carol and Saki's mother, Hamida. The theme of fake ideology of marriage is also important in the novel. The novel further shows that women have always been considered to be objects for satisfy the sexual appetite of men in married life. In short, through the novel, Sidhwa tries to present the miserable condition of women in this male dominating society.

1 Introduction

The Pakistani Bride has been a heart touching novel describing the traumatic experiences of a girl named Zaitoon before marriage and the aftermath in the male dominating society in Kohistan, Pakistan. The tale of the novel is based on the life of Zaitoon who is an orphaned girl brought up by Qasim. The novel commences when riots of partition start and in these riots Zaitoon’s parents are murdered by the mob. After the murder of her parents, Zaitoon is adopted by Qasime who brings up Zaitoon like his own daughter. Later she has to marry with a tribal man who ruins her marriage life. As Suman Dhull writes: "Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel The Bride deals with the repression of women in the patriarchal Pakistani society. The novel related how Zaitoon, a Punjabi child, orphaned by Partition, is captivated by the fantasies of her protector father’s visions of the lost mountain paradise. Married eventually to a tribal man in the north-west regions of Pakistan, Zaitoon rapidly discovers that reality is harsh and her romantic dreams erroneous (Dhull 21)."

2. Oppression of Women

The novel thematically deals with the oppression of women in context of psychological and sexual by men in the conservative tribal society. In the novel, there are three major women characters ranging from Zaitoon, Carol and Saki’s mother, Hamida who represent different aspects of the problems faced...
by women in a patriarchal world. These different types of problems become symbols of traumatic life of repressed women. The lives of women become very worse if their families are illiterate and live in tribal society.

As far as the background of the story of the novel is concerned, the story of the novel is based on a true story of an orphaned girl, narrated to Sidhwa when she and her family visited remotest region of Karakoram Mountain. During this period, the colonel, engineers and doctors narrated Sidhwa about the horrific story of a girl who was taken away from the plains across the Indus by an old tribal to marry her to his nephew. One month after her marriage, her life became hell in which she could not sustain and survive. Her husband used to beat her severely on the smallest pretext to show his manliness over her. As a result the marriage turned into hell. Eventually the situation became too unbearable for her to stay with her husband any longer under one roof. She decided to run away to escape the brutal experience of marriage and unbearable hardship of life given by her husband.

In the Karakoram, the world’s most rugged mountains, where there were no vegetation and habitation, she survived for fifteen days. After abandoning her home, she was followed and hunted by her husband along with his whole clan members. She was at last caught near the rope bridge and her husband did cut her throat and threw it into the Indus River. This story of the orphan girl fascinated Sidhwa and she has written *The Pakistani Bride*. She accepts that “The girls’ story haunted me: it reflected the hapless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but also in the Indian subcontinent. Telling it became as obsession” (qtd. in Chaudhary 67). She also explains further that “... I felt I had to tell her story. I had not written before. I had a compulsion to write the girl’s story and the story of the tribal hidden away in this beautiful part of the world. I started writing a short story about this girl, without my really being aware of it; it was developing into a long story. It was an obsession” (qtd. in Alvi 88).

3. The Story of the Novel
The story of the novel is not completely based on the story of the girl narrated to Sidhwa by doctors and engineers in the remote mountain of the Karakoram. The themes and crux of the novel rely upon the story of the girl but the ending of the novel is completely different. In her fictionalized and modified novel, in *The Pakistani Bride* Sidhwa has made some changes and modification in drafting the story of the novel so that the contents of the story may fit into the plot of the novel. There are some reasons behind the modification in the story which became evident during the journey of the story. The heroine of the novel is Zaitoon, a Punjabi orphaned child who is the victim of the bloody riots of partition of India and Pakistan. When her parents are butchered and murdered in the riot, a Kohistani man named Qasim sees her crying for her parents. At first, Qasim hesitates to pick her up. But when he looks her, she looks like his own daughter Zaitoon who dies after the some years of birth.

As an adopted girl, Zaitoon spends her childhood in the area of Qila Gujjar Singh, Lahore. When she is sixteen years old, her marriage is fixed with the son of Qasim’s old tribal friend Misri Khan who lives in Kohistan, Pakistan. But after getting married, the experience of her marriage is not fruitful. She is expected to lead the traditions of tribal community which are barbaric and inhuman in nature. But it is difficult for her to deal with barbaric traditions of the tribal community which have no space for women. She realises that she is encountering with a family as well as community which is completely different from her earlier life. She does not enjoy the fruit of marriage. Her marriage life turns out to be hell. The happiness of the marriage for Zaitoon is for a short time. The marriage gets
failed from the very beginning of the first day of her marriage. The torture upon Zaitoon begins on the very next day after marriage. Zaitoon is beaten by her brutal husband, Saki. Two months after her marriage, Zaitoon is severely beaten for going up to the river against the commands of her husband. Her sorrows are not confined to the tortures of her husband only, but the way of life in Kohistan is a big problem for her to live there.

Zaitoon’s horrible experience of journey to approach the army camp has been vividly presented. The experience of the first night of her flight for freedom is a horrible. She does not even imagine that she would have to encounter with grim and horrible situations. In the forest she is extremely tired due to her long walking. In the evening, she observes that the mountains and trees are turning into forms of ghosts. She feels that she is entering the darkness where there is no path leading to the Army camp. Alternatively, the thoughts of fear and courage come over her and sometimes she starts screaming in the moments of fear. She does not lose feeling of courage to move further in the horrible situation. She continues to walk in the second day without a proper direction of her destination and passes the second night also in the forest. She is not acquainted with the paths of the forest, but she endeavours to find a path which can help her to reach the Army camp. For the next two days Zaitoon carries on to climb mountains where the air grows rarer and she breathes it in quick. She drinks water from the streams and washes her hot face. In the evening, the air turns icy and she feels deathly cold. She starts shivering and her teeth chatter until a cold numbing sensation drugged her to sleep. Eventually she falls asleep due to excessive tiredness and walking.

4. The Female Sensibility through Female Characters

There are three major characters that represent a female sensibility on every page of the novel. The female characters are Zaitoon, Carol and Saki’s mother. They are the soles of the novel. They represent issues of all stages of woman such problems of girl, daughter, wife and mother. Zaitoon exhibits the problem of a girl who has to follow her father and husband’s order. Saki’s mother shows predicament of tribal woman who has to live a tragic life. Carol, an American woman who marries with a Pakistani engineer, shows that women have to survive under the rule of their husband whether they are educated or not. As Sofia Dildar Alvi about Sidhwa that

She exposed two brides, Carol and Zaitoon, but both with the same fate. Both are exploited by men. 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” (Alvi 91)

The stories of both the women expose the main issue of the novel, the position and treatment of women in Pakistani society. Carol is not a central character of the novel, but she plays an important role to show the problematic issues related to women’s life. All the three women characters are different from each other in nature. Carol is distinguished in nature from Zaitoon. As far as her background is concerned, Carol is a typical middle class American girl living in Pakistan. After studying at Berkeley for a while, she drops out to learn more about life, while working as a salesgirl in a cosmetic store. She meets Farukh, a Pakistani engineering student, and falls in love with him. In the novel, when we first see her, she is accompanying Farukh on his post in the Kohistani hills. The relationship which begins with what Carol considers Farukh’s charming and gallant possessiveness towards her, has degenerated into distrust and revulsion with Farukh’s almost insane jealousy and suspiciousness. Carol has not been able to cope very well with the repressed sexuality of Pakistani society where she is constantly appraised and pressurised by men. Her westernised habits of social
intercourse are invariably misinterpreted both by Farukh and by the other men she meets. Due to her westernised way of life, Farukh is jealous. In the hills, Carol finds herself being attracted by Major MustaQ. She defiantly plunges into an affair with him when Farukh is away, her marriage anyway being at low ebb.

Carol meets Zaitoon when Zaitoon and Qasim are interviewed by the major while visiting Kohistan. Both the female characters are different in every aspect of character but they exhibit the same problems of the women’s experiences. Carol is open minded girl who wants to live a free life with any restriction and boundary. On the contrary, Zaitoon is a submissive woman who has no power to go against male to some extent. When Carol comes, Zaitoon looks sympathetically at Carol. Her conscious makes Carol realize that they both are playing in the hands of men, which is transported by men in marriage. They are merely dolls in man’s hand with which men play. Both the women have to follow the orders of their husbands without any resistance. S.D. Alvi remarks that “The women of the household have an unfixed, unlimited, ambiguous, and always changing set of rules to observe. Men, either they are husbands, fathers, or brothers are the generators of those rules” (Alvi 89).

She realises to understand this in her relationship with Mustaq when Mustaq refuses to marry her and in the marriage of Zaitoon. As Carol says:

> 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. What had the tribal girl done to deserve such grotesque retribution? Had she fallen in love with the wrong man? Or was she simply the victim of a vendetta? (Sidhwa 226).

She also learns that Zaitoon has run away from the tribe and she is being hunted by Saki and his tribal men. She wants to help her. She realizes that Farukh and Mushtaq would also treat her similarly in all probability.

5. Women Positions in Male Dominant Society
The stories of Zaitoon and Carol highlight focal issue of women’s position in male dominated and conservative society which have been manipulated and controlled by men for a long time. The picture of the oppression of women, which emerges with the progress of the novel, is strengthened by numerous other images of violence, oppression and subjugation of women. The villagers of tribal society consider women to be an invaluable commodity which is used as material of marriage to be transported from one man to another. The patriarchal view of men is that women are not equal in comparison to men. Men have always been remained superior to women. A Russian scientist Anton Nemilov says about the status of woman in society: “Until now the concept of inequality between man and woman has been so deeply rooted not only in the lesser educated people but also in the high educated people...” (qtd. in Dhul 21).

6. The Theme of Marriage
The theme of marriage in the novel occupies a significant space showing no role of women in marriage. Sidhwa destroys the longstanding notion of marriage, highlighting the spiritual view of the marriage. It is believed that marriage means coming of two sole together. It is believed that marriage is decided in heaven. Both are made for each other. But on the contrary to it, through the marriages of
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Qasim and Afshan and Zaitoon and Saki, Sidhwa criticises this fake ideology of marriage. Marriage is not a matter of the two souls, but a matter of economical status of boys and girls. She does not openly say her critical remarks about marriage, but her approach towards marriage becomes clearly evident through the incidents of the novel when the novel progresses. The marriage is a part of biased social and cultural structure in which women are intrigued by men. It is not relationship of two sole but a trade of women in which women are traded. In other words, it is a way of controlling and manipulating women for meeting the requirement of men. Imran Ahmad expresses that:

“Marriage becomes a transaction of body rather than a relationship based on mutual understanding. By presenting three married couples, Afshan and Wasim; Maitoon and Sakhi; and Carol and Farukh before the readers, Sidhwa interrogates the institution of marriage is manipulated and exploited to give legal sanctions to the appropriation and abrogation of women’s personal freedom and body” (Ahmad 1)

In the trade of marriage, women are treated and considered as commodities or things to be traded in the marriage. Before marriage they are dolls in the family of their father and after marriage, they become decorative ornament and pet for their husband. Women have no identity and freedom in male dominated society. And their husband tames and subdues them like animals.

The secondary and derogatory image of woman is evident in the case of Afshan, Qasim’s wife and Zaitoon. The marriage of Afshan is not a marriage of two souls whose destination and future are decided and made in heaven, but a trade and agreement in which she is sold and exchanged. They are not considered as equal partner in marriage, but they are believed as other and derogatory objects which always remain inferior and low in comparison to men. The marriage of Qasim and Afshan becomes a significant symbol exhibiting low standard and status of women in the marriage. Qasim’s father Mishri Khan knows “just how generous the offer was. Any girl - and he had made sure that this one was able-bodied- was worth then the loan” (Sidhwa 8). In the place of money, Afshan is given to Qasim’s father in exchange. Afshan, the girl to be Qasim’s wife, is fifteen, five years older than Qasim, yet she has no choice but to accept him as her husband. The decision of Qasim’s father to give the girl to Qasim is another example of one of the important aspects of patriarchal society in which women are treated as commodity or things which can be transported and exchanged in the place of money. They are like commodities to be bartered and traded. Once married, she becomes part of the property of her husband, which is must be protected and controlled by her husband; otherwise, someone else will molest them. Finally, they have no choice but to accept the option of husband chosen for them by their father.

When the marriage is arranged, Afshan was only 15 years old and Qasim only ten years old. It can be easily said that the fate of the women is not decided in heaven but decided in patriarchal society by men. Men are the master of women who decide the future of women. In the society women play merely role of a doll and inactive character. When a woman is born, everything is pre-decided that what they have to do and what they have not to do. What kind of life she has to live is decided by man. They are transported through the cultural mechanism of marriage. As Imam Ahmad writes: “Woman is shown as a territory to be conquered by men. The relationship becomes one of colonizer-colonized type wherein the colonizer as if on an imperial offensive tries to possess and extend his powers so as to use and abuse this occupied territory” (Ahmad 2)
The most influencing and important character of the novel is Zaitoon who occupies the central status. She is the soul of the novel around whom the whole story of the novel is woven and drafted. The whole story of the novel is cantered upon her brutal experience of married life of Zaitoon. This distressing image of women is presented vividly through the life of Zaitoon. She belongs to the next generation to Qasim and is brought up in Lahore, and even educated a little. The worst phase of her life begins when she has to accept the offer of her father to marry Saki against her wish. When her marriage is being planned and managed, she is never consulted about her marriage. She begs her father not to marry her into his tribal community. She is threatened with death by father. Once married to Saki, her life becomes miserable. She is abused and battered routinely on the slightest pretext and suspicion.

The same story of the marriage is occurred with Zaitoon which happened with Afshan. Qasim is not her father but incidentally Qasim gets her during the riots of partition of India and Pakistan. He takes the responsibility of Zaitoon. When she grows up, Qasim fixes her marriage with his remote friend in the tribal community. In this tribal society of Kohistan women have no rights and freedom to show her willingness in marriage. They are not expected and supposed to choose and select their husbands own their own. Such kind of will is against the codes and norms of society. This rigid and outdated ideology is evident when Zaitoon tells Qasim her wish not to marry with a tribal man whom she does know but her father says her in reply that:

Hush, Zaitoon, that’s no way to speak to your father. It is not seemly. A decent girl doesn’t tell her father to whom he should marry her....I’ve given my word. Your marriage is to be a week from today.... I’ve given my word. On it depends my honour. It is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare band (Sidhwa 58).

This short dialogue between Zaitoon and her father indicates that how social codes and structure have set the rules and behaviours of an individual’s sex. These social codes drafted in the patriarchal society are in favour of men, not in women. Women’s duty is to abide by and follow these rules and regulation. There is no doubt that entire code of honour of the tribe rests on notions of superiority and possessiveness of men over women.

7. Women as an Object

Women have always been considered to be objects to satisfy the sexual appetite of men in marriage life. They have no other role except to sleep with men on the bed. For example, the conjugal relationship of Saki and Zaitoon shows that their relationship is also based on sexual appetite. For Saki, Zaitoon is only a source to satisfy his physical pleasure. She is not a human being who also wants respect and dignity in relationships as well as in society. Again Zaitoon becomes the tool of sexual pleasure when she is caught in the jungle and she is raped on the river bank by two strangers. The sensitive handling of the encounter and the presentation of Zaitoon’s mental and physical condition shows writer’s anguish at the barbarous acts which women have to deal with. The image of Zaitoon’s rape throws the light upon the hidden side of society in which man brutally ravishes woman whenever man finds women alone.

The aim of Sidhwa in the novel does not end with the portrayal and treatment of women in men dominated society. Her focus is not only to present the derogatory and painful situation of women, but Sidhwa’s central focus is to eradicate and eliminate these atrocities and biased treatment
which are socially and economically hurdles and constraints in the development of women and nation. She endeavours to form a society in which both men and women are equal. Both men and woman should have equal privileges and opportunity. Both should have the same status in society.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the novel seeks to present a mirror to the society and shows how rigid and insincere its social code has become a particularly constraints and obstacle for women. The novelist celebrates her womanhood by giving voice to the women who have been rendered voiceless since ages and *The Pakistani Bride* tends to present feminine sensibility without being anti-male. The novel can be considered that it is against male, but against the social codes which create hurdles in women’s life. The novel endeavours to show that how society has been exploiting women for a long period. They are ignored in every sphere of life.

References