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## Representation of Female Figure in Sidhwa's "The Bride"

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### Abstract

The research aims at examining the essence of patriarchy in the ill-treatment of post-colonial women. Women were deliberately manipulated in that era. This highlights the absurdity of patriarchal society as a governing power. The ruthless customs, honor of tribes and word of shame has only meanings for women. A patriarchal society like Pakistan which is repressive and oppressive gives privilege to men and allows their harsh treatment toward women, they are considered inferior to men and are sexually oppressed. This work covers the ways of Sidhwa with which she has applied the feministic approach in her work through gynocritic lense and concludes the excellence of the writer by which she has presented such a marvelous piece of English fiction in the history of Pakistan. We will also make an effort to depict the suppressed, objective, gendered and marginalized journey of Sidhwa's woman.

**Keywords:** *Patriarchy, Postcolonial-feministic approach, Gynocriticism, Honour, Manipulation, Harsh treatment, privilege, Customs, Sidhwa, The Bride.*

### 1. Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa is a conspicuous and phenomenal part of the Post-colonial era. The community of writers in which she is included is one of those illustrious writers who made their voices prominent in an age when the literary climate of Pakistan was not much stable and prominent. She was awfully aware of the confusion, and agony suffering by the people of the new nation. The urgencies of identity and supremacy of the confused men who could not find any other way let their infuriation out; calm themselves by the tempestuousness that they bestow on their subservient. That subservient is commonly known as a wife.

Through her vivid and forceful writing, Sidhwa has portrayed a backstabbing, heartless, and manipulative picture of men. As she has depicted, women are not equivalent to men. The relationship between husband and wife matches the master/slave relation where no sentiments are involved, but only cold-hearted ownership. Like she opines in her novel "*you are my women! I will teach you to obey me. Zaitoon stumbled and sprawled face down*" (p. 157).

This study focuses on the analysis of text through gynocriticism and the way Sidhwa has portrayed women and men of the patriarchal society. The power relation and cultural mindset create a boundary between men and women. Men are depicted as superior, authoritative and impatient beings, while women as inferior, submissive, and marginalized beings.

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“*The Bride*” is based upon a truly tragic story, but in this version, Sidhwa has given a “tentative note of future happiness” (AamerHussen). “Zatoon” the protagonist of this novel, made a strenuous effort to fight against the patriarchal norms. An orphan girl of sixteen is forced to marry a brutal and savage tribal man. After suffering a great extent of infuriation, she was able to envision a future for herself. A new hope awoke in her to live a life of freedom away from that tribal rules and vague norms. She got raped during her way toward her success. She was rescued by Mushtaq, but still, she had a long way to go to attain full possession of her freedom.

The Pakistani Bride rotates around the theme of honor, woman suffering, marriage, partition. Bapsi Sidhwa has humorously used the language of this novel by code missing and code-switching and she has shown the struggle of a woman to find a space and live on her desires in a male dominant society.

So in overall Sidhwa has portrayed the disastrous institute of marriage, the blind followers of vague traditions and norms, the concept of fake honor that is based on men’s insecurities, the heartless and manipulative picture of men, the position of women which are degrading, objectifying and marginalized in such a male chauvinistic patriarchal society, and these are hints of benevolent, hostile, and internalized sexism.

## 2. Literature Review

In her novel “The Bride” Bapsi explores different facets of Pakistani society with respect to woman rights, status, position, problems, etc. Women are the supplemented part of society. Sidhwa highlights women’s place in this chauvinistic patriarchal society. Pakistani society is divided into parts due to gender discrimination. A society runs with certain rules and society does not allow anyone to violate them.

An Indian critic Makarand Paranjape (as cited in Dhawan, 1987) explains, “*it would seem that entire code of honor of the tribe rests on the notions of sexual superiority and possessiveness*” (p. 120). A society allows equal rights for both men and women and does not allow anyone to replace one another.

Spivak’s concept of “Can the Subaltern Speak” (Macmillan, 1988) can be referred to as a marginalized place of women are in our society. Women have no right to speak, to indulge in the activities of life. In the eyes of men, women are a burden. The important decisions are made by men and are allowed for women to accept them. Khan opines “*female self that remains marginalized within a system*” (Ross, 1991).

The notion of master and slave is highly common in our society. Women are considered slaves and men are the masters. It is the vision of men, we are masters, we have the right to do anything, we are liberal, and we are free. We can hold society with our vision.

“The Bride” captures a new wave of light that presents in women. It gives a new picture of Pakistani society and culture. In male dominating society, an element of hope which is hidden in the women is flourished out. Fawzia Afzal Khan says that this novel is “a challenge to the patriarchal culture and value of Indian Pakistani society” (Ross, 1991).

Different people explore this novel with different visions. We have explored this novel through the lens of gynocriticism. To see women’s place in our society, the rights of women, to capture a picture of woman’s writing that how women present the other women in literature. What the ideas of women regarding society and the major themes of women's writings.

This novel is a true picture of women's place in society, the position of women in literature and a major element of which is a wave of hope to liberate them. As Andrew Sinclair says *“Bapsi Sidhwa is a powerful and dramatic novelist who knows how to flesh out a story”*. (London Times 1990)

### 3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Our paper focused on a qualitative analysis of “The Pakistani Bride” by gynocriticism. The whole text is being diagnosed to extract the lines which provide the idea of discrimination, objectification, insulting, degrading, derivative, and marginalized position of women, while impatient, heartless authoritative, and the manipulative picture of men.

For analyzing the feministic approach the research method employed in this research is theoretical. First of all, we read the novel “The Bride” by Bapsi Sidhwa and analyzed how effectively the feministic theory was being employed in this novel by Bapsi. We have also illustrated the text with the help of different author’s quotations. We will select some quotes from the text which describes the attitudes, behaviors, ideas, actions and interaction, opinions about women. And those textual lines which represent the thought of characters. With the help of thought analysis, we have also depicted the picture of the society of that time i.e. their values, customs and culture.

This study presents the qualitative analysis of the novel to highlight those aspects which are not only dominant in Pakistan but also in various other regions of the world. And the oppression of women in such a male chauvinistic society has been the main theme of many literary studies. So, this treatment is being analyzed by applying the qualitative analysis of gynocriticism on “The Pakistani Bride”.

### Research Questions

- What are the cultural constrain which are implied on women in The Bride by Sidhwa?
- What are the ruthless customs and the merits of honor for the tribal people?
- Are men free from the morals of society?
- How women are repressed in Pakistani society?
- Do women have rights in Pakistani society or not?
- How much equality do we see in our society?
- Can we overcome the defects in our society?
- Why is that, words like maintaining social position, shame, and honor have meanings only for women?

Along with the critical analysis of gynocriticism, this work also focuses on the question of the female objection, socio-religious positioning, feministic approach of this novel and we will also make an effort to elaborate the corporeal, suppressed, marginalized and gendered journey of Sidhwa’s woman.

### 4. Analysis

With the presentation of women, the novel shows restricted, miserable and confined circumstances in which these women are living. Education is an important element in our life and literacy of the people is a basic key for the progress of a nation. Brigham Young says:

“You educate a man; You educate a man. You educate a woman; You educate a generation”  
(p.12)

***“She’s not going to become a baboo or an officer! No, Allah willing she’ll get married and have children.” (p. 44)***

This line could be analyzed in this way that education is purposeless. There is no duty for women to get an education. Women are closed in the four walls of a house and the only purpose of women in life is reproduction. In society, women are considered marginalized by sexism. Like the ***“marriages were the high points in the life of the women.”(p. 78)***

In “Pride and Prejudice” the writer elaborates on the situation of society. Women did not have the right to property and education. The only way to get property and a right of decision is marriage. According to gynocriticism, the female writer Sidhwa herself portrays the female characters like men portray in their writings. The society of Pakistan is divided into different cultures. And Sidhwa portrays the culture of a tribe. In the tribe, women are constrained into the home. It is the culture of a tribe to marry a girl at a young age. The novel shows ***“A girl is never too young to marry.”(p.45)*** cultural constraints are imposed on the women. Culture does not allow women to indulge in activities. There are limited areas of women's work.

There is a conversation between Qasim and a nautch girl. Women are nothing but an element of pleasure for men. The central theme of Sidhwa, s writing is the portrayal of the women character. The lines show that women are trained in their duty. ***“To entertain, a courtesan knows how to elicit laughter ...We automatically smile in the presence of man.” (p. 63)***

Women accept “that is our destiny”. Qasim himself thinks that it is not allowed in our society. But Qasim’s treatment of women explore his vision is not distinguished from the vision of the tribe. *Naachpagli!* He called her a ***“madwoman and jabbed her with a cane.”(p. 57)***. Men are the masters and women are slaves. Men are free from the morals of society and they can do anything which they want.

The novel presents the life of women, their way of life and their position in society. There is an extreme type of criticism on the garments of women. Burka is considered as a way to cover and hide the women piousness. But not to hide the sins. As the line “After the wedding the burkas, which hid a multitude of sins, allowed the women to revert to their usual sloppy style of dress.”(p.79) shows that women are the bundle of sins and burka is used as a cover to hide this.

Miriam says that the people of the tribe are brutish, uncouth, savages and ignorant. The character of Miriam is the one who has awareness about the rights of women and on the other side portrayal of Zaitoon who is repressed and mistreated by the men. ***“It is my word- the word of a Kohistani.”(p. 84)*** this clearly shows that society is male dominating and men are the power of the society. Women are not allowed to make a decision. Men are the ones who can make a decision only. And society is going with the vision of man. Qasim decides to marry Zaitoon with the tribal man. It is a sense of honor for men that they can make a decision. The word prohibition is not present in the dictionary of tribal men. ***“I cannot cross my father.”(p. 87)*** This line shows that women are repressed. They do not know their rights.

***“Women are ... murdered, raped, exploited, and enslaved ... impregnated, beaten up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable law of nature.” (p.207)***

In patriarchal societies, women are enslaved, exploited, and raped. Men practice their inherent controlling right over women, considering them as their property and as weak powerless beings by nature. This superiority complex of men has made them feel that they are the only super-being. Women have no feeling and no right to even their own life. It's men's responsibility to facilitate and ratify women. She is to be restricted (bound) in customs, and traditions. Respect, liberty and equality are taken from her and she is marginalized.

*"Oh, let me stay in purdah –don't lift my veil. If my purdah is removed...my mystery is betrayed." (p. 65)*

Limits are brought up to the mind of women. She is restricted to the households and likewise, she is restricted to even to think openly. The inferiority that is internalized in women by the patriarchal society became part of her self-respect. The standards of her freedom are very low. Internalized sexism and gender is shown even in the songs that they sing in the hours of celebrations. They are not allowed to think wide. The cultural constraints have restricted their gender identity that was aligned with the roles that were assigned to them when they were born.

*"I don't like to see you waiting on all kinds of men... go out with anyone but himself..." (p.96)*

Farukh prohibits Carol from being friendly with other men. Farukh shows possessiveness toward Carol. It gives hints of 'benevolent sexism'. He shows a protective attitude on one hand, and on the other hand, his possessiveness and controlling attitude are rooted in his feeling of superiority, that he is the only one who has right in his life.

"Sign of deep and unique love"= Carol thinks that Farukh's restriction on her is because of his deep love, but she is ignoring the fact that it can be the sign of losing her self-respect and freedom. This deceptive concept is internalized in her because of that patriarchal social system.

*"I've given my words. On it depends on my honor" (p. 143)*

Qasim was furious due to the bold way with which Zaitoon spoke her mind. His tone was icily incisive. For these tribal men 'words are everything'. Words value more than the life of their loved ones. **"I will kill you with my bare hands" (p. 143)** he threatened her that if she besmirches it or defies their traditions, he would kill her. All those years of love do not matter. The only thing that matters to them is their words and that arrogance which made them believe that their honor depends upon their words, traditions and customary practices and if anyone goes against them, their honor would be threatened. This mindset gives rise to honor killing.

*She screamed and screamed. 'abba', save me, ...why didn't Qasim come? (p. 146)*

The 'corroding jealousy' that Sakhi was feeling, developed in him a kind of disastrous mixture of hate and fever, it shows a sense of 'hostile sexism'. His violence frightened Zaitoon. She screamed but no one came. This inhuman behavior of Sakhi gives us hints of fanaticism and shows his brutal mindset. He had no love for her but only a controlling attitude and superiority complex.

*"You are my women! ... I will teach you to obey me ... Zaitoon stumbled and sprawled face down" (p. 157)*

Sakhi objectified, insulted and degraded Zaitoon. He practiced his authority over her. The wife is not considered as an equal partner but a servant whose duty is to obey her husband (master).

Tribal men claim that the wife is a symbol of man's honor, but the way they treat their wife, only shows that the merits of their honor are very low. They claim to be the real man but their act of violence brings them to the lowest point of the ladder of manhood. Zaitoon became a reboot who can appease him and remained off switch until she had to listen to any further command.

Oh, women get killed for one reason or other... imagined insults, family honor, infidelity... (p. 206)

Honor killing is just like a usual matter for tribal men '*It happens all the time*' (206). They take it very lightly. If women behave in a way that brings shame and dishonor to their family, it is considered compulsory that they should be killed at once without any justification and if their families do not take any serious offensive action against her then that family is considered shameless the conventions and customs of their surrounding made it difficult for that family to even breathe, they are labeled as immodest. So to save the family's honor, it is obligatory to kill such a woman without any question and hesitation.

*"He was to be blamed for imposing his will on something that was bound to end in disaster."* (p.228)

Zaitoon's suffering did not start after marriage the impacts of patriarchy were clear even in her early life when she was stopped from going to school, her sense of not belonging to that tribal area, her marriage to a brutal husband, who treated her like a slave and a hostage, and finally when she got raped twice. It was not only Sakhi and therapists but also Qasim who is to be blamed for making her life miserable. That forced marriage was bound to end in disaster.

*"We are a free and manly lot. We live by our rules- calling our destiny! We are free as the air we breathe."* (p. 90)

Tribal men considered themselves as the true and real man their merits of honor are very sensitive. They practice their free will over their home ladies. They claim that they make their destiny and considered themselves superior to the man of plain areas. They can do anything for the sake of their honor i.e. they can even kill their loved ones. They consider themselves as free as the air they breathe. All of the restrictions are only for women. By oppressing woman's liberty they feel security and superiority. Their superiority complex is the main source of their moral vagueness which they are practicing generation after generation.

## 5. Conclusion

"The Bride" is whimpering across a society where women are given very minor recognition as individuals. Women are degraded and manipulated by men. They stand, exist and acquire their gender identity in relation to the man to whom they belong. Along with the description of female sufferings Bapsi Sidhwa has given a source to expose the insecurities, heartless and manipulative picture of men, the degrading, objectifying and marginalized position of women in a male chauvinistic society, and hints of benevolent, hostile, and internalized sexism. In patriarchal society culture, customs and religion are used as effective tools to develop and maintain its hegemonic, governing control and superior authority over female bodies.

During the Post-colonial era Pakistani society was repressive, patriarchal, oppressive, giving allowance and privileges of the men's authority and their cruel handling of women, which they validate in the name of traditional culture and religion. In our patriarchal society men are often

born with eminence, appreciation, and respect, whereas women are treated as marginalized and called 'other'. Women are conceded as bodies while men are taken as individuals.

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