

Marriage as a Form of Domestic Violence in *the Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract – The aim of the present paper is to demonstrate the multiple dimensions of domestic violence against women to control the lives of women to dominate in the society especially in patriarchal society which are presented in *The Pakistan Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani novelist. Domestic violence has always been a long standing constraint in the progress and prosperity of women for a long time. Being an acknowledged novelist, Sidhwa endeavours to demonstrate all the aspects of violence in the marriage to bring the hidden negative effects of marriage on women's lives on the surface. Having practical experience of problems faced by women in patriarchal society, she refutes the sacred notion of marriage in which women are entrapped through different social codes drafted by male representatives of society. An attempt has been made in this paper to present all the social codes and tools used by men to control women through the so-called sacred institution of marriage for centuries.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Pakistani Bride*, written by an acknowledged Pakistani novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, occupies a significant position in the field of feminism. The objective of Sidhwa in the novel is to demonstrate the silent aspects of domestic violence in marriage, in which women have not significant role to play. The marriage is hinged upon women directly or indirectly but they have no significant part to function. Keeping all the hidden negative aspects of marriage in her mind, Sidhwa endeavours to delineate everything which becomes hurdle in their lives.

The theme of marriage in the novel occupies a significant space showing no role of women in marriage. Marriage in the life of a girl becomes a form domestic violence. Sidhwa destroys the longstanding notion of marriage, highlighting the spiritual view of the marriage. It is believed that marriage means coming of two souls together. Both are made for each other. The situation of marriage is practically difference and against the romantic view of marriage. Women are not even consulted in the whole process of their marriage. This becomes evident through the marriages of Qasim and Afshan and Zaitoon and Saki, the central characters of the novel. Sidhwa criticizes this fake ideology of marriage. Marriage is just of tool or medium of domestic violence against women. She says that 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 and offended by men. It is not a relationship of two souls but a trade of women in which women are always traded. In other words it is a way of controlling and manipulating women for meeting the requirements of men physically as well sexually. Imran Ahmad expresses:

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

In the trade of marriage, women are treated and considered as commodities or thing 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 husbands after marriage. Women have no identity and freedom in male dominated society. And their husbands tame and subdue them like animals by hook or crook.

The secondary and derogatory image of woman is evident in the cases 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 agreement in which she is sold and exchanged by her father. Women 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 domestic violence in 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 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.

With passage of time, the marriage is arranged. Afshan are only 15 years old and Qasim only ten years old when they get married. 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 masters of women who decide the future of women. Women play merely role of a doll and inactive character in the society. When a woman is born, everything is pre-decided about 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. Their 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 occupies 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 centered upon her brutal experience of married life of Zaitoon. In the other words, she can be defined as embodiment and symbol of domestic violence in married life. 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. But she is threatened with death by her father. Once married to Saki, her life becomes miserable. She is abused and battered routinely on the slighted pretext and suspicion.

The same story of violent kind of marriage is occurred with Zaitoon which happened with Afshan. Qasim is not her father but Qasim incidentally 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 Kohhistann, women have no right and freedom to show her willingness in marriage. They are not expected and supposed to choose their husbands on their own. Such kind of will is against the codes and norms of society. This rigid and outdated ideology is clearly evident when Zaitoon tells Qasim her wish not to marry with a tribal man whom she does know but her father tells her in reply that:

Hush Zaitoon, that's not way to speak to your father. It is not seemly. A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom she should marry him... 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 by bare hand (Sidhwa 58)

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

The manliness is also the epicenter of the novel. In the point of view of society the very word manliness means the power of controlling and domesticating women. It is well known fact in the patriarchal society that a man should have power and right to control and demarcate women. Men should keep woman under their thumb. If a man is unable to control and tame his wife, he does not get honour and respect in society. People make fun of him for not controlling his wife. S.D. Alvi says that "Being a woman is like being a beast of burden. Woman is a woman in status far away from any sanctity of relationship. A man is judged by how well he can control his woman. The violence is not only verbal and physical but sexual." (Alvi 91)

After their early marriage, Saki is taunted by his brother Yunus Khan for not being man because he does not beat and torment his wife. This, of course, leads to increased savagery on his part towards his possession. In blind rage, He first batters his ox until the beast collapses and nearly dies. He also shows her manliness when his mother tries to save the animal. You think you can make a fool of me?" (Sidhwa 172). The very phrase, my women, suggests that Saki is the master of her life and she is his slave. She will have to do what he orders her.

She has no right to raise voice against his brutal action. In the end, more women father to prevent further brutality. Saki walks away, his honour apparently vindicated:

A region where men were heroic, proud and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honour that banned all injustice and evil.... Their women beautiful as houris and their bright rosy-cheeked children lived besides crystal torrents or melted snow. Zaitoon's escape from this rigid, traditional tribal community is considered by Fawazia Afzal-Khan as a spirit of defiance which endorses a challenge to the structure of patriarchy. (qtd. in Dhull 21) (p. 3)

The beating of his mother and wife is a symbol of power of men how easily men can tame and control women. Women are like animals which they can teach any lesson by hitting and torturing them whenever they want. Beating and demarcating women are considered to be part of men's valour and power. In the novel, Saki is simply exercising his right of proprietorship. Saki has a mindset making him believe that women and animal are equal and his is the master of both. It is the duty and obligation of women that they should abide by the men's orders without raising any questions. When they attempt to oppose the order, the punishment is ready for them. First he beats his ox, then his mother and finally his wife. In each of the latter two cases, he stresses that they are beaten because they belong to him and further that they are merely women. Being a woman nearly means being a slave and being like a beast as an ox. In this male dominated society is show what the position of women is.

In other words, it can be believed that the honour of men depends upon how men can control and demarcate women on unlimited scale. The honour of a man is judged by how well he can oppress and control his women. The violence against women in the tribal society is more shocking because of its savagery. Saki beats Zaitoon not only with a stick, but also with sharp stones; he even kicks her. The violence is sexual and verbal, not only physical. On the first wedding night, Saki establishes his proprietorship over Zaitoon's sexual organs. She is almost raped by Saki on their first night of marriage. The practice of controlling begins with the taming of Zaitoon by Saki through physical torture. She becomes captive in the house with Yunus Khan, Saki's younger brother who keeps watching over her.

Language is also matter of power which show itself control over women. Abusive and threatening language has a strong role to play in the marriage. Men always try to control and subjugate women through loud and abusive tone in language. The violence of the language is nearly as degrading as physical violence. Saki always uses abusive language

whenever he talks to Zaitoon. When Saki begins to beat her, in instinctive gesture Zaitoon bends her head beneath her salwar: "Sakhi quickly secured the cord of his salwar round his waist, glowering with thunderous hatred. Zaitoon flinched. He aimed a swift kick between her legs, and she fell back. Sakhi kicked her again and again and pain stabled through her she heard herself screaming." (Sidhwa 186). Saki's retaliation is brutal; he kicks her between her legs till she faints with pain. It is after this incident that Zaitoon decides to run away. This is the first and the only choice she makes in the novel and she nearly dies for it. Saki knows that the best way to control Zaitoon is the abusive language.

Sidhwa has been concerned and apprehensive over the issues of safety of women in the native area in which they live. She disproves the longstanding notion that women are safe in the region, which they belong to and in which they are married. It is assumed that they can feel free in their home area. But this notion is partially true. She is not ready to accept this notion slavishly. Even women don't feel any sense of security in the home as feel as outside. They become the victims of domestic violence. Men take the advantage of women whenever they find women alone in remote and deserted place. In the novel this picture becomes clear in the very opening scene of the novel when a strange man tries to rape Afshan, Qasim's wife: "The man released Qasim. He stared at Afshan's wet body, at the colour that flushed her cheeks and at her suddenly darkening eyes. His expression changed. A wary indecisiveness crept in his features. He snickered, leering at her. Afshan covered herself quickly" (Sidhwa 11-12). Afshan is nearly raped by a stranger when he sees her bathing. She is protected by Qasim alone, who is only boy at that time. Qasim hits the man with a large rock and escapes with his wife. It shows that the ill-treatment with women is quite evident and obvious in their native area.

In the end, it can be concluded that Bapsi Sidhwa seems to criticize the sacred form of marriage. In the novel, it is clear that marriage is just another form of domestic violence. Violence gets started when the question of women get stated in family. She is not considered to be individual who can take her decision regarding her marriage on her own. She is traded in the name of marriage. A form of violence gets started after marriage. She means to say that the mechanism of marriage is planned to meet the requirement of men whether they are physical or sexual. Marriage is not pre-planned in heaven but they are in the patriarchal society which is against the freedom of women.

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