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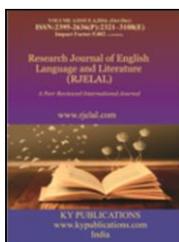
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**A Quest for Life : Pakistani Bride, A Novel by Bapsi Sidhwa**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Pakistani Bride*, a novel by Bapsi Sidhwa, is a picturesque presentation of Pakistani culture, tradition and plight of contemporary woman who is merely considered as a commodity of transaction, and a property owned by Man. 'Jar (Wealth), Joru (Woman) and Jamin (Land)' are the proprietary rights of a man which can be kept at stake at anytime in the name of Honour. Zaitoon, the unfortunate girl who was brought up in civilized city of Lahore, was married to a brute savage hill man by her adopted father Qasim on his tribal land, only to keep his word given to a Man of his clan. The girl was forced to surrender herself in the name of honour of her father. When Zaitoon tried to intimate him with her unwillingness, he blurted at her "I have 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 hands".

In Twentieth century where people talk about women education, women liberation, women rights and Feminism in particular, Sidhwa, here, presented a world where women were not considered even a Human. She was a living being which could be used as per their requirements, which could be traded like dumb cattle, which could be hunted at their disobedience.

**Keywords:** plight, predicament, honour, trauma, pride, repression, restriction.

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'Woman: A beautiful creation of God, leads the whole creation forth; But dependent on the Raham-o-Karam of Man for her own survival.' This was the Woman depicted in *The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa. Bapsi Sidhwa was widely celebrated as the finest Pakistani Writer and *The Bride* (or *The Pakistani Bride*) was her debut but second published novel. In this novel, she picked the marginalized character, Qasim, a Koshistani tribesman, from one of Pakistan's minority groups. Koshistan, situated on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the mountainous region is one of the most remote outposts of the world. When Bapsi Sidhwa set her debut novel *The Pakistani Bride* here in Karakoram Range in 1983,

she would have never imagined that the region would become suspected hideout for Al Qaeda militants twenty years later.

Qasim, a Koshistani Hillman, had to leave his mountains after losing his family due to smallpox epidemic. After a brutal attack on his train to Lahore, at the time of Indo-Pak riots in 1947, Qasim met a child who lost her parents in this massacre and "He had barely started when suddenly a short form hurtled out of the dark at him. ...that same instant he realized it was a child, a little girl....She sobbed,'Abba, Abba, my Abba!' For a moment Qasim lost his wits. The child was the size of his own little Zaitoon lost so long ago". (p.29) That forlorn

child melted his heart and reminded him his own daughter Zaitoon. He adopted that girl and named her as Zaitoon. Both got settled in a city of Lahore, after the span of many years in this bustling city, Qasim grew intensely nostalgic about his early life in mountains, his own tribesman. And out of this impulse, He promised Zaitoon in marriage to the son of a man of his own clan. And here began the series of Zaitoon's miseries which led her to the traumatic culmination and ended with this life-sucking marital knot. When pain attains its culmination, leads us to the path of salvation. One day she decided to run away from her husband's house for her emancipation, though she knew that by the tribal code the punishment for such an act was only death. Sidhwa's *Pakistani Bride* gives a deep insight into the plight of contemporary woman who was merely considered as a commodity of transaction. There was no sacredness and solemnity in the Marriage. It was just a trade and merely a contract to settle down the feud, where things like women were kept at stake. As the story circumferences around the protagonist Zaitoon, Bapsi Sidhwa also presents other two women characters –Afshan and Carol to unveil the predicament of a Pakistani woman. At the outset of novel, there was a conversation between Qasim and his father where Qasim was intimated about his marriage. When Resham Khan, another middle-aged tribesman, was unable to pay his loan to Qasim's father, he recompensed his daughter to settle down the feud. Earlier, it was Qasim's father who wanted to get married with the girl as he had only one wife. And as under Islamic Marital Jurisprudence, Muslim men are allowed to practice Polygamy. They can have four wives at same time. "To begin with, he had thought of marrying the girl himself. He had only one wife; but in a twinge of parental conscience, he decided to bestow the girl on Qasim. It was his first duty." (8) One can imagine how pitiable was the condition of women where they were entertained as a 'Thing', merely as a 'Property' owned by men which can be transacted as per their convenience. Afshan was fifteen year young girl and her marriage had been fixed without even asking her will. At the time of Nikah when girl is being asked about her will by Kaaji, it was her old Aunt who murmured 'Yes' on her behalf. It was like

crest had fallen on her when she found that she got married with a child "She peered through slit lashes and saw the sandalled feet of her husband, and then the shalwar-clad legs. Her heart constricted with dismay: she was married to a boy!" (p.9). She was in amazement, dumbstruck, failed to understand whether to laugh or cry. "She had been told that her groom was very young, ...But...She began to laugh, while tears of disappointment slid down her cheeks."(p.10) Gradually, Afshan accepted her lot cheerfully and started to live happily with her destiny. It has been said that woman has a great heart and she is considered as a Goddess of love, patience and tolerance. Afshan was the perfect image of that Goddess who had given her whole life for the repayment of Loan borrowed by her father.

Women delineated here are wrapped with the virtues of love, compassion and submission. Afshan whose father traded her to settle his feuds and fixed her marriage with a kid, she felt hurt but eventually accepted her lot. Miriam who was conditioned by male chauvinism, considered getting married, bearing kids and serving her man are primary concerns of a woman's life. She considered women education was only wastage of time. "Miriam, scandalized by such a foolish waste of the girl's time,...Now that she's learned to read the Holy Quran, what will she do with more reading writing....Allah willing, she'll get married and have children....Who'd want an educated..." (53). Marriages were considered sole purpose of their life. Allah, send them on earth only to serve man. "A girl is never too young to marry" (52) "Marriages were the high points in the life of the women."(88) Zaitoon who was nurtured by those stereotyped ideals, was ready to sacrifice her life for the so-called honour of her father. It is adjectived as 'So-Called' because honour which could keep an innocent life at stake should be considered 'So-Called'. But she was not ready to sacrifice her self-respect, her dignity. And protested against her husband when he tried to mutilate her pride and honour and run away from his land in the search of her own life. Her father Qasim gave her to Sakhi, a tribesman, in marriage only to keep his words. Miriam tried to convince Qasim that the girl who was brought up and educated in the city of Lahore,

will not be able to live her life happily in the mountains. She is not aware of tribal laws which are totally different. "They are savages, brutish, uncouth and ignorant! She will be miserable among them." (93) But Qasim was too arrogant to understand. On reaching to the mountains, Zaitoon got frightened to see poor ways to live life of tribesmen and asked her Abba to take her with him back to plains. "Abba, I don't want to Marry. Look how poorly they live; how they eat! Dirty maize bread and water! My stomach hurts...If I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains. That jawan at the camp, Abba, I think he likes me. I will die rather than live here." (157) These words by Zaitoon were like a dagger to Qasim to crush his manhood, ego and honour. Contemporary women were not appreciated when showed their choice of men. "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" (158) It got on Qasim's nerves and rebuke her "You make me break my word, girl, and you cover my name with dung! Do you understand that? Do you?" (158). And her marriage was fixed next week. Sakhi, a boorish, cold hearted, ruthless man, made her life miserable, made every possible effort to crush her pride and honour. A Wife was only to serve a man, to satisfy his eros, to attend his each and every need in house but has no right to utter even a single word to represent herself. She was no better than a cow which was fed and kept alive only to be used by her man. It was not only the condition of wife but mother delineated here was also subjected to same wrath. Sakhi didn't have any regard and respect for her mother. He savagely shouted at her when she called him for some work "Can't you see I'm working, You old hag!" (171) And It was really heart rendering when he beat her in fit of anger when she tried to save poor Zaitoon from rackless Sakhi. Sakhi wielded his staff and struck her (Hamida, his Mother) violently on her legs in his fury. "I'll teach you," he hissed, "I'll teach you meddling woman." (172) Hamida Appalled and She Wanted to die at that same instant.

Sidhwa tried to present here that it's only our circumstances that mould our personality. There were only circumstances that transformed an

innocent dreamy girl in to a strong woman who had broken all the shackles of rotten relationship, fought against stereotyped tribal ways and struggled hard for her own survival. In Zaitoon Sidhwa presented a woman who was innocent, lively, dreamy and submissive by nature and ultimately how the torments of circumstances turned her in to a strong and brave woman who ran away from her house to save her honour and dignity where it was considered as an dishonourable act and punishment for this was only Death. "There was only one punishment for a runaway wife. Wordlessly, the men organized their hunt and walked into the twilight-shrouded mountains" (190) How bravely she fought for herself in snowy mountains where she could find only wild beasts. "On trembling knees, she surveyed the sterile landscape. Not a trace of life : not even the droppings of a mountain-goat. No sound but that of the cold breeze swooshing up from the deep shadow of the cleft and from concealed channels and gullies. Trailing her blanket, she wobbled towards a cluster of boulders." (192) It could give a cold shudder even to a bravest man to think about it. "Someone bound to stumble on the corpse sooner or later. She can't be alive, it's four days now." (199)

*Pakistani Bride* reflected Possessive and intolerant nature of Koshistani Men for their women where they were dictating and desirer to rule over their soul too. Where women were only to facilitate their life, they were like a bounded labour who were deprived of every right. Qasim gave her daughter Zaitoon to Sakhi, one of tribesman of his clan, only to keep his words and to put a balm on his diasporic soul. Neither he, himself gave a thought to the compatibility of this marriage nor he listened to anyone else. He was blinded by his own wants and desires and sacrificed his own loving daughter. When Miriam tried to convince Qasim and made him understand that this marriage would not prove a success, Qasim frowned at her and possessively claimed his right on her daughter. Similarly when Ashiq Hussain, a soldier, tried to speak against this marriage and made him understand how much failure it would prove, Qasim gave same frowned gaze and glared at him.

“ ‘you’re going to leave this girl with them?’ asked Ashiq. ‘There’ll no one to protect her.’

‘Hah! Kill her, more likely!’

‘Hold your tongue!’ Qasim retaliated furiously.” (152)

Zaitoon remained silent like a dumb cattle. Miriam...On their depart to tribal village, Ashiq Hussain told her about those people where she was going to get married, “I know how they live-All the murders, the bloody family feuds. You are like me. You will not be happy there. Please don’t go.” But Zaitoon refused to listen him and uttered “It is my Father’s wish. I must go with him” (144) Like an obedient daughter, she merged her will with her father. But on her visit to Koshistan, she got frightened by their tribal ways which were seemed horrifying and unacceptable to her. And when she tried to express her wish, Qasim rebuked her. “I’ve given my word. Your marriage is to be a week from today. Tomorrow your betrothed goes to invite guests from the neighbouring villages. 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 hands.” (158) Finally, that dumb cow was handed over to Sakhi by his father. Ah! From one Man to another Man; her another Protector; this was the destiny of Woman. And Sakhi who was already filled with contempt and resentment since the day he saw her first time and found them with a young soldier on their arrival to Koshistan. “Not only was the old tribal accepting a ride from the hated soldiers, but he was allowing the young jawan to walk with the girl- his girl.”(147) Sakhi brunt in the fire of contempt and rage when young soldier hold her hand at the time she was about to slip in gorge on their way. “This’, thought Sakhi with contemptuous rancor, ‘so this is the girl my clansman brings me from the plains!”(147) Woman, a dumb cow, was driven by Koshistani Man who got mad with rage at her single effort to live for herself. Yunus, Elder brother of Sakhi, condemned him and doubted at his manhood “How is your wife from plains? you know, she requires a man to control her” (170) when Zaitoon rushed behind her father Qasim on his depart to Lahore. Which infuriated Sakhi “Quick to anger, in a land where pride and wrath are

nurtured from boyhood, he burned with an ungovernable fury.”(171) And it broke a havoc in the life of poor Zaitoon. Now Sakhi started to beat Zaitoon on any slightest pretext just to show his manhood to other men of his clan. Life became miserable to her. All her dreams of happy life had fallen facelong and got crushed on the face of harsh reality. “She no longer thought of marriage with any sense romance. She now lived only to placate him, keeping her head averted unless it was to listen to a command” (174) Sakhi abused Zaitoon when she went on river and waved her hand at a vehicle. Sakhi beat her mercilessly; his fury was so intense that he would kill her in his rage. “You whore, you dirty, blk little bitch, waving at those pigs; waving at that shit-eating swine. You wanted him to stop and fuck you, didn’t you!” (185) This age-old terror and repression conditioned the tribal women and made them to believe that they were made only to live for men, it’s their destiny to suffer. But poor Zaitoon was not accustomed to this pain and suffering and decided to run away from that place. And when Zaitoon ran away from house, no one was there who could understand her plight. But on the contrary, everyone was condemning her and sympathizing with the family. It was being considered a heinous act which would bring shame and disgrace for their community and praying for her infallible hunt “They’ll be back soon with that bitch’s corpse, your son’s honour vindicated!”

Awful! Conditions were horrifying, depressing where there was no ray of hope. Alas! Adverse were the conditions that no ray of hope was desired. This novel was based on a true story which Bapsi Sidhwa heard when she visited to Karakoram mountain area. She felt touched by the tragic story of a young girl who ran away from her husband’s house to save herself from his tortures. And it was considered an dishonourable act by the tribals and punishment for which is only death. Some of tribal men set hunt for her and murdered her.

“When I came back to Lahore, the story haunted me”, says Bapsi Sidhwa, “The girl’s story, the poor tribals, the way they lived, all of that I wanted to write about.”-

(<http://kazbar.org/jazbah/bapsis.php>)

Sidhwa opened a window to show the microcosm of cultural diversities. She delineated the posh life and culture of Lahore and subculture of koshistani minority group. Zaitoon became her medium to present this cultural diversity of Lahore and kashistani minority group. Zaitoon witnessed these multicultural diversities and adversities which ultimately led her to her 'An exotic cliffhanger' (Financial Times). Zaitoon who was adopted and brought up by Qasim in the city of Lahore and took her to his ancestral village of Koshistan for her marriage. "I cross this spot and my life changes"(153) zaitoon thought with sudden reluctance when they reached at the outskirts of Qasim's ancestral village. She filled with unknown fear and reluctance and found herself unable to adopt their tribal way of life and savagery of their culture. "She knew poverty and the harshness of their fight for survival made them the way they were, and her mind revolted at the certainty that to share their lives she would have to become like them."(156) Lofty mountain cliffs, refreshing, energizing weather and panoramic views presented a drastic contrast to the Poverty, harshness and savagery of tribesmen. She felt restless and frightened and asked her father "Look how poorly they live; how they eat! Dirty maize bread and water! My stomach hurts." (157) Unending tortures and murderous cruelty of Sakhi, savagery in tribal ways and hardship of the time left her alone with her anguished tormented soul. Diasporic soul of Zaitoon occasionally found solace in the lap of her old memories of Lahore. "She longed for Qasim's love, for Miriam's companionship, for the protective aura of Nikka's status." (174) Here sidhwa delineated the relationship between dominant and minority multicultural communities in Pakistan

Carol is an American woman who had married to a Pakistani man Farukh. But love lost its charm when faced reality. This was the case of Carol-Farukh's love relationship. Carol got frustrated to increasing jealousies and insane suspicion of Farukh. She found herself strangulated and incompatible to get accustomed to this restricted repressed society unlike her open westerns culture. But despite these frustrations, she was not ready to leave Farukh. It was not because of her deep love

for him but her love and attachment for Farukh's status, for luxurious life she was enjoying in Pakistan. "Her life in Pakistan was rich: it was exciting, and even glamorous. She had taken it too much for granted, and the crisis in her relationship with Farukh made her realize just how much she would miss it all." (218)

"One of the pleasant surprises of her marriage to Farukh was her very special status. As an American married to a pakistani she was allowed much more freedom than a pakistani wife." (219) But when she heard about Zaitoon's endeavor to run away from her husband's house for her emancipation from Patriarchal hegemony, found herself repulsive from this culture. First, Mushtaq's casual attitude towards women's sufferings, Zaitoon's in particular made her feel averted.

"Don't worry, she'll probably be Okay. If not, too bad. It happens all the time. (Mushtaq)

'What do you mean' 'happens all the time'? (Carol)

'Oh, Women get killed for one reason or other....imagined insults, familyhonour, infidelity...' (Mushtaq)

'What's the matter with the men here? Why are they so insanely jealous?' (Carol)

'Jealousy, my dear, is not a monopoly- It's pretty universal' (Mushtaq)

'Chopping off women's noses because of suspected infidelity isn't universal!' (Carol)

'That's in the Punjab. Here they kill the girl. They'd kill her there too...' (Mushtaq)" (223)

This insensitive and cold attitude exposed Mushtaq's hypocrisy behind his friendly, protective and gallant behavior towards her. It was the height of patriarchal brutality when she saw 'a young, tribal woman's face' in river. She was appalled at Farukh's casual remark, 'God! Someone's cut the head clean off!'. "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." (226) These incidents rent her soul; found suffocated and decided to run away from this

inhuman and insensitive culture. The verse by Iqbal, here, strengthen her spirits-

*Khudi ko kar buland itna,  
Heighten your 'khudi' to such majesty,  
ke har taqdeer say pahalay  
that before every turn of fate  
Khuda banday say khud poochay'  
God himself asks man-  
'Bata teri raza kya hai?'  
'Tell me, what do you wish?'*

And she intimated Farukh about her decision. "I think I'm finally beginning to realize something...Your civilization is too ancient...too different...and it has ways that can hurt me....reallyhurt me....i'm going home....San Jose" (229)

Sidhwa, though, picked marginalized tribal community to lay bare the predicament of contemporary women but successfully, exposed the hypocritical ways, double standards and insensitive attitude of the men of higher society. Despite all societal restriction, repression and exploitation, there can be observed a ray of hope of emancipation. Though Zaitoon had to suffer a lot but her endeavor to set herself free from male chauvinism paved a path for leading generations.

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