AGPE THE ROYAL GONDWANA RESEARCH JOURNAL
OF HISTORY, SCIENCE, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
ISSN (E): 2583-1348 | A Peer reviewed | Open Accsess & Indexed
Volume 04 | Issue 02 | February 2023 | *www.agpegondwanajournal.co.in* | Page No. 91-96

A POST COLONIAL STUDY OF CULTURE AND GENDER IN SIDHWA'S THE PAKISTANI BRIDE

Dr. Priyanka Singla
Associate Professor of English,
Government college for women, Hisar. Haryana, India.

ABSTRACT:

There has been a geographical explosion of literature in English. After the Partition and decolonisation of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947, the writings in English split up into distinct national canons. Writings in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have diverged from each other because of their different cultures and identities. Redistribution of the sub- continent into sovereign postcolonial states had its effect on literary cultures, giving place to national traditions, geography and history, multi- lingual and multi- ethnic socio- economic order, politics and aesthetics. The writers in postcolonial era focus on ethnic identities rather than racial divisions, male dominance rather than European colonisation. Bapsi Sidhwa is the author of four internationally acclaimed novels, and is one of the most prominent English fiction writers of Pakistan. The Pakistani Bride shows how female emotional demands are crushed by violence. Despite Zaitoon's predicament Sidhwa has shown that through struggle, there is hope even for women to see the dawn. The Pakistani Bride is a woman's lyric cry in prose against the existential fate and societal abuse. Sidhwa has fashioned complex metaphors to orchestrate the multiple agonies of a woman, a successful portrayal of pain and suffering in the character of Zaitoon. She has written dramatically of a particular culture, marriage, loyalty, honour and their conflict with old ways. The present paper is a humble attempt to touch upon the cultural and gender issues in this novel from a post-colonial perspective.

KEYWORDS: *Decolonisation, Post colonialism, Culture, Gender Issues, Male Domination.*

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:	RESEARCH ARTICLE
Dr. Priyanka Singla Associate Professor of English, Government college for women, Hisar. Haryana, India. Email: priyanka.ind81@gmail.com	

Today, the most viral writing in English comes from Britain's former colonies in the so- called Third World. There has been a geographical explosion of literature in English. After the Partition and decolonisation of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947, the writings in English split up into distinct national canons. Writings in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have diverged from each other because of their different cultures and identities. Redistribution of the sub- continent into sovereign postcolonial states had its effect on literary cultures, giving place to national traditions, geography and history, multi- lingual and multi- ethnic socio- economic order, politics and aesthetics. For many writers in Pakistan, as Vinay Dharwadker has observed, "the search for a distinctive national identity has led to a new literary archaeology" (275). He further asserts that the writers have "directed their verbal excavations at Pakistan's rugged landscape, which changes rapidly form icy mountain and fertile river valley to desert and seashore" (275). Literature becomes a vehicle for indigenous expression. The writers in postcolonial era focus on ethnic identities rather than racial divisions, male dominance rather than European colonisation.

Bapsi Sidhwa is the author of four internationally acclaimed novels, and is one of the most prominent English fiction writers of Pakistan. She was born in Karachi and brought up in Lahore. She now divides her time between U. S. A., where she teaches creative writing, and Pakistan. In Pakistan, she is an energetic advocate of improved social and legal conditions for women. She represented Pakistan at the Asian Women's Conference in 1975. As a member of the relatively small Parsi community in Pakistan, she is conscious of the problems of insecurity and insularity faced by minority communities everywhere. In 1978, at a time when publishing in English was practically non- existent in Pakistan, Sidhwa published her novel *The Crow Eaters*. It was published in Britain in 1980, a year before Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. It was the first major novel about the Parsis. While *The Pakistani Bride*, also published as *The Bride* in 1982, was the first novel Sidhwa wrote, it was the second to be published. *Ice- Candy- Man*, also published as *Cracking India*, is her third novel for which she has been awarded the Literature Prize in Germany. *An American Brat*, Sidhwa's latest book, was published in 1993.

The Pakistani Bride deals with the lives of another culturally and geographically remote group, the inhabitants of Pakistan's harsh mountainous regions. Pakistan's population is mostly Muslim, yet beneath this religious unity there is cultural diversity in different regions, especially between the plains and the mountains. *The Pakistani Bride* is a work of fiction based on the events from a tribal girl's life. Bapsi Sidhwa was on a visit to Karakoram mountain area of Pakistan with her husband where the tragic story of a young girl brought to the tribal areas as a bride was narrated to her. The girl, unable to bear the tortures inflicted on her, had run away, but she was murdered on being found because she had brought dishonour and disgrace to the tribe. Sidhwa was so touched by the story that it haunted her when she came back to Lahore. She began her writing career at the age of twenty- six. She wanted to write the girl's story and also about the poor tribals and their pride in their valour and honour. Sidhwa sat down to write a short story which turned into her first novel *The Bride*.

The poetic imagination of Sidhwa named the girl in the novel, Zaitoon, who became an orphan during the Partition riots. She is adopted by Qasim, a Kohistani who had to leave the mountains and was on his way to Lahore from Jullundur. Qasim was lonely man after the death of his wife and children because of small pox. He is touched when a girl of five whose parents are dead, sobs and calls him "Abba, Abba, my Abba" (29).in her face he sees the face of his daughter lost long ago. Hence he gives her the same name, "Munni, you are like the smooth dark olive. . . the zaitoon that grows near our hills. . . The name suits you. . . I shall call you Zaitoon" (30). He makes a home for the two of them in the glittering city of Lahore. They have Nikka and Miriam as neighbours, who too, love Zaitoon as their child. As the years pass by Qasim leads a comfortable life, but is nostalgic about his life in the mountains. Impulsively, he promises Zaitoon in marriage to a man of his tribe in the mountains despite Miriam's caution that Zaitoon will be miserable there. Miriam says, "I tell you, she'll be a slave, you watch, and she'll have no one to turn to. No one!" (93). It turns out to be real. For Zaitoon, brought up in the civilised city atmosphere, the tribal life becomes traumatic. After becoming the wife of Sakhi and the bestial treatment meted out to her, she resolves to run away, though she knew that by the tribal code the punishment for such an act was death, yet she contemplates the ultimate escape- the one from which there is no return.

The concept of postcoloniality is to give expression to indigenous cultures once subjugated under the colonial rule. Postcolonial theory accepts Benedict Anderson's contention that "nations are imaginative and cultural artefacts rather than empirical and scientific entities. They are imagined into coherence in spite of their varied cultural identities" (6). In postcolonial literature, we find a rejection of colonial hegemony and positional superiority of Western consciousness. Indigenous cultures are given full expression with their historical background, customs and beliefs, irrespective of their being good or bad. Macaulay's statement tried to prove the inferiority of colonised cultures and their literature. This pre- eminence of English writers was challenged by African writers as well as the writers of the Indian sub- continent after gaining independence.

In *The Pakistani Bride* this culture- consciousness is foremost. As Sidhwa tells us, Qasim was "a simple man from a primitive, warring tribe" (30). Because of his white skin, tall and robust build, he was conspicuous as a mountain- man anywhere in Lahore. He hates to be called a Pathan. He is conscious of his identity and says, "I am not a Pathan, I am a Kohistani" (36). He protests at being called a Chinaman by Mushtaq: "Is this a Chinaman's nose? No! it leaps forth as a banner of my race! A legacy from Persian ancestors who came through those hills with Cyrus and Darais . . . or from the Yahudis even . . . Some say the lost tribe of Israel settled here" (132). When he first arrived in Jullundar from the mountains, Qasim spoke Hindko, a distorted mixture of Punjabi and Pushto. But gradually he became conversant with Punjabi and Urdu. Sidhwa has used words and phrases from the native language. Words like 'Chapati', 'Hookah', 'Manja', 'Zenana','Payal', 'Chum chum of feminine feet dancing', 'Dancing bulbul'- are freely used in the novel. She has also quoted from Iqbal.

Sidhwa has given a vivid description of the distinctive dress of Koshitanis, "the sheepskin waistcoats and shirts made from beaten wool. Uncured leather wrapped around their legs, taking on the shape of their calves, resembled knee- length boots" (151). And the mountain diet consisted of

flat maize bread soaked in water. These tribals had "a fierce capacity to love or hate to lavish loyalty or pity. Each emotion arose spontaneously and without complication, and as reinforced by racial tradition, tribal honour and superstition" (30). Qasim says, "Generations had carried it that way in his volatile Kohistani blood" (30). Different customs, the landscape and the mountains are described by Sidhwa with immense vigour and liveliness and she has brought her world and people exuberantly to life. When Qasim was returning to his people, to the house of his ancestors, the vigorous air and the sight of the stark mountains stirred in him a long dormant pride. "He read the mark of his ancestry in each arrogant face" (151). He tells Zaitoon: "Bibi, you will like my village. Across the river, beyond those mountains, we are a free and manly lot. . .You will see how different it is from the plains. We are not bound hand and foot by government clerks and police. We live by our own rules- calling our own destiny! We are free as the air you breathe" (100). We are told that the tribals could be "trigger happy" (116). There is the other side of their character too. "The Koshitanis are quite untameable" (116) as Sidhwa calls them. They are feuding tribes. "They have their own notions of honour and revenge; a handful of maize stolen, a man's pride slighted, and the price is paid in bloody family feuds" (115).

Mushtaq narrates an incident in which a Khan was paid six thousand rupees in compensation for his land evacuated by the government. He had thought that the Khan would use that money in improving his miserable lot. But to his shock, he found that the Khan shot the male members of an entire clan. It led a load off his mind and his conscience at ease. And the next day he pays his fine to the Wali of Swat. "Six thousand rupees, the fine for ten murders!" (11). Something unimaginable. Killing was easy with them. Qasim tells an old man in the train, "I killed a baboo just before getting here" (21) because he had ridiculed Qasim. "Death was the price for daring such an insult to his tribe, his blood, his religion" (23). The difference is in the basic values. Life was easy in plains. To Qasim, "the men of the plains appear strangely effeminate. . . Where he came from, men- almost trackless mountains to secure salt for the tribes" (21). It was a tough life. The tribals were "Routed by centuries of ruthless pride, submerged beneath the hard toil, buried in a way of life that could afford no sentiment. . . (they were) Quick to anger, in a land where pride and wrath are nurtured from boyhood" (171). Like all tribals, the Kohistanis hated the outsiders. This hatred is quite apparent when they talk about Carol, the American woman married to Farukh, the Army officer.

The women artists of Pakistan are grappling every moment of their lives with the problems of gender identity and role. The pressures on women are enormous as Salima Hashmi's book *Unveiling the Visible* shows. In the novel The Far Thing (1997) by Mai Kureishi, who, like Sidhwa, is a woman from the tiny minority of Parsis in Pakistan, focuses on gender issues. Individual voices of protest found in Pakistani women poets and novelists in the postcolonial period are poignant. Their rebellion shows the need to challenge outdated traditions and customs. For centuries, the very concept of woman has forbidden to woman the right to deviate. Women are seen as gender only, and not as human beings. *The Pakistani Bride* starts with showing the low status of women in Kohistani tribe where girls were given in marriage in exchange of loan due. When Qasim's marriage was being settled, his father had first thought of marrying the girl himself. Sidhwa writes,

"He (Qasim's father) had only one wife; but in twinge of paternal conscience, he decided to bestow the girl on Qasim. It was his first duty" (8). After the marriage, fifteen-year-old Afshan is shocked to see Qasim, a boy of ten as her husband. 'The girl didn't know whether to laugh or to cry" (10). Gradually, she accepted her lot cheerfully. Later on, we find Mushtaq, a Major in the Army commenting on marriage, "A wife was a symbol of status, the embodiment of a man's honour and the focus of his role as a provider. A valuable commodity indeed, and dearly bought" (138).

When Ashiq, the Jawan, cautions Zaitoon about the murders and family feuds in the hill tribes, Zaitoon's reply is, "It is my father's wish. I must go with him!" (144). When the marriage has been solemnised, we find Sakhi surveying his bride Zaitoon with "proprietorial lust and pride" (159). As the novel progresses, Zaitoon becomes immune to the tyrannical animal- trainer treatment meted out to her by Sakhi. He used to beat her on the slightest pretext. "She no longer thought of marriage with any sense of romance. She now lived only to placate him" (174). When she is standing by the riverside, Sakhi goes on hitting her with stones until she falls down with serious injuries. That was the night when Zaitoon resolves to run away. She knew that "in flight lay her only hope of survival" (186). She then carefully ventured into the unfamiliar hills. Her struggle for emancipation is full of tragic incidents.

Sidhwa has shown the condition of women through animal imagery which is prominent in the novel. Sakhi is often mentioned as 'hissing'. After meeting Zaitoon, Carol comments: "The girl had no control over her destiny than a caged animal" (136). Even in dream, Zaitoon could "sense the savagery of the people". Tribals take guns not to search for the girl, but to hunt her. Mushtaq tells Carol about the run- away girl: "The girl's run away. The whole bloody clan is out hunting her". Carol is surprised and asks, "Hunting her? What will they do when they find her?" Mushtaq replies: "Beat her up. Probably kill her" (223). Sidhwa tells that women get killed for one reason or the other- imagined insults, family honour, infidelity. Carol is aghast to know that in the region women were killed even for "imagined infidelity" (223). She takes it as an insult to herself and women kind. "That's really what's behind all the gallant and protective behaviour I've loved so much here, isn't it?" I felt very special and all the time it didn't matter to you any more than the girl does as an individual to those tribals, not any more than a bitch in heat. You make me sick. All of you" (224).

Zaitoon's pain and agony after the rape, her licking the bruises like a wounded animal, subsequent wandering in delirium and the hallucinations are more tragic than even King Lear's. she realises, "So I am to die after all, she thinks. . . her destiny is compressed into seconds. She hurtles in a short- cut through all the wonders and wisdom of a life unlived. Instantly old, her tenure spent, she is ripe to die" (235). At this moment, she has an unexpected insight: "She was certain, that in these very moments she had lived through one version of her destiny and that somehow she had escaped it, though at a price. She would remain stamped with horror. . . she was certain now that Sakhi was nearby, waiting to kill her" (235). Still she rises above the situation and is ready to pardon him. She thinks: "It is not an act of personal vengeance; he is dispensing justice- the conscience and weight of his race are behind him" (235).

At the end, when the Major finds the skeletal creature Zaitoon in the dark hollow between the stones, he wondered if it was the same girl. The girl, in an attempt to cover her nakedness, began to smooth and pull at her torn clothes. Mushtaq felt a surge of pity. He huddled the girl in a blanket and sent it to the Army Mess telling the jawans that it was a bundle of roots, and to Sakhi he informed, "Your wife is dead. Understand me? You have no option. You have to take my word for it. She is dead. . . the jawans know she is dead. I swear no one will say otherwise. . . I give you my word. Your honour will not be sullied" (243). For Sakhi, it was "for the first time he faced a humiliation he could not avenge: a sorrow he dared not share" (243). As for his father Misri Khan and brother Yunus Khan, "It was as if a breeze had cleared the poisonous air suffocating them and had wafted an intolerable burden from their shoulders" (244). The Major noticed, "Misri Khan's back straightened. He saw the triumphant swagger in Yunus Khan's gait and Sakhi's relaxed lope as they resumed their journey" (244). They soon disappeared. Their honour was saved. For them, the girl was dead. Mushtaq visualised a new world for Zaitoon. She could either be sent with Carol to Lahore or even to the States or perhaps Ashiq could propose marriage to her once she recovered. But, the old Kohistani Qasim must never know that she was alive. Sidhwa says that it was a pity that he appeared to love her. Still, he was to be blamed for imposing his will on something that was bound to end in disaster.

Hence, we see in the novel how female emotional demands are crushed by violence. Despite Zaitoon's predicament Sidhwa has shown that through struggle, there is hope even for women to see the dawn. *The Pakistani Bride* is a woman's lyric cry in prose against the existential fate and societal abuse. Sidhwa has fashioned complex metaphors to orchestrate the multiple agonies of a woman, a successful portrayal of pain and suffering in the character of Zaitoon. She has written dramatically of a particular culture, marriage, loyalty, honour and their conflict with old ways. She has introduced the reader to an exotic new world. In an entertaining style she has drawn the reader into Pakistan, the hill areas, the bazaars of Lahore and the native language. The novel also reveals that in the last few decades, women in Pakistan have gained confidence to articulate their thoughts. The change from the European- inspired vocabulary to a bold look at one's own visual culture and appropriation of images and motifs from one's background is an exciting journey for the postcolonial writer.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Dharwadker, Vinay. (2001). "Poetry of the Indian Subcontinent", *A Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry*, ed. Neil Roberts. U. K.: Blackwell.
- Sidhwa, Bapsi. (1990). *The Pakistani Bride*. New Delhi: Penguin

■ ■ ■