

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE*

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Abstract

The paper throws its light on the themes such as struggle for freedom, gender discrimination, culture displacement, women empowerment, female identity and so on. The study focuses on the empowerment of the women protagonists Zaitoon and Carol of the novel *The Pakistani Bride* by the empowering writer Bapsi Sidhwa. It also exposes how the women protagonists struggle to overcome from their oppressed state and emerge as empowered women, who are able to take decisions on their own and make choices in life. The women characters Zaitoon and Carol reveal the pathetic condition of women in the rigid patriarchal society of Pakistan, where women are expected to act according to the words of men and they are considered subservient and fragile. Each and every decision in women's life is taken by men and she does not even given the liberty to choose her spouse and also women are denied of basic education with the thought that they does not need education as they are only meant to satisfy men and serve him and his family throughout her lifetime. Thus, the study reveals how the women protagonists Zaitoon and Carol overcome repression and emerge as empowered women amidst patriarchal norms in Pakistan.

Key Words: *Gender discrimination, patriarchy, women empowerment, oppressed state.*

The brides Zaitoon and Carol in *The Pakistani Bride*, though they belong to different backgrounds they both suffer due to the rigid patriarchal norms laid by men to enslave women. Both of them suffer under the hands of their husbands, who ill-treat their wives and does not care and show love and respect. So they both took courageous decision of escaping from their husband's house and take decisions on their own and choose their own

path after a long period of resistance. At some point they are not able to tolerate their oppressed status and they want to free themselves from the clutches of patriarchal society.

Zaitoon, the chief character in the novel is trapped in marriage to a man of Kohistan culture and she undergoes physical and mental torture at the hands of her husband Sakhi, who ill-treats Zaitoon and uses her only for sexual gratification. He does not consider her as a human being who has emotions but exploits her and expects her to act according to his words like a slave who obeys his master without neglecting. She is unable to tolerate her oppressed status for a very long period and so she takes a powerful and courageous decision of escaping from her husband's house and to lead her own way of life without restrictions. As Gerda Lerner rightly says,

“At certain level women make the shift from androcentric city, in which they have been schooled, to woman centeredness” (243)

Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride* upraises from her captivity of marriage. She seeks self-liberation. Her spirit of sovereignty inspires her to breakdown the traditions at two ranks. In the first level, the Pakistani woman is always expected to narrow her physical movement within the *zenana*, whether in her parent's house or in her husband's house. At the second level, as a wife to a Kohistani tribal man, Zaitoon is expected to be submissive and reliant. She differs from her mother-in-law Hameedha and other tribal wives who symbolize unquestioning life style and who are habituated to the programmed norms of the society. Zaitoon's arousal for freedom has been hindered because of her deprived education background. She reassesses the choice she has made formerly to continue as Sakhi's wife. Her displacement to an unknown place does not oppress her spirit of independence. Instead, she is self-inspired and she initiates her journey towards her deliverance.

Zaitoon overcomes her handicapped positions in order to move ahead and to achieve emancipation. Her fortitude for revolution to a new level discloses that she is a goal setter. With strength of mind and audacity she plans her audacious journey with ultimate excellence. The revelation that she perceives from within her own self encourages her towards the path of a new and sovereign status. Sakhi threatens Zaitoon not to go near the stream since he worries that she may find a chance to escape from the mountains. But

she violates his command and visits the stream. When he finds her near the stream once, he blows her up exhaustively and Zaitoon is substantially distressed. This episode makes a turning point in her life. She is not only prompted to rebel against Sakhi's brutal behaviour but is also stirred to free herself from her enslavement by Sakhi. While recovering, she ponders over this event again and again and gradually rises as an empowered woman.

Carol, an American woman fights to create her own identity and individuality and emerge as an empowered woman. She is married to Faruque, a Pakistani soldier and so she quits her job in California. She is substantial and she helps people around her. She acquaintances herself with her husband kinsfolk's with compassion and reverence. Though Carol is from different social and cultural background, she associates herself with others freely. But her husband Faruque comes from the background of patriarchal Pakistani society that upraises male honor and lays a lot of limitations for women. So, he is impotent to admit his wife's act of liberally moving and communicating with other men. He starts doubting her friendliness.

Carol is subjugated by her husband, in spite of her faithfulness to him; she is being condemned that she has no decent behaviors and good personality. Being disrespected and degraded by her husband often, she pursues liberation for her sensations. Thus, she takes freedom with Major Sahib when her husband is away in the expeditions. The narration of Bapsi Sidhwa shows that Carol's renovation from the role of wife to mistress has been triggered by the suspicion of Farukh. It is to be noted that the protagonists of Bapsi Sidhwa are either a Pakistani or an Indian. They are very subservient because of colonial inheritance and they have deficiency of awareness to proclaim their uniqueness. But Carol comes from America that has already struggled to launch women's sovereignty ethically as well as officially. Women's education and employment have paved means to modify gender discrimination. New theoretical attitude of the feminists and action plans of the women's movements have had optimistic influence in the minds of women. Thereby, women have succeeded over patriarchal supremacy and restored their independence.

Carol is made to prove that she is not like the other protagonists of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. Bapsi Sidhwa makes with solid potentiality of mind and wide superiority of knowledge. So Carol takes decisions rapidly. Her consciousness about her self-esteem makes her cut both the relationships as a wife and mistress. She retains the state of

independence. She ranks her own self. Carol's fortitude to go back to America is a twofold purpose. Her valiant encounter against social and patriarchal beliefs for women anticipates her. Sidhwa's feminist perception helps Zaitoon's emancipation from the restraints of encoded rules and patriarchal persecutions. Zaitoon may take accommodation in America with the help of Carol. Simon de Beauvoir says,

“Sexually and emotionally most wives and mistress are radically frustrated. These difficulties are more obvious for the independent woman, because she has chosen not acquiescence but combat” (743).

Carol exposes her female individuality when she ends her relationship with Farukh and a mistress with the Major. She gets back her vigor to battle against patriarchy. Carol gives significance to her selfhood and autonomy in the end. In order to comprehend that status, she is ready to lose both the men in her life. Through the struggles she faces, she is able to arise as an independent woman.

Bapsi Sidhwa's women protagonists come under two different categories: the privileged and the underprivileged. Women of the deprived sections of the society are deprived of the basic rights such as right to education, freedom to choose life partners, right to have apart in family properties and so on. The honored women acquire education, employment and other social statuses. Either section of women endures persecution in a similar way in the hands of men. Hence, opposition and predicaments are unavoidable for both sets of women to attain the ideal status. The thought of empowered women is exemplified through the depiction of women protagonists. As far as Carol is concerned, she seeks for unrestricted and blissful lives. Being educated and employed, she has the consciousness and intellect to contemplate and find a way out promptly at any acute circumstances. But, Zaitoon who is not as educated as Carol do not have the wakefulness like her, hence her accomplishment of liberation has been delayed.

Thus the endings of Sidhwa's novels show that her women protagonists overthrow patriarchal subjugations and free themselves: they affirm their self-identities, uniqueness, and autonomous thinking.

WORK CITED

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