

## **Cultural history, Identity and Resistance: A study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride***

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**Abstract:** Identity is a subject of continuous disputes within the fields of social sciences and humanities. The construction of identity is facilitated by the process of socialization and the impact of social institutions. The individual's identity is shaped by different discourses, including psychological constitution, personal experiences, social interactions, public status, and political associations. The individuals had a heightened level of disturbance when encountering a foreign culture that proved to be entirely novel and unfamiliar to them. Thus, the concept of identity holds a prominent position within feminist discourse, serving to emancipate individuals from the constraints that have paradoxically transitioned from societal limitations to personal ones. Numerous female writers endeavour to articulate opposition to longstanding societal practices and traditions through their works of fiction. Bapsi Sidhwa is a notable female writer who explores the societal position of women under a patriarchal framework. The emphasis of this paper is to delve into the novel *The Pakistani Bride* and look at how the female characters challenge, negotiate, and reconstruct their own identities throughout the novel. This will focus on how the novel presents cultural history and how female protagonists manage their identities in the face of patriarchal norms. The purpose of this analysis is to explore modes of resistance of female figures.

**Key Words:** *Identity, Cultural History, Resistance, Patriarchy, Feminism*

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### **I. Introduction**

Identity is a topic of continuing discussion in the social sciences and humanities. Individuals' identities are shaped by their interactions with others and the institutions they grow up within. Discourses of various factors—a person's psychological make-up, his private life, his social relations, his public position, his political affiliations, etc.—contribute to the formation of a person's identity. The Narrative strategies are also important in establishing one's national, ethnic, and cultural background. Many writers have focused on the condition of women, their hardships, and their daily fights for survival in a male-dominated society. When these women must relocate from their native land to a foreign one, the situation becomes much more dire. They were already unsettled, but then they were exposed to another culture, which was completely foreign to them. Feminist discourse places an emphasis on the importance of one's identity in breaking free from constraints that, ironically, have gone beyond the realm of society and into the realm of the individual.

The arts are a reflection of society and culture, which in turn capture the spirit of the times. So, it should mirror the ways people actually live and incorporate their traditions, customs, and culture. It's commonly held that women writers of fiction are more likely to accurately reflect the world as it really is, including the chauvinistic views of societies and the practice of patriarchal ideals. Many contemporary female authors use their works to critique societal norms and assumptions. It's also thought that when it comes to depicting society, English fiction writers place a premium on showing how women are treated as second-class citizens. When it comes to literature written by women in English, Bapsi Sidhwa is one of the few who tackles the topic of women's place in patriarchal cultures. She is a Pakistani woman who has achieved fame as a writer in the South Asian American literature genre. This paper will focus on how the novel *The Pakistani Bride* presents cultural history and how the novel's female protagonists manage their identities in the face of patriarchal norms. This work represents an effort to extract and recreate historical significance. Her book features a medley of cultural, geographical, and historical references. Before and after partition, women faced discrimination and inequality. Today, their identities are still largely determined by the men in their households. The purpose of this analysis is to delve into the text and look at how the female characters challenge, negotiate, and reconstruct their own identities throughout the novel. She delves into the traditions and cultures of the tribal people in the novel. She

demonstrated clearly the strength of patriarchal culture, which mandated women's subservience to men in all spheres of life.

## II. Analysis

The women Writers from the Indian subcontinent rarely advocate for women's rights, they make an effort to show the insensitivity and callousness with which society views women. These authors were strongly focused on the exploration of female subjectivity. Women experienced a range of gender-related infringements. In broad terms, society perpetuates Gender discrimination against women is institutionalized and encouraged throughout all stages of life. In patriarchal cultures, women are often devalued whereas men are typically seen as valuable assets. Numerous authors have depicted female characters in their literary compositions as being of lesser status and lacking proficiency. Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that women encounter a greater number of concerns and challenges compared to their male counterparts.

Sandra Lee Barkty in her article, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988) declares, "Women's oppression under male domination not only consists of solely in depriving women of political and legal rights but also extends into the structure of our society and the contents of our culture and permeates our consciousness" (Barkty 69). Despite the ongoing advancements in addressing matters pertaining to gender and sex, women continue to be constrained by deeply entrenched patriarchal values and traditions. The traditional culture of the country incorporates the notion that women are the responsibility of men, whether in the roles of husbands, daughters, or mothers (Sharma, 2017).

Twentieth-century writers' works revolved around the depiction of women as rational, intellectual, and articulate beings, while also allowing them to articulate their own distress in their own words. Helen Cixous places significant emphasis on the significance of unconventional modes of feminine articulation as a means of challenging established gender binaries and constructing alternative conceptions of personal identity. This framework serves as a valuable tool for comprehending the process by which individuals can free themselves from the constraints imposed by patriarchal expectations. It enables them to embrace the boundless possibilities inherent in feminine wants, so constructing a distinct sense of self or a novel feminine identity that is detached from the discourse of masculinity. (Sellers 2003). "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context' positioned". Common Historical experiences and Shared cultural norms that unite a people into a cohesive whole are reflected in their shared cultural identities. Emergent forms of representation among marginalized communities continue to be fueled in large part by cultural identity. (Hall 1996)

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani American writer of Parsee descent. The individual in question, being a Parsee lady, bore witness to the harrowing and violent event known as the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947. Through her written works, she not only conveyed her personal encounter with this historical event but also addressed the communal challenges that arose as a result. The works produced by the individual in question cannot be examined apart from the prevailing social and cultural factors that influenced her during that particular period. In this story, the author effectively depicts the entrenched patriarchal norms and conventions prevalent in modern society, along with the associated challenges and issues. The aforementioned issues are exemplified by a diverse range of female characters, including Zaitoon, Carol, and Afshan. Sidhwa sheds light on the challenges faced by women in the patriarchal society of Pakistan, with a particular focus on the Kohistani hill region. She delves into an exploration of the cultural practices and customs of the tribal community. She explicitly demonstrated the influence of a patriarchal society, when women were compelled to submit to male authority in all aspects of their lives. British critic Rebacca West, says "feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in patriarchal culture, a culture organized in favour of men" (253).

The construction of identity is rooted on the process of recounting historical events. The past serves as a repository of resources for resistance and the formation of identity, through which events are rebuilt. The historical events of the past continue to communicate with us. The construction of knowledge is consistently shaped by the interplay of memory, imagination, storytelling, and myth. The novel *The Pakistani Bride* is grounded around a factual account of a girl who was orphaned, with the narrative being relayed to Sidhwa. The individual embarked upon a journey to a secluded region within the Karakoram Mountain range, where she proceeded to recount the tale of her matrimonial union with her nephew within the tribal territory. Shortly after her marriage, her life descended into a state of extreme hardship and adversity, rendering her unable to endure and persevere. The narrative served as a source of inspiration for Sidhwa, leading her to undertake the task of authoring the novel titled *The Pakistani Bride*.

In Ashok Kumar's scholarly article titled "A Feministic Approach to Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride," the author provides an analysis and interpretation of the aforementioned literary work from a feminist perspective:

... I felt I had to tell her story. I had not written before. I had a compulsion to write the girl's story and the story of the tribal hidden away in this beautiful part of the world. I started writing a short story about this girl, without my really being aware of it; it was developing into a long story. It was an obsession. (1170)

The story centres around the protagonist Zaitoon as she resists and fights to break free of the oppressive tribal community of Pakistan, where she has been trapped since her marriage.

This novel explores the socio-cultural foundations and the dominant patriarchal structure of Pakistani society. The narrative portrays the manner in which the societal construct of marriage and patriarchal norms exhibit disdain and subjugation towards the individuality of a girl who has lost her parents. Furthermore, it sheds light on the challenges encountered by a little girl named Zaitoon who finds herself in an unfamiliar environment or society. Expulsion is utilized as a method for shaping a sense of belonging in relation to one's self-identity. The story explores the poignant narrative of Zaitoon, a young woman, as she navigates through a series of distressing encounters before and after of her marriage and the subsequent consequences within the patriarchal society of Kohistan, Pakistan.

Sidhwa employs narrative to depict the history of Pakistani tribal culture. She uses multiple storylines and an ongoing urge to create stories to describe their first meeting. The focal point of the tale revolves around the experiences of the female protagonists. In her novel, she has employed cultural history as a literary device. The act of recalling past events is a quality exhibited by the individual, serving as a means to demonstrate cultural history. Novels sometimes serve as repositories of cultural histories, shedding light on various areas of life such as historical events, the impact of war, living styles, the significance attributed to history, and the economic and social conditions prevalent during a certain period.

The narrative of *The Pakistani Bride* takes place in the city of Lahore during the historical event of the India Pakistan split in 1947. The story commences by depicting the tumultuous circumstances surrounding the Hindu-Muslim conflict, characterized by widespread violence and loss of life across the subcontinent. This literary work has effectively brought attention to the issue of women's oppression and exploitation within the context of Pakistani Muslim society. This document pertains to a historical occurrence and explores the profound impact it has on the life of Zaitoon, an orphaned girl. The work focuses on themes including women's fight for independence, tradition versus modernity, an existential crisis, and the effects of patriarchy. It also illustrates the hardships experienced by a little girl Zaitoon as an alien in an alien land and culture.

Zaitoon, a young orphan, was taken under the guardianship of Qasim, an individual hailing from a mountainous region. Qasim, having departed from his place of origin, assumed the occupation of a watchman at an English financial institution situated in the low-lying plains of Jullundur. During the chaos, Qasim escaped and rescued Zaitoon, a young girl. She loses her parents at age five during the partition of the subcontinent. She is raised by Qasim and his neighbours Miriam and Nikka in Lahore, who are also childless. Zaitoon reminded him of his deceased daughter, who was also five years old at the time of her demise, so he eventually accepted her. He adopts her and names her Zaitoon, the name of his deceased daughter. Zaitoon, being from a Punjabi background, and Qasim, belonging to a tribal community, represent an intriguing juxtaposition of two distinct cultural identities. Their union brings together elements of both the dark and fair complexions, as well as the urban and tribal lifestyles, resulting in an unconventional amalgamation. Zaitoon was raised in accordance with the principles of refined conduct and obedience within the context of her Muslim upbringing.

Qasim's decision to arrange a marriage between Zaitoon and a tribal man is met with opposition from Miriam, who exerts pressure on Zaitoon to reject her father's decision. Zaitoon dismisses her offer by acknowledging, "I cannot cross my father" (98). It is patriarchy's expectation that women will leave their lives alone. Women are seen as a liability and are expected to rely on men for their whole lives. When Zaitoon's parents pass away, she, too, is raised by Qasim and eventually married to Sakhi. She had to deal with masculine dominance her whole life. The silence of women serves to suppress their individuality and identity. Zaitoon's father, Qasim, asserts his authority by bestowing her name and arranging her marriage to Sakhi, without considering the potential challenges that may arise from a girl raised in an urban environment adapting to life in the hills with a tribal community. Even there, he worries for his daughter, he shows concern about his tribal culture: "I have given my words on it depends my honor. It is dearer to me than life." (93) .

Following their marriage, Sakhi exhibits dominance by engaging in physical abuse and inflicting torment upon his partner. He inflicts both physical and psychological torment upon her. The woman experienced significant physical abuse from her spouse, who would inflict harm upon her on minor pretexts as a means of asserting his dominance. Consequently, the marital union transformed into a state of extreme distress and suffering. The circumstances got increasingly unbearable for her to continue cohabitating with her spouse. In an effort to evade the harsh realities of her marital situation and the overwhelming hardships imposed upon her by her husband, Zaitoon made the decision to embark upon a journey of escape. The tribes viewed this as a disgraceful behaviour, and the husband was expected to track down and kill a fugitive wife. Marriage and associated rituals are frequently characterized as confining and oppressive, with a perceived lack of equity and justice towards women. In the works of numerous women writers in post-colonial contexts, symbols denoting marital status often assume connotations of violence and oppression.

Carol, a woman from California, is introduced; she has fallen in love with a Pakistani soldier and run away with him. After experiencing her husband's overly possessive behaviour, she leaves for her hometown of Lahore, Pakistan. After marrying Farukh, Carol finds herself the center of his attention, but that all changes once they arrive in Pakistan, where gender roles are strictly defined. In this society "a man may talk only with unmarried women his mother, his sisters, his aunts and grandmothers" (113). Carol is oblivious to the differences between the sexes. Therefore, she continues to practice her western ways. She's flattered by the men of Pakistan's unexpected interest. Carol enjoys this attention and is attracted to all of Farukh's friends and family because she is tolerant and has been raised in the West. He consistently offers criticism to her, stating, "You laugh too loudly, you touch men" (10). These statements capture the precise nature of the fight that women face today. In the sake of honour, males throughout history have enslaved, tortured, and ultimately slaughtered countless women. A guy is just as guilty of adultery as a woman and, if she is punished for it, so should he. To Farukh, she confessed, "I think I'm finally beginning to realize something...Your civilization is too ancient...too different...and it has always hurt me...really hurt me" (229) Carol gives up trying to live by both sets of norms and returns home. She has finally come to terms with the double standards that Pakistani males face within their own country.

In her work, Sidhwa explores the manner in which the tribal society perceives women as commodities. Qasim's future wife, Afshan, is fifteen years old, making her five years older than him. However, she is compelled to acquiesce to his presence. Qasim's father graciously made the decision to bestow the girl upon his son, as he had first contemplated marrying her himself. In primitive societies, women are often perceived as commodities that are subject to bartering and exchange. In contemporary society, women are often regarded as belonging to their husbands and are considered as part of their husbands' property. In certain nations such as India, Pakistan, and Arabia, women were historically deprived of the agency to exercise their choice in selecting a spouse. They were bound by the influence of their culture and adherence to traditional practices. In the story, Sidhwa presents Afshan as a notable exemplar. Women are expected to acquiesce to their family's decision and enter into matrimony with the man chosen for them. The portrayal of oppression and degradation of vulnerable women is reinforced by a multitude of further depictions of violence and subordination towards women.

Feminism and postcolonialism emerge as the primary discourses of resistance in response to specific circumstances of oppression and marginalization. Resistance can be conceptualized, drawing from the perspectives of Haynes and Prakash, as a form of opposition that is "non-confrontational" and "contestatory". It is an enduring aspect of the behaviours, traditions, and consciousness of marginalized groups, possessing the capacity to disrupt and challenge dominant power structures. As Haynes and Prakash suggest, resistance emerges as a response to systems of domination. (1991:1).

The novel *The Pakistani Bride* portrays the patriarchal society of Pakistan and the role of women within this societal framework. The young woman's determination to challenge patriarchal norms captivated Sidhwa. She has been captivated by her boldness in contemplating a future independent of the rules imposed on her by society. She depicts the terrible true story with a hint of hopeful future. She gives her characters the freedom to flee, struggle, and ultimately triumph over insurmountable obstacles.

### **III. Conclusion**

The concept of women's empowerment arises as a result of the battle against patriarchal systems. The work portrays a notable pattern wherein every female character takes the initiative to bring about change, resulting in the attainment of self-empowerment via resistance against patriarchal norms.

The process involves a critical evaluation of prior experiences and a reestablishment of connection with the feminine, which serves to validate internal feminine aspirations. The initial step in challenging the notion of patriarchy is recognizing its pervasive impact, which is subsequently followed by the deliberate construction of

a redefined and emancipated identity. The female characters in the narrative counteract the influence of patriarchy by acknowledging feminine desire as a potent force of strength rather than a perceived weakness. Female protagonists of the novel complete their fight against patriarchy by inscribing and remaking their sense of identity. Each of the female characters in the story is able to use her own unique method of reinscribing and redefining herself through the use of this feminine writing. The central emphasis of the study has revolved around the transformative effects of severe losses on the protagonists' lives. The aforementioned transformation might be ascribed to the effective liberation from patriarchal structures.

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