



Cultural Conflicts in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

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Abstract

Bapsi Sidhwa wrote *The Pakistani Bride* based on an actual story that she had heard about a Punjabi girl. The girl was married to a Himalayan tribal man. However, the girl found it very difficult to live with the tribal man. She escaped from her husband and wandered in the Himalayan Mountains for about fourteen days, later her husband found her, cut off her heads and threw away her body into a river. Likewise, Sidhwa moves her novel *The Pakistani Bride*. She belongs to Muslim culture but later she married tribal man so that she could not adopt her to tribal culture and with her husband so she decided to ran away from her husband and went to America and start her life delightful. In this novel Sidhwa deals cultural conflicts.

Keywords:

Cultural Conflict, Patriarchy, Gender Oppression, Identity Crisis, Tribal Culture, Muslim Society, Marriage, Feminism, Tradition vs Modernity, Displacement, Female Resistance.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a prominent South Asian writer who belongs to India, Pakistan, and the United States, and identifies herself as a Punjabi Pakistani-Parsi woman. Born in 1939 into an eminent Parsi family in Karachi, she began her literary career at the age of twenty-six. Despite entering the literary world relatively late, she quickly established herself as one of the most significant English novelists from South Asia. Her early novels, *The Bride* (later republished as *The Pakistani Bride*) and *The Crow Eaters*, brought her wide recognition and critical appreciation.

Sidhwa received the prestigious Sitara-i-Imtiaz from the Government of Pakistan and the National Award for English Literature from the Pakistan Academy of Letters in 1991. She is considered one of the first Pakistani English writers to gain international acclaim. As a diasporic writer of Parsi origin, her works frequently explore themes of cultural clash, identity crisis, displacement, colonial impact, gender discrimination, and social transformation. Through her novels, she presents the complexities of South Asian society, particularly focusing on women's experiences within rigid social structures.

The Pakistani Bride is a powerful novel that sheds light on the repression and marginalization of women in a patriarchal society. The novel centers on the life of Zaitoon, a young girl brought up as an obedient and submissive Muslim daughter. She is married off into a tribal community where strict customs and traditions dominate everyday life. Sidhwa uses Zaitoon's character to emphasize how marriages arranged without considering cultural compatibility can lead to emotional and physical suffering. Zaitoon's husband comes from a completely different cultural background, and the clash between tribal customs and her upbringing leads to severe consequences.

Through the failed marriage of Zaitoon, Sidhwa critically examines how cultural norms, traditions, and social institutions like marriage function as tools of male dominance. The novel exposes how women's bodies and identities are controlled and regulated in the name of honor, tradition, and family prestige. Sidhwa also presents another female character, Carol, who, despite being Western, faces oppression due to gender expectations. Both Zaitoon and Carol suffer because of the rigid structures of caste, class, gender, and patriarchy.

Overall, *The Pakistani Bride* is not merely a story of an individual woman's struggle but a broader commentary on cultural conflict, gender inequality, and the power structures embedded in society. Through realistic portrayal and psychological depth, Bapsi Sidhwa gives voice to silenced women and questions the social systems that sustain their oppression.

The characters in *The Pakistani Bride* are taken from a rising lower middle class and elitist group in Pakistan, in *The Pakistani Bride*, the story moves between the Northern tribal culture of Kohistani and the urbanized culture of Lahore, Punjab. It is observed that in spite of significant differences in class, religion, geography and times, the novels share experiences of patriarchal hegemony. *The Pakistani Bride* is characterized as masculine sexual virility, physical strength or power, ability to mark and defend one's

territory but more importantly, to have complete control over women's bodies. It is pointed out that masculinity in any culture is defined to a large degree in terms of men's power and ability to control women's morality and dominate them in the name of tradition and culture.

The Pakistani Bride expose the double standards of morality in the cultures, which expect women to be modest, exhibiting control and discretion in the expression of their desires. While such morality or culture allows men to commit adultery and infidelity by having premarital and extra-marital relationships, it is observed that the culture imposes restrictions on women, whereas it offers freedom to the men. Sidhwa had tried to attack the dual nature of culture Sidhwa's Zaitoon in *The Pakistani Bride*. Zaitoon's journey as a bride in her husband territory runs parallel to Carol's experience with her husband. The novel ends with both of the brides, Zaitoon and Carol refusing to bow to their expected roles of submissive brides. However, we come across the floating head of a bride in a river which indicates the harsh consequences for brides who dare to challenge their roles as submissive wives. Through such characters as Zaitoon, Carol and many others, the novelist point out the physical, psychological and emotional punishments women are subjected to as a routine part of their daily lives. These punishments are often given on the pretext of offences, insults and even imagined infidelities. Sidhwa explores the issues of marriage in greater details as the title of her novel *The Pakistani Bride* reveals a great deal about the possible subject-matter of the novel.

Carol, who falls in the love with a Pakistani soldier, stays with him against her parents' permission, because they fear that she gets converted to Islamic culture and may not able to adjust to the highly conservative culture and tradition. She has experienced, in this culture, a man may talk only with unmarried women, his mother, sisters, aunts and grandmother. (113). It is observed that even though Zaitoon's marriage is arranged by her father, she finds herself unable to adjust just like Carol in this discriminative culture, whereas Carol fails to understand this distinction of gender and cultural difference and keeps on following her western ways. All these experiences reveal the true condition of women. It is noted that women are tortured, tormented and then killed at the hands of their male counterparts in the name of culture, tradition and honour. It is observed that there are different codes of conduct for males and females in the culture. Therefore, it focuses on different ideas that how they suffer cultural conflict at many levels such as physical, psychological and moral.

Bapsi Sidhwa have presented a realistic picture of human relationship that shows disintegration of the socio-cultural world. Her novel *The Pakistani Bride* have established that only the low caste women but even the high caste women are also exploited and marginalized and Zaitoon, both of them continuously struggle to liberate themselves from the censors of the patriarchal and cultural bounding. Therefore, the novel is seen depicting the psychological as well as the cultural crises that encompass the lives of their protagonists. Through the novel how women are suffered with different culture and how they overcome with in that cultural conflict.

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