UNRAVELING PROPRIETORIAL PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES: A STUDY OF SIDHWA’S THE BRIDE

Behzad Anwar
Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat

Shamshad Rasool
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat

Saiqa Imtiaz Asif
Vice Chancellor, Government Sadiq College Women University Bahawalpur

Abstract

This paper intends to analyse the position of women during the process of their self-discovery and search for identity to become strong enough for an honourable survival. The study has been conducted through textual analysis of Sidhwa’s novel The Bride while focusing on language, different customs and events represented by the author to highlight the patriarchal structures. It examines that women have been treated as commodities and objects without caring for their desires. Their disrespect of patriarchal notions may deprive them of existence as human beings. It also pinpoints that women are oppressed, subdued and marginalized through patriarchal structures rampant in the society like marriage, family and the concept of honour. Any struggle to get liberation from oppression results in sexist violence.

Keywords: Oppression, patriarchal, liberation, sexism, womanism, violence.

Introduction

Since the inception of the feminist movement in the 1960s, many women have come forward to challenge their representation in literature, language, religion, history, culture and politics etcetera countering the male voice with a female one. They have taken up the pen to voice their silenced presence by writing about their unique experiences, sensibilities, silence, and other problems (Rasool, 2009). They have also used their writings to explore the notions of a female self, identity and subjectivity to present their world view and, finally, turn their gaze inward to show that female, itself, is not a homogenous term. They have, further, pointed out the factors like race, ethnicity,
color and economy which affect the way it is seen and it sees itself (Moi, 1985; Ruthven, 1984; Legates, 2001).

Within the literary circle, the women writers have used the pen to find out their voice that challenges their representations by the male authors (Rasool, 2009; Curti, 1998). They have also foregrounded the way female writers have been excluded from the traditional literary canon, and thereby, showing how their writings have shaped/enriched the existing reservoir of literature. The writers have also particularly engaged in projects exploring the issues which have been ‘sensitive’ for women, for example, the issue of violence, oppression (domestic and public), rape and silence etcetera.

The current study takes up the writing of a female Pakistani, Sidhwa, who, across time and space, has written about issues of women living in a society bifurcated by issues of gender and ethnicity. It focuses on the issues of women as highlighted by her. As deconstruction and reconstruction of womanism (Walker, 1990) are central to this study, it seems reasonable to discuss the concept of ‘Womanism’ to have an understanding of the dilemma of women in patriarchal societies.


In The Bride, Sidhwa tells the tale of Zaitoon, a child orphaned during the riots of the Indo-Pak partition and then adopted by Qasim, who leaving his tribal home in northern parts of Pakistan has settled in Lahore. The decision of Zaitoon’s marriage to a man of his tribe, gives rise to conflict, in the novel, between the progressive culture of Lahore and the conservative outlook of Pakistan's Northern areas. A conflict, metaphorically, used by Sidhwa to unmask the politics behind the concept of honor in Pakistani society, at large, voicing how religion, traditions, customs are manipulated in patriarchal Pakistani society, not only to exert control on female sexuality but also to marginalize and oppress women.

**Research Objectives**
This study focuses on the techniques used by Sidhwa in her novel *The Bride* to expose the patriarchal social structures by bringing to light the resistance shown by women against the dominance and possessiveness of males who consider them their commodities. It is to explore the way Sidhwa has pointed out the extreme subjugation which causes women to escape from the shackles of cruel marriage challenging the patriarchal culture of society.

**Research Question**

The preliminary discursive readings reveal that Sidhwa has portrayed a metaphorical concept of subjugation by patriarchy. Similarly, while talking about women, she deconstructs this notion to show that, in a patriarchal society, a woman’s search and assertion of her identity (as opposed to the communal submissive position), interest and desires are labeled as shame. Therefore, the research question for the present study is: **How do the Patriarchal structures subjugate women as represented by Sidhwa?**

**Literature Review**

Feminism was launched by the oppressed strata of life for self-assertion (Walker, 1990; Rasool, 2009). It is a political movement, a philosophy in the field of morality, and a theory in social life aimed at the egalitarian rights of females as human beings. As a political act, it aims not simply to interpret the world but to bring a change in the world (Fetterley, 1978). It challenges the notions of androcentric ideology entrenched in language, social life, literature, media, politics, and culture as well as the notions of 'Female Self' (Culler, 2005; Green, & LeBihan, 1996; Ruthven, 1984). Currently, the discussion has emerged about various Feminisms rather than Feminism (Bucholtz, 2014; Culler, 2005) because the feminists are struggling for the end of sexism in social, political and cultural contexts. Their needs are multifaceted, unsatisfied and diverse (Sunderland, 2011). They have examined the ways the patriarchal system makes the women silent or voiceless, and lose their identities. According to Ranjan (2019), Feminism is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of equality of sexes” (p. 120). The advocates of feminists have underscored that multiple factors restrict the lives of women more than that of men. Women are marginalized and subjugated. They are regulated to homes and do not have due rights. Feminism was launched as a social movement and political philosophy and fought against oppression, discrimination and
injustice. According to Madsen (2000), it struggles for “the unique experience in history; the notion of female consciousness; the definition of gender that limit and oppress; and the cause of women’s liberation from those restriction” (p. 200).

Almost across the world, women are dominated. Men dominate societies. Therefore, they control every walk of life. “Societies are patriarchal in nature” (Mehmood, 2021, p. 22). Patriarchy literally means the male-headed family where a male supervises the activities of the family. He has power to control the home. Generally, it refers “to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways” (Bhasin, 2006, p. 3). Patriarchy has inherent belief that women inferior to their men. Women are subjugated by the patriarchy in multiple ways (Mehmood, 2021). Patriarchal system determines gender roles. “Males and females have absorbed the existing structures so much that they promote males as the sole decision makers without the interference of females” (p. 2021). Mothers have never thought of challenging or resisting the authority of father rather they obey this authority religiously as the elderly women inculcate that their survival is possible only through being servitude.

The last decades of nineteenth century dealt with different aspects of the feminist cause. Feminism is a term used for women working, writing and speaking on women’s issues and rights. Walker used the term “Womanism” to point out how patriarchy and misogyny try to limit the role of women in society (2005). In The Color Purple (1995), she deals with women’s quest for liberation and survival. Her female characters possess enough of self-reliance including the art of letter-writing, sewing quilts, sewing pants, driving cars and even blues’ singing. They fight against oppression, both racial and sexual. They not only fight for themselves but also help each other in their fight against violence and injustice in patriarchal society. She has tried to explore the meaning of life, the search of black women for self and identity, the tendency and possibility in males to change and above all the unity among women. In fact, Alice Walker emphasizes that the human existence requires harmonious relationships between men and women.

According to Singh (2005), Sidhwa’s novels are gynocentric but The Bride is an exclusive paean to women's zest for life and indomitable courage. It is dedicated to the incredibly simple, deprived and courageous women of this magnificent country. Singh has analyzed The Bride pointing out women's zest of life but it should be added here that this zest of life in the case of Zaitoon becomes hazardous because, at times, it seems that her escape through mountainous areas is not easily
possible even for a man. Jaydipsinh Dodiya opines that Sidhwa criticizes that to men in Pakistan and especially in the granite folds of the Karakorum, a woman is like a piece of property that a man possesses. In such tribal areas of Pakistan, she cannot free herself from the clutches of her brutal husband. She cannot think of divorce or escape except death. But Dodiya did not add that Sidhwa has indirectly tried to make women protest and struggle for life instead of becoming easy prey to be sacrificed in the name of patriarchal honour.

Discussing Sidhwa among other South Asian writers, Sinha comments that their works realize not only the diversity of women but also the diversity within each woman. They are emphasizing a new perspective of women which invokes rebellion against stern patriarchy. Some males in the novel are helpful, considerate and kind-hearted as well. According to Brians (2008), Qasim explains in the novel, his decision to himself as a need to reaffirm his roots, to reconnect with his people. It also suggests that the substantial bride-price the groom is willing to pay has something to do with his decision in the matter. Brians also opines that on his compassionate side, Qasim rescues a little girl whose parents have been killed in the rioting during partition and raises her as his own and names her after his daughter, Zaitoon, who becomes the bride of the title. Qasim combines the qualities of kindness, generosity, ferocity and murderous violence, all at once Brians rightly points out that the tradition-bound minds of Qasim and Sakhi, Zaitoon's husband prevent them from understanding the horrific suffering they inflict on Zaitoon. Kumar (2005) states that The Bride based on an actual incident occurred in Pakistan deals with the oppression against women in the patriarchal setup. It is important to note that Major Mushtaq and his soldiers, also being men, provide help to her. Therefore, Sidhwa shows an optimistic approach. Other investigators’ works on Sidhwa’s novel are highly valuable yet this study pinpoints that the novelist wants the crushed women to raise their voice and struggle against male dominance and possessiveness.

**Framework**

To probe the issue of the position of women in the patriarchal structures and to find answers to the proposed research question, we would be making an in-depth exhaustive study of the selected text of Sidhwa by using insights from feminism.
Feminist theory has been used as the foundation because these narratives are not merely works written by women. They are also feminist in terms of their political engagement with issues of women marginalization, oppression and rape.

As deconstruction has shown how the voices from the margin of a literary text challenge, subvert and over-throw the dominated meanings in a literary text, therefore, this analytical model would be used to examine the way Sidhwa, being a female writer writing from the margins of patriarchal and literary margins, has used this technique to challenge, dissolve and ultimately give new meanings to the constructs of the identity of women hitherto written and talked about from a male point of view.

The framework in a feminist study does not involve a single method (Rasool, 2021; Sunderland, 2011) as it challenges biased against women based on the gendered ideology which declares them incapable of logic and reason being ‘emotional’ (Walker, 2005). Therefore, it does not take into account issues related to ontology. According to Culler (2005), approaches for a feminist research encapsulate the comprehension of feminisms as no singular theoretical perspective or comprehension of the reasons of gender discrimination can cover women’s experiences (Rasool, 2021; Culler, 2005). So multiple perspectives (feminism and deconstruction) have been employed for analysis in this study.

**Research Methodology**

The present study is an explanation of the ideas and arguments as structured by Sidhwa. The argument functions through ideas supported by the pieces of evidence. So the study involves the writer’s perspective she conveyed in her novel. The shreds of evidence from the text have been extracted for analysis to construct the writer’s approach. Being a qualitative research, the data of this study comprises sentences, ideas, themes and words. Therefore, the current research requires intensive study of the text to identify the shreds of evidence. Therefore, Textual Analysis is the most appropriate approach for this study.

Textual analysis is a method of gathering pieces of information from a text, written, painted or recorded (Bobbie, 1996). It is suggestive of symbolic, denotative meanings as well as connotative (Caufield, 2019). It finds out who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect (McKee, 2003; Lasswell, 1992). Therefore, it is a technique for generating valid and replicable
shred of references from data (Krippendorff, 1980). Regular patterns and structures in the data help making inferences objectively and systematically (Bobbie, 1996).

**Analysis and Discussion**

Sidhwa deals with multiple types of issues faced by female strata. In the gender-based social structure of Pakistan, Sidhwa's women are strong and confident as well as considerate and loving. *The Bride* reflects Sidhwa's personal experience when she witnessed, in the mid of twentieth century, the blood-spattered division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Her experience of violence and bloodshed of partition left a special mark on her memory. It is the suffering, torture and dishonour of women at the hands of men. Sidhwa has raised a strong voice in *The Bride* while emphasizing her feminist ideologies through events and characters. Her treatment of the importance of marriage, family and honour in the lives of South Asian women is worth-reading.

*The Bride* is evidence of Sidhwa's special trend of showing reality. Her imaginative faculties are all along at work no matter what situation, scene, or people in their thoughts are being portrayed. Sidhwa has based her novel on a real story that she heard during her honeymoon visit to an army camp in the Karakoram mountain area. In the actual story, a Punjabi girl wedded to a tribal man tried to escape and after running and wandering for fourteen days in the cold mountains, the miserable and tired girl was found by her husband who cut off the poor creature’s head and threw her into the deep downriver. Sidhwa with her extraordinary sense of creativity allows her heroine, Zaitoon, to escape death. This significant alteration in the original story conveys a special message – the message to rebel against proprietal patriarchs. She indirectly directs female sufferers to protest steadfastly, no matter whatever the consequences they face to get rid of patriarchal atrocities.

As the very title shows that the novel is set in Pakistan and brides of this region have to follow the customs and traditions of the same area. But within South Asia, each country has its cultural background with its impact on still prevailing values. Similarly, within Pakistan, all provinces have their customs and values whereas tribal areas have their separate laws, rules, code of conduct, traditions, etc. Although Sidhwa focused on Kohistani tribals yet her portrayal of other men also shows proprietorial patriarchy. Major Mushtaq and Farukh are good examples in this regard. At the outset of *The Bride*, there is a conversation between ten years old Qasim and his father that makes it clear that women are just transactional commodities. They arrange marriages not for
mutual understanding and to adhere to moral, social and religious obligations but for material bargaining.

In her narrative, Sidhwa presents three married couples; hence narrating stories of Afshan, Zaitoon, and Carol who undergoes the possessiveness of males. Pakistani brides suffer the possessiveness of fathers as well as husbands. Afshan's father, not being able to pay the debt to Qasim's father, offers Afshan's hand in compensation for the loss. To him, the daughter is that property that is there for settlement. This transaction is obvious proof that these tribal people consider a woman to be a bargaining commodity. Whenever Qasim finds his wife (elder than him) commanding him, he shows male authority by declaring angrily "I am your husband how dare you?" (p. 4).

Carol is from California and has married a Pakistani soldier, Farukh. She faces the opposition of her parents who fear she will get converted to Islam and now she finds it difficult to adjust to the conservative culture of her husband's country. Here she experiences over – the possessive attitude of that man whom she has married after a love – affair. His dominating attitude has created a breach in their previous love relationship. As a result, she develops extramarital relations with Major Mushtaq who is a married man having children. When she wants Mushtaq to marry her, he rejects the idea at which she feels betrayed and makes efforts to reconcile with her husband Farukh. Different moral codes of Pakistani society force her to think about what her husbands’ reactions can be if he comes to know about her adultery. She realizes that "women get killed for one reason or other… imagined insults, family honour, infidelity…” (p. 195). When she asks Major Mushtaq if Farukh would kill her, he replies, “who knows? I might, if you were my wife” (p. 196). Sidhwa reveals here that Pakistani men whether educated or tribal share the same patriarchal nature towards torturing and killing their women in the name of honour. It is the only woman who is punished for adultery and not the man who is also equally responsible for it. That is why Carol, failing to understand double moral and social standards and ultimately, takes the decision to go back to America.

Zaitoon, the bride of the title of the novel, has lost her parents during the partition of 1947, mistakes Qasim as her father who wants to kill her to feel free of responsibility because his tribal ways teach to end that thing which bothers. But in the memory of his same age, his dead daughter not only adopts her but also gives her the name of his daughter Zaitoon. Later, in Lahore, they live with a childless couple Nikka Pehalwan and his wife Miriam who loves and takes care of the girl.
Sidhwa portrays Miriam as a woman who can express her views fearlessly. When Qasim makes an unwise decision to marry Zaitoon to his nephew living in Kohistan, it is Miriam who opposes it and tries to persuade Qasim to change his decision because it would be very difficult for the girl who is brought up in Lahore to adjust to Kohistan. Miriam attempts so as she was an equal contributor to the upbringing of Zaitoon. She even forces Zaitoon to refuse to marry and to reject Qasim’s decision. But Zaitoon refuses to cross her father. Miriam is bold enough to criticize Qasim for taking money as bargaining for Zaitoon’s marriage. He sells her like a greedy merchant for, “five hundred rupees- measly maizes and a few goats” (p. 281).

Sidhwa shows the submissiveness of women in Pakistani society who show – respectfulness to their fathers and husbands. Zaitoon wants to touch Sakhi’s feet and "to rub her lashes on the soles of his feet and kiss them" (p. 142). It is the same husband who tortures her so brutally that the innocent wife finally rebels and decides to run away.

Male dominance is obvious from episode to episode in The Bride. Qasim shows domination when he names her, then he stops her education, then he takes her across the river Indus and marries her to Sakhi, his nephew, not paying heed to her frequent appeals not to leave her behind at which he consoles her by flatly and heartlessly telling that he will be visiting her on yearly-basis. Sakhi, her husband tortures her both physically and psychologically. When one day he beats her that very night Zaitoon resolves “to run away” (p. 162). She thinks that in-flight lay her only "hope of survival" (p. 162). When she leaves in the morning, she knows that her punishment will be death. But this courageous rebel wanders for many days and nights through the cold mountains in the hope to reach Major Sahib who has promised to help her. Sakhi, his father, brother and other members of his tribe are resolved to find and kill her. When Carol sees from the bridge a young tribal woman's face in the river whose head has been cut off, she gets horrified and Farukh comments that she probably "asked for it" (p. 197). She remains thoughtful over what her husband has said. She thinks that women ask to be murdered, raped, enslaved, beaten up and disinherited. Afterward being upset she weeps at night and asks Farukh to tell her the meaning of "Khudi" (p. 199) used by Iqbal in his poetry. Then she tells him that she has found his civilization to be “too ancient…too different” (p. 200), and decides to go back to San Jose.

Zaitoon is a submissive girl and gets caught up in the authoritative attitude of Qasim. When she reaches the hills, she requests Qasim at night to take her back with him to the plains. She suggests him reasonably marry her but with someone who belongs to the plains. She fears that she may die.
here. In response, he does not console her rather becomes proprietorial while declaring that he has given his word and that on his word depends his honour. Upon her humble objection her father, “groped for her and his hand closed around her throat” (p. 329). His tone became icily decisive and he asserted, “you break my words, girl, and you cover my name with dung! Do you understand that? Do you?” (p. 329). Zaitoon withdraws her claim and lies quite still, “Yes, she croaked, her will utterly defeated” (p. 329). This incident reflects the condition of women how they are treated and married against their will for the honour of men or family-like dumb creatures or for coveting money and how they are forced to obey the decisions of the male members. He, further, adds in a threatening tone that his honour is so dear to him that for its sake he may kill her with his hands. Zaitoon's appeal is rejected heartlessly by the man from whom she expects a lot. He treats her as if she is his property. He does not care for her emotions. Her tears and request fall flat on him. After her marriage (which takes place without her consent), she becomes prey to the animal instinct of her husband. Sakhi, on the first night of their marriage, thinks that she is all his own. This thought comes to his mind “with proprietorial lust and pride” (p. 139). Then, like a brute, he tears her ghongat and treats her savagely. In this pathetic situation, Zaitoon screams and calls her Abba to save the poor, innocent creature but she does not know that, now, he cannot help her being the property of Sakhi. Sakhi suppresses her with violence. Her life becomes so miserable that her ultimate decision is to run away. Even then she suffers and faces rape but finally reaches near the bridge and after all her faint cry "Major Sahib? Major Sahib" (p. 209) is heard by Major Mushtaq who saves her.

Sidhwa shows her serious concern for South Asian women’s issues. She prefers to emphasize female suffering under patriarchy, ancient customs and conventions. A close reading of The Bride provides awareness about manipulation of laws and rules by men to overpower delicate sex. The portrayal of Zaitoon is to prove that the rebelling voices cannot be silenced. South Asian women got inspired with a feministic approach because of colonialism. South Asian writers who write in English like Sidhwa have succeeded to protest through literature against female subjugation. The novel is a source of encouragement for the women anywhere who are repressed, dishonoured and kept as possession by proprietorial patriarchs.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, in The Bride, it has been found out that women are constantly a target of brutality and inhumanity at the hands of proprietor men. Considering women to be a territory of men who
think themselves to be the conquerors after marriage and start using and abusing their occupied territory can be challenged by daring women who rebel and prove their identity, confidence and individuality.

Sidhwa has represented the issues of women living. Her struggle to present them on the international forum is successful to a great extent as her novels have been translated into different languages of the world. In this way, her massage—the problem of marriages for specific purposes except for the felicity and care for the sentiments of women, subjugation and oppression of women, child and forced marriages, physical abuse and alienation of women are the problems that are causing havoc with the women has been communicated to different nations. The mainstream feminists are not ready to pay heed to such issues declaring them integral to the culture of the subcontinent. The works of Sidhwa have shown the reality that these issues of women are not cultural but patriarchal in nature and these issues need the attention of the Western feminists for a solution.

Sidhwa advocates egalitarian rights for women and the elimination of gender discrimination based on sexism. She suggests mental training of men to accept and deal with the opposite sex as human beings with equal privileges and obligations. They should not behave as superior creatures. She suggests that women should also recognize themselves and resist the atrocities and raise their voice against their subjugation. They should not obey men's version as a holy command.

This research leaves room for fresh researchers to explore the boldness of women in a social setup like South Asia where dauntless women like the one of the true story live and die daringly and never become hopeless.

References


