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## STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE*

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Whether it is India or Pakistan, the whole issue of feminism is so much mired in the physical. Women are still being burned to death, they are being kidnapped, put into prostitution, and so forth. In Pakistan, it is quite alright if a man kills his sister because she has been having an affair, or if a father kills his daughter if he believes that she has been doing that. -Bapsi Sidhwa

Women form an integral part of human civilization. Common images of women appear in various literatures of the world. Although the place of woman in society differs from one culture to another and from age to age, yet one common fact in most societies is that women have been considered inferior to men. Moreover, women are captured by the very institution of marriage which should shelter and shield their lives. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature". (295)

The study attempts to analyze the various difficulties traversed by women, elucidating struggle and the strategies adopted for survival amidst odds and discriminations in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. Though the characters pass through pain, agony and trauma, the individual's response to these difficulties manifests in courage and strength for survival. The struggle of women and the saga of how they grapple to survive in the patriarchal society are analyzed in detail. The individual's response to the challenges that confront them is resistance or rebellion.

Women writers generally have a clear conception of the problems related to women and so it is natural that they choose themes and characters which they are aware of. Sidhwa, in her novel *The Pakistani Bride* confronts various issues faced by women, especially oppression, discrimination and the struggle for survival. Her women protagonists resist against the dominant patriarchal society, which exploit women in their struggle for survival and honour. Sidhwa delineates the lives of the women inhabiting the harsh mountainous region. This novel is initiated by a true incident of a Punjabi girl who was married to a tribal man. After a month, unable to cope with the harsh treatment inflicted on her, she ran away from the hills. The tribal people, who considered this to be an ignominious act, started pursuing her. The girl survived for almost two weeks in the Karakoram mountain area and found her way to the river Indus. But unfortunately, she was caught by her husband and her head was severed and thrown into the valley. The tribes lived by a code of honour that reflects their harsh condition. Sidhwa who was taken aback by this story felt the necessity to fictionalize it, as it symbolized the treatment of many women in the subcontinent. In the novel, Sidhwa makes her protagonist Zaitoon to escape from the tribes and survive in the end. Explaining the reason for this optimistic ending, Sidhwa posits, "I'd inhabited this girl's body and her emotions for so long that I felt it was a shame ... At least in the end she lives – she barely survives, but she lives"(91).

By unfolding the real life experiences of a runaway married woman, Sidhwa points out the fundamental complexities of her quest for freedom. She explores a woman's self-conscious protest to her marginalization, discrimination and oppression. Regarding the theme of the novel, Makarand.R.Paranjape

states: "At the core of the book is the struggle for survival of the heroine, Zaitoon, fleeing from the brutal, tribal society in Kohistan into which she has been married" (94).

The first part of the novel is set in Lahore which is crowded and the second part is set in the mountains of the Karakoram which is desolate, grim and dreadful. The novel traces the life of Zaitoon, a sixteen year old girl, who is a child of partition. She loses her parents during the partition riots and is rescued and adopted by Qasim, a Kohistani, who moved away from the mountainous region after the death of his wife and children. Qasim names the adopted child Zaitoon, the name of his own daughter. Reaching Lahore, he befriends Nikka Pehelwan and works odd jobs. Zaitoon is educated till she is able to read the Holy Quran and grows up to be a well cultural girl.

In spite of being fortunate in Lahore, Qasim is nostalgic about his life in the mountains. Zaitoon also fascinates about the hilly region to which her father belongs. When Zaitoon is sixteen, he promises her in marriage to a man of his tribe, Sakhi, without the consent of the daughter. Though Nikka and his wife Miriam warn him of the differences between the life of the city and the tribals, Qasim is firm in his decision and gives his daughter in marriage to Sakhi, a Kohistani.

Though Zaitoon had romantic fantasies about the life on the hills, her torture begins the very next day of her marriage. Zaitoon had to cross the river to reach the hills which forms a boundary between the life on the hills and the city. Crossing this border and boundary becomes tragical for Zaitoon. She runs away from the hills, unable to bear the bestial treatment, knowing well that the punishment for such an act is death. In the forest, she encounters starvation, molestation and other dangers and suffers for ten days. She overcomes all these dangers and is rescued by Major Mushtaq who saves her life from the tribal people.

Sidhwa flamboyantly sketches how domestic violence, denial of human rights and discrimination against women is practiced in the patriarchal and tradition bound society through the character of Zaitoon. Brought up as a Muslim child, she is denied higher education and has to get married early in life. This is apparent in the words of Miriam, who says, "Now that she's learned to read the Holy Quran, what will she do with more reading and writing – boil and drink it? She's not going to become a baboo or an officer! No, Allah, willing, she'll get married and have children" (PB52). Zaitoon is removed from school when she attains puberty and spends much of her time in 'Zenanas' like the other women. Sidhwa picturizes the dwellings of men and women as:

Rooms with windows open to the street were allotted to the men: the dim maze of inner rooms to the women – a domain given over to procreation, female odours and the interminable care of children. Smells of urine, stale food and cooking hung in the unventilated air, churning slowly, room to room, permeating wood, brick and mortar. (PB56)

It is discernible that discrimination against women prevails at home where they are denied hygienic conditions. Women suffer from mismatched married lives which only bring domestic turmoil, frustration and suffering. There is immense struggle for survival. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445). Qasim promises Zaitoon in marriage to Sakhi, a tribal man. The basic human rights of good education and decision – making is denied for a girl child which is observed in Zaitoon.

As they were crossing the army camp, Major Mushtaq, Ashiq and Carol try to warn Qasim about the happiness of Zaitoon. "Do you think she will be happy with the tribals?" (PB138) warns Mushtaq. Ashiq tells, "What do you know of them? Ask me, I know how they live – all the murders, the bloody family feuds, you are like me. You will not be happy there. Please don't go" (PB144). They tried to dissuade Zaitoon from going to the hills but she having lived a life of subjugation in the patriarchal social system obeys her father and goes with him. Major Mushtaq who is aware of the code of honour of the tribes, promises to assist her when required.

Sidhwa magnifies the inner turmoil of Zaitoon as she steps into the world of mountains. She intuits the awaiting danger, "I cross this spot and my life changes, she thought with sudden reluctance" (PB153). The once fantasized mountainous region, now becomes portentous and she regrets, "I will die rather than live here" (PB157). When she sees the savage and harsh conditions of the people, she persuades her father to take her back to Lahore. Her father threatens to kill her if she disobeys him, as he considered his words and his honour dearer than his daughter's life. He intimidates her, "A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom she should marry... I've given my word. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands" (PB158). Zaitoon is

compelled to submit to his will and marries Sakhi. Zaitoon undergoes discrimination, subjugation and power control to her marriage.

Domestic violence for Zaitoon begins on the very next day after their marriage. Sakhi senses insecurity after having seen Zaitoon's travel in the truck of the army people. He viewed them contemptuously, "Hawk-eyed, he followed each movement with growing feelings of humiliation and jealousy. Hatred and fury burned within him"(PB148). This hatred turns him into a tyrannical person, and treats her cruelly and punishes her for trivial matters.

Men are conscious of their superiority over women. Sakhi's brother Yunus Khan, insults him for not having control over his wife. Sakhi becomes savage and his cruelty is observed when he hits the ox until it collapses. Sakhi maintains his patriarchal superiority over women when he hits his mother shouting, "I'll teach you meddling woman. You think you can make a fool of me? Do you?"(PB172).

The most prevalent form of violence done to women is wife-beating. Man shows his superiority and tames his wife through this opportunity. When Zaitoon prevents him from beating his mother, he beats her and threatens her:"You are my woman! I'll teach you to obey me"(PB173).Sakhi exposes his possessiveness over his women when he stresses that his wife and mother are 'his' and are also 'women' who are inferior to men. The honour of a tribal man is judged by how he can exercise his superiority over women and also by the means of oppressing them. Zaitoon undergoes violence physically, sexually and also verbally.

Unable to overcome the atrocities committed by her husband, she decides to run away, knowing that "in flight lay her only hope of survival"(PB186). As a woman, Zaitoon who was "meek, docile and humble" becomes "bold, challenging and conscious" (Harru, 75). Her self-discovery has made her to come out of her passive condition and she refuses to be a victim in the tribal region. Zaitoon struggles to overcome her psychic alienation and physical torture and abuses and moves towards strategies of survival. Sidhwa has exhibited 'escape' as a strategy of survival.

Zaitoon's decision to abscond is forced upon her as she is unable to condone the ill-treatment inflicted on her and has the passion for survival instead of being killed. She ventures into the forest. Through the escape of Zaitoon, Sidhwa emphasizes the eternal adventure of man into the unknown and his struggle for survival against Nature's cruelty. Indira Bhatt opines, "Zaitoon's struggle is at one level a struggle of man against Nature but it is also at another level the struggle of a woman against both man and nature"(155).When Sakhi learns that his wife has run away, he feels that he has brought disgrace to the tribal people. Simone de Beauvoir states, "The tribals see the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests"(24). Sakhi, along with his clansmen sets out to hunt and kill Zaitoon as a punishment for such an act is death and they also considered the escape of a woman to be immoral. The reaction of the tribes is well depicted by Sidhwa as, "The threatening disgrace hung like an acrid smell around them. It would poison their existence unless they found the girl"(PB190).

Women, not only experience brutal violence at home, but also undergo the same outside home. Her life is insecure and she faces different atrocities. Sidhwa furnishes such atrocities through the life of Zaitoon in the unfamiliar terrain. Without enough food, bare-foot and ill-clothed, she proceeds through the mountains appalled or terrified of being killed. Everyday, she encounters danger. On the eighth day, a vulture attacks her and she escapes from it. Every slightest movement "squeezes the breath from her lungs"(PB207). Pain and agony are her companions along with courage. She also encounters a leopard which is hunted down by a tribesman. On being contented of having reached the river, she is molested by two tribal brutes. Here, she becomes a victim for the lust of men and undergoes sexual violence. A woman's protest to survive is misused by some men. Beyond all difficulties, and having lost her physical strength, the will to survive forces her to reach the bridge and is rescued by Major Mushtaq. The Major, knowing the tribal people well, understands the condition of Zaitoon, saves her from her husband by making Sakhi believe that his wife is dead. He says, "Your wife is dead. Understand me! You have no option. You have to take my word for it. She is dead ... Your honour will not be sullied"(PB243).The final escape as Cynthia Abrioux perceives it is:

Zaitoon is ultimately protected and saved, which suggests that an awesome, ancient, natural order combined with a young girl's defiant spirit can overcome the oppressive shackles of a conspiracy of men(70).

She becomes a puppet and victim in the hands of men who subjugate her, abuse her and even try to kill her, but it is her escape which lead to her survival. Zaitoon's escape creates an inner maturity in women which culminates in the realization that a woman cannot depend on anybody but herself.

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