

March-2022

E-ISSN : 2348-7143

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH FELLOWS ASSOCIATION'S
RESEARCH JOURNEY

International E-Research Journal
Peer Reviewed, Referred & Indexed Journal

Issue -290

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The Phenomenon of Honour Killing and Honour-Based Violence: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride

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Abstract—

Honour killing have been considered as a cultural phenomenon practiced by most of the countries throughout the world. This crime rate in India and Pakistan is more than thousands per year. There are various reasons why family members tend to kill their daughter and son in the name of preserving and managing their family honour. The fact that patriarchal society continues to be at its stiff and the people from the rural areas refuse to change their bad notion. The basic objective of this study is to focus on 'honour killing' and honour-based violence perpetrated against women in patriarchal societies, and also attempt to study the role of literature in tackling such sensitive issues with special reference to Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride.

Keywords— Culture, Patriarchy, Marriage, Family Honour, Honour Killing.

The phenomenon of honour killing and honour-based violence is one of the extreme forms of violence mostly perpetrated on women where both men and women are equally responsible for the inhuman act. It is a cultural practice that has evolved over many years and is carried out in many countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Israel, Italy, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (UK).² The phenomenon of honour killing and honour-based violence has been rampant and heinous in India and Pakistan. Over the last few years extensive reports have been reported in Newspapers and Television channels all over the globe about the brutal killing of young boys and girls in the name of 'Honour Killings'. The practice of honour killing and (VBA) against the young boys and girls, who supposedly transgress their social and religious norms and who fall in love or tie nuptial bonds, against the wishes of their family has been burning issue in India and Pakistan. The socio-economic dominant castes are usually accountable for these inhuman and illegal activities against inter-caste, intra-caste and inter-class relationships. "In the name of preserving 'social order' and saving the 'honour' of the community, caste or family, all kinds of justifications are asserted into service. (Singh 1). Honour killing is the murder of a member of a family or community by other members of same family or community because the perpetrator is of the view that the victim has brought dishonour to the family or community.

The origin of honour killing and honour-based violence is in ancient desert tribes where a woman was considered the warehouse for her family's and men's honour. In these communities, honour or *Ghairat*, was closely associated with the prestige and nobility of one's in community, or their *izzat*, which is determined by a man's wealth and property. Women, who must be the property of their father, husband, or male family member, were given the significance for their



reproductivity. Men would kill women to hide their shame and publicly show their handcuff to avoid being considered 'socially impotent' and *beghariat* (without honour) by their community.

Honour killing is observed in all over the world in different ways. In Pakistan and India, there are many examples where women who are found guilty of involving in dishonourable activities such as pre and extra-marital sex, marrying out of the clan are killed in full view of the community. In such incidences, offenders are killed in private. In spite of location, the culture that practice honour killings is used as a means of maintaining societal and familial power structures because any assault on men's property is an assault on their honour, which weaken the system of patriarchy. This is supposed destabilization of patriarchal utopian community. Pakistan was declared as an independent nation of Muslim community in 1947, where 97 percent population was of Muslims and only 3 percent included Non-Muslims such as Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. Patriarchy is deep rooted in Pakistani culture and rigid moral code of conduct as well as gender discrimination can be observed there. Family and community honour is closely associated to the virtuous behaviour of female member. In many cultures of the world, the individual is considered as a responsible for the family and the failure of the individual result in the loss of honour of the whole family. Honour killing has been one of the oldest traditional thing since pre-historic period in Pakistan. It is a phenomenon embedded in the structure of community's identity. Baluchistan, the border regions of Sindh, NWFP (North West Frontier Province) and Southern Punjab are the predominantly populated provinces. Honour Killing is identified by varied terms depending on the region in Pakistan in which it is practiced. In Sindh province it is mostly known as *Karo Kari*; *Karo* means the 'blackened' or dishonoured man and *Kari* means the 'blackened' woman. Originally, *Karo* and *Kari* were rhetorical terms for adulterer and adulteress. It is also used in relation to the various crimes which are lined to behaviour of women. Once a woman is considered as a *kari*, family members consider themselves to be allowed to kill her and the co-accused *karo* in order to restore the family honour.

Karo-kari is considered to be a act of killing person for violating moral behaviour. Such violated behaviour may take the form of alleged betrayal in marriage, rejecting to submit voluntarily in arranged marriage, asking for divorce or behaving against tradition, culture as well as religion. It is thought to be destructive of men's and family's honour. In patriarchal societies, women have been trained to follow strict maintenance of an honour code. For preserving women's chastity, women should follow social restrictions and cultural practices such as *Purdah*, the separation of gender level for maintaining family honour.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani novelist, born in Parsee family, in 1938, She lived in Karachi Pakistan then India. She later moved with her family to Lahore and now she lives in USA. She took her basic and degree education in Lahor. She has worked actively as social worker. The married life of Sidhwa has not been successful in a traditional sense because she married twice. Sidhwa was an ardent reader in one of her interviews she says ". I remember reading *Pickwick Papers* five or six times." She is competent in Urdu and English but she is more comfortable in English while expressing her ideas. *The Crow Eaters*, (1978), *The Pakistani Bride*, (1982), *Ice-Candy-Mun*, (1989), *An American Brat*, (1993), *Water* (2006) these are some of her critically acclaimed novels in majority of her novels she deals with the marginalization and subjugation of women in patriarchal society.



The Pakistani Bride by Bapsi Sidhwa a depiction and interrogation into the sociological and cultural practices of Kohistani society in particular and Pakistani society in general. It is representation of brutal treatment of women. The major female characters such as Zaitoon and Carol demarcated within the constricted framework of rules forced by honour-based patriarchal society. The novel is a critique on the patriarchal social system in Pakistan. The present paper is an attempt to describe a sorrowful portrayal of women characters named Zaitoon, Carol and Mariam who fail to attain human rights in society honour-based violence and honour killing run by patriarchal ideology. One of the male characters named Qasim seems to be the victim of honour-based violence. This novel is a poignant tale of Kohistani tribal people of Pakistan.

The story is divided into thirty chapters but it can be understood three sections of women protagonists. The first section deals with the sympathetic and natural descriptions of tribal society in Kohistan of Pakistan. Here we meet Qasim, a very young boy, who is forced to get marry and is being given weapon by his father. In the second section, we see the Qasim's struggle to get work and livelihood. He is caught up partition riot and finds a little girl whom he adopts and takes care of her after his own dead daughter. He gives promise to his tribesman and arranges her marriage without thinking and taking prior consent of her. She does not dare to deny agrees to get marry Qasim and suffers lot in her marriage with Sakhi. Her husband exploits her and at the end she decides to run away from home in order to escape from the agonies of married life.

Sidhwa Communicates the prevalent situation of women in Kohistani patriarchal society. Women are compelled to follow rigid rules assigned by their husband, brother, father and male member of family. Zaitoon is a orphan girl, who has lost parents in inhuman slaughter of partition riots. She is adopted by Qasim, who looks after her in proper manner but he, being the victim of honour and moral code of male dominated society, he rejects fundamental and natural rule of having equal of to get educational opportunity. It has been normalized that education is not going to do anything in her life as –

“What will she do with more reading and writing

She's not going to become a baboo or an officer! No Allah willing,

She will get married and have children” (The Pakistani Bride p.52)

These lines show the traditional psychological violence perpetrated on women by male chauvinistic society. Education is considered as unnecessary thing for women because going outside is unsafe for Zaitoon. If a girl gossips with other man, it is crime for her because that affects men's and family's honour.

As a guardian, Qasim takes the decision of Zaitoon's marriage tribesman whose name is Sakhi. While taking important decision on her life she is not to take active participation. There are many Zaitoons in the patriarchal culture who are denied the right to express in family and society. Qasim assures to tribesman that Zaitoon will never disobey him. Though Mariam makes him aware about the savageness of tribesman, he is firm on his decision because he cannot take back his word.

‘Sister, I gave him my word’ Qasim spoke gently.

‘Your word! Your word! Your word! What has your word to do with the child's life? Tell me!’ (The Pakistani Bride p.93)

‘Is it because that Pathan offered you five hundred rupees – some measy maize and a few goats? Is that why you are selling her like greedy merchant?’ (The Pakistani Bride p.94)



Here Qasim doing business of his daughter for the mere cause of paying back the debt. This makes us remember the mythical character Daupadi a consort of Pandava. In the game dice at Hastinapur where Yudhishthira loses his wife. This may seem exaggerated comparison between Zaitoon and Daupadi but this is the the brutal reality of patriarchal world where woman seems to be an object. The concepts of being honoured and dishonoured are very striking and shocking.

And said shyly, 'I cannot cross my father.' (The Pakistani Bride, p98). This sentence of Zaitoon makes it clear to us as a reader that she cannot dare to deny her father's decision though she is not interested in marrying a tribesman. Only thing she has been taught by that honour-based culture of patriarchal society is that 'she should not be dishonest to her father.'

'You'll see how different it is from the plains.

We are not bound hard and foot by
government clerks and police.

We live by our own rules – calling our own destiny!

We are free as the air you breathe!' (The Pakistani Bride, p100)

Above statement is the evidence of betrayal of tribesmen against rules, law, courts and government. These people live with their savage rules which are cruel for women. Zaitoon, a innocent girl fails to understand the real meaning of statement and she faces married life with an uncivilised man. When Zaitoon reaches to the place of her husband, she encounters with the uncivilised life of tribesmen. Zaitoon realizes that she cannot adapt and survive with tribesman because they live dirty life, they eat maize bread.

She tells Qasim: 'abba, take me to the plains when you go. Please don't leave me here. Take me with you.'

'Hush, Munni, be quiet,' he said gently holding her close.

'Abba,' she sobbed, 'I don't want to marry, look how poorly they live; how they eat!.....'The girl clung to him desperately, digging her fingers into his shirt, her legs grasping him in a vice 'Abba,' she begged in a fierce whisper, take me back. I will look after you always. How will you manage without me – and the foods? If I must marry, marry me someone from the plains. That jawan at the camp, Abba, I think he likes me. I will die rather than live here. Qasim was furious to this He was shocked by her brazen choice of words' (The Pakistani Bride, p157)

Above statement makes it clear that though Qasim loves his daughter and somewhere he is aware about her future but as a member of community, he does not dare to take right decision about her life. Zaitoon continuously begs for changing his decision of her marry with that savage man. Here, we come to know about the helplessness of father because he cannot violate the rules of male dominated society and if he thinks to do so, then the violation of societal rule will bring dishonour to him which may ultimately bring expulsion from society. In the above extract we find Zaitoon expressing her choice in marriage decision and to this we find a very fierce reply of her father Qasim. Women have no right to select life partner in patriarchal society, if woman selects her partner on her own then this will bring dishonour for men and society. Here, Zaitoon is the example that women are found helpless and completely dependant of men.

'Now understand this.....I've given my word.

Your marriage is to be a week from today.

I've given my word. On it depends my honour.

It is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it ,
I will kill you with my bare hands." (The Pakistani Bride, p158)

This is the dialogue where honour killing begins. Zaitoon is being threatened that she will be killed for the bringing dishonour by denying marriage. Qasim loves his daughter but honour is more important for him. At the end Zaitoon runs away from her husband. Sakhi is not concerned about the safety of Zaitoon instead he thinks about honour. He also threatens her that 'You are my woman; I will teach you to obey me!' She is just a slave for him. Zaitoon is raped in the forest by two tribesmen, this shows that woman is treated as inanimate creature who is used to fulfil the sexual appetite of man. Readers are forced to think about the future of Zaitoon when she leaves house.

Bapsi Sidhwa has dealt with the subject of honour killing in an indirect way. She has given detail description of psychological and physical oppression and marginalization. The issue of honour-based violence and honour killing can be sorted out, if the scholars in political, social and psychological field come forward and dare to write in their respective fields. Honour killing is undoubtedly a barbaric and shameful act, which is the reminiscent of feudal society. In this way Sidhwa focuses on the honour-based violence and oppression of women in the cultural dominance of male dominated society.

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