

An Evaluation of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

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Abstract

The Pakistani Bride (1982), the second novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, is an interesting novel showing tremendous story telling capabilities of the novelist. The story of the novel is thematically based on the real story of a tribal girl about which Bapsi Sidhwa has heard about during her honeymoon to the Karakoran Highway. Sidhwa highlights the cultural inter relations of Hindu and Muslim communities starting ironically that both communities have shared their culture living together years and years in the novel. Sidhwa is deeply concerned at the exploitation of women and therefore highlights the exploitation of women her novels.

Key Words: Bapsi Sidhwa, Exploitation, Women, Communal violence, Partition

The Pakistani Bride (1982), the second novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, is an interesting novel showing tremendous story telling capabilities of the novelist. It is primarily the story of an orphan girl, Zaitoon, who lost her family in the communal violence, erupted during the partition of India she is brought up in Lahore by Qasim, a Pathan, who decides to migrate from his mountainous village to the plain of Pakistan after the small pox and typhoid takes his entire family. Traveling alone from the isolated mountain village where he was born, the tribal man takes the orphan girl for his daughter and brings her to the glittering city of Lahore. Amidst the pungent bazars and crowded streets, he makes his fortune and a home for the two of them.

After some years, Qasim becomes home sick about his life in the mountain and his fifteen year old daughter envisions a romantic landscape, filled with tall man who roams the mountain like gods. Impulsively the man promises his daughter in marriage

to a man of his tribe. To please Qasim, whom she believes, is her real father, Zaitoon agrees to marry a Pathani relative, Sakhi. She proceeds into the arranged marriage excited by the shopping, attention, and presents and romanticizing her imminent adulthood and the machismo of her intended. Despite her unrealistically romantic notions, it becomes evident that her capriciousness and the sadistic jealousy of her husband do not mesh, and after a humiliation and hurtful skirmish with him, she understands that she is in mortal peril and determines to run away.

The story of the novel is thematically based on the real story of a tribal girl about which Bapsi Sidhwa has heard about during her honeymoon to the Karakoran Highway. Sidhwa explains the reality in her interview and says:

“When I went on my honeymoon to the Karakoran Highway, I heard this story of this little girl from the Punjab, who was taken across the Indus River

into the unadministrated territory. I was living in a little remote army camp at the time and they told me the story of how, after sheds been taken their, she had run away, And I realized in that area, she was obviously brought: and a runaway brides who is bought and she runs away is like stealing the villagers chased her and killed her at the Indus”.

The novelist reflects the situation when Qasim, aged about ten years, is married to Afshan. The father of Qasim, a sturdy middle-aged tribesman, was delighted when Reshma Khan promised to marry his daughter to his son. His three older sons were already married and not it was Qasim’s turn. Like other bridegrooms, Afshan is also thrilled to imagine to first meeting with her husband at her first night. Sidhwa explains this delicate situation in lively manner:

“The drowsy boy was pushed by into the bridal chamber amidst a clamor of cat calls. He heard the bolt shot from outside and was on his own, suddenly terrified. For a while he stood backed up against the door, his eyes awkwardness over the dimly lit room: then they focused on the stooped and veiled form of his bride. She sat on a brightly colored quilt spread on a string bed, with her back to him”.

Afsan Knew her husband was locked in the room with her, and her body trembled with anticipation. Overwhelmed by modesty, she bowed her head still further. The edge of her veil almost touched her toes.

The novelist explains:

“By the time she was thirty- four. Qasim and Afshan had lost three children, two to typhoid and Afshan had lost three Children, two to typhoid and one in a fall of a ledge. It did not matter really, because two sons and a daughter survived a fair enough average. Then a fugitive from Soviet Kirgiz visited. He left the next day. And within a month they heard that he had died of small pox”.

Pakistan has come into existences after partition of India. Hindu and Muslim communities here lived together from long-long time and they have accepted and adopted mutually their social and cultural norms. Sidhwa highlights the cultural inter relations of Hindu and Muslim communities starting ironically that both communities have shared their culture living together years and years in the novel. The novelist shows us as to how Qasim and Afshan, like other villagers, despite being a Muslim believed that the smallpox has been erupted due to angers of a “Goddess” (Mata).

“A few days later Qasim returned to find Afshan weeping by their hut.

‘What is it?’

She forced herself to be calm, lest ‘Mata the dreaded Goddess, So easily enraged, do even more harm. ‘Zaitoon is not eating,’ Mata’ has honoured her with a visit.

‘Qasim throat contracted. He loved his daughter, a child with wide,

Tawny eyes, and limb of quicksilver”:

The chapter two of the novel shows us as to how the North Indian plains witnessed the communal riots in 1947 rendering partition

during lakhs and lakhs of people homeless, Sidhwa shares her personal experiences of partition days and presents the situation by a lively and truthful picture of communal riots, she writes.

“Hysteria mounted when the fertile, hot lands of the Punjab were suddenly ripped into two territories Hindu and Muslim, India and Pakistan. Until the last moment no one was sure how the land would be divided. Lahore, which everyone expected to go to India because so many wealthy Hindus lived in it, went instead to Pakistan. Jullundur, a Sikh stronghold, was allocated to India. Now that it was decided they would leave, the British were in a hurry to wind up.”

Bapsi Sidhwa admits that she has presented her personal experiences in the novel. She narrates in her own interview about her experiences of riot as well as the changes Pakistan met since that time in the following words: ‘I was about eight years old then and my awareness during that period was the chant of the mobs. I could not hear what they were saying, but it was a threatening sound and I know they were burning places and killing people. Our neighborhood totally changed, our Hindu neighbors went away. Although I have written about the color of Pakistan changed later, at that time of course I was not aware of what happened because I was very young. As I got older, In the 1960s, I Could go to college wearing a dress on my bicycle but after that time the counting got more stern, Women are being restricted more and more.’

The heart- rendering situation of 1970;s communal riots and cruelty of crazy mobs engaged in the riots has been incorporated in the chapter two of the novel in the following words of a Sikh Mona Singh:

“I thought we would stay by our land, by our stock, by our Musalman neighbors. No one can touch us, I thought, the riots will pass us by. But a mob attacked our village- Oh, the screams of the women, I can hear them still.... I have a twenty year old brother, tall and strong as mountain, a match for any five of them. This is what they did: They tied one of his legs to one jeep, the other to another jeep and then they drove the jeeps apart...”

The novel reminds us Khushwant Singh’s *A train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* and shows us as to how riots-affect people left their native places to arrive at their new destination. Muslims at Ludhiana Station boarded train to Pakistan and the panic – stricken families were abandoning their animals and other possessions in an attempt to catch the train, Zohra and Qasim were also among them. The novelist explains the situation:

“The train at Ludhiana Station already swarmed with Muslim who had boarded it at earlier stops, Panic stricken families were abandoning their animals and possessions in an attempt to get on. Zohra glanced back at their mound or luggage now scattered and indistinguishable among the mounting litter of tin trunks and bundles. Their goats had already run

off. She pressed closer to Sikander, roughly yanking Munni by the hand.”

The news of brave act of Nikka and defeat of the extortionist spread like a fire in dry leaves. Qasim also felt a new admiration for his friend.

Sidhwa is deeply concerned at the exploitation of women and therefore highlights the exploitation of women her novels. She highlights exploitation of

women working as a prostitute or dancing girl.

Summary:

The sum up, *The Pakistani Bride* is a fast moving and interesting novel. It shows Sidhwa’s genius and also her rare sense of fun that is irresistible. The novel has been widely appreciated for dramatic presentation of marriage, loyalty, honour and their conflict with old ways in this well –told tale.

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