Chapter III

Barbarism in Cultured Soil: The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy in *The Pakistani Bride*

Sakhi quickly secured the cord of his shalwar round his waste, glowering with thunderous hatred. Zaitoon flinched. He aimed a swift kick between her legs, and she fell back. Sakhi kicked her again and pain stabbed through her. She heard herself screaming.

At last he lifted her inert body across his shoulders and carried her home.

That night Zaitoon resolved to run away. Her sleepless eyes bright with shock, her body racked by pain, she knew that in flight lay her only hope of survival.

. . . *(PB 186)*

The brutality of Sakhi, the Kohistani husband, against his wife from the plain, Zaitoon, in the novel *The Pakistani Bride*, is microcosm of the rampant violence against women in the mountainous region of Pakistan, where beating, beheading, strangling and shooting of womankind is highly common. *The Pakistan Bride* is the strong exploration of feminism, and a potent voice against the male subjugation of woman in the name of culture, creed and religion in the tribal society of Kohistan where woman is treated merely as property, having no individuality of her own, but an instrument of sexual gratification. In *Gynocritical Perspective on Bapsi Sidhwa’s the Pakistani Bride*, Sunita Jakhar aptly writes: “A woman’s existence is discerned in accordance to the service she can render to a man. A pathetic phase of women’s marginalisation begins with marriage. A marriage is visualised as a medium to gratify sexual pleasures to a man.” *(72)* In *Women, Identity and Dislocation in The Bride*, Furrukh Khan remarks: “*The Bride* is a damning indictment of the Kohistani community in particular
and the Pakistani society in general with regards to its brutal treatment of women. The women are marginalized and have, in a number of cases, no say in decision-making processes or actions which may ultimately seal their fates.” (142)

The atrocities and violence against women have been occurring since the time immemorial in South Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India which have drawn the attention of the worldwide authors who have given voice to the saga of their struggle for survival against their male counterpart. The novel by Sidhwa is a perusal of male domination and endless brutality being committed against womankind in the rural mountainous regions of Pakistan. The decision taken by the protagonist Zaitoon to squash the tyranny, cruelty and domination of her husband Sakhi, and her resolve to leave him once and for all as an ultimate way of her survival reflects the indomitable courage and strong will of womankind in fighting for survival.

While The Pakistani Bride was the first novel that Sidhwa wrote, it was the second to be published as The Bride after The Crow Eater. The novel is a very poignant and fascinating work of art “. . . a scathing indictment of a patriarchal society that not only fails to protect women, but also preys on them.” (Thakur 293) The Pakistani Bride describes a pronounced idealism, a philosophical attitude which shows the supremacy of the human spirit over physical and material hindrances. It is a story of courage and audacity which is superbly chronicled. The novel is exclusively showcases women’s gusto for life, their resilience and invincible courage. In Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Pakistani Bride, Dipika Sahai remarks:

The Pakistani Bride is a women’s lyric cry in prose against the existential fate and societal abuse. Sidhwa has fashioned complex metaphors to orchestrate the multiple agonies of a woman, a successful portrayal of pain and suffering
in the character of Zaitoon. She has written dramatically of a particular culture, marriage, loyalty, honour and their conflict with old ways. (85)

_The Pakistani Bride_ is a highly renowned novel which deals largely with the pathetic state of women, and partly with the partition of India and its crisis. The novel provides its readers a peep into the barbarous world of Kohistani people where men treat themselves instinctively superior and authoritative to women. Here, women are not treated as human beings, but as sexual objects and commodities that are meant to be governed. In _The Dilemmas of the Colonized Women_, Shivani Thakur throws rightly remarks: “For the men . . . a sharp line is drawn between the women of their own family and the women on the outside. Women who are relatives are protected, guarded and kept secluded from public life and from men who not family. Women, who are not relatives, are viewed with lust. In both cases, women are treated as objects. (294) _The Pakistani Bride_ is a story of womankind in general. The woman characters in the novel—Zaitoon, Carol, Afshan, Shahnaz, Hamida and are all representative of their kind, victimized by the members of the patriarchal society. It is a feminist novel that shows way to women by the courageous struggle of Zaitoon, for their emancipation from the male barbarity and maltreatment. In _The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa_, Makarand R. Paranjape writes: “At the heart of this novel is the struggle of an orphaned girl for survival in the brutal and primitive tribal society in the mountains of Pakistan.” (89) Though Zaitoon is illiterate, she epitomizes the woman of today who are ready to take on the world. She is not a persona but a metaphor, the symbol of courage. Her attitude to subvert tyranny subjugation in every form lends voice to the myriad women around her. Through Zaitoon, the author gives voice to the women living in the periphery of their society.

In _The Fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa and Taslima Nasrin_, Sunita Sinha appraises the situation aptly, “. . . an exclusive paean to women’s zest for life, their adaptability and indomita-
ble courage.’’ (200) The novel owes its genesis to a trip undertaken by Sidhwa to the Karakoram Range where she was told this gruesome story of a young Pakistani girl who had dared to run away from an intolerable marriage, and had been killed in the mountainous region of Karakoram by her tribal husband. He brutally murdered her to keep his honour intact when she tried to escape ill-treatment of her husband who was a man of barbaric; law abided brutal tribal society of the mountains. The running away of the woman for this tribal society was an unbearable insult to the respect of the husband and his family that it caused them to hunt and murder her. In Why do I Write, Sidhwa says:

The girl’s story haunted me: it reflected the helpless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but in the Indian sub-continent. Telling it became an obsession, I thought I’d write a short story after all it had barely taken thirty minutes to narrate. Before long, I realized I was writing a novel it became The Pakistani Bride or The Bride as it was titled in India.’’ (104)

Women in the novel are seen being treated as objects under the power of men. Men’s power over women in this male dominated society is shown through the socio-cultural power of the fathers and the husbands, but also more violently through the physical power of men in general. The culture that boasts its superiority over the others, certainly betrays itself as by doing that it assumes the form of an isolated culture. In Society and Culture, S.R. Maheswary writes:

Societies which attempt to freeze their cultural traditions as absolute and final become atrophied in the sense that they are unable to recognize their immediate contemporary conflicts and problems. Adaptation of such a course seems convenient to those sections of society which need to contain, mask or conceal the prevailing conflicts, tensions and dilemmas. (6)
There is also a focus in this novel on the more diffuse power of the culture and traditions of the society in which the characters live, and how the requirements and expectations of the society limit and direct how women should lead their lives. Men’s control of women’s lives implies male control of female bodies. As a contrast to the objectification of women in society and also to some degree in the family, Sidhwa brings tales from the women’s private lives in the women’s quarters, where they are free to talk and act like they want to be, together with their female friends and relatives. Sidhwa shows the contrast between the outside, ‘male’, world and the inside, ‘female’ world, and she lets the women speak of their private thoughts and feelings. Female sexuality is also focused on, something which is quite uncommon in a Pakistani novel.

When Sidhwa started writing in the 1970s, the feminist novel in the United States and Britain had developed, strengthened and transformed through several centuries. Quite contrary to this, feminist novels had not been written in Pakistan. This meant that Sidhwa was quite alone in her literary landscape. The lack of a feminist literary tradition to build on meant that inspiration and feminist literary belonging had to be found elsewhere. Sidhwa, thus, writes combining elements from Anglo-American novels written in the last two hundred years.

The novel reveals the barbaric, cruel and biased treatment of patriarchy towards the womankind in the Pathan society. The cyclic move of the novel begins from Kohistan, and from Kohistan to Jullundur, Jullundur to Lahore and then Lahore to Kohistan. The story opens when Qasim was merely a boy of ten, summoned by his father who informs him: “Son you are to be married!” (PB 7) The novelist here illustrates what significance marriage has in this uncivilized society of mountains where an adolescent is married. Sidhwa explores the evils of child-marriage rampant in mountainous region of Pakistan where a boy or girl is considered marriageable as soon as he/she reaches his/her puberty. In cases of adolescent girls,
they are married off as a settlement of debts, as in the novel, Arbab agrees for the marriage of
his son Qasim with Afshan, the daughter of Resham Khan. It was an offer made to pay off a
loan which Resham Khan had taken from Arbab, a year ago, and he was unable to repay it.
Ridiculously, the girl was offered to marry with whosoever in the offered family, whether it
is the son or the father himself: “Resham Khan has promised us his daughter!” (PB 7)
Qasim’s father ponders over the offer for himself, but, because of his affection for Qasim,
decides in favour of him to be married with the girl, Afshan. Here, Sidhwa exposes the evil
prevalent in the society where woman is treated as a commodity used as an exchange of the
loan. In The Dilemmas of the Colonialized Women, Shivani Thakur writes:

In the patriarchal society of Pakistan, marriage is seen as a transaction be-
tween two families . . . The tribals do not practice dowry. In the tribal hills, a
wife is bought with bride-price. It is more difficult to find a wife in the moun-
tains due to hard living conditions and a high mortality rate. The bride is thus
bought like a commodity. (294)

Consent or dissent of a woman in mountainous society regarding her marriage matters
not, it is cipher and null. While Afshan’s marriage took place with Qasim: “. . . Thrice she
was asked if she would accept Qasim, the son of Arbab, as her husband and thrice an old aunt
murmured ‘yes’ on her behalf. Then the mountains reverberated with joyful huzzas, gunfire
and festivity.” (PB 8) Sixteen year old girl Afshan is married to a ten year old boy Qasim
who had imagined wedding a girl to play with her. In Women Identity and Dislocation in the
Bride, Furrukh Khan writes: “Afshan becomes Qasim’s wife without knowing how close she
had been to ending up as his step-mother. The entire matter rested in Qasim’s father’s hands
and the decision could have gone either way and all without Afshan having any say in the
matter at all.” (142) Afshan is disillusioned as well when she sees a boy before her as her
husband. She is astounded but she does not resign, she gathers her strength to face the realities of her life.

The novelist highlights the fact that mismatched early marriages of girls are done chiefly because of the false notion of honour—to avoid any possibility of being stained due to pre-marital relation. The psyche of such a woman is best illustrated by Sidhwa in Afshan recalling her life just after her marriage. She tells: “I used to wander by streams, she said, or sit on some high place dreaming of my future husband. Gusts of wind enveloped me and I’d imagine the impatient caresses of my lover. My body was young and full of longing. I’d squeeze my breasts to ease their ache . . . she paused mischievously. Instead, I very nearly suckled my husband!” (PB 10) Afshan represents a submissive and yielding woman but she is also a courageous woman who faces the reality of her life. After her disillusionment in her marriage, she does not resign but boldly accepts her destiny and takes on her role as a wife. She performs her household works helping her mother-in-law. At the same time, she assumes the role of a dominant member in her family. She takes care of her husband as if he were her child. At times, she becomes authoritative and rebukes Qasim when he is stubborn. Speaking about the role and place of women in such a society, In Women, Identity and Dislocation in The Bride, Furrukh Khan writes: “The women become “space” on which the “status” of “their” position is marked, they could either be husbands, fathers or brothers. The notions of “honour,” “shame,” and “social position” are all imposed on a woman’s body and actions attain honour and status.”( 145)

Sidhwa shows the status of women in male dominated society. In South Asian countries, the power and authority belong to male only, and women are to observe the dictates and commands of men as women do not enjoy any individuality. Qasim though a minor often
shows patriarchal authoritative trait. His instinctive masculinity is emanated in time and again. He commands Afshan: “I am your husband. How dare you?” ( PB 10 )

The novelist invests sensuality in the story by giving a turn to the relationship of Afshan and Qasim which was so far like that of a caring mother and a son. The investiture of being a ‘real’ husband’ for Qasim came after four years of their marriage while Afshan was bathing in a nearby mountainous stream with upper part of her body was semi-naked, and Qasim was peering her behind a rock, slid into the water. Sidhwa depicts:

With a thrust of his young arm, he gripped her breast. ‘Let me . . . Let me,’ he begged in his cracked young voice. Afshan smacked his arm off. Aghast, she stared at his sheepish face. Again he tried to hold her and again she slapped him hard. Qasim cowered, shielding his face, while Afshan berated him, ‘ . . . you shameless dog, you jackal, you! I’ll teach you to be brazen.’ She wept with embarrassment, lashing out and hitting him wherever she could. Qasim scrambled from the rushing stream. He stumbled. Afshan fell on him with a stick, screaming abuse. ( PB 11 )

The life of the tribal men is governed with the sense of honour, and the any possibility of any stain on honour makes man do or die for revenge. In The Pakistani Bride, Indira Bhatt writes: “No law of the civilized life affect the tribal man. They may kill their women for dishonour caused to them but do not hesitate to rape women if they get such an opportunity . . .” ( 156 ) While Afshan was bathing at the stream, a passer by tribal man from the neighbouring village snickers “leering at her”. It awakens Qasim’s sense of the tribal honour:

Qasim’s fear exploded into loathing at the stranger’s lewd glance. Picking up a large rock he flung it at him straight, and then another. The man bent over and squatted in pain. His teeth glistened ferociously between cracked lips. But be-
fore he could get back his wind, Qasim, holding Afshan’s arm, was skittering away through the winding gullies. (*PB 12*)

Sihwa has touched the varied aspects of the life of the Kohistani people. She draws her readers’ attention towards high mortality rate of child death in this area where no basic medical facilities are available. Of six children of Qasim, only three survived. The novelist describes the harsh reality of Pakistan as a country that is defamed for high death rate of children. Every year, numerous infants meet their untimely death because of various diseases in such areas like Kohistan. She depicts about the epidemic as well which nearly devastated the whole race of the people in the mountains. While Qasim was thirty four, his family suffered from a fatal attack of epidemic in the form of small pox. His remaining two sons and a daughter Zaitoon, who was very close to his heart, all die. After some days, his wife Afshan too dies of the same disease living Qasim all alone in the family. Sihwa draws the attention of the world towards the South Asian countries where medical facilities are at the worst, ordinary diseases like typhoid and diarrhoea have no proper treatment available in these regions, and epidemics like small pox and others take a heavy toll of life every year.

Migration is one of the chief issues raised by Sihwa in almost all of her novels. She depicts the hard life of the people who live in mountainous region in Pakistan. The people lead here a very hard life, and “Survival being the sole aim of life in those uncompromising mountains, they asked for no more.” (*PB 12*) Qasim, the man of mountains, migrates to the plains in search of his livelihood and gets a job of watchman in an English bank in Jullundur. Qasim, the migrated man from mountains is made adapt to the life of the city merely for the sake of earning his living for his survival.

Sihwa deals with the traumatic event of India’s partition in *The Pakistani Bride*, but fragmentarily. She depicts the widespread violence that took a heavy toll of life from each
side of two major communities of the region-Hindus and Muslims. In the riots between Hindus and Muslims, millions of people were brutality murdered and nearly the same numbers were completely destitute. People were forced to leave their houses and go to safer places where their communities were in majority. In the summer of 1947, there was complete chaos in North India. Communal riots and violence were frequent in this region of the country which made people of the minority group flee to safer places for their safety and survival. Amidst the atmosphere of insecurity: “One by one the hill-country tribesmen fled Jullundur.” (PB 14) Qasim was in a dilemma whether he should go back to his home in the lap of mountains or somewhere else. In anticipation of the possible pressure of his remarriage by his kin there, Qasim decided against it. In the mass migration of Muslims from the Indian part of Punjab, Qasim opted to migrate to Lahore to restart his life.

Sidhwa like several other authors who have written over India’s Partition opines that the way India was hurriedly divided by the English, and allocation of Lahore to Pakistan, a Hindu majority city caused the biggest chaos and mayhem and became the root cause of large number of communal violence and holocaust. It was a daunting task for Cyril Radcliffe who has no proper idea and information about the geography of India where vast area of land was unmarked. In Remembering Partition, Gyanendra Pandey writes: “The boundaries between the two new states were not officially known until two days after they had formally become independent” (2). Sidhwa opines: “The earth is not easy to carve up. India required a deft and sensitive surgeon, but the British, steeped in domestic pre-occupation, hastily and carelessly butchered it . . .” (PB 14)

Sidhwa depicts about how, during the upheaval of partition, the trains were ambushed and attacked by the rioters and the passengers were slaughtered by the communal frenzied mob. Those who were fortunate enough survived and unfortunate ones fell prey to the fury of
the mob. Sikandar and Zohra with their daughter Munni were travelling on the roof of the train towards their new destination to Pakistan when Sikhs attack the train and kill a large number of innocent people including Sikandar and Zohra as well. Their daughter Munni escapes who is taken to Lahore by Qasim boarded in the same train. Qasim names Munni as Zaitoon and becomes her foster father. Sidhwa here draws her readers’ attention towards a highly applauding face of humanity. It was a time when everyone was thirsty of everyone’s blood, humanity survived through such benevolent works as that of Qasim’s. As a keen observer of what was happening around her, Sidhwa vividly throws light on the widespread hustle and bustle and fire of communal violence in various parts of India and Pakistan:

Towns were automatically divided into communal sections. Hindu, Sikh, each rushed headlong for the locality representing his faith, to seek the dubious safety of strength in numbers. Isolated homes were ransacked and burnt. The sky glowed at night from the fires. It was as though the earth had become the sun, spreading its rays upward. Dismembered bodies of men, women and children, lay strewn on roads. Leaving everything behind people ran from their village into towns. (PB 23)

Sidhwa highlights the suffering, pain and agony people had to endure while leaving their homes and during their journey to their new land. The dislocation from the land of one’s motherland to a new ‘motherland’ became cause of a great deal of physical, mental and psychological trauma for them. In Women, Identity and Dislocation, Furrukh Khan opines that it “wrecked and transformed personal lives of “common” people in such calamitous ways that they could never be their same selves again.” (141)

Sidhwa shows how conscious and intolerant the mountainous people are who cannot bear even the query about their female members of the family in the name of honour. Seeing
the dark complexion of Zaitoon, when Nikka, a refugee pehelwan asks Qasim about the girl and her mother, Qasim is offended by it and considers it interference in his personal matters: “You don’t ask a hill-man anything about his womenfolk, understand? I would have slit your throat for less had you not saved me and my child from that tree.” (PB 36) Sidhwa highlights the fanaticism of the Muslim Pathans of Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province who can go to any extreme in the name of honour. It reveals the gender segregation prevailed in the Muslim society, and also brings forth the fact how Muslim women are made live in isolation.

Qasim and Nikka shift to adjoining rooms on the second floor of a tenement in Qila Gujjar Singh. Nikka’s childless wife Miriam treats Zaitoon as her daughter; in fact, she gradually assumes the role of the foster mother. The second part of Zaitoon’s life begins under the careful nurturing of Miriam. The horrifying night, when her parents were brutally assassinated, was totally obliterated from her reminiscence. She earns basic education, but under the influence of Miriam, Zaitoon is withdrawn from going to school. Miriam thinks that “... she’ll be safe only at her mother-in-law’s... A girl is never too young to marry...” (PB 53) Sidhwa highlights the fact about the limited access of girls’ education in Pakistan where they are provided little formal education. Irony of the fact is that, in most of the cases, it is not a man but woman who plays an active part in creating hurdle in depriving the girl the benefits of education. In ‘Women Subjugation: A Suppressed Survival Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Pakistani Bride’ Sadaf Fareed writes: “... women are subjugated not only at the hands of men but they also prove a helping hand in suppressing other female members of the society.” (255)

Miriam as a foster mother makes Zaitoon aware with various womanly traits, virtues and household chores. While Zaitoon reaches the time of her menstruation, it is Miriam who
guides her maternally: “We all bleed. It’s to do with having babies and being a woman . . . of course you won’t have babies–not till you’re married–but you’re growing up . . . Zaitoon was too distracted by her garbled talk to understand anything.” (PB 54) Zaitoon gets opportunity to peep into the world of womanhood when Miriam takes her to the neighbourhood: “Entering their dwellings was like stepping into gigantic wombs; the fecund, fetid world of mothers and babies.” (PB 55) Sidhwa portrays realistically the pathetic condition of living of women and children in such areas:

Smells of urine, stale food and cooking hung in the unventilated air, churning slowly, room to room, permeating wood, brick and mortar. Generations of babies had wet mattresses, sofas and rugs, spilled milk sherbets and food, and wiped hands on ragged curtains; and, just in case the smells should fade, armies of new-born infants went on arriving to ensure the odours were perpetuated. (PB 56)

Sidhwa reveals how a girl’s life changes rapidly and radically while she reaches her puberty. Restrictions confine her under the four walls of house, belittling her freedom and individuality. As a kid, Zaitoon was allowed, without any apprehension, to play hide and seek with the children, and enjoy the kite flying in the spring with young men and boys. No sooner did she reach the menstruation than she was deprived of her schooling. Miriam instructs Zaitoon: “You are now a woman. Don’t play with boys–and don’t allow any man to touch you . . .” (PB 55) The practice of this sort of discrimination against women in Muslim society is very common. Sidhwa also mentions about woman and girl who are abused in. Zaitoon overhears a woman who was talking about an unmarried girl of ten being impregnated. It shows how even adolescent children are sexually abused in the Pakistani society. Sidhwa’s profound concern against such a malady is apparent here. She exposes the dualistic attitude of patriar-
ch thy towards the women. Men in the Muslim society never wish to see their women and girls in public places without wearing a burkha to shield them from the covetous glance of other people. Sidhwa satirizes the folly of this imposed restriction on women where woman has to cover herself from top to toe–forcefully against their will: “After the wedding the burkhas, which hid a multitude of sins, allowed the woman to revert to their usual sloppy style of dress. With no men to show off to or compete for, complacent about their husbands’ sexual attentions, they visited one another in their house clothes; none too clean and perhaps torn under the arms.” (PB 89)

Sidhwa satirizes the fake moral principles of the Muslim community where man is free to lead a wanton life, whereas woman is kept an eye on in the name of protecting ‘hon-our’. Nikka and Qasim visit to dancing girl to slake their sexual urge:

The suave Pakistani held out a ten rupee note as a more tangible sign of his appreciation. The girl stood up and without discontinuing her song, collected the money. The American held a note between his teeth and kissed Shahnaz’s fingers as she plucked it. Qasim stuck a note on his turban and blushed un-bearable when Nikka shouted, ‘Tweak his hair! Pinch his cheeks!’ (PB 74)

Shahnaz, a dancing girl, represents the dark side of women’s life. She is merely a show-piece and an object to be used as an entertainment for men. Her dance is erotic and her ways are sensual that is the source of pleasure for men folks, merely a sex object and nothing else. Shahnaz’s dancing profession is a symbol of struggle for survival. Sidhwa divulges the double standard prevailed in male dominated Pakistani society. Women’s segregation and their intentional seclusion through burkha i.e. a veil can aptly be recognized by the lyric that Shahnaz sings:

Oh, let me stay in purdah – don’t lift my veil.
If my purdah is removed... my mystery is betrayed.

Allah... forbid! Allah... forbid!

My veil has ten thousand eyes.

- Yet you cannot see into mine.

But if you raise my veil even a bit –

Beware! You’ll burn.

So... let me stay in purdah – – don’t lift my veil.

Allah – meri Toba! Allah – meri Toba!

Oh God – who can have made me? –

Whoever it is – even he doesn’t know me...

Man worships me – Angels have bowed their heads...

If my purdah is removed... my mystery is betrayed.

Allah... forbid! Allah... forbid!

Allah... forbid! Allah... forbid! (PB 73)

Sidhwa highlights the issue of marriage in The Pakistani Bride. In South Asian society, the primary and utmost concern of parents is their girls’ marriage. As soon as a girl reaches her menstrual period, she attains the so called womanhood in the eyes of her parents. The daughters are married off in observance to age-old traditions. In most of the cases, parents marry the girls early to avert any prospect of stain on the family respect. In the novel The Pa-


kistanti Bride, when Nusrat, the Mullah’s step daughter and Zaitoon’s closest friend, is married, Qasim begins musing on Zaitoon’s marriage since she was then sixteen.

Sidhwa shows that once the patriarchal restraints on women are removed, they set free themselves from the shackles of cultural and traditional bondages set by their man folks. Sidhwa writes: “The absence of men permitted an atmosphere of abandon within the zenanna . . .” (PB 89) The fostered girl of the mountainous man Qasim:

Zaitoon was in constant demand and obliged with energetic dances copied from Punjabi films. Jumping and gyrating, making eyes and winking, shaking her shoulders to set her adolescent breasts atremor, she flaunted her young body with guileless abandoned. The older women gather about her, delighted in her innocent exuberance. Her muslin kurta clinging to her, she collapsed at last amidst the girls, smiling at the whoop of laughing ‘shabashes’ – ‘Well done!’ – and applause . . . (PB 89)

The reminiscence of the bucolic mountains gradually developed a deep yearning in elderly Qasim, and filled him with nostalgia. Zaitoon too feels an urge:

. . . to see what she considered her native land. Her young, romantic imagination flowered into fantasies of a region where men were heroic, proud, and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honour that banned all injustice and evil. These men, tall and light skinned, were gods – free to roam the mountains as their fancies led. There women beautiful as houris, and their bright, rosy-cheeked children, lived beside crystal torrents of melted snow”. (PB 90)

Sidhwa highlights the tribal ways of settling the marriages of their children, and ridicules the way the marriage of a girl is set. When Qasim’s cousin Misri Khan visits him from
the mountains, Qasim makes a commitment of marrying Zaitoon with Sakhi, Misri Khan’s son. Nikka and Miriam dissuade Qasim to marry Zaitoon with a man of mountain as it could be hazardous for her. Miriam knew from her long experience of life about the people from the mountains who are highly rude, violent, barbaric, ruthless, ignorant and obstinate people. Miriam, a rebellious woman for the sake of another woman, lodged a strong protest against the decision. Sidhwa writes: “Then turning to him, she addressed him as boldly as she might a woman in the privacy of her own rooms.” (PB 92) Miriam tried to convince Qasim:

‘Brother Qasim,’ she coaxed, ‘how can a girl, brought up in Lahore, educated – how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different, you don’t how changed you are . . . And as rancour settled on Qasim’s compressed lips, she continued in a rising passion, ‘They are savage. Brutish, uncouth, and ignorant! She will be miserable among them. Don’t you see?’ (PB 93)

Miriam severely charged Qasim of selling his daughter to the men who are entirely an uncivilized race: “Is it because that Pathan offered you five hundred rupees – some measly maize and a few goats? Is that why you are selling her like a greedy merchant? . . .” (PB 94)

Sidhwa exposes the fact that in tribal society of the mountains in Pakistan, women are not considered as complements to men, but they are bought as a commodity. The repercussion of such a marriage is also catastrophic. The woman receives brutal treatment, undergoes torments and suffers terribly in the hands of her husband. Being aware of such possible occurrences, Miriam strives to persuade Zaitoon at the station against her marriage with a tribal boy of Kohistan: ‘You are ours. We’ll marry you to a decent Punjabi who will understand your ways. Tell your father you don’t want to marry a tribal. We’ll help you.’ (PB 97-98) Lost in the realms of fantasy, soaring high up in the vision of the dream land of her fiancé, Zaitoon replied matter-of-factly, ‘I cannot cross my father.’ (PB 98)
The cyclic move of the story reaches to its last but the most crucial phase when elated Qasim returns with Zaitoon to his mountainous land amongst his Kohistani people. En-thralled with his comeback in the lap of nature, excited and exhilarated Qasim fired at the tyre of an army truck. But, before the driver and the jawan, Ashiq Hussain could open fire, Zaitoon rushed towards the jawans apologizing: “It is a mistake . . . forgive us. It’s a mis-take’. She pleaded with them for their forgiveness: ‘Brother, please believe me: I begged my father to allow me to shoot his gun . . . and you happened to pass by. I did not see you, I swear.” (PB 102) The army jawans take them to Dubair at the army camp so as Qasim and Zaitoon can pass their night there for their further journey.

Sidhwa introduces Carol, an American from San Jose California, married to Farukh, a Pakistani Engineer. The juxtaposition of two brides, from two entirely different backgrounds, creed and culture provides an opportunity for a penetrating analysis of the western and eastern women in particular, as well as woman in general. Born in Indianapolis and brought up in San Jose, Carol had been living a life of parties and jazz. She had passion for long drives, and sometimes enjoyed drugs as well. Her parents were scared of her being converted to Islam, but later they agreed since there was no such pressure on her from Farukh. After the marriage, Carol the member of a civilized society of America, shifts to Lahore with her husband Farukh. She is the representative of the modernized West, while Zaitoon, of the conservative East. But, what is significant in the case of Carol and Zaitoon, they step into a world that is entirely different from their culture, Carol willingly in Farukh’s love, and Zaitoon unwilling-ly obeying her father. As long as Farukh had been in America, his approach towards Carol was highly heedful and caring, but, no sooner did she cross the boundaries of country and reaches Pakistan than Farukh camouflaged himself with cultural cover, disclosing the guise of his amiable persona. The disillusionment of Carol came in the form of Farukh’s extreme possessiveness and jealousy:
Why are you sulking? Please tell me . . . I thought we were having such fun.

How do I know what’s bugging you if you don’t tell me?

I’m so ashamed of you! Displaying your honky-tonk pedigree! You laugh too loudly. You touch men . . .

But they’re your friends . . . And what do you mean, touch men! I only . . .

Don’t you know if you only look a man in the eyes it means he can have you?

( PB 108 )

The constant envious and moaning nature of Farukh makes Carol fed up and disgusted with him, and that results in lovelorn Carol’s falling in sexual affair with Major Mushtaq. Carol takes her relationship with Major as a reprisal for Farukh’s suspicious behaviour towards her: “. . . She recalled the Major’s caresses soothing her and his warm, hard embrace. Yes, she had avenged Farukh’s grotesque jealousy–helped its nightmares come true!” ( PB 126 ) The presence of Mushtaq was enough to unleash waves of emotions and passionate yearning in Carol. She was so much besotted with Major that:

Each time Mustaq stood before her Carol was swamped anew by desire, it was as if the struggle with Farukh’s jealousy, combined with the bewildering forces let loose within her in Pakistan, had broken in a storm of feelings centred on Mustaq. A glimpse of him, by chance in the morning along the Mess corridor, or out of her window, left her enfeebled and breathless. ( PB 177 )

In spite of knowing the fact that Mushtaq is a married man, and has four children, Carol insists on him to marry her. She implores him: “God, I’d do anything for you. I would really – wear a burkha if you wanted me to.” ( PB 179 )
Carol’s world of fantasy is shattered when she learns that Mushtaq is merely exploiting her sexually. Mushtaq pleads: “You know I love you, but Farukh is my friend—and there are so many obligations—you have them too, you know . . .” (PB 181) Carol is absolutely astounded by the Major’s betrayal. She realises that she is duped by him, and in a fitful burst of fury, she retorts angrily: “Her furious eyes blazed open. Swinging her hand deliberately, she slapped Mushtaq full in the face . . .” (PB181) In The Early Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, Makarand R. Paranjape writes:

Carol, despite the veneer of sophistication and gentility that surrounds her life, is also oppressed. Farukh is overbearingly possessive of her and is also naggingly jealous. He seems, in this sense, like Sakhi. Of course there are major differences. He never beats her and she decides to have an affair with Mushtaq on her own. Yet, slowly, she begins to realize that the Major values her primarily as a sexual object. (100-01)

Sidhwa reveals how vulnerable womankind is to male exploitation. She exposes male chauvinism and injustice committed to women in patriarchal society of Pakistan. The harsh reality of male dominated society with its fallacy shatters Carol’s notion of Pakistan as a land of romance and adventure. Carol finds herself on the horns of a dilemma. Left with no viable alternative to her present rich and glamorous life with Farukh, she decides not to go back to States:

Her life in Pakistan was rich: it was exciting, and even glamorous. She had taken it too much for granted, and the crisis in her relationship with Farukh made her realise just how much she would miss it all. She had, after all, put some effort into her marriage. She had, adjusted to the climate, the country,
the differences in culture and the people — and had come to love them. It would be a shame to throw it all away. (PB 218)

Betrayed by Mushtaq, Carol envisages to leading a happy life with Farukh, begetting children and making her married life successful. She even imagines herself as a goddess of the tribal world, but her fantasies soon shatter while walking with Farukh down to a sharp bend in the river, she sees a young woman’s head. “Carol faces the realities of woman’s life in the east. . . (Bhatt 159) In her reminiscence come her Pakistan women friends and their culturally compressed world that reveals her the differences between the cultures of east and west:

It was like peering into the secret vaults of a particular lineage or tumbling through a kaleidoscope of images created by the history of a race. A branch of Eve had parted some way in time from hers. There seemed a definite connection in Carol’s mind between all this and the incomprehensible brutality of the tribals. (PB 227)

Carol becomes aware of the normative patriarchy of the Pakistani civilized world: “That girl had unlocked a mystery, affording a telepathic peephole through which Carol had had a glimpse of her condition and the fateful condition of girls like her.” (PB 229) She realizes that “. . . the girl who ran away . . . exercised her “khudi.” (PB 229) In The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality, Bhatt writes: “Sidhwa brings into focus the issue of Pakistani women’s plight through the eyes of an outsider, an American bride of the Pakistani man.” (Bhatt 159)

Sidhwa highlights the fact how financial dependency ultimately leads woman to be constrained and then forces her to yields before patriarchal domination. The recollections of her past days of struggle in America reinforced Carol’s idea of staying at Pakistan. Abandon-
ing her present status of the wife of a wealthy man, she was not prepared to plunge into the life of poverty and scarcity in America. Carol decides to maintain a distance with the Major and restore the warmth of her relation with Farukh:

Her inherent impulsiveness had burgeoned correspondingly . . . She had not understood the strange contradictions and forces in her new life — and often they tore her apart — but she felt she had come a long way to understanding . . . She was up against Farukh’s jealousy of course. She suddenly thought his spate of words and posturings were not as restricting as they appeared. She knew she could handle him with a few adjustments in her thinking and behaviour. (PB 219)

The meeting of the two brides, in the army camp, is a precise portrayal of two widely different cultures, the progressive western and the retrogressive eastern. Carol is surprised at the shyness and innocence of Zaitoon. Out of affection and sympathy, Carol gifted Zaitoon an embroidered chaddar, a piece of chocolate and some oranges: “For an intuitive instant Carol felt herself submerged in the helpless drift of Zaitoon’s life. Free will! She thought contemptuously, recalling heated discussions with her friends on campus. The girl had no more control over her destiny than a caged animal . . . perhaps, neither had she . . .” (PB 136)

Major Mushtaq had been posted in the region for a long time, and he was well acquainted with the fake tribal code of honour, their barbarity towards women: “A wife was a symbol of status, the embodiment of a man’s honour and the focus of his role as a provider. A valuable commodity indeed, and dearly bought . . .” (PB 138) The Major’s attempt to dissuade Qasim against Zaitoon’s marriage with a man of mountain proved futile because of Qasim’s obstinate denial to comply with his request.
Sidhwa has deftly exposed the bitter fact about the patriarchal domination and authority over the matriarchy which sanctions no free will to woman in any sphere of her life, an obvious inferiority of woman in general, man monopolizes. While getting ready to sleep at night in the army camp, Zaitoon asks her father about Carol’s wearing trousers and drinking wine:

‘Abba, her ways are different from ours?’

‘Yes, child,’ replied Qasim perfunctorily, already half asleep.

‘As different as my ways will be from those of your people in the hills?’

‘Hush, Zaitoon. What nonsense you talk.’

‘But, Abba, I am not of the hills. I am not of your tribe. I am not even yours,’ she said quietly. (PB 140)

Captivated by Zaitoon’s austere beauty and feeling an insight liking for her, the army jawan Ashiq, finding an opportunity, approaches Zaitoon and reveals hesitantly his concern and feelings to her: ‘Your father told the Major Sahib that you’re not of the hills. 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. I will tell the Major Sahib that you don’t wish to go. You have nothing to fear, I . . . I will care for you.’ (PB 144)

Man is the supreme authority in relation to woman in South Asian societies, more especially in Pakistan where gender antagonism is all-pervasive. It is a society where men folk are fanatically suspicious and over possessive of their women folk. When Sakhi watches Zaitoon with the army jawan and his father from afar: “His heart started to beat fast. He was immediately filled with resentment at the young jawan’s presence. Not only was the old tribal
accepting a ride from the hated soldiers, but he was allowing the young jawan to walk with the girl – his girl.” (PB 147) Sidhwa makes her readers acquainted with the monopolistic attitude of the Kohistani people who have no regard for woman’s individuality, but woman, for them, is merely an object and show-piece. These are the people who live in a different world of their own. The bridge at Pattan marks the boundaries between the civilized and uncivilized world. In *Women, Identity and Dislocation in The Bride*, Furrukh Khan writes: “The bridge is the symbol of the influence of “outsiders,” which has been built to encroach on the Kohistanies’ separate and unique way of life. The very fact that the bridge is there reveals the chasm which has been in place not only to server link but to maintain the status quo of fervent hostilities between two ways of life on either side of the river/’bridge.” (141) The other side of the bridge is governed by the tribal code which gives women no freedom, and Zaitoon also understands it: ‘I cross this spot and my life changes’ . . .(PB 153)

No sooner did Zaitoon arrive the village than she realized the poverty and harshness of the life of the people there, and the realization, that she has to live amongst them, made her heart heavy: “The frightened girl began to cry, her muffled sobs absorbed by the ancient walls of the cave . . .” (PB 156) Frightened by the moaning voice of jackal and the spooky atmosphere of the village at night, sobbing Zaitoon clings to her father and yells: ‘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! Dirty maize bread and water! My stomach hurts’ (PB 157). In extreme perplexity, Zaitoon beseeches her father: “… If I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains . . .” (PB 157) But Zaitoon’s words fell into Qasim’s deaf ears who, though spent large part of his life in plains with people of different castes and creeds, was inherently a tribal, deeply rooted in his cultural code: ‘Now understand this . . .’ Qasim’s tone was icily incisive. ‘I’ve given my word. Your marriage is to be a week from today. To-
morrow your betrothed goes to invite guests from the neighbouring villages. 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’. (PB 158) Thus, Qasim seals up the fate of his foster daughter for the 
sake of protecting his fake honour which is a frequently used as a crucial patriarchal weapon 
for women’s subjugation. In Cognizance of Veritable Culture and Social Veracity, Dr. Sreeja 
Balakrishnan writes: “Despite her strong protest and solemn qualms about cultural compati-
bility, she is married to Sakhi. She becomes a victim of domestic violence, physical brutality 
and sexual oppression.” (3)

In The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality, Indira Bhatt opines: “The novelist 
has added a dimension to Qasim’s character by revealing this detail. Man’s wish to realize his 
own dreams even by sacrificing his own child’s life to insecurity and hardships of the cruel 
traditions of the tribal men, is fully explored by Sidhwa.” (155)

Notwithstanding with constrained and helpless Zaitoon’s remonstrance, she is mar-
rried off to Sakhi. On the wedding night, Zaitoon, the groom, is surveyed by Sakhi with 
mounting excitement: “Here was a woman all his own, he thought with proprietorial lust and 
pride, a woman with stangely thick lashes and large black eyes that had flashed in one look 
her entire sensuality.” (PB 159-60) But, Sakhi became furious abruptly, remembering the 
scene at Pattan when the army jawan was holding Zaitoon’s hand, and in a sudden surge of 
anger: “He tore the ghoongat from her head and holding her arms in a cruel grip he panted 
inarticulate hatred into her face.” (PB 160) The innate brutality of the tribal genes overpow-
ered Sakhi turning him into a beast: “He tugged at the cord of her shawar and the silk fell to 
her ankles. Before she could raise her trousers Sakhi flung her back. He crouched, lifting her 
legs free of the silk. Freely kicking out, Zaitoon leapt over the charpoy. She screamed.” (PB 
160)
Sidhwa, as a keen observer of the society of her clime and time, exposes the widespread brutality towards womankind. She raises her voice against gross violence and abuse being committed against women in Pakistan, particularly amongst Pathans in mountains. She draws the attention of the world towards the male brutality prevailed in the Pakistani societies. The cruelty, barbarity and misogynistic attitude of Sakhi rattled Zaitoon utterly. The next day, When Qasim was to return, Zaitoon ran out of patience: ‘Abba, I’m coming with you. Abba!’ she cried, breaking the old woman’s hold and running to Qasim. ‘Wait for me!’ (PB 167) But, Qasim had his own priority and selfish ends behind his decision of marrying Zaitoon in the region: “Her marriage to Sakhi would consummate an old, fervent longing. Through their children, she would be one with his blood! . . .” (PB 166) He bids farewell assuring Zaitoon to visit her regularly.

The remark made by Sakhi’s brother Yunus Khan ‘How is your wife from the plains? You know she requires a man to control her . . .’ is epitome of the whole tribal social system, a society where woman is assigned the role of the ‘second’, and her existence is meant to be governed physically and sexually. The contemptuous remarks of Yunus Khan pierced Sakhi’s heart. Infuriated Sakhi toiled for hours in his fields. Later at noon, when his mother, Hamida calls him loudly to chop some wood, engulfed in fury, Sakhi yelled at his mother: ‘Can’t you see I’m working, you old hag!’ (PB 171) Through this instance of abusing his mother by Sakhi, Sidhwa discloses an intrinsic character of a whole barbaric tribal culture where pride and wrath are nurtured from the boyhood. The shear obstinacy and callousness hardens Sakhi as if a rock. It has developed cruelty in him not only for human beings but for animals also. The way he beats an ox to give vent of his anger while uprooting a rock in his field exposes the extreme brutality of the Kohistanies: “Sakhi shouted and fell on the animal, beating it with the heavy stick, which fell pitilessly on a soar on its spine.” (PB 172) He derived demonic contentment when “The beast grunted, lifting its neck in pain.” (PB 172) When his
mother tried to save the beast from his merciless beating, he thrashed his own mother, roaring: ‘I’ll teach you,’ he hissed, ‘I’ll teach you meddling woman. You think you can make a fool of me? Do you?’ (PB 172) The tormentor’s barbarity swings suddenly towards Zaitoon as she tried to rescue the old woman. Sakhi hysterically screams: ‘You are my woman! I’ll teach you to obey me!’ (PB 172-73) The callous disregard of Sakhi towards his mother and Zaitoon exemplifies the gross violence and savagery committed against womankind in this terrain. In The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality, Indira Bhatt writes:

The episode of Sakhi beating the animal almost to death and his mother’s attempt to save the animal, his beating his own mother and even Zaitoon brings into sharp focus the tribal manhood and the barbarious view of honour. The woman, be she a mother or a wife, is savagely ill-treated; it is man against woman; there is no code of respecting the mother or an elderly woman. Man is the master even if he is a child . . . (156)

Zaitoon realises that to escape Sakhi’s brutal bestiality, she has to be servile and docile. She immersed herself in her household jobs: “. . . chaffing, kneading, washing, and tendering the animals and the young green rice-shoots and the sprouting maize. She collected animal droppings and, patting them into neat discs with her hands, plastered them to the hut . . . in her quest for firewood, Zaitoon became familiar with the terrain.” (PB 174) Zaitoon grows accustomed to Sakhi’s inhuman treatment towards her. She used to yield herself before his sexual urge “with an unreasoning passion.” (PB 174) to his great astonishment. It boosted Sakhi’s ego and he arrogantly struts before his brother. But Zaitoon continued to be treated harshly by him. Zaitoon is filled with nostalgia for the time which she had spent in Lahore: “At night she lay awake, her stupor lifting awhile as she indulged her fancies. She longed for Qasim’s love, for Miriam’s companionship, for the protective aura of Nikka’s sta-
tus. In the plains, she had not even been aware of these securities. Now she longingly lived for her promised visit to Lahore...” (PB 174)

Sidhwa draws her readers’ attention towards the difficult life of the Kohistan where trees have been cut mercilessly, turning the entire hills into barren lands. It makes the life of the Kohistani women more demanding who wander in the hills in search of brushwood. Sidhwa shows her keen concern with regards to the rapid devastation of forests by the merchants who have thoughtlessly wiped out nearly all the trees and denuded the entire region of trees.

Sidhwa establishes the fact that one of the most significant reasons of man’s brutality against woman is his ‘male ego’ and desire to assert his superiority over her. Patriarchy always tries to dictate terms of woman’s life in the name of protecting the hollowed honour-honour of man only, since in this tribal society woman has no honour at all. Male chauvinist Sakhi uses severity to tame Zaitoon merely to keep her in his clutches, and to confine her individuality. Sakhi’s savagery and ferocity is again witnessed when Zaitoon, though forbidden by Sakhi, visits to the riverside seeking some solace from the reminiscence of Sakhi’s barbarity. She sees a jeep in her view, and in enthusiasm she waved her hands towards a figure mistaking as the army jawan, Ashiq. Zaitoon is suddenly pelted with stones. Sakhi had caught her waving hands towards the man in the army jeep. This incites Sakhi’s fury, and he assails her brutally beating and abusing: ‘Waving at that shit-eating swine. You wanted him to stop and fuck you, didn’t you!’ (PB 185) His savagery crossed all the limitations. Sakhi’s severity and barbarity towards Zaitoon exposes the double standard of man who demands woman’s utmost obedience to the code of morality, but ironically man disregards such codes of morality set by him. For maintaining the supremacy and superiority over the woman, man uses those nugatory codes of morality for woman’s subjugation, and sometimes uses muscle pow-
er to tame her. Sakhi beats Zaitoon fanatically and mercilessly, and carries her squashed body home lifting across his shoulders.

The torment inflicted on Zaitoon by Sakhi made her resolve to break the shackles once and for all. She understands that the cruelty and inhuman treatment of her husband has no end and, there is only one way of her survival, and that is to run away. The yearning for self identity and self assertion makes her resolve to defy all the patriarchal bondages and cross the man made boundaries of customs, culture and traditions to stamp out her sustained victimization in the hands of Sakhi: “Her sleepless eyes bright with shock, her body racked by pain, she knew that in flight lay her only hope of survival . . .” (PB 186)

Zaitoon waited for two days before setting out in her epic journey. Her runaway represents the disillusionment of one culture from the other–one is civilized and the other is entirely barbarous. Zaitoon’s escape is an ordeal to articulate herself and attain her identity. It is a fight against unjust norms of male dominated society. She begins her expedition with meagre pieces of maize bread and water in a small container.

Sidhwa dexterously exposes the patriarchal attitude of male oriented Kohistani society where a woman’s runaway is not less than obloquy for a man before the whole community. Sakhi feels humiliated to know about Zaitoon’s runaway. In utter indignation he tells: ‘I knew that bitch would run away.’ He had known it, and he had taken no measure to prevent it. He had invited the disgrace that now affected the entire clan. ‘I should have killed her by the river!’ . . . (PB 189) Sidhwa delineates the fact that, in the tribal society, the runaway of a woman is considered disgrace not merely upon the husband but also upon the entire clan and community. The punishment of the escaped woman is taken here as a collective responsibility by the society. Sidhwa portrays vividly it:
One behind the other, they emerged, eyes ablaze in fanatic determination. The crowd of tribals dispersed in a hushed understanding, each to get his own gun and prepare for the hunt. Not a word was said. They identified with the man’s disgrace, taking the burden on themselves. Collectively, they meant to salvage the honour of the clan. The runaway’s only route lay across the river. Once across, she was lost to them for ever. How then would they hold up their heads? The threatening disgrace hung like an acrid smell around them. It would poison their existence unless they found the girl.

There was only one punishment for a runaway wife.

Wordlessly, the men organised their hunt and walked into the twilight-shrouded mountains. *(PB 190)*

Sidhwa brings forth the absolute social reality of the perpetual and continual atrocity against women by male. In *Honour Killings in Pakistan*, Neshay Najam writes:

> In the tribal setting an honour killing is not a crime but a legitimate action, seen as the appropriate punishment for those who contravene the honour code. The man who kills for reasons of honour becomes ghairatman (possessing honour) and is morally and legally supported by his kinsmen. A man's ability to protect his honour is judged by his family and his neighbours and is taunted by tano (institution bordering insult) that he is “socially impotent” and beghairat (without honour) if he fails to kill a woman of his household who has damaged his honour. *(145)*

Sidhwa draws her readers’ attention towards the role of women in the subjugation of women. The women’s consoling words, who had come to comfort Hamida after Zaitoon’s
runaway, reveal the bitter reality that woman also plays a significant role in the subjugation of woman. The women tell: ‘There, there, don’t fret. They’ll be back soon with that bitch’s corpse, your son’s honour vindicated!’ (PB 191) Such belief of women is quite absurd, and highlights the bitter reality of the South Asian societies where woman plays no less a role than man in woman’s oppression and subjugation, and thus, becomes a tool in the hands of patriarchy.

Zaitoon’s resolve to attain her lost individuality and freedom from the cruel and inhuman primitive society of the mountain represents the desperate attempt of matriarchy to retain her existence, dignity and to assert her ‘Self’. In Cultural-Consciousness and Gender Bias, Dipika Sahai aptly remarks: “Despite Zaitoon’s predicament Sidhwa has shown that through struggle there is hope even for women to see the dawn.” (85) The resolve made by the men-folk to hunt her represents man’s desperate attempts to keep his domination intact, at the same time, to impose it forcefully on matriarchy. For Zaitoon, it was a mad dash for life through the mountains, as she knew that she would be chased. Puffing and panting, she continued her journey till the day faded. Petrified girl covered herself with her blanket. Sidhwa reveals the psyche of the girl who is enwrapped by the frightening spell of the night: “. . . She grew vastly afraid. She imagined strange creatures stalking the nocturnal wilderness. Snarling beasts tore at her – inhuman things crept up to touch her; the air within her blanket was lacerated by screams! And throughout, like a malign disease spreading, was the consciousness of Sakhi’s insane wrath, his murderous cruelty.” (PB 193) The break of the day brought a sigh of relief to Zaitoon, but she had a demanding task to reach the bridge to cross the river. The novelist has used ‘river’ as a boundary. The Kohistani end of boundary represents the brutality, barbarity and subjugation while the other end of boundary represents the survival of life, identity, dignity and self-respect. Zaitoon has to cross the boundary line to evade capture—a route to her escape, but it is an ordeal through which she has to pass.
Sidhwa externalises the humiliations, exploitation and frustrations women suffer in male dominated Kohistani society of Pakistan where there is no autonomy, no individuality, and no choice of her own for a woman, and, if someone dares to cross the confined world created by man, death is assigned to her as punishment for her rebelliousness. Zaitoon’s rebel has destined her either of the two—escape or death. In The Fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa, R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia aptly remark: “She rebels at the cruel treatment, the beatings, mistrust and realizes that her imagined ideal community is no longer “a region where men were heroic, proud and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honour that banned all injustice and evil . . .” ( 17 ) Sakhi and his kin are on her hunt, and there are numerous hurdles before her to cross, before she gets her emancipation from the brutal world of tribal people. There are two quests going on in the mountains of Karakorum. Sakhi and his men’s quest are to find out Zaitoon, and to save their honour by slaying her. On the other hand, Zaitoon’s quest is to find a safe passage to cross the river and elude her certain death, and to restore her lost honour.

To escape the clutches of Sakhi, during the torturous journey, Zaitoon falls prey of two tribal men who rape her brutally. Sidhwa divulges the fake view of tribal honour here whose men kill their women in the name of honour, while the same men never miss to stain other women’s honour if opportunity presents. Zaitoon’s rape mirrors the pattern of behaviour of the male dominated Pathan society of Kohistan where women are preyed on for gratification of sexual desire.

The felony assault could not diminish Zaitoon’s deep yearning for her liberation from uncivilized world to a civilized world. She collects herself but, because of her tired and frail limbs, collapses “into the dark hollow between the stones . . .” ( PB 235 ) But, fortunate enough was the girl, as the next day, Major Mushtaq happens to be there, and hears the
moaning sound of hers ‘Major Sahib? Major Sahib?’. Major Mushtaq lifts her ‘huddled in a natal curl in the blanket’ and walks rapidly towards the river to cross it. ‘River’ and the ‘Bridge’ over it signify survival for Zaitoon though with an uncertain future.

Sakhi, sitting on the sand with his back towards the bridge over the river, sees the Major carrying something in a ‘homespun tribal blanket’. Sakhi approaches the Major and asks him ‘What have you got there . . . on your back?’. The Major tells ensconcing the truth ‘Old roots . . . and herbs’. On replying Sakhi’s query of the tribal blanket, Mushtaq told him that it was found on the girl’s dead body, and hurriedly shifted the bundle to Ashiq who escapes from there with other jawans. The Major, to calm the wounded self respect of the tribal man, assures ‘Your wife is dead. Understand me? You have no option. You have to take my word for it. She is dead’ . . . The jawans know she is dead. I swear no one will say otherwise . . . If they make a liar of me they will be blasted like those rocks. I give you my word. Your honour will not be sullied. This is no man’s business but yours’. (PB 243) Sakhi had no option before the Major. Feeling helpless “. . . he wept. For the first time he faced humiliation he could not avenge: a sorrow he dared not share.” (PB 243) To avoid the dishonour and intact his family’s respect, Sakhi informs his father and others of Zaitoon’s death and her burial by his own hands. Zaitoon’s fate made Carol realise the reality of the feminine plight in Pakistan. She perceives the truth that the Pakistani ‘civilization is too ancient “. . . too different . . . and it has ways that can hurt me . . . really hurt me . . . I’m going home.” (PB 229) In Bapsi Sidhwa, Randhir Pratap Singh remarks: “She gets convinced that she isn’t programmed to fit into the Pakistani society.” (34) Thus, Carol makes herself strong enough to leave the primitive, obscurantist and conservative land of Pakistan as does Zaitoon, two disillusioned brides. In Patterns of Migration in the Work of Bapsi Sidhwa, Cicely Havely aptly writes:
Zaitoon, uprooted at a much earlier age, knows only the hubbub of the bazaar and the frowsy comforts of purdah. Yet she and Carol, the American shop girl and college drop-out, are sisters under the skin. Both are lured by their romantic imaginations into an immense journey which deposits them on either side of the Indus in the high Karakoram. For both women, marriage is in more than the literal sense a journey to a foreign land: for Carol, it is an escape from disappointment; for Zaitoon, the crossing of the imperative divide between daughter and wife. But neither is content in her place of arrival. Carol’s dreams are satisfied neither by her wealthy Pakistani husband, nor her dashing lover. (65)

Aghast from the pathetic condition of women in Pakistani societies, be it civilized or uncivilized, disillusioned Carol decides to go back to America. In The Portrayal of Women by Bapsi Sidhwa, about Carol’s decision of retraction, Madhavi Lata Agrawal writes: “She rebels against the restrictions imposed upon women in Asian society and the subordinate role assigned to them. She fights against her husband’s jealousy and suspicions, against the cultural norms that hinders free exchange between men and women.” (8) For Zaitoon, her society in the plain is liberal while the same liberal society of the plain, for Carol, is oppressive. Madhavi Lata Agrawal aptly remarks: “. . . the society or culture that Zaitoon thought to be liberal, modern and free was considered as being oppressive, confined and old fashioned by Carol. In creating ‘a Carol’, Sidhwa illustrates how the concept of ‘freedom’ is relative.” (8) The emancipation of Zaitoon and Carol from the oppressive patriarchal control reflects the disillusionment of women from her male-counterparts whose sole motive is the confinement of female in the name of culture, creed and traditions. The two women grow restive under a reproachful society until they carve a niche for themselves. In The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality, Indira Bhatt writes:
“The novel presents the collapse of negativity into the positivity that the two women characters (Carol and Zaitoon) displace. In a broader sense the initial thrill is followed by a seizure of panic at the realities of life and the women rebel and try to break off shackles of another culture and attain freedom, their own individual self. It is a struggle to seek freedom from negation of life and freedom to attain one’s identity. (157)

Zaitoon and Carol’s assertion of self is an evocation to women to rise for their rights and respect.

Zaitoon and Carol’s ultimate exit from their preferred life exhibits the Zaitoon’s strong desire, indomitable spirit, incredible courage, her will to live, and yearning for individuality, epitomises the whole women-folk’s desperate wriggle to set free from the bondages of men-folk. At the same time, it is a strong message to patriarchal society for taking immediate initiatives for the amendment in its attitude towards women. In Changing Images of Women in the Fiction of Bapsi Sidhawa and Taslima Nasrin, Sunita Sinha opines: “Sidhwa seems to give a message to women that life must be preserved at all cost, since one can fight oppression only when one is alive . . .” (201) As against the original story of the girl in mountains, Sidhwa consciously altered the ending of the novel. Perchance Sidhwa believed that letting Zaitoon die despite suffering intensely would be hugely unfair to her will and dauntless courage. In The Sword and The Needle, by V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar, Sidhwa admits: “I had ended The Pakistani Bride with the girl dying, but then I felt by this time that I had partially identified with the heroine. She became a deep part of me, and then I felt she must be made to live. So I changed that ending of the book.” (89)

Arduous efforts of Zaitoon to attain her liberation have been illustrated well by Indira Bhatt in The Pakistani Bride: From Fantasy to Reality: “Zaitoon’s odysseys from the plains
to the snow mountains and back to the plains is symbolic of the inner journey of the young woman from the fantasy world of love, romance and heroes to the harsh and hostile realities of life, where man is the hunter and exploiter, cruel and inhuman treating woman and animal alike.” (157) The Pakistani Bride is gynocentric, a very women centric novel. The author takes pains to portray the predicament of women in different socio-cultural and political contexts. In The Fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa, R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia write: “The Bride provides an incisive look into the treatment of women. It is the most contentious of Sidhwa’s novels, the most critical towards unjust traditions that undermine the structure of community.” (16) In an interview with Sunil Sharma, Sidhwa asserts her agony, saying: “The condition of The Pakistani Bride and of the tribal culture, in which her story unfolds in the novel, remains much the same in the remote mountain regions.” (145) Yet, she is hopeful of a future when such conditions would change and matriarchy would attain its deserved status in society.