

## SUPPRESSION OF FEMALE DESIRE UNDER PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A FEMININE CRITIQUE OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S SELECTED SHORT STORIES

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### ABSTRACT

*The proposed research aims to delve into the enduring struggle of women within the patriarchal framework of Pakistani society, using the anthology "Their Language of Love" (2013) as its focal point. Bapsi Sidhwa, widely regarded as one of Pakistan's foremost English-language writers, has penned four globally acclaimed novels from 1978 to 1993, all translated into numerous languages. Not only celebrated for her literary prowess, Sidhwa has been an outspoken advocate for women's rights, actively engaging in public discourse and political activism in Pakistan. Despite her prominence in Pakistani literature, Sidhwa remains relatively obscure in Europe, prompting the necessity for a broader recognition of her as both a writer and feminist figure. In stark contrast to the societal objectification of women, Sidhwa's narratives delve into the intimate lives of women within the confines of their private quarters, where they find solace in unfiltered discourse among female peers and family. She illuminates the dichotomy between the external, male-dominated sphere and the internal, female-centric world, providing a platform for women to voice their innermost thoughts and desires. Addressing themes of female sexuality, often overlooked in Pakistani literature, Sidhwa's collection portrays a spectrum of female characters grappling against patriarchal forces, entrenched in traditions, cultural constraints, and social expectations. These stories depict women navigating through challenges such as domestic abuse, coerced marriages, societal marginalization, and the imposition of male-centric laws, showcasing Sidhwa's steadfast commitment to championing the female cause through the medium of the novel.*

**Keywords:** Suppression, feminism, sexuality, honour, patriarchy

### INTRODUCTION

The ongoing research focuses on a Pakistani writer belonging to the Parsi community. Within this exploration, it becomes evident that numerous women writers of Pakistani descent are actively engaging with feminist themes, offering nuanced reflections of their societal milieu. These writers demonstrate a keen understanding of the constraints imposed upon women by patriarchal structures and practices prevalent in their society. Through various symbols and representations, they vividly portray the multifaceted restrictions and obstacles faced by women, both concretely and abstractly. Furthermore, their thematic explorations serve as a mirror reflecting the intricacies of the female psyche and the myriad ways in which women perceive themselves amidst societal pressures. Yet, it remains a subject of further analysis to ascertain the extent to which women assert their presence within traditionally designated spheres, such as the home, as well as in the ostensibly male-dominated public domain. Bapsi Sidhwa emerges as a prominent voice shedding light on the socio-economic plight of women in Pakistan. Her narratives are deeply rooted in the struggles of diverse female characters striving for survival and dignity within a society marked by entrenched gender inequalities. Sidhwa's fiction serves as a poignant commentary on the harsh realities faced by women, echoing their resilience amidst adversities.

To contextualize these discussions, it is imperative to understand the concept of patriarchy, which serves as the bedrock of systemic gender oppression across various societies. Originating from ancient civilizations like ancient Greece, patriarchy delineates a social structure wherein men wield disproportionate power and authority over women. Historically, the patriarch, typically the father or eldest male figure, holds sway over all members of the family, particularly women and younger males, relegating them to subordinate roles both socially and economically. However, feminist discourse has redefined patriarchy beyond its familial connotations, conceptualizing it as a broader system of male dominance permeating societal institutions and norms. Feminist theorists, including Simone de Beauvoir and Sylvia Walby, have dissected the intricate workings of patriarchy, delineating its manifestations in both private and public spheres. Private patriarchy confines women to domestic roles, relegating them to the margins of decision-making and power dynamics within the household. On the other hand, public patriarchy manifests in institutionalized forms of discrimination and marginalization, hindering women's access to opportunities and equitable treatment in workplaces and state institutions. Patriarchy, as a system, poses formidable barriers to women's advancement and well-being, perpetuating inequalities and depriving them of their inherent rights. Women across various strata of society experience daily subjugation and marginalization, ranging from discriminatory practices to outright violence and exploitation. The author under scrutiny adeptly navigates these nuanced dynamics, drawing from her own lived experiences amidst the socio-political upheavals of partition-era India. Having resided in Pakistan for an extended period, the author brings a nuanced understanding of the societal complexities and challenges faced by women in both urban and rural settings. Her firsthand encounters with the aftermath of historical events, including the partition of India, imbue her narratives with a sense of authenticity and empathy, enabling readers to engage with the lived realities of women across diverse backgrounds. In summary, the ongoing research underscores the invaluable contributions of Pakistani women writers in elucidating the intricacies of feminist discourse within the context of patriarchal societies. Through their literary endeavors, these writers offer poignant reflections on the struggles and triumphs of women navigating through entrenched gender hierarchies, thereby enriching our understanding of gender dynamics and societal transformation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Throughout history, writing has been a powerful tool for feminist thinkers, enabling them to advocate for women's rights and challenge patriarchal norms. In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, writers with feminist perspectives have utilized literature as a means of resistance, a tradition dating back to pre-partitioned Pakistan. Since the early 1940s, literary forms such as magazines and novels have served as platforms for educating women, with notable figures including Bapsi Sidhwa, Rukhsana Ahmad, Bina Shah, Qaisra Shehraz, Talat Abbasi, Muhammad Hanif, Jameel Ahmad, and Danyal Mohayuddin. Contemporary fiction by women writers often features female characters questioning societal norms, reshaping their identities, and challenging traditional roles. Bapsi Sidhwa's characters, for instance, traverse a trajectory from victimhood to empowerment, confronting male violence and defying societal constraints. These literary works mirror evolving social and cultural dynamics, shedding light on women's struggles and aspirations.

The relationship between a woman writer and her characters is significant, as characters often reflect the author's own experiences and ideals. Authors like Sidhwa infuse their female characters with femininity, using them to express personal frustrations and desires. Sidhwa, drawing from her own life experiences, imbues her characters with authenticity and resilience, crafting narratives that resonate with readers. In "The Ice-Candy-Man," Sidhwa envisions a world free from exploitation and oppression, highlighting the plight of female characters amidst the chaos of the 1947 partition of India. Characters like Ayah symbolize resistance against patriarchal systems, grappling with issues of sexuality and identity amidst communal violence.

Similarly, Shahraz's works delve into the struggles of women under patriarchal structures, portraying characters like Zari Bano and Naghmana who confront gender discrimination and societal pressures. Through their stories, these authors expose the injustices faced by women in Pakistani society, challenging cultural traditions and social practices that perpetuate male dominance. Pakistani fiction by women writers serves as a crucial lens for understanding the complexities of gender dynamics and patriarchal oppression. These narratives offer insights into the lives of women marginalized by societal norms, shedding light on their resilience and resistance. By portraying female protagonists who defy traditional roles and assert their autonomy, authors like Sidhwa and Shahraz contribute to a broader discourse on women's rights and empowerment. Patriarchy, as a pervasive system of male domination, subjects women to various forms of subjugation and discrimination. In South Asian societies, patriarchal structures are deeply ingrained, perpetuating gender inequalities and restricting women's freedoms. From early childhood, girls are conditioned to prioritize obedience and submission to male authority figures, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Cultural norms, such as veiling and segregation, further marginalize women, limiting their social interactions and opportunities for autonomy. The partition of India in 1947 exacerbated tensions between communities, leading to widespread violence against women like Ayah in "The Ice-Candy-Man." In patriarchal societies, women's bodies become battlegrounds for male honor and power, subjecting them to exploitation and abuse.

Feudal traditions, particularly prevalent in regions like Punjab and Sindh, exacerbate women's subordination, treating marriage as a transaction between families rather than a union between individuals. Women are viewed as commodities to be traded, their lives dictated by patriarchal customs and traditions. Even before birth, girls are assigned societal roles and responsibilities, perpetuating cycles of oppression and subjugation. Despite these challenges, contemporary feminist writers in Pakistan are challenging patriarchal norms through their literature, amplifying the voices of marginalized women and advocating for gender equality. By depicting female characters who resist societal constraints and assert their agency, these authors offer alternative narratives that challenge dominant patriarchal ideologies. Through their stories, they inspire hope for a more equitable and just society, where women can live free from the shackles of patriarchy.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The current investigation delves into selected short stories from Bapsi Sidhwa's anthology "Their Language of Love" from a feminist perspective. Feminism, an expansive concept, encompasses various theories and ideologies concerning women's issues, spanning domestic, social, political, and economic spheres. However, this research specifically scrutinizes patriarchal social structures in Pakistan. Feminism originated as a movement spearheaded by educated white women in Europe and America, later embraced worldwide. Over time, it has diversified into numerous sub-types and gained traction in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Its evolution spans two centuries, transitioning from advocating basic women's rights to demanding broader political, social, and economic participation alongside men. Historically, feminism is divided into three waves: the first spanning the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the second emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, and the ongoing third wave from the 1990s to the present. Throughout these phases, feminist discourse has addressed a wide array of issues affecting women of all backgrounds, including gender discrimination, reproductive rights, sexuality, and intersectional concerns like those of black women and transgender individuals. Feminist activism initially centered on legal rights such as property ownership, voting rights, and contract rights. It progressed to encompass reproductive rights, protection against domestic violence and sexual harassment, workplace equality, and abstract issues like identity and gender dynamics. While the movement originated in Europe and North America, it gained momentum with the participation of feminist groups from former colonies, especially in the post-colonial era of the 1960s and 1970s. Criticism from black feminists and activists from Southeast Asia highlighted the ethnocentric nature of Western feminism.

The present research draws on Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy, defining it as a system of social structures and practices wherein men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. Walby identifies six key structures of patriarchy covering economic, social, and domestic realms: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Rejecting biological and psychological explanations, Walby posits patriarchy as a socially constructed phenomenon. This study focuses on analyzing Bapsi Sidhwa's selected short stories within the framework of Walby's patriarchal structures and resulting practices. While these structures operate independently, they exert causal effects on each other, albeit with contextual adjustments. Employing a qualitative approach, the research relies on textual analysis to gather evidence supporting the thesis, examining characters, attitudes, events, and social practices to elucidate patriarchy's aggressive and dominant stance. The scope of this study is delimited to two short stories, "Breaking it up" and "Ruth and Afghan" extracted from Sidhwa's compilation "Their Language of Love." These narratives serve as focal points for investigating patriarchal dynamics within the context of the selected structures.

## **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

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## **Patriarchal Relations in Cultural Institutions**

In Pakistan, cultural institutions such as religion, marriage, family, and tribe are predominantly controlled by men, contributing to a highly patriarchal society where women are systematically subjugated. This subordination is intricate and multi-dimensional, structured to privilege men while rendering women vulnerable. Scholars like Walby (1990) argue that the concept of patriarchy is essential for understanding gender inequality, as it encapsulates the depth, breadth, and interconnectedness of women's subordination within household, familial, and societal contexts. Similarly, Lim (1997) underscores the role of patriarchal institutions and social relations in perpetuating the inferior or secondary status of women. Male violence constitutes the fifth structure of patriarchy, manifesting in various forms and systematically affecting women. Despite its diversity, male violence against women is frequently overlooked and legitimized by the state, which often fails to protect women adequately. Das Gupta (1997) encapsulates the predicament of women, whose identities are often confined to roles of dutifulness, obedience, and honor within familial and societal frameworks.

Family is one of the most important cultural institutions. The society of Indo-Pak sub-continent is highly patriarch where men decide the future of women. They are not consulted in matters of matrimony. The story under discussion 'Breaking it up' tells, through the voice of a mother narrator, the concerns of an Asian mother whose daughter comes to America for studies and falls in love with an American boy. "Drawing comfort from his concern Zareen blew her nose, and, with a supreme effort of will, choking on her tears, managed to say: 'I got a letter from Feroza. She wants to marry a non.'" (Breaking it up, p. 29)

The Text recounts a personal incident where Zareen receives news from her daughter, Feroza, expressing her desire to marry outside her community. Zareen's emotional turmoil reflects the societal pressure and familial expectations placed on women regarding marriage. This narrative mirrors Fish's (2013) anecdote about familial objections to interfaith relationships, highlighting the persistent influence of patriarchal norms on personal choices. The Text further illustrates the cultural pressure Feroza faces regarding her marriage choices, particularly concerning her grandmother's disapproval. This societal expectation echoes Rufai's (2015) commentary on arranged marriages and shifting attitudes towards parental involvement in partner selection, underscoring the clash between tradition and individual autonomy. Feroza pleads with her mother to accept her choice, emphasizing her love for her family while expressing her inability to bear their rejection. This emotional plea highlights the conflict between familial expectations and personal autonomy, as Feroza grapples with the repercussions of defying cultural norms. Zareen's attempt to sway Feroza's decision by presenting alternative suitors deemed more suitable by societal standards. This manipulation reflects the entrenched patriarchal control over marriage choices and the emotional blackmail employed to enforce conformity. Wiley's (2011) discussion on mate guarding elucidates the societal mechanisms that perpetuate control over marital decisions, particularly in cultures favoring arranged marriages.

"What will you bring to the family if you marry this David? But that doesn't matter so much . . . What matters is your life: it will be so dry"(Breaking it up, p. 33)



The Text continues the emotional coercion exerted on Feroza by her mother, who warns of social ostracization and personal desolation should she pursue her chosen partner. This manipulation underscores the high stakes involved in deviating from societal expectations, as Feroza grapples with the prospect of sacrificing her happiness for familial approval. The next story under discussion is "Ruth and the Highjakers". Ruth is an American diplomat's wife living in Pakistan. Her husband hires a tribal man as security guard who watches at their door. Ruth feels the impact of patriarchal norms as her guard is highly protective of her in her husband's absence. "He knew that even if he was to as much as touch Ruth, Jungi Khan would have no compunction about killing him. The guard was honour bound to protect Rick's possessions". (Ruth and the Highjakers, p. 98). The text highlights the cultural valorization of female chastity and the expectation of male protection, particularly in tribal communities where honor is intricately linked to women's virtue. The narrative underscores the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms on gender relations and the stringent consequences for transgressing societal expectations.

The passage emphasizes the cultural emphasis placed on female chastity and the responsibility of male protection, particularly within tribal societies where a woman's honor is closely tied to her virtue. It highlights how patriarchal norms heavily influence gender dynamics, with severe repercussions for those who defy societal norms. Ruth had developed a friendly rapport with Raj, but she couldn't shake off the memory of the harsh gossip that ensued when news of their affair spread. She reflected on the stark contrast between the cultural acceptance of such behavior in her home country versus the condemnation it faced in Pakistan. As Raj embarked on a new assignment, Ruth acknowledged that their affair was over, leading to a mix of restlessness and eventual relief. No longer burdened by guilt, she recalled the rumors surrounding their relationship and the disapproval it garnered from her Pakistani acquaintances. According to Doi (1989), modesty is closely linked with practices of seclusion, gender segregation, and is supported by religious teachings. Advocates of modesty argue that it serves as a deterrent to the prevalent sexual disorder in society. This sentiment is echoed in Pakistan, where Islamic law is invoked to uphold modesty, particularly emphasizing the expectation for women to exhibit modesty not only in dress but also in behavior and manners.

Syed and Ali (2005) say that in support of modesty for Muslim women, a reference is always given by the religious scholars:

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their (sexual) modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their husbands, or their fathers or their husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical desire, or small children who have no sense of sex; and that they should not stamp their feet in order to draw attention to them. And O believers! Turn all together towards Allah, that you may attain bliss" (Qur'an 24:31).

These texts collectively illustrate the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms on cultural institutions in Pakistan, particularly regarding marriage and female autonomy. Women like

Feroza grapple with familial and societal expectations that prioritize collective honor over individual agency, underscoring the complex interplay between tradition, autonomy, and societal pressure. The narratives also highlight the varied strategies employed to enforce patriarchal control, from emotional manipulation and coercion to societal ostracization and religious mandates. Through familial interventions and societal expectations, women are subjected to a multitude of constraints that limit their choices and perpetuate gender inequality. Moreover, these narratives reflect broader debates within feminist discourse regarding the tension between tradition and modernity, autonomy and conformity, and individual agency and collective expectations. While some women like Feroza assert their autonomy in defiance of patriarchal norms, others like Ruth navigate cultural expectations while challenging gendered constraints within their respective contexts. Overall, these texts provide nuanced insights into the complex dynamics of patriarchy within cultural institutions, shedding light on the enduring challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies and the ongoing struggle for gender equality and autonomy. Through personal narratives and societal commentary, they underscore the multifaceted nature of patriarchal control and the resilience of women in contesting and reshaping gendered norms and expectations.

## CONCLUSION

The research explores how cultural institutions such as family, marriage, tribe, and religious institutions reinforce patriarchal norms and values. Through narratives like "Ruth and afghan," "Breaking it Up," and "Ruth and the Highjakers," Sidhwa elucidates the workings of patriarchal structures within Pakistani society. The stories depict women's struggles against societal expectations and the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms, highlighting the complexities of gender relations in Pakistan. In Sidhwa's novels, women are often depicted as objects subject to the authority of men, both within familial and societal contexts. This portrayal underscores the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms, wherein men wield socio-cultural and physical power over women. Additionally, Sidhwa explores the impact of cultural traditions and societal expectations on women's lives, highlighting how these norms constrain and dictate their choices and behaviors. The control exerted by men over women's bodies reflects the broader manifestation of patriarchal dominance within society. However, Sidhwa also presents a contrast to the objectification of women by depicting scenes from the private lives of women, where they enjoy freedom of expression and camaraderie with female companions. This portrayal emphasizes the dichotomy between the external, male-dominated world and the internal, female-centric sphere, allowing women to voice their thoughts and experiences freely. Furthermore, Sidhwa addresses female sexuality, a topic often overlooked in Pakistani literature, thereby challenging societal taboos and conventions. Patriarchal dominance extends to sexual matters, where familial, tribal, and religious institutions wield control over women's bodies and behaviors. Sidhwa illustrates how women become victims of male aggression in various contexts, including wartime and communal violence.

In conclusion, Bapsi Sidhwa's collection of short stories provides a rich tapestry of female experiences within the patriarchal framework of Pakistani society. Through nuanced narratives and insightful commentary, Sidhwa challenges societal norms and advocates for the

empowerment of women, making a significant contribution to feminist discourse in Pakistani literature.

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