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Dislocation and Silence: A Quest to Break Transgenerational Patriarchal Chain in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

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Abstract
The study articulates the psycho-social aspect of silence and pays attention to women's existential crises by utilising Michelle Balaev's pluralistic trauma theory in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *The Pakistani Bride.* The study examines the change in the protagonist's identity even though, except for gender, she has the same religion and culture. The research endeavours to figure out this specific difference and highlight the non-reflexive male-dominated environment of a postcolonial country. Moreover, it shows the pre- and post-wedding experiences of a young Muslim girl who seeks approval of tradition or religious ideals while challenging privileged patriarchy. However, the study raises complex questions about why women relinquish their right to articulate their opinions and prefer silence over speech. Does fear of isolation put women into silence and force them to internalise the social set-up? This study has wide-ranging ramifications for gender parity and the rights of women. By illuminating the intricate web of connections between gender equality and prosperity, this study can challenge harmful cultural norms, encourage empowerment, and have a positive impact on society.

Keywords. Dislocation, Early Marriage, Twisted Identity, Silence, Mental Health.

Introduction
Marriage is a sacred ritual in Islam and is considered a social responsibility because a successful marriage brings positive outcomes. However, marriages at an early age are a big concern in the modern world. There are many places in Pakistan where children are married before they turn eighteen.[1] Child marriage, which refers to the marriage of persons under the age of eighteen, is a significant societal problem in many places. South Asia, especially Pakistan, is a prominent area where this issue is prevalent.[2] In some regions, marriage might

[1] Muhammud Ilyas, Shujaat Ali, Muhammus Fazal Khaliq and Haroon Khan, 'Bridal Burdens in Bapsi Sidhwa's "The Pakistani Bride,"' *Arbor* 10, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1234/arborjournal.vi.

[2] Debi Fry, Kirsteen MacKay, Zain Kurdi and Tabitha Casey,*A Qualitative Study on the Underlying Social Norms and Economic Causes that Lead to and Child Marriage in Jordan* (Research Gate, 2019),

be characterised as one-sided due to the prevalence of a patriarchal culture, as seen in the narrative of Bapsi Sidhwa's book *The Pakistani Bride.*

The discourse in *The Pakistani Bride* provides a feeling of authority from the male-dominant culture as it interacts with subordinated characters, including Zaitoon, Carol, and Hamida in the rural regions of Pakistan. The text explores the manifestation of female oppression in Pakistani culture and Sidhwa portrays silence as a pervasive tool of oppression, particularly for women.[3] The protagonist, Zaitoon, and other female characters are often silenced by the expectations and norms of their society. They are taught to accept their fate without protest, as speaking out could lead to severe consequences. The silence imposed on them is not just verbal but also emotional and psychological, forcing them to suppress their desires, fears, and needs. Moreover, the novel also emphasises how silence is gendered, with women being more likely to be silenced than men. This silence is deeply rooted in the patriarchal structures that define the roles of women as submissive and obedient.

Zaitoon's journey reflects the internalisation of this silence, as she struggles with her voice and identity in a world that constantly tries to suppress her. For instance, the protagonist, in Jullundur, is Munni, the daughter of Sikandar and Zohra. In Lahore, she is Zaitoon, the Punjabi daughter of a Kohistani father. In the hills, she is Sakhi's wife. Her new role as a wife resulting from an early marriage leads to her inability to adapt and assimilate into an entirely new culture which is quite contrary and dissimilar to that of her own in Lahore. She flees from the hills by breaking the male-dominant society's barrier.

Zaitoon, the protagonist, is a sickly and isolated youngster, much like Sidhwa. Sidhwa was constrained by religious obligations at home and devoted her attention solely to reading. She states that between the ages of eleven and eighteen, she engaged in continuous reading due to her lack of attendance at school. I had no other activities to engage in except for reading.[4] In addition to *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa also produced other very impactful works *The Crow Eater*, *Ice Candy Man*, and *The American Brat*, which explore themes of social struggle and resistance against authority.[5] Shah Faisal Ullah, Ihsan Ullah Khan and Abdul Karim Khan argued that adopting a feminist perspective regarding resistance challenges and undermines traditional gender power dynamics.[6] Having said this, women like Zaitoon may experience complexities associated with resistance. Therefore, in such instances, it is typical for women to suffer from anxiety and their mental health can be negatively affected. To address the inquiries raised, the writers establish a correlation between events and silence by conducting a textual examination of the book *The Pakistani Bride* utilising Michelle Balaev's pluralistic trauma theory.

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https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35092.78723; Tina Khanna, Ravi Verma and Ellen Weiss, *Child Marriage in South Asia: Realities, Responses and the Way Forward* (AbeBooks, 2013).

[3] Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride* (St. Martin Press, 1983).

[4] F. Jussanwall, 'An Interview with Sidhwa,' in *The Novels of Bapsi,* edited by R. K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia (Prestige Books, 1996).

[5] Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* (Penguin, 2000); *Ice-candy-man* (Penguin, 2000); *An American Brat: A Novel* (Milkweed Editions, 2012).

[6] Shah Faisal Ullah, Ihsan Ullah Khan, and Abdul Karim Khan, 'Power and Gender Issues in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride:* A Critical Discourse Analysis,' *Sir Syed Journal of Education & Social Research (SJESR)* 4, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021(240-246).

In pluralistic trauma theory, the focus is placed more on external factors that show an individual suffers from silence in a particular case, and at a distinct place and time. Each factor has its unique role in revealing the true nature of the traumatic experiences of women. Here, silence is not depicted as a form of oppression but instead we show that it can be used as a tool for survival and resistance. Zaitoon's silence at various points in the novel can be interpreted as her strategic choice, providing a way to navigate the dangers of her environment. This form of silence is not passive but active. It is a means of coping with the harsh realities she faces. Moreover, the concept also illustrates that silence can also be a form of resistance. By refusing to speak or by selectively choosing when to speak, Zaitoon and other characters assert a form of agency within their limited power structures. Thus silent resistance challenges the dominant power construction without confrontation because women have no other way but to be silent. Nevertheless, the psychoanalytical approach has largely overlooked the significance of silence and its consequential positive impacts. Our study provides a fresh outlook through which we can comprehend the concept of silence. The researchers aim to discern the distinct, binary silence/non-silence, disparity by using the pluralistic theory that is applicable after the migration events, which would have been encountered by any individual identifying as a woman in Pakistan.

Literature review

Researchers in the fields of humanities and cultural sociology have tried to interpret the issue of Muslim women and identity crises through the lens of feminist discourse,[7] whereas others have examined it from a patriarchal cultural perspective.[8] The oppression of Muslim women also explores the distinctiveness of the feminist perspective in terms of sex, power, gender, and the significance of these themes in contemporary society. Nevertheless, Umber Adil, Syeda Samina Tahira and Saira Akhter offer a distinct perspective on the role of women within Pakistan's gender-based social hierarchy. They view Zaitoon as an emblem of female fortitude, unwavering, tireless, and unstoppable.[9] Their research highlighted the need for culturally sensitive methodologies in studying the concept of maturity within the context of feminist discourse. However, they did not use the opportunity to examine the topic from a Pakistani standpoint. So, the psychoanalytical approach to the understanding of psycho-social concepts has been overlooked in the contemporary discussion of Muslim women's identity in Pakistani literature.

The Pakistani Bride has been subjected to extensive investigation, which has included the application of several theories and ideas, including Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse

[7] Syed Muhammad Muaz Arshed Bukhari, Muhammad Akbar Khan, and Aatika Riaz, 'A. Female Objectification in Anglophone Literature: A Critical Feminist Analysis of The Pakistani Bride by Bapsi Sidhwa,' Al-Aijaz Research Journal of Islamic Studies & Humanities 8, no. 1 (2024).

[8] Zia Ahmed, 'Pakistani feminist fiction and the empowerment of women,' *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* 1, no. 2 (2009).

[9] Umber Adil, Syeda SaminaTahira, and Saira Akhter, 'Gender and Sexuality in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride: An Analytical Study,' *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 5, no. 2 (2021), https://plhr.org.pk/issues/v5/2/gender-and-sexuality-in-bapsi-sidhwas-the-pakistani-bride-an-analytical-study.pdf.

analysis.[10] This analysis aims to uncover the sequence of discourse that highlights the presence of dominance, power, and inequality. However, when seen from an existentialist perspective, men want to dominate women by categorising them as 'other' in contradiction to Simone de Beauvoir.[11] In contrast, a woman is seen as the object of attention, whereas a male is seen as the 'self' or the active participant. She is superfluous, flawed, and reliant on him, but he is unequivocal and indispensable. De Beauvoir argues that while it is typical for individuals to establish their identity by comparing themselves to others, this approach is faulty when applied to gender. Men categorize women as 'other,' so denying their humanity unilaterally. Michele Byers and Diane Crocker conducted a study on feminism and culture, which showed that every feminist issue aims to achieve communal growth and secure rights for women from the community.[12] Nevertheless, Pakistan has been actively addressing exploitative practices and creating obstacles for women in their pursuit of establishing and fighting for their civil rights since gaining independence.

Sidhwa's narrative portrays fictitious anecdotes of women's tumultuous encounters. From a critical standpoint, *The Pakistani Bride* has been extensively examined within the realm of feminist fiction by scholars from many perspectives. However, to fill the gap, this paper focuses on the pluralistic approach of Balaev to show how cultural values, place, and protagonist play their roles in understating the concept of silence as resistance. The reason for selecting this particular theoretical position is to highlight the importance of silence which is often viewed in terms of trauma rather than resistance.

Methodology

Our research is qualitative, and our analysis of the novel has been done by using Balaev's pluralistic trauma theory.[13] Balaev presents two notable contributions to the field. She offers a comprehensive critique of the existing paradigm of the unspeakable in literary trauma studies. Second, she provides guidance on appropriate methodologies for literary scholars to use in the examination of trauma theory and its application to trauma literature analysis. Her work is grounded in a pluralistic model that critiques the essentialist narratives surrounding trauma. She examines multiple literary elements, establishing a framework that highlights the protagonist, setting, and language. Balaev presents a critical analysis of the dominant perspective on trauma within literary criticism, contending that it remains reliant on Freudian concepts of trauma. Psychology has achieved a more thorough comprehension of trauma than literary criticism. Nonetheless, the foundation of the field is based on an essentialist discourse concerning stimuli that remain unrecognised, that significantly depends on the Freudian notion of trauma, which pertains to experiences or events that the mind fails to perceive.

Due to the essentialist discourse, trauma in literary studies revolves around the concept of the unspeakable. Cathy Caruth emphasises the unknowable and unrepresentable

[10] Teun A. van Dijk, 'Discourse and ideology,' in *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, edition 2*, edited by Teun A. van Dyke (Sage Publications, 2011), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.

[11] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Everyman's Library, 1949).

[12] Michele Byers and Diane Crocker, 'Feminist cohorts and waves: Attitudes of junior female academics,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 35, no. 1 (2012), https://doi.org//10.1016/j.wsif.2011.09.003.

[13] Michelle Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (Northwestern University Press 2012), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv4cbg44.

nature of trauma, suggesting that it is not confined to a single violent event in one's past. Instead, trauma manifests itself in an unassimilated and haunting manner through which it resurfaces, causing damage to the survivor's sense of self.[14] Similarly, In the book *Worlds of Hurt,* Kalí Tal discusses the challenge of accurately representing trauma.[15] According to Tal, trauma is inherently beyond our normal understanding, making it difficult to recreate the event and fully capture its essence in a 'normal' conception. Both Caruth and Tal acknowledge the inherent unassimilable quality of trauma and its impact on the mind and memory. They also emphasise the significant role that narration plays in the process of integrating the traumatic experience into one's sense of self and bringing order to the tumultuous mind.

Balaev's claim challenges the commonly held notion that trauma is unspeakable by addressing the trope of the unspeakable. The perspective of Balaev's theory is undergoing a shift regarding trauma, now acknowledging its potential for representation.[16] Barry Stampfl asserts that the concept of 'trauma' encompasses a diverse array of experiences that are so vast and varied that they require a multifaceted comprehension of the indescribable. This perspective recognises the different or even conflicting interpretations of the term.[17] Balaev suggests that the concept of unspeakability can be better understood as a result of 'cultural values and ideologies, rather than as a complex issue of knowledge or neurobiology.'[18] Before this, it is necessary to consider Balaev's understanding of the protagonist's role. The concept of the unspeakable is demonstrated through the use of silence in trauma narratives. The absence of words signifies the overwhelming nature of the traumatic event, rendering it unspeakable. Nevertheless, Balaev initiates a pattern that views silence as a rhetorical tool—a deliberate choice by the author to refrain from explicitly describing the distressing and traumatic event experienced by the character, allowing the reader to imagine it instead. This phenomenon of unspeakability, characterised by silence, is not primarily due to the inability to represent trauma but rather it stems from the deliberate use of rhetorical tactics.[19] According to Balaev, there exists a fundamental distinction between concepts that are challenging to articulate and those that cannot adequately be portrayed. While not suggesting that all traumatic experiences can easily be represented, Balaev or the writer of the novels? argues that difficulties in understanding trauma are primarily due to cultural interpretations rather than an inherent inability to represent it.

In her work *Against the Unspeakable,* Naomi Mandel takes a more radical stance.[20] She argues that the concept of the unspeakable is inadequate, providing several claims that ultimately align with Balaev's assertion about unrepresentability. Mandel discusses the significance of the concept of unspeakability in her analysis. For instance, when someone describes an atrocity as unspeakable, it implies that other atrocities cannot be adequately

[14] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins Press Ltd., 1996).

[15] Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[16] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels,* 1.

[17] Barry Stampfl, 'Parsing the Unspeakable in the Context of Trauma,' in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory,* edited by Michelle Balaev (Springer, 2014).

[18] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma.*

[19] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma,* 20.

[20] Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (University of Virginia Press, 2006).

expressed. This rhetorical strategy highlights the limitations of language, understanding, representation, and cognition, while also emphasising the unique nature of atrocity, horror, trauma, and pain. The unspeakable has assumed various forms, ranging from the sacred to the sublime, as a result of its extensive and distinguished history in the realm of representation.[21]

In her argument, Balaev contends that studies of literary trauma have failed to recognise the significant role that the protagonist plays in describing events that affect both the individual and the group. Zaitoon's personality is a good example of this kind of thing. When it comes to depicting both personal traumatic experiences and the individual's perspective of trauma within a certain culture or region, the individual who plays the role of the protagonist is very important. Additionally, the author claims that the particular location in which the protagonist suffers trauma maintains value in its representation, regardless of the degree to which the experience is isolated within a larger cultural and societal framework. This is the case regardless of whether or not the circumstance is isolated. When it comes to comprehending the many interpretations of the traumatic incident, the existence of anguish and the remembering of loss are both very important factors.

Balaev incorporates the concept of place into her analysis of trauma narratives, emphasising its significance as a 'silent second character.'[22] The geographic location, cultural influence, and historical moment all converge to shape the value of the individual and community. Viewing place as a secondary character allows it to establish itself as a relational concept to the characters, providing contextual factors and social dimensions when analysing traumas in literature. Place, as a symbol, can evoke various connotations that aid the reader in understanding the characters' traumatic experiences. Due to its geographical significance and the impact it has on the characters, this setting plays a crucial role in comprehending the various forms of trauma depicted, such as loss, suffering, and the need for connection. In addition, the setting highlights the protagonist's traumatic experience within the cultural context of the narrative, thereby enhancing our understanding of the suffering and demonstrating its importance in Balaev's pluralistic model. In summary, the significance of place in depicting trauma lies in its ability to serve as a tangible location of suffering and a means to convey the various interpretations of the event and the distinct emotional reactions it elicits.[23] Tal further highlights the consequences of repression in a particular location, illustrating how it results in a decline in self-assurance and a lack of trust in the societal and cultural systems that are meant to establish stability and security.[24] Considering this, it is within the purview of literary scholars to delve into the analysis of trauma in literature, going beyond the narrow focus on pathology emphasised by Caruth.

Conclusively, pluralistic trauma examines external elements to demonstrate that silence arises in specific instances, under certain circumstances, temporal contexts, cultural contexts, and geographical locations. Memory is a significant part of the trauma experienced by victims since their experiences are dependent on cultural influences. Psychiatrist Laurence

[21] Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (University of Virginia Press, 2006).

[22] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma,* 38.

[23] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma,* 39.

[24] Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, 15.

Kirmayer asserts that the remembrance of traumatic experiences is influenced by social environments and cultural frameworks for memories, narratives, and life stories.[25] Cultural models have a significant impact on what is considered important, how it is understood and stored in memory, and, crucially for memories that are related to personal experiences, what can be openly discussed and what must be kept hidden and unacknowledged. The unsaid aspects of a trauma story may be influenced by cultural norms, rather than solely attributed to the conventional belief that trauma is inherently unspeakable owing to its neurobiological functions.

Result and discussion

Cultural context and pre-marriage silence

Traumatic silence may arise not just from large-scale events like wars or tsunamis, but also from intense individual responses inside the victims. This paper instigates an inexpressible dread that severs or annihilates one's sense of self via the medium of language, live encounters, and memories. Balaev's trauma theory, particularly her emphasis on the importance of silence and narrative in understanding trauma allows for a deeper understanding of Zaitoon's trauma by situating it within the specific cultural and social context of rural Pakistan.

In the backdrop study of Balaev's concept, our analysis of this novel shows that repression of Zaitoon's emotions is evident when she says 'Abba, she sobbed, I don't want to marry.'[26] Her desperate cry against her impending marriage encapsulates both her internal emotional struggle and the cultural forces that suppress her desires and agency. Zaitoon's emotional outburst represents the culmination of a long period of psychological repression which Caruth links with unspeakability. However, Balaev sees repression from a different perspective and involves the unconscious blocking of undesirable thoughts, emotions, or desires to cope with external pressures. In this case, Zaitoon has likely repressed her fear, anxiety, and resistance toward her forced marriage to align with the expectations of her father and society. The moment she begs her father to stop the marriage, her repressed emotions break through, revealing the depth of her fear and distress. Zaitoon's emotional repression is also linked to her culture where defying one's parents, particularly a father, can lead to severe repercussions. This fear amplifies her psychological turmoil, as she knows that expressing her true feelings could lead to ostracisation, violence, or being labelled as dishonourable.

The cultural norms around gender, silence Zaitoon and other women, discouraging them from openly expressing their desires or opposing decisions made by male authority figures. Women in her society are often expected to endure hardships without protest. Interestingly, Zaitoon's attempt to voice her feelings represents a significant cultural breach which is evident from the following statement when Sakhi says, 'Hush Zaitoon that is not a way to speak to your father. It is not seemly. A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom he

[25] Laurence J. Kirmayer, 'Landscapes of memory: Trauma, Narrative and Dissociation,' in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays on Memory and Trauma,* edited by Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (Routledge, 1996).

[26] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 133.

should marry her.'[27] The act of repressing her emotions until this breaking point speaks to how deeply embedded this cultural silence is. However, Qasim's (Zaitoon's father) decision was not supported by the couple, Miriam and Nikka who brought up Zaitoon like their own daughter. Qasim brushed aside the opposition because he had given his 'word' to Misri Khan. Furthermore, they are against marriage at an early age. This excerpt from the novel is a clear depiction of the devastated lives of women in that particular society. The discussion goes on:

> She will inevitably tie the knot and start a family. "Poor child". If she had a mother, you may find her in the kitchen or sewing room. Qaisam ought to give serious consideration to marrying her. She is just a baby. A baby? Ten years old! She will not be in danger anywhere else but at her mother-in-law's house. "There is no such thing as being too young to get married".[28]

Zaitoon does not want anyone to be married at ten years old, as she 'once overheard a woman telling a ten-year-old that she was pregnant. 'How can that be?' she questioned, perplexed. 'She's not married; it's impossible!'.[29] Zaitoon's thoughts were also opposite to Qasim's but he kissed her stroked her head, and muttered 'I have given my word, child, my word….'[30] Qasim seemed to struggle with the justification for the sudden increase in violence within him. However, he found himself powerless against the strict societal norms that dictated men's behaviour, leaving him no choice but to conform, regardless of his own emotions. Arguably, all Zaitoon's efforts were of no use and kept her silent. The way she was silenced highlights the patriarchal rule over women and against their opinions. She sacrificed herself for her stepfather's desire, to protect his honour and 'felt a pang of loss'[31] that Balaev links with the notion of loss and suffering. She buried the urge to live a different and happy life. Cultural critic Eunil David Cho asserts that 'individuals become ethnic'[32] as a result of the pressures imposed by society. Moreover, the silent suffering of Zaitoon is like Chang-Rae Lee's Henry who says, 'suffering is the noblest art, the quieter the better.'[33] The silence also links with the loss of trust in the external world and gives birth to trauma. As a result, Zaitoon 'had no more control over her destiny than a caged animal perhaps' and ceases to desire a conversation with the 'other' and retreats into the inner world of herself. Zaitoon seems as helpless as Henry in Lee's novel *Native Speaker* who feels like 'a trapped animal' and cannot escape a cage.

Balaev asserts that the condition of 'unspeakably' should not only be considered in connection to neurobiological facts but is also a result of cultural values. For example, Zaitoon complies with her father's desire to arrange her marriage to Sakhi. She granted her father the authority to establish objectives for her life in this world. Granting this right to her father

[27] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 143.

[28] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 50.

[29] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 55.

[30] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 158.

[31] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 129.

[32] Eunil David Cho, 'Coping with a double pandemic of health crisis and anti-Asian racism in America: The role of immigrant churches,' in *Between Pandemonium and Pandemethics: Responses to Covid-19 in Theology and Religions,* edited by Dorothea V. Erbele-Küster and Volker Küster, *Contact Zone. Explorations in Intercultural Theology* 27 (2022).

[33] Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Riverhead Books, 1996), 333.

illustrates the extent of the influence of the cultural values imposed on women by paternal figures or society. Moreover, the concept of cultural values can also be judged through the conversation of Mariam and Zaitoon. For instance, Miriam tries her best to dissuade Zaitoon from marrying Sakhi by saying: 'You are ours. We will marry you to a decent Punjabi who will understand your ways. Tell your father you don't want to marry a tribal. We will help you.' Zaitoon replies: 'I cannot cross my father.'[34] Arguably, Zaitoon's reply is the reflection of her consciousness that reflects how tradition dictates the behaviour of Zaitoon within broader social and cultural dynamics. Such cultural dynamics shape her understanding of herself and her place in society. From this, the reader can see that Zaitoon has learned the habit of suppressing and muffling emotions from his father. Her psyche is damaged more than Qaisam imagines. She is not emotionless but rather social and cultural values bond her to follow her stepfather. She has two options, either go against her father or suffer from pain.

Women as a commodity and unspeakable trauma

The grip of the trauma of silence on Zaitoon and how its spread damaging her psyche is evident. Personal isolation is one of the characteristics of trauma. It does not allow its victims any avenue through which to vent their grief and pain. To make matters worse, trauma deprives victims the means of finding comfort through an expression of feelings. To add insult to injury, during her loveless life, Zaitoon is also dependent on the mercy of the mountain men and she tolerates the physical and mental torture from Sakhi, her husband, who beats her for no reason and 'tore the ghoon gat from her head.' She no longer romanticised marriage. She kept her head down except to obey him. She then had Hamida-like eyes.[35] In addition, she remains in a peripheral area in the society into which she is married. This peripheral zone is a symbolic one that is filled with aloneness, anxiety, chaos and shame. Consequently, if this situation continues over a long period, this traumatic zone or place becomes a site of unfathomable pain and loss for the victim.

This type of arranged marriage also reflects the commercialisation of women. Sakhi makes an inappropriately personal contact with Zaitoon on their wedding night, which causes her pain. He responds to Zaitoon's impromptu reluctance by asking, 'Why not? It's my cunt!'.[36] Rather than being a proclamation of love, these words are a confession of possession. His subsequent desire to physically punish Zaitoon to instil obedience in her reveals his egotism. 'You are my lady. I will explain to you to follow me!'.[37] Women from the mountains lose their lives as a result of defiance. With time, the psychological effects of her subjugation have transformed Zaitoon into someone she did not choose to be. In a world where she cannot act following her desires, she has lost her innocence and voice.

The profound impact of the awful horror was also clearly apparent in Sidhwa's construction of Carol's character. Despite originating from a distinct cultural background, Carol continues to face ongoing scrutiny and evaluation based on her conduct, even after a significant amount of time has passed. For example, Mushtaq previously highlighted the

[34] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 82.

[35] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 112–45.

[36] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 162.

[37] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 172–73.

disparity in the modesty of women in his nation by claiming, 'our women are modest'[38] and he mocked the ideals she upheld. It demonstrates that males are expected to conform and adhere to the norms and regulations of a male-dominated society, with modesty being limited to obedience. Carol had emotional distress due to the conduct, but instead of openly expressing it, she chose to suppress it. Moreover, this additional suppression has contributed to the accumulation of all the other emotions and experiences that she was concealing inside herself. It also prompts the issue of whether patriarchal men, no matter how much they modernise, are bound by profoundly ingrained patriarchal traditions. Zaitoon's statements further support this assertion. Any woman, whether from the Punjab or America, evokes the same attention. 'I ... I felt they were undressing me.' 'That's why I told you last evening not to go wandering off on your own.'[39]

Zaitoon and Carol suffered so much and were damaged due to their gender. Adding to this, the loss of emotional support during those struggles made Zaitoon's situation increasingly dire. She is unhealed due to improper emotional support. The repeated traumatic experiences of traumatised Zaitoon testify to the constant and harmful force of trauma even when they could not be given expression in the narrative. If she did not speak up, put her horrendous past experiences into a narrative, and accepted those experiences as an integral part of her life, she would always remain in the 'black hole' of trauma that would sap her vitality by fixating on the trauma.[40]

To recover, according to Balaev, the traumatised person, in this case Zaitoon, 'construct[s] a narrative for sharing traumatic experiences, as the memory of such events is perceived as a concrete and unchanging account of the experience, which can be accessed through verbal communication.'[41] Similarly, Mohsin Hamid says, 'Silence kills hope. It kills optimism.'[42]

Resistance and agency

Despite her trauma, Zaitoon's journey also reflects moments of resistance and the search for agency. Balaev's concept allows for the recognition of this agency even within the context of trauma. She pretended to behave in a certain way—instead of expressing herself—as she failed to understand the significance of having her voice heard and understood. Zaitoon had invited it herself through open defiance. For instance, Sakhi had gone to a neighbouring village and Zaitoon visited the river. When he came to bed, Zaitoon was already asleep. When she muttered something, Sakhi told her in no uncertain terms that she should not go to the river again. Despite this peremptory command, Zaitoon went to the river again the next morning. Sakhi saw an unsuspecting Zaitoon smiling when an army jeep appeared and waved her hands merrily. He came immediately into view 'glowering with thunderous hatred,'[43]

[38] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 198.

[39] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 97.

[40] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma,* 9–11.

[41] Balaev, *The Nature of Trauma,* 9–11.

[42] Mohsin Hahmid, 'Silencing Pakistan,' *The Express Tribune*, 4 June 2011, https://tribune.com.pk/story/181760/silencing-pakistan.

[43] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 186.

mouthed obscenities at her and kicked her between her legs. He lifted her inert body across his shoulders and carried her home.

In another event, Zaitoon's acts of oppositional agency and resistance are evident via her act of running away from Kohistan which Robert Ross links with the woman's bravery and 'endorses a challenge to the institution of patriarchy.'[44] In the tribal society into which Zaitoon was married, women are expected to submit to the authority of their husbands and families without question. However, Zaitoon, driven by a desire for autonomy and self-preservation, chooses to defy this expectation. Her escape from her abusive husband is a radical act of resistance against the societal norms that dictate her subjugation. For instance, Zaitoon hurried away one night. As her body ached and her eyes burned with terror, she knew she had to run for her life. To recover, she gave herself two days.[45] She resorted to displacement to express what the other person had forced on her. It is possible to see Zaitoon's last effort as defiance against the cultural influences that want to subjugate her. She posits that 'Honor! she scowled. Honor costs a life! The girl she loved was sacrificed, and her family was gone.'[46] Furthermore, Zaitoon exercises her agency in a context where she has very little power. Her flight is not just a physical escape but a symbolic rejection of the oppressive structures that seek to define her life. It represents a critical moment where she takes control of her destiny, despite the risks involved. Her resistance is both an assertion of her identity and a challenge to the patriarchal order that seeks to silence and control her.

Silence, by applying Balaev's concept, is the manifestation of resistance and is a state of wordless action to voice opinions and embrace reality as is the case of Zaitoon. Zaitoon's actions can be understood as part of a broader struggle for self-determination within a repressive cultural context. She encounters several challenges in achieving the status of 'self.' The girl, who used to follow the norms established by men for her survival, is now an individual with the ability to fight for her right to live. Furthermore, she is raped by two men, yet she remains courageous and fights for her life. She remained unconscious for many hours. '"You want to eat me? You want to eat me?" cried Zaitoon. "I'm alive, look, I'm alive!"'[47] Balaev asserts that traumatic experiences such as sexual harassment or assault shape the memory via a 'temporal gap.'[48] The retelling of such distressing memories may be conveyed via acting and expressing them verbally or in writing.[49] Therefore, Zaitoon's trauma does not solely define her; it also propels her towards acts of resistance, however limited or fraught they may be. This complexity aligns with Balaev's view that trauma is not just about victimhood but also about the possibilities of agency and resilience. For instance, Zaitoon was found after fleeing. All the people want her to be killed as she had run away from her home

[44] Robert Ross, 'The search for community in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels,' *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa,* edited by R. K. Dhawad and Novy Kapadia (Prestige Books, 1996), 74.

[45] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 153.

[46] Muhammud Ilyas, Shujaat Ali, Muhammus Fazal Khaliq and Haroon Khan, 'Bridal Burdens in Bapsi Sidhwa's "The Pakistani Bride,"' *Arbor* 10, no. 2 (2023), https://arborjournal.com/index.php/files/article/view/39/20.

[47] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 181.

[48] Michelle Balaev, 'Trends in Literary Trauma Theory,' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 41, no. 2 (June 2008).

[49] Balaev, 'Trends in literary trauma theory.'

and bruised the family's honour. The novel shows that no one was sorry for her worst fortune. Rather they were waiting for her execution. She was dragged to the village. Sidhwa writes:

> Lifting her weightless body in his golden arms, he carries her to his village. 'Were you lost?' he asks. 'No,' she admits, 'I ran away.' 'Oh! Then I must kill you. You know I must.' He fumbles with the knife blade, tears streaming down his cheeks.[50]

Conclusion

In *The Pakistani Bride*, Sidhwa uses the theme of silence to explore the complex dynamics of power, gender, and identity. Silence in the novel is both a tool of oppression and a means of resistance, reflecting the intricate realities faced by women in patriarchal societies. Sidhwa's portrayal of silence challenges readers to consider how societal norms and cultural expectations shape the voices and lives of women and the potential for empowerment that comes with breaking that silence. Moreover, the novel's representation of the transformational force of masculine characters and the possibilities for change and resistance within the community further improves our knowledge of the intricacies of gender, power, and agency in this environment. In addition, Sidhwa does not romanticise Zaitoon's resistance. The novel makes it clear that her defiance comes at a significant cost. Zaitoon is pursued and almost killed for her act of rebellion, highlighting the dangers that women face when they resist patriarchal oppression. However, her resistance, even in the face of such risks, underscores her resilience and determination to assert her agency.

The research provides a vivid depiction of the experiences of individuals belonging to marginalised societies, who face both explicit and concealed forms of violence and marginalisation. It also emphasises the significance of women's identity and urges for a recognition of this identity. Furthermore, the research showcases Zaitoon's resilience in the face of a patriarchal society and trauma, as she strives to express and embrace her authentic self. It is important to note that Zaitoon's case is not typical, and many young individuals do not have the opportunity to overcome their traumas.

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[50] Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride,* 172.

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