

Gendered Subjectivity and Oppositional Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

AUTHOR

Abstract

Subjectivity is gendered. From the moment of its birth the human infant comes under a regime of gender under which one cannot be a subject without being male or female. Gender, Judith Butler asserts, is performative. It is created by acts which are really socially established ways of being a man or a woman. The "reiterative and citational practice" of gender norms constrains the gendered subject. A woman is "interpellated" as woman so that she internalizes the feminine norms like submissiveness, domesticity and passivity. Similarly, it is normative for a man to be dominant, aggressive and cruel on his women to ensure submission to his will. He has to "disavow" any marks of effeminacy or weakness within him. The gendered subject is constrained to repeat the norm because any deviant behaviour faces social abjection.

In this scenario where the subject is socially or culturally constructed and social power, as Michele Foucault points out, does not flow simply from top to bottom but from all the sources familial, cultural and political, how is it possible to theorize oppositional agency? It is possible because the internalization of social norms usually engenders resistances within the subject. It is upto the gendered subject to heed these dissenting voices within her/him and become an agent by deflecting the norm. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* the male characters Qasim and Sakhi fail to impress because they mechanically perform the normative assignments of gender in spite of subversive tendencies within them. But Zaitoon, the girl from the plains who married a Kohistani tribal, realizes the inequities of the norm in her changed social position and runs away from her tyrannical husband. She ceases to be the victimized woman of feminist discourses and becomes an agent. I propose to analyze the complications involved in gendered subjectivity and the need to subvert gender norms through oppositional agency in my study of the novel in this essay.

Key words:

Gendered Subjectivity, Oppositional Agency, Performative, reiterative and Citational Practice, Interpellated, Abjection, Subversive Tendencies.

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Subjectivity is gendered. The very first information we get about the human infant after its birth is whether it is a boy or a girl. This identity is based on what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* describes as "chromosomal sex" (2489). Categorization of individuals into discrete genders- men and women- is part of the process of "humanization" within contemporary culture. Gender is a "cultural fiction" which is based on a "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain it as discrete and polar" (Butler, 2500). Gender, however, is not a matter of choice for an ungendered subject. From the moment of our birth we come under a gender regime where we cannot be persons without being male or female (Culler 104). Gender is a rigidly dichotomized social production which is informed by the heterosexist binary of boy/girl, man/woman. Each of the binarized genders is defined in relation to the other and difference in power positions has affected the balance in gender relations. Several cultural discourses converge to construct the prevailing views about what "boy" and "girl", "man" and "woman" signify. They form the norm into which all subjects are made to fit according to their gender. Any departure from the norm is foreclosed through punitive exclusions and public shaming or abjection. The aim of this article is to study Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* (1990) as an illustration of the depravity to which gendered subjects sink when they mechanically reiterate the gender norms; why it is necessary to deflect the norm through oppositional agency; how and under what circumstances subversion of the norm is achieved.

According to Jacques Lacan's theory of subject formation the subject is always in psychological tension because of a sense of the self as fragmented and fractured. Gendered norms like all other norms come into being when the subject passes from the imaginary to the symbolic order. They are inviolable because they are informed by the subject's desire for a firm grounding to conceptualize his/her identity. Louis Althusser has argued that these norms are a system of representations produced by ideological state apparatuses like the church, the school, the family, the courts etc. which create the impression that the fundamental belief systems of the society, its norms, are natural and unchallengeable. These ISAs "interpellate" us as men and women so that

we internalize the social conventions of gendered subjectivity. A child, for example, is interpellated into her or his adult social identity through popular children's literature and unknowingly internalizes her or his normative gendered subjectivity. The fairy tales "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella" have interpellated generations of girls even to-day into stereotypical feminine norms of passivity and domesticity (Hall 89). Thus, the norms of femininity and masculinity are imperceptibly built into our subjectivity and the subject internalizes them. Michele Foucault objects to the term "internalization" in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) when he discusses the subjection and subjectivation of criminals. He prefers to call it "incorporation" (29) because the norm does not appear external to the individual it subjectivizes. Rather it becomes the very essence of her or his self. All these theories postulate how the norms, gendered or otherwise, appear to inform our identity and are, therefore, considered inviolable.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990) Judith Butler modifies the theories of Lacan, Althusser and Foucault to suggest that gender should be thought of as "performative". As Butler puts it, the gendered body has no "ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (2495). She goes on to assert that "gender is not a fact"; the idea of gender is created by the "various acts of gender". Gender is a kind of "persistent impersonation" that passes off as the real (2489). Gender norms are a "sedimentation". They have produced and reified a "set of corporeal styles" as the natural corollary of gendered subjectivity. Gender is a role played in a social drama that requires repeated "performance". The strategic aim of these performances is the maintenance of gender in its binary form and, thereby, "to found and consolidate" the subject (2500).

Butler proposes that gender should be understood as citational repetition. Individual actions only cite the dominant views established within the diacritical frontiers of differing genders. The little boy learns that it is not masculine to weep and cry. He must grow into masculinity through imitation of actions considered male so much so that such behaviour becomes his second nature. Similarly, the little girl learns that certain ways of doing things would make her tomboyish. She is encouraged to adopt feminine qualities. In fact, Jonathan Culler thinks that the very naming of a girl initiates a life-long process of "girling" i.e. the making of a girl through an "assignment" of compulsory repetition of gender norms, the "forcible citation of a norm" (104-05). In Butler's view, we feel our way into the gendered roles under the watchful eyes of powerful social forces which establish the way we are expected to occupy our gendered positions.

Those labelled deviant face external sanctions and are mortified by a deep sense of guilt. Normalized gendered identity is achieved through the forcible exclusion or "disavowal" of all contradictory impulses in keeping with commonplace obsessional notions of identity as something that is consistent in all places and at all times. Socially this disavowal is expressed through the discourses of what Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, aptly terms as "abjection" (1). The abject stands for all that is expelled from the body, discharged as excrement. Culturally hegemonic identities are founded on repudiation of subversive acts.

The gender structure has been hierarchical in which woman has been considered a "lack", hence subservient to man. Powerful social forces keep women confined to the feminine virtues of domesticity and submissiveness while men are encouraged to be proud and domineering. In *Between Men: English literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick talks of "homosocial desires" (2435) that bond men together to ensure their domination over women. While this bonding forestalls acts of men that are not considered masculine, it obstructs with all its might women's rights to oppositional agency. Survival of women in a dominant patriarchal culture, as Audre Lorde points out, is not simply "an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and reviled" (112). Foucault also hints at the impossibility of subversive agency in a landscape blinded and hostile to variety because the possibility of resistance is already anticipated and foreclosed through discursive norms that regulate what is "possible for us to think and say" (Davies 70).

In this context it is worthwhile to take note of Lata Mani's admonition against the feminist discourse of women as victims because "it leaves us with reductive representations of women as primarily beings who are passive and acted upon." We should instead engage "simultaneously with women's systemic subordination and the ways in which they negotiate oppressive, even, determining social conditions" (40). Theories of gendered subjectivity, therefore, caution us against demonization of men for their acts of aggression because it is necessary to take into consideration the compulsions behind their actions and because it is wrong to judge a subject on the basis of performances that are considered normative. We should not forget that gender is a kind of "persistent impersonation". Similarly, valorisation of oppositional agency in women must be tempered with the realisation that in real life women have been negotiating oppressive social conditions without appearing openly subversive. Feminist concentration on victimization of women in patriarchal societies have no doubt foregrounded the systemic character of gender domination. But it is important to understand how women can still remain agents even as they are oppressed and that is the proper way to negotiate structures of domination (Mani 40).

I intend to concentrate on the circumstances in which Qasim married Zaitoon off to Sakhi and the two incidents of Sakhi's brutal assault on Zaitoon in my discussion of gendered subjectivity in *The Pakistani Bride* to interrogate the demonization of these two Kohistani tribals in most of the commentaries on the novel. I will

then put into perspective Zaitoon's bold flight from her matrimonial home as an act of oppositional agency that is always available for oppressed feminine subjects although it is a perilous, almost mad, project.

Why did Qasim marry Zaitoon off to Sakhi? When Miriam heard that Zaitoon's marriage was settled with a Kohistani tribal she remonstrated with Qasim that Zaitoon, who was educated and brought up in the Lahore plains, would never be happy with the "Brutish, uncouth and ignorant" tribals who do not know how to treat women. She would be a "slave" and she would be all alone with no one to turn to. Qasim brushed aside the opposition because he had given his "word" to Misri Khan. It is easy to dismiss Miriam's objection as prejudiced because she had "never been there" and she does not understand the value of a tribal's word. (93-94). But the warnings at the army camp at Dubair are not to be ignored as uninformed and biased. When Major Mushtaq first saw Qasim and Zaitoon he was surprised that while Qasim was unmistakably the tribal, the girl was altogether Punjabi. In the course of their conversation Mushtaq learnt how Qasim adopted her when she was only five and how he brought her up as his own daughter. Mushtaq gingerly hinted that Zaitoon would not be happy in Kohistan because life there was very hard (138). Similar fears were expressed by Ashiq Hussain, the young mechanic with the army. He told Zaitoon directly that she would not be happy there because she was not of the hills. No woman from the plains could bear with "all the murders, the bloody family feuds" which were so common among the tribals. Ashiq urged Zaitoon not to go to Kohistan and suggested that he would gladly marry her (144).

All these admonitions by sympathetic well-wishers had even planted doubts in the mind of Zaitoon, who had been accepting the dictates of Qasim in filial obligation. Once in Kohistan, she realised that the living standards of the tribals, who ate "Dirty maize bread and water" as staple food, was rather too poor for her liking. Her stomach hurt and she pleaded with Qasim to take her back with him: "If I must marry, marry me to someone from the plains." She even suggested that Ashiq Hussain, the jawan at the army camp, would marry her. The brazenness of Zaitoon's proposal shocked Qasim and he threatened her: "I have 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." His hands closed round her throat as if to convince her that he would not hesitate to work out the threat if she refused to marry Sakhi. He explained: "You make me break my word, girl, and you cover my name with dung" (158).

Qasim's failure to understand the genuineness of Zaitoon's fears, his blunt threat to kill her if she refused to marry Sakhi, suppressed her will and she had to submit to her father's wishes. In most of the critical analyses of the novel this one action of Qasim's has overruled all his good works, his love and tenderness for Zaitoon and invested him with the stereotypical subjectivity of a tyrannical patriarch. This interpretation is fundamentally flawed because it downplays the compulsion to repeat gender norms, the citational aspect of gendered subjectivity. We must take into account what are the accepted norms of masculinity that are threatened if Qasim listened to her appeal before designating his action as patriarchal high-handedness.

Even when Qasim threatened Zaitoon with strangulation, and she cowered under the threat in timid acquiescence, he was torn by remorse, he kissed her and stroked her head, and muttered "I have given my word, child, my word..." (158). It is as if Qasim was not convinced that the sudden surge of violence in him was justified, but he was helpless before a rigid tribal code of conduct for men which must be adhered to regardless of his personal feelings. Zaitoon had openly expressed contempt for his people when she said "I will die rather than live here", and she had even unabashedly mentioned that the jawan at the army camp liked her and would marry her. For Qasim this was a gross violation of the feminine code: "A decent girl does not tell her father to whom he should marry her" (158). He was upset that "perhaps he had not directed the course of the girl's life correctly" (157). A nagging fear that his own people, the tribal society of Kohistan, would hold him responsible for Zaitoon's acts of misconduct kindled his wrath and in mad fury he threatened to strangle Zaitoon if she disobeyed.

After the marriage when the time for Qasim's departure came, he had an "unreasoning impulse" to take Zaitoon back with him. He even felt that he was wrong in forcing this marriage on her: "He should have listened to the child's violent plea the night they arrived." Perhaps he had acted in undue haste. He hoped that everything would turn out well because "if anything should happen to her I will not be able to bear it" (166-7). This wave of sentimentality for the girl should not be discounted to emphasize his readiness to throttle her if she became a badge of dishonor for him.

The value of "honour" in the life of a Kohistani tribal man cannot be overemphasized. Major Mushtaq had told Carol that for a tribal man from Kohistan life can be unceremoniously sacrificed to keep up the honour. A man may feel his honour slighted by a "handful of maize stolen." And the price is paid in bloody family feuds (115). Hamida, Zaitoon's mother-in-law, corroborated Mushtaq when she was aghast at the news of all the clans-men hunting for Zaitoon who had run away: "Honour! she thought bitterly. Everything for honour- and another life lost" (190). A man's honour lies in keeping his words. At the beginning of the novel Resham Khan had no objection to his daughter Afshan, who was fifteen years old, being married to a ten-years-old Qasim, simply because he had taken a loan from Qasim's father and promised his daughter if he failed to repay it. The rigorous code of conduct governing the Kohistani tribal man's life enjoins him to keep his promise. The

sternness of Qasim's warning to Zaitoon that she should marry Sakhi regardless of her feelings is thus indicative of his inability to subvert the tribal code of honour, not that of his unfeeling harshness for the girl. The repeated mutterings "I have given my word" show the battle within him and his obligation to undercut potential resistance and maintain the norms of masculinity. The compulsion to act in accordance with the norm through the performance of Zaitoon's marriage to Sakhi in spite of his "nagging fear for the girl, his misgivings" that would not be "stilled", made him grow old all on a sudden and his voice as he left Zaitoon was "broken" and "old-sounding" (168).

Apart from Qasim the other character much maligned for his cruelty to women is Sakhi. He is described as a beast, a tyrannical animal-trainer of a husband who relished beating his wife to submission on the slightest pretext. While I do not endorse Sakhi's conduct towards Zaitoon, I intend to explore the reasons behind his criminal behaviour and the evidences within the text of a much more admirable Sakhi if there had been no fear of social abjection and the grip of the citational aspect of the norms of gendered subjectivity had been less vicious on him.

Two things need to be emphasized before we examine Sakhi's behaviour with Zaitoon: the tribal's instinctive dislike of the soldiers from the plains and the significance of a wife for the tribals. The tribal's hatred for all outsiders, for the soldiers from the Pakistani plains in particular, was visceral. It came out openly when, after fifteen years on the plains, Qasim's feet touched the beloved ground of his youth for the first time with Zaitoon in his company. He fired instinctively at the army truck when it was close enough and the roar of its engine drowned the noise of the river. When Qasim saw the road through the Karakoram range he was galled by a feeling that the people from the plains were "creeping up", "penetrating remote plains". Their intrusion "rekindled the Kohistani hatred of all outsiders" and he fired the bullet shattering the back wheels and inviting strong retaliation from the jawans in the truck which was only averted by Zaitoon's presence of mind (100-101).

Unnoticed by others, Sakhi was unfortunately watching when Qasim and Zaitoon got down from the army truck and Ashiq walked with them a little distance in deference to Major Mustaq's orders. Sakhi guessed that the girl who was obviously from the plains was his chosen wife. He resented the fact that Qasim accepted a ride from the hated soldiers and allowed the jawan to walk with "his girl". He watched the "soldier's arm go up to steady the girl." As they continued the descent Zaitoon slipped and the "jawan's grip on her arm steadied her all the way to the sand embarkment." Embittered by Zaitoon's easy manners with the jawan, he "spat spitefully on the rocks." He watched each movement with "growing feelings of humiliation and jealousy". "Hatred and fury burned within him" (147-8). The tribal's instinctive distrust of outsiders (Zaitoon was a girl from the plains) and the hatred for soldiers combined to make Sakhi harbour ill-feelings against Zaitoon even before they met each other.

Why was Sakhi so jealously watchful of Zaitoon and why did he feel humiliated by the presence of Ashiq by her side? The observation of Mushtaq who had been familiar with the tribal customs may be taken as an explanation: "A wife was a symbol of status, the embodiment of a man's honour ..." (138). It was evident in the beginning of the novel when Qasim, who was only a lanky ten-years old married boy, picked up a large rock and flung it at the stranger who was glancing lewdly at his bathing wife. The tribal man's "honour" is thus tied up with his wife's demureness in front of other men. Zaitoon's unfortunate openness with Ashiq violated Sakhi's sense of normative femininity. Her difference from all the other women in his locality was marked out from the beginning because of her deep brown skin and spotted dress. Her strangeness had thus filled Sakhi with rancour from the outset. So on their first night together after marriage Sakhi was at first repulsively aggressive.

There was, however, nothing perverse in Sakhi's initial feeling as he surveyed his wife for the first time. There was "mounting excitement"; there was "proprietary lust and pride" because she was "a woman all his own." But he suddenly remembered the jawan and Zaitoon laughing together and "corroding jealousy" surged up within him in a "murderous fusion of hate and fever." He held her arms in "a cruel grip", tore the ghoongat from her head and "panted inarticulate hatred into her face." The senseless fury continued as he roughly yanked her shirt over her head and tugged at the chord of her salwar. The violence was tantamount to a rape. Zaitoon screamed and her scream brought Sakhi back to his senses. He froze against the wall. His manners conveyed "utter capitulation"; he turned his eyes away from her "mortified nudity"; and "restored her dignity" (160). He was "mutely contrite" and filled with a "desire to make amends." His eyes spoke "of love" (161). The Sakhi who almost raped his wife initially was impersonating the subjectivity of the offended male resenting the transgressions of normative femininity in Zaitoon's easy manners with the jawan. The real Sakhi capitulated when Zaitoon recoiled and his eyes were full of love for her.

The build up to Sakhi's first savage attack on his mother and Zaitoon should be taken into account before dismissing him as a brute in human garb. Zaitoon had inadvertently touched a soft spot when she mentioned Major Mushtaq's offer of a job to Sakhi. It revived his jealousy as the vision of the jawan's grip on her arm and her "laughter and ease in his company" inflamed him. His question-"Why did you let him touch you?" - and accusation- "You laughed together as if you were lovers"- show how the memory tormented him. The diacritical norms of gendered subjectivity which are socially sanctioned behaviours for men and women are violated in Zaitoon's openness with the jawan (166). There was also the proud tribal's grudge against the

soldiers from the plains: "Coming to our territory as if it belonged to them" (165). Added to this is the realization of what Qasim described as "the ignominy of his illiteracy" and the awe of educated men of power like Mushtaq who held "bewildering power over the likes of him" and could "upset his plans at a whim" (134). This sense of being emasculated by unequal power positions also blazed Sakhi's wrath.

In spite of his sense of being wronged and his grudge against Qasim for having allowed the jawan to touch Zaitoon, he was considerate enough to suggest Zaitoon should come out to bid farewell to her father. But Zaitoon's "tempestuous display" when in front of all his kinsfolk, she broke free of Hamida's hold and wrapped Qasim in a frenzied hug and pleaded fervently to be taken back to Lahore, was so unbecoming of a married woman that it mortified Sakhi. He thought his "severity" was perhaps responsible for her hysteric conduct and tried to mollify the violently weeping Zaitoon. He brought her bread and meat, talked to her with gentleness. Although he was "buried in a way of life that could afford no sentiment", yet he felt a "spark of pity" for Zaitoon (169).

But all this changed four days after marriage when Sakhi resumed his work and on his way to the field he passed by his brother Yunus Khan who taunted him telling that his wife from the plains "requires a man to control her". The "calculated pity" lurking in Yunus's words stung him and he was filled with shame for his efforts to appease his wife in front of his kinsfolk. He had a feeling that all his clansmen "doubted his manhood" because of his "docile efforts" to mollify her. Burning with an "insane ungovernable fury" he was determined to show everyone how much of a "man" he was. His fury was spent first on the ox who was unable to pull a half-submerged rock. He shouted and beat the beast again and again until the flesh on its sore spine gaped open. When his mother Hamida caught his "flailing arms" to spare the beast, he hit her on the shoulder shouting "I'll teach you meddling woman". Appalled at the inhuman ferocity of Sakhi's blows on his mother, Zaitoon tried to get hold of the stick and even managed to wrench it away. Sakhi struck her so hard that she stumbled and sprawled face down on the ground. Sakhi was shouting "You are my woman! I'll teach you to obey me" (172-73).

All these signs of brutality were really Sakhi's efforts to prove his masculinity to thwart abjection or shaming which was palpably present in Yunus's taunt. The compulsory repetition of gendered norms which establishes the performativity of gender in a community requires Sakhi to demonstrate his "savage subjugating will". In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler asserts that each individual is composed of several "crossings of identification" and that no subject can act "without disavowing certain possibilities and avowing others" (115-116). Sakhi had to disavow the softer, humane possibilities of his subjectivity and avow the savage subjugating possibilities. His failure as a subject lies in his capitulation before the citational aspect of gendered subjectivity, the "socially established ways of being men" (Culler 104).

Sakhi's brutality crossed all civilized limits on the second occasion. But Zaitoon had invited it herself through open defiance. Sakhi had gone to a neighbouring village but when he returned Yunus met him and told him about Zaitoon's trip to the river and her joy at the sight of the army jeep. After a long chat with Yunus when Sakhi came to the bed Zaitoon was already asleep. But when she muttered something Sakhi told her in no uncertain terms that she should not go to the river again. In spite of this peremptory command Zaitoon went to the river again next morning when Sakhi left home to sell a goat. Sakhi returned early to keep a watch on his wife. He saw an unsuspecting Zaitoon smiling when an army jeep appeared and waving her hands merrily. He came immediately to view and "glowering with thunderous hatred" (186) mouthed obscenities at her and kicked her between her legs. He went on beating her till she sank to the ground senseless. He lifted her inert body across his shoulders and carried her home.

This murderous cruelty was a deliberate performance calculated to effect a complete surrender of Zaitoon to his commands. He had a savage subjugating will but allowed it to be tempered by his love and commiseration for the girl. He knew he had been too soft on his wife in the eyes of his kinsfolk. In keeping with the tribal code for men he was determined to make Zaitoon obey him. He hit her hard when she dared to come between his anger and his mother. Thereafter, he beat her regularly on the slightest pretext. But he did not punish her when Yunus Khan informed him about her trudge to the river during his absence and her elation at the sight of the army jeep. He let her off with a warning- "Don't go there again." But Zaitoon went to the river again the very next morning and waved to the army jeep. So Sakhi was seized with a fury that turned him into an avenging beast. The gendered norms of masculinity sanctioned this violence. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, the "masculine subject" apprehends a "scandal" when a "female object" shows "unanticipated agency" (2489). Zaitoon's scamper to the river in spite of Sakhi's stern injunctions to the contrary was an instance of agency that Sakhi must stifle to remain confirmed in his masculinity within the gender norms reified in his community. His masculinity is predicated upon his ability to ensure Zaitoon's complete surrender before his will. In fact, after the cruel beatings which almost killed Zaitoon, Sakhi thought with "morbid elation on his lips" that she would not dare to defy him again. But Zaitoon still ran away and the entire clan was unable to trace her even after four days of frantic search. In desperation over his impending insult Sakhi doubted the sincerity of the searching men. Yunus Khan was forthright in his accusation to Sakhi: "Are you a bugged-up eunuch? You should have slit her throat right then" (200). Sakhi's savagery has, therefore, still fallen short of

the cruel Kohistani norm of masculinity. In the eyes of Yunus and his own kinsfolk Sakhi was rather an "eunuch".

Zaitoon's running away from Kohistan is certainly an act of oppositional agency. She knew she would be pursued by the entire clan of Sakhi's tribesmen. Her chances of reaching the army camp without being traced were extremely slim. If she was nabbed the penalty would be death. In spite of it she ran away because "in flight alone lay her only hope of survival" (186). If she died repeating the feminine norms by docile acquiescence to her husband's commands, no one would shed a tear. Life meant very little in Kohistan: "A man killed was a candle snuffed out, a tree felled, no more" (109). Sidhwa honoured Zaitoon's agency by making her survive while in the actual incident forming the basis of the novel the girl was captured, her head was severed and floated in the river. But valorization of Zaitoon's agency will have little significance for feminist struggle unless the gendered subject is seen in its proper perspective.

Zaitoon was not much different from other women in many ways. She adhered to the feminine norms as a daughter. When her marriage was settled Miriam did all she could to dissuade Zaitoon from going with her father to Kohistan. She urged Zaitoon to tell Qasim that she did not want to marry a tribal. She promised to marry her off to a decent Punjabi who knew her ways. But Zaitoon simply lowered her head and said shyly "I cannot cross my father" (98). Major Mushtaq politely aired his misgivings when he asked Qasim if he thought Zaitoon would be happy with the tribals who live a very hard life. Ashiq urged Zaitoon not to go there because the tribals always fight bloody family feuds and she would not be able to cope with their life. He even volunteered to tell the Major that she did not wish to go. He promised to take care of her if she stayed. But Zaitoon did not accept the offer saying: "It's my father's wish. I must go with him" (144). Zaitoon conducted herself strictly in accordance with the prescribed norms for decent girls within the Kohistani gender regime. That norm was spelt out by a furious Qasim when Zaitoon fervently pleaded to be taken away and married to a man from the plains instead: "A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom she should marry her" (158). Zaitoon kept herself within the limits of decency for girls in her decision to marry Sakhi in deference to her father's promise.

As a wife also Zaitoon was not different from the other wives in Kohistan. Her life within a few days of her marriage mirrored "the grim drudgery of the mountain people" (174). Before marriage she complained that tribals lived on dirty maize bread and water and her stomach hurt when she ate it. But soon baked maize and water became her staple food. Only on rare occasions there was a supplement of a little rice. She kept herself busy all day with the assignment of chores for women: chaffing, kneading, washing and tending the animals and the young green rice-shoots and the sprouting maize. She gathered animal droppings, patted them and plastered them to the hut walls to be dried by the sun and used as fuel. She would skillfully direct the flow of the irrigation waters into the terraced patches of tilled fields. She walked out in search of firewood and became familiar with the terrain.

The animal treatment meted out to her by her husband did not surprise her anymore. In his presence "she drifted into a stupor, until nothing really hurt her." He beat her on the slightest pretext. She now lived "only to placate him". Her eyes were "anxious and obsequious" like those of Hamida, her mother-in-law whose very sight filled her with revulsion when she first came to Kohistan. At night she "acquiesced docilely" (174). Thus, there was nothing in Zaitoon's early married life to suggest that she would subvert the norms of feminine subjectivity with a sudden surge of agency. In fact, Sakhi was fully satisfied that he had subdued the recalcitrance Zaitoon showed when she brazenly ran bareheaded to cling to her father exposing herself to the stare of his clansmen. He swaggered before Yunus who doubted his masculinity i.e. his ability to control her.

While all this was true, there was something in Zaitoon which suggested that she would not take everything lying down. She had an "instinct for self-preservation" (174) that kept her going. When she was only five years old and her parents were butchered in the communal riots following the partition of India, she clung to the legs of Qasim sobbing "Abba, Abba, my Abba". Qasim knelt beside her and gently asked her name and the name of her father. She answered: "My father's name was Sikandar". Qasim marked the use of past tense and felt, "It showed a courage and a forbearance that met the exact standards of his own proud tribe" (30). Thus, even at the age of five when she lost her parents, Zaitoon showed "a courage and forbearance" that impressed Qasim.

Another aspect of Zaitoon's subjectivity needs mention as a pointer to the possibilities of agency. It is a willingness to take risks in order to do what she wanted to do. After she dropped out from school, Zaitoon accompanied Miriam to the Zenanas and became an eager participant in marriage activities. Women in Lahore used burkhas during these visits but Qasim forbade Zaitoon the use of a burkha because his kinswomen were not even aware of such a garment. So Zaitoon slipped in and out of his friends' homes wrapping her head and torso in a shawl. But she would sometimes borrow Miriam's burkha and love to walk past Qasim unrecognized. This resort to "simple deceptions" when her father has forbidden the use of burkha signifies a readiness to disobey when necessary. Together with this willingness to employ simple deceptions, there is also a peculiarity in her features which suggested that she is "poised for flight, even when she entered a room. It was a quiver of her

supple body that started in the soles and high, finely drawn arches of her feet" (153). So, her docility as a daughter and wife notwithstanding, there were elements in her subjectivity which augured a subversive agency.

The grim prospect of life in Kohistan presented by Miriam, Major Mushtaq and Ashiq Hussain along with her first revulsion from the acute poverty of the tribals and their savagery unnerved Zaitoon and she pleaded with Qasim to be taken back to Lahore. But as she stayed and married Sakhi, she vaguely hoped that Qasim's nostalgic reminiscences of tribal men who were "heroic, proud and incorruptible", whose code of honour "banned all injustice and evil" and who were like gods "free to roam the mountains as their fancies led" (90)- would prove to be true. On the first night with Sakhi, after the initial shock, his tenderness, his desire to make amends and the love in his eyes, revived in Zaitoon feelings that her romantic fantasies about tribal lovers would be certainly fulfilled (180). In the morning, she watched the sleeping Sakhi with "alternating waves of tenderness and passion." When he pulled her to him in the morning, she hid her face in the chest and felt "filled with life" (164).

But all this changed within a few days of marriage when Sakhi became increasingly cruel as if to disprove Yunus's accusation that he was not man enough to control his wife. Zaitoon no longer thought of marriage "with any sense of romance". She indulged her fancy as an escape from this nightmarish life. She "longingly lived" for her promised visit to Lahore for the birth of her first child. Miriam would weep, caress her tired limbs and flare at Qasim showing him the cruel welts and bruises on her back. Perhaps Qasim would declare a terrible vendetta against Sakhi. But this hope was soon dismissed because it would take nine months for the child to come and she might not live that long.

Zaitoon's "instinct for self-preservation" urged her to run away from Sakhi if at all she hoped to survive. Her first visit to the river was an act of reconnaissance rather than a simple and innocent whim. Why should she otherwise feel "carefree" after a long time as she settled on the ledge, guessed that the two soldiers sitting on the passing jeep were Ashiq and Major Mushtaq and remembered the Major's concern and Ashiq's tenderness for her? What is the significance of her "know[ledge]" that "she belonged with them" (183)? It seems she pinned her hopes of rescue from Kohistan on a chance meeting with the Major and Ashiq. That is why the road "hushed her misery" (184). So even though Sakhi's "cryptic injunction" weighted down her spirit, she muttered a silent prayer as she went to the river a second time. When after an hour's wait the jeep droned into view and there was a solitary figure who was not quite perceptible from the distance, Zaitoon smiled "on an impulse" and "merrily" waved her hands. This impulsive action indicated the direction of Zaitoon's thoughts and feelings. Sakhi was perhaps not altogether wrong in suspecting that Zaitoon planned to run away and besmirch his honour.

When both the visits to the river were of no avail and she was beaten almost to death for the effort, she decided to run away. As she had become familiar with the track, she ventured to take the difficult, so unlikely, track to Dubair with the provision of only a blanket and a bundle of maize breads to support her. It was a mad scheme with very little chance of crossing safely to the army camp before being nabbed by the entire horde of Sakhi's clansmen scouring the mountain track on her trail. In fact, as Mushtaq transferred to Ashiq the bundle with the girl inside, Ashiq said, "I think the girl's gone mad, sir". As far as Zaitoon was concerned it was not important whether she escaped to safety or not. By running away in spite of the jealous watchfulness of Sakhi she had proved that it is possible for oppressed women to change the narrative of gendered subjectivity.

The novel *The Pakistani Bride* thus turns out to be a critique of the gendered norms which both animate and constrain the gendered subject. Qasim and Sakhi have both deviant desires within them, sympathy for the daughter and love for the wife, which they "disavowed" to "avow" as natural the normative masculine subjectivity. It is wrong to castigate them as barbaric male chauvinists for actions which are at best "impersonations" done under a situation of duress to avert punitive consequences for failing to "do their gender right" (Butler 2500). For all their bash and brawn, they ultimately turn out to be weak subjects unfit to subvert the narrative of gender. Sidhwa based her novel on the real story of a Punjabi girl who dared to run away from the tribal society to be nabbed in the middle of her flight and killed. It is a deliberate attempt to modify the feminist discourse of women as victims and to engage with the ways women, real women, negotiate oppressive systems. Zaitoon's story is an instance of oppositional agency that women in real life show by their courage to stand alone and subvert the norms of gendered subjectivity.

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