



## *Societal Representation and Reality: A Hermeneutic Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's the Pakistani Bride*

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### Abstract

The research paper examines the hermeneutic of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel – The Pakistani Bride- and the social representations and cultural contexts that shape gender and identity interpretation. Using the main hermeneutic theories of the great philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, the project studies the impact of author intentions, reader perception, and historical consciousness. It claims that Sidhwa's narrative criticizes the practice of variations of patriarchy buying women, while personalities such as Zaitoon reflect the paradox between an individual's desires and our society's expectations. The paper highlights the role of cultural and historical context in interpreting themes of the novel, the impact of arranged marriages, and the status of women as an honor symbol. By examining key passages closely, the study describes the complexity of the process whereby identity is formed in the tribal context and raises the broader consequences of the lack of representation in society. In the end, this hermeneutic study enriches the discussion about the issues of gender, culture, and power struggle in literature, demonstrating how the texts by Sidhwa captivate readers in the complex layers of meaning of Sidhwa's depiction of female experiences.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, Gender Identity, Cultural Representation, Patriarchy, The Pakistani Bride



## Introduction

Hermeneutics is the science of explaining and understanding the meaning of texts, including literature and scriptures. It identifies how meaning is made and received, spotlighting history and culture (Demeterio, 2001; Ali et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2021). Although hermeneutics was developed long ago, two key luminaries, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Hans-Georg Gadamer, have postulated its general principles.

Demetrio (2001) writes that hermeneutics is the organized study of what different kinds of communication, like religious writings and words, mean. The name derives from the Greek word "Hermeuein, "meaning – to translate or explain. Hermeneutics, which appears in the study of religion, studies the basic tendencies and methods used in explaining sacred scriptures, including the Bible, the Quran, and the Bhagavad Gita. However, hermeneutics is more than the decipherment of what religious books mean. It also includes figuring out what literature, art, and other forms of communication mean (Wernet, 2013; Javed Iqbal et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Sabir et al., 2021a).

Benson (1967) says that the German philosopher and priest Friedrich Schleiermacher is a significant figure in developing hermeneutics. In his volume *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, Schleiermacher says that interpretation is a part of speech. He talked about understanding a piece; you had to become yourself, the author, and determine their meaning in their time and place. As an interpretive method, a "hermeneutic circle "demonstrates the relations between the separate textual parts and the text. It also shows how the translator shapes the text and vice versa (Ullah et al., 2020).

The other great man in hermeneutics is the Swiss philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's important book, *Truth and Method*, continues the work of Schleiermacher and is filled with testimony for how to think about hermeneutics. As Gadamer suggests, an individual's preconceived ideas/ preconceptions guide the perception of a book to determine the interpretation of a book. So, he stressed how important it was to be aware of oneself and how important it was for the speaker and the text to talk to each other (Thiselton, 2009).

Warnke (2016) writes that Gadamer's ideas about interpretation also included the idea of "historical consciousness," which emphasizes how important the historical and cultural setting is about the text. He talked about the need to know about the past events that influenced the writing and publication of the book if you want to understand a book. This approach to reading texts questions the assumption that there is only one fair reading and illustrates how many there are.

As it turned out, on the same footing as Schleiermacher and Gadamer, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur contributed significantly to the field of hermeneutics. In his work – *The Conflict of Interpretations*, the idea of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" first comes up by Ricoeur. Using this method, researchers examine closely the central beliefs and thoughts that create how they understand things. He said interpretation carried more than the literal meaning of a document. It also meant uncovering the hidden meanings and power relations beneath it (George, 2020; Bleicher, 2017).



Roberge (2011) says Ricoeur's hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of story and the role of language in reading texts. He says that to understand a book, one must piece together a plot that connects all of its differing parts and perspectives. Hermeneutics of the self is a hermeneutics in which the emphasis is on deciphering how the reader shapes the text.

As a rule, hermeneutics is a complex and extensive discipline with many aspects and methods. It also considers writing, art, and conversation, not only holy books. Schleiermacher's (1998), Gadamer's (1977), and Ricoeur's (1977) works have been critical in the history of hermeneutics and still have an impact on how we read and understand texts today. Because of their ideas, a more profound and complex way of interpreting has grown, putting historical, cultural, and language aspects of meaning first (Braaten, 2016). Hermeneutics, a field of study, is constantly evolving and expanding as new researchers and thinkers build upon the contributions of earlier authors (Shpet, 2019).

### Research Problem

The research problem discussed in the current research is the complex relationship between social representation and personal identity as portrayed in the book written by Bapsi Sidhwa – *The Pakistani Bride*. Although the novel is rich in narrative and thematic material, the reader finds that there is relatively little knowledge concerning how hermeneutic laws can lead to an understanding of the gender roles and cultural identity of the text. The main question is how Sidhwa's portrayal of her characters, particularly her women, including Zaitoon, can project the greater society's expectation and commodification of the female identity in patriarchal societies.

Two primary questions (inquiry) form the basis of this research. First, which hermeneutic elements can be distinguished in *The Pakistani Bride*, and second, how can those elements be read through which hermeneutical glasses can be read? The research aims to reveal how the layers of meaning under the character's and society's experiences are organized through the frameworks presented by Schleiermacher, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.

Furthermore, the paper explores the consequences of these interpretations for interpreting women's lived realities in analogous cultural situations. The research question is significant in literary scholarship and broader discussions about gender, power, and cultural representation. To heighten the debate on how literature can reflect upon, as well as comment on, societal norms of a given society, this thesis puts forth its contribution to the discussion about the thematic concerns of the novel, with the ultimate objective of discussing the constant struggle of both identity and agency that women in the patriarchal societies have to encounter.

### Research Questions

This study answers the following questions:

1. What hermeneutic elements are found in the novel *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) by Bapsi Sidhwa?
2. How are these elements interpreted through the perspectives of Hermeneutic?

### Literature Review

Hans-Georg Gadamer, who published *Truth and Method* in 1960, took hermeneutic theory to the next level. He pointed out that interpretation is not a matter of fact but a mere discourse between the interpreter and the text. Gadamer used the term 'historical consciousness', which refers to understanding how historical and cultural perspectives



relate to interpretive processes. One held that each person has his or her perception of the event; hence, interpretation is not stagnant (Ullah, Ali, & Khalid, 2017).

Paul Ricoeur greatly enriched hermeneutics by employing the concept of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. This means the interpreter should look at the text for such ideologies or, more specifically, the power relationships concealed in a text. He protested that interpretation relates more to the discovery of implicit meaning and the structures that underlie the text by assigning broader hermeneutic tasks.

### **Application of Hermeneutics**

In literature, hermeneutics offers a way of identifying figures who, according to their interpretation, author different messages within the language of the text. Such an approach enables the reader to understand the pros and cons of the story, including the themes, symbols and characters' intentions within the story, which portrays the nature and complications of life. At the same time, the hermeneutical approach involves commentary on language, structure, and cultural aspects, which leads to a better interpretation of the text (Sabir et al., 2021b; Ullah et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020).

Hermeneutics also plays a proper role for the reader, especially in interpreting texts. Instead, the reader interprets the book differently based on their own experience, attitudes, views, and personal and culture-borne perceptions (Sabir et al., 2021c). This interaction is important because it allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding and discover several levels of meaning of the text.

### **The Link between Hermeneutics and Literature**

There is a close link between hermeneutics and literature since hermeneutic principles of literature interpretation. Generally, literature is a form of interpersonal communication that helps the sender pass specific ideas, feelings, and even negative views on specific cultures across to the receptor. Thus, exploring these elements through the prism of hermeneutics about literary texts is possible, enhancing the reading process.

### **Interpretation of Literary Texts**

Literature is replete with layers of meaning, and there is always much effort that goes into an attempt to understand the hidden message. In that respect, hermeneutics assists in this process due to the awareness that the reader is required to gain not only the words in the text but also the circumstances under which those words were written. Before proceeding to the characterization and analysis of the particular author, cultural and historical context and a cultural backdrop that was important for the creation and development of the work must be discussed.

For instance, while approaching *The Pakistani Bride*, one has to take into account Pakistan's history and put the circumstances of writing in perspective, such as Sidhwa's skin colour as a Pakistani woman immigrant. These elements are crucial for the study of the novel to analyze such motifs as gender and identity and cultural differences.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology applied within this study is qualitative, conducting a hermeneutic analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Pakistani Bride*. Through such an approach, one may burrow deeper into the discussion of text themes, characters, and their cultural background and reveal them to the intricacies of gender and identity, as can be observed in the given text. Critical elements of the methodology include theoretical framework, CAT survey, text analysis, and interpretation.



### Theoretical Framework

The study's main foundations are the ideas of Hermeneutics, with significant emphasis on the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. These writers present an active theoretical basis for explaining how meaning in literature is constructed and received.

**Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics:** This framework emphasized the importance of knowing what the author attempted to do in writing and the historical context in which the text was created. Based on Schleiermacher's ideas, the research seeks to examine how Sidhwa's background and the socio-political climate of Pakistan at the time of partition structure the narrative.

**Gadamer's Historical Consciousness:** Gadamer raises issues regarding historical consciousness, which plays on what historical and cultural context contributes to interpretation. This part of the methodology opens a new insightful insight into the mechanism that forms how the characters' identities are determined by their cultural and historical background.

**Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Suspicion:** Ricoeur's standpoint allows one to analyze the ideological basis within the text critically. This section of the methodology allows one to explore power dynamics that characterize gender roles and identity and reveal the complexities of Sidhwa's writings regarding female characters.

### Data Collection

The primary text for this research is Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*, which is the central text for analysis. The novels have a lot of narrative depth and thematic complexity, which qualifies them as ideal hermeneutic analysis topics. Scholarly articles, books, critical essays on hermeneutics, gender representation, and Sidhwa's work constitute secondary data. The following secondary sources support the analysis by placing the novel into a literary and cultural context.

### Text Analysis

The research of *The Pakistani Bride* is based on a close study of particular deeper passages; this work shows themes and character relations. This technique examines text line by line to observe its many meanings, symbols, and thematic importance.

**Character Analysis:** The protagonists, especially Zaitoon, have been given greater consideration as examples of women in a patriarchal society. By analyzing her character arc, the study explains the collision of individual desires against society's expectations. The analysis also refers to the second characters, Qasim and Carol, to examine their impact on exploring gender and identity in the narration.

**Thematic Exploration:** The research identifies and studies the main themes, which include women as commodities, arranged marriages, and the cultural depiction of honour. In each theme, hermeneutics is the looking glass used to explore it and test how the aspect of the concept is interwoven into the fabric of the narrative.

### Interpretation

The interpretation stage merges information gleaned from text analysis into the theoretical frameworks. This stage focuses on how Sidhwa's text critiques societal norms and certain intricacies of gender identities.

**Contextual Interpretation:** The findings are provided against the background of the sociopolitical scenario of Pakistan during the period of partition. Such an interpretation of





the context brings to light how incidents of history and cultural practices are shaping their experiences and identities.

**Critical Engagement:** Based on Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, the research offers a critical interrogation of the text as one interrogates the ideological unconscious and power relations that structure Sidhwa's rendering of women. This engagement makes readers think twice about their assumptions regarding the roles of genders and cultural representation.

### Limitations

Even though the qualitative hermeneutic approach has clear merits, one must consider its limitations. The interpretive nature of hermeneutic analysis is that interpretations are not the same for readers. In addition, too much focus on a particular text may prevent the generalizability of the results. This methodology may later be transferred to a comparative reading of other works by Sidhwa or other authors addressing similar issues.

### Conclusion

To sum it up, the research methodology selected for this research project aims to give a full-scale analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* through the hermeneutic lens. By integrating the above views, the methodology provides a strong platform for exploring the complex inter-relationship between the societal representation and the identity of the given individual in the novel. This mode of analysis adds colour to the analysis of Sidhwa's work while expanding the general debate on gender, culture, and power relations in the literature. The results highlight the importance of context and critical interpretation in grappling with literary texts. They suggest that the reader should pay attention to the complexity of the human experience in the patriarchal society.

### Textual Analysis: Literal Interpretation

#### Introduction to Bapsi Sidhwa and *The Pakistani Bride* (1983)

Extending one's understanding of multiple meanings of *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) and developing a richer understanding of themes, characters, and socio-political context can arise if approached from a hermeneutic approach by the researcher. The question Bapsi Sidhwa raises is not peculiar to Pakistan or any other country, but it hits everyone. Her most outstanding literary production is *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), which demands the portrayal of innumerable themes on the subcontinent around the time of partition.

The story *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) explains the possible unity of those from many origins. This should be just as anticipated given the geographic area that Kohistani is native to; their context of socioculture is best explained by the use of tribal context. Therefore, the novel's first description of the Kohistan clan's society is without hostility; the atmosphere is welcoming. Qasim is among the ten-year-old children who 'inherited' a gun from his father. He feels he must go through a marriage ceremony to clear an outstanding debt. Zaitoon and Qasim are husband and wife to each other. She is an orphan girl who left the company of her family. All had been done away with through violent mass killings.

"A wife was a symbol of status, the embodiment of a man's honour and the focus of his role as provider. A valuable commodity indeed, and dearly bought. He glanced at the girl. Her head was bowed" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 118).

Literal hermeneutics says that every text should be read or interpreted in light of the time and culture in which it was written (Lings 67). This gives us an idea of the traditional values that Bapsi Sidhwa mentions above in *The Pakistani Bride*. In such a context, the word "wife" is defined according to a traditional and patriarchal context, in which the



husband constructs important parts of his own social and economic identity through his wife. This way, the wife is valued as a status symbol, talked about, and seen as a commodity, a person whose feelings can be touched. In that way, the wife is not only a companion but a way of expressing the husband's dignity based on his ability to "provide" and maintain respectable guard in his world. The word "dearly bought" plays with the money, setting why a man might buy the marriage opportunity and reducing his wife to a purchasable item or sum.

That a woman lacks agency, embodied in "her head bowed" in the world she lives in, is a recurring theme in the hermeneutics of understanding the author's intention. When read through Ricoeur's window, the passage proposes an indictment of cultural honour and possession, presenting the tension between personal honour and self-interest versus the socio-cultural self and a significant power imbalance. By situating the text in literal hermeneutics, readers can see the social pressure that informs the otherwise narrow imaginings of female identity through the patterns of male-constructed views of status and property.

"More children are born to the pair, but when there is an outbreak of smallpox, Qasim emerges as the sole survivor" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 11).

Taking this passage from *The Pakistani Bride*, understood from a hermeneutics of dispositions point of view, one realizes that it resonates with the painful reality of life in this rural terrain. In a world in which disease and death constitute constant variables that govern the existence and fate of the people, Qasim's death of his family by smallpox and survival as the last surviving member exposes the gore of survival.

Viewed from a different perspective, applying Schleiermacher's hermeneutic approach to analyse the unique syntax and grammar used in language, the reader will likely plumb the depths of an author's conception and the actual meaning of a text. They will learn that Sidhwa writes of life and beings' fragility and how we must be reborn and strong in this place. In simply portraying smallpox as a "ruthless destroyer" of Qasim's household, Sidhwa sets the reader face to face with the reality of death in that part of the world, and there are no preventive countermeasures offered by modern medicine.

Ricoeur continues developing the hermeneutic layers inside a text, directing the reader to read this passage as a symbol of Qasim's detachment from his former life and an impossible unfolding of the world (an unending circle of cynicism). In literal hermeneutics in history, the passage unveils the fragile balance of fate-survival, which has happened to people living in oppressive situations.

Similar to Zaitoon, Carol's story is very much like her. Carol, an American, is now married to a Pakistani military man; she says he is from the United States (specifically, San Jose). We left Indianapolis when I was a little girl" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 91). This certainly proves Carol's dissatisfaction with her marriage. This condition has led to the challenges that women experience as they come into a marriage with an individual from a different cultural base.

"Slowly Carol had begun to realize that even among her friends, where the wives did not wear burkhas or live in special, women's quarters, the general separation of the sexes bred an atmosphere of sensuality" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 96).

This part of *The Pakistani Bride* serves as a demonstration of the way Carol, as an outsider in the Pakistani environment, learns to degrade herself. However, it is implied in every aspect of a patriarchal society. The thing that surprises Carol even more than the



reference to the fact that "wives did not wear burkhas" and lived apart a la "chattels" is the "atmosphere of sensuality" arising from the extreme separation of genders. The signification of this awareness, therefore, is that the social parameters that regulate male and female interaction help to heighten rather than inhibit awareness of the sexual, thereby standing starkly against interaction between the sexes, which is more of a norm in Carol's own culture.

Another humanistic tradition, writing between the lines of Sidhwa, is Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. If one reads Sidhwa with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, the entire import of Carol's character may be to illustrate Carol's increasing enlightenment about the cultural idiom of gender relations in Pakistan, naturalized in Carol's perception. Sexual separation, even outside strictly enforced religious dress, still enlivens an atmosphere of excessive sexual awareness, which is new to Carol.

Carol's critiques include a larger vision of cultural adaptation and perception so readers can get a glimpse of her judgments and a methodical appreciation of Pakistani culture. This passage shows Carol's developing sensuality of the gender dichotomy in a literal hermeneutic way.

Carol wondered why these women must be so damn coy. "You should well know better than to raise such delicate questions, dear", scolded primly Farukh. Our women, especially young girls, are also modest" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 113).

The Pakistani Bride (1983) by Bapsi Sidhwa, excerpted, shows the issue of culture and gender roles in the narrative of female ingenuity regarding Pakistani society. Although a couple of women I met oohed and aahed over her as if a cat imitating disinterest only to pounce, Carol was baffled by their expressions of besottedness and justified scorn them. Her disdain for their coyness—goddamn coy—reflects the before cultures from whence she likely hails, using direct communication as the plan: Eastern Pakistani culture is conservative and modest.

That is how Farukh responds to how he feels when Carol is sad. By scolding Carol and adding that our women, our young girls in particular, are chaste, he reaffirms, he cements, the image of women in their culture as demure and dutiful and a little chaste romanticism about how women ought to behave. The adjective prime means that he dislikes this standard of behaviour and would like to stop it.

This quote provides an example of using elementary hermeneutics to explain and interpret behaviors and set expectations in relation to particular societal and cultural orientations. It also shows how Carol was exposed to norms besides the "Pakistan" she re-entered, suggesting the theme of cultural circularity and the strain of cross-cultural communication throughout the book.

Marriage and identity play important roles in the novel's plot; symbolically, they are the most important motifs, as is grief. This object is usually connected to Indigenous culture with authority, making it militant in connotation (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 180). Small rocks can be used as a convenient means to demonstrate the effects of a negative culture and history (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 11).

Amongst Characters ": Afshan accepted her lot cheerfully. She assisted her mother-in-law, fairly the maize, took care, milked, the two goats and frolicked her way through chores" (Sidhwa, 1983, p.16).

In the extract, Afshan wore her fate cheerfully. Bapsi Sidhwa describes the internal characteristics of a character passionate with fulfilment, joyfulness, and happiness in the





routines by saying, “She assisted her mother-in-law, chaffed the maize, looked after and milked the two goats, and played hide-and-seek over the chores” (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 16). That she finally accepts that this is her lot means an acceptance of her lot without bitterness or regret. The roar she seems to lead in this acceptance makes space for grace and gratitude, as frequently extolled in a character who brings gladness to defeat or the daily.

Afshan was brought up in a rural household, used to doing menial, traditional tasks, She helps her mother-in-law process maize and cattle. The work of the home translates the rhythm of rural life and speaks of a feeling of culture and identity, here representing her entry into the familial and societal space. By concentrating on what she is doing, Sidhwa ties her character to the world where she lives, partly to reflect her socialization and securely situate her in the domestic world and the land. The expression “frolicked her way through her chores” implies joy, even playfulness, in Afshan as she does her daily tasks. She carries out her particular responsibilities not because they are tasks but cheerfully. I do not see her loads but how she can find the beauty and the joy of living within the most common human activity.

This picture of Afshan is the soul of everything that comes from the ashes and goes down the road of life with purpose and a smile, atoning for himself and the world. Sidhwa’s articulation reconfigures every common state with the help of the character’s gaze, transforming the act of drinking a glass of water into a transcendent state and endowing a way of life with meaning, which would mean that the form ought to be more valuable than the content (6).

‘Brother Qasim,’ she persuaded, ‘how can a girl, grown up in Lahore, schooled – how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different; you do not know how changed you are’ (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 81).

Through the fine scope of literal hermeneutics, her double victimization in both patriarchal and traditional patriarchal paradigms of life is captured in this passage from *The Pakistani Bride*. Zaitoon’s words clarify that she is a victim bound by the modern times of urban Lahore, as well as by the tribal values of the old, patriarchal society. Zaitoon got a degree and started a new life, but she is always just a commodity in the hands of Qasim now, becoming his partner and then one of the tribe members. Her cries for empathetic listening from the kidnappers show the lack of agency on her part because she sees that there is a gaping rift between her upbringing and the tribal life to which she is now bound. Schleiermacher, who centres importance on interpretation when understanding the author’s aim, enabling consideration of the cultural context, shows readers how Zaitoon describes oppressive ways of Islam, preventing her from starting her decision-making process regarding life and living. This, in turn, is a critique of the effect of patriarchy and moral posturing on women and women’s ability to be autonomous human beings. Sidhwa paints the image of the societal norm on the part of women of like backgrounds, irrespective of their individual preferences, in Zaitoon.

Ricoeur’s vision of interpretation, in which several layers of meaningful interpretation are found, is congruent with this depiction in drawing attention to the inbuilt conflict between self and others in the case of communal tradition. Thus, hermeneutics of literalness make Zaitoon a mirror that reveals the plight of masses of women pitifully made vulnerable to patriarchal ethos. These norms justify their lives by loading them up with a common truth and, in so doing, rob them of the power to act on their agency.



Meanwhile, the heroine, Carol, the single woman who has been obliged to stick it here, between two countries, depicts the horrifying challenges the women in this world are experiencing.

“You think tribals will satisfy her desires?” he asked, hiding his sympathy. “It is a hard life for your people” (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 118). In *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), Carol raises a question about the brutal barriers Zaitoon meets in a traditional tribal society, a question that no one from a tribal society (at least, no woman) would find it possible to ask. From a hermeneutic point of view, this excerpt suggests the ongoing conflict between Carol, who identifies with his situation, and Qasim, who wishes to do away with the old-school values. Carol’s concern gives the picture of the familiar urban life of Zaitoon, and she knows that he may struggle with a monotonous life with all the rigour in the mountains. However, it also is a reminder of how the ungodly modern attitude, which treats individual happiness and choice more highly than everything and everybody in the world, conflicts with the tribal mentality that has the priority on the society instead of the person and cares about personal will.

Schleiermacher says that we all have to ascribe intention to the author to understand a text. The slight dilution of Carol’s benevolence indicates that Sidhwa may be criticizing arbitrary traditions and cultures that may have ignored an individual’s needs. Carol’s unwillingness to fully profess her sympathy perfectly reflects her difficulty finding her moral line between respect for Qasim’s culture and Zaitoon’s.

Interpretively, Carol challenges Qasim and his answer, even at the hut, because he challenges us to think about cultural fidelity despite having to forsake personal happiness. She knows readers might read her as a villain for asking such a question. So, one knows it from a literal hermeneutics perspective. In that case, one can see how Sidhwa explores a tension between human sensibility and orthodoxy to capture the ambivalence of Carol’s cautious care and how it interacts with the inferences of practice against rigid cultural demarcations.

Moreover, constructing the novel’s unique cultural codes and practices activates the reader’s hermeneutical questions of what these signs mean in the particular context. What brings rich culture and history to Sidhwa’s characters is the realism in the landscapes, towns, weddings, celebrations, and events, which are positively detailed in the works of Sidhwa. This makes her world a bright, deep world. This helps readers to interpret the hidden meaning of some pictures/images or symbols in the works. They can open up hidden ties and traces that accumulate our knowledge of the novel’s messages and creative purpose.

*The Pakistani Bride* (1983) reaction follows the mystery of femininity, the clash of cultures, and the wonderful details of history. As a writer, Sidhwa fails us in several ways by compelling our attention and taking us into a world where an individual’s story comes into contact with other stories and forces that cause us to reflect on the world. Readers can find essential meanings by displaying the main points of debate in the novel and developing their comprehension of important features such as themes, characters, symbols, and cultural allusions.

The researchers can also apply the reader response to study male-dominated cultural places like gaming and mentality, thus similarly determining the complex mechanisms of how gender, culture, and power are reflected in the novel. On this basis, if viewed from the hermeneutic approach, one can admit that the novel is full of stylistic



density, depth of intellectual thoughts, and ethical message. Further, there is also one to make a reply to the intellectual need and reticent questions in the text; perhaps this can extend one's familiarity with literature, society, and the depth of life.

#### **Findings: Societal Misrepresentation**

This research identifies a significant social-cultural divergence between public expectations and personal lives, especially regarding how women should behave. In this story, Zaitoon and other characters within *The Pakistani Bride* exist mainly as maternal and marital identities. Such reductionism shows itself as part of a broader cultural practice which defines women only based on their attachments to men. The social value Zaitoon finds in her life borders entirely on how her family members and community members judge her and her husband.

The incorrect representation of women has different appearance factors. The story shows how creating women's identities through housekeeping responsibilities and motherhood tasks prevents them from exploring self-growth goals. The rigid social structure of the patriarchal system forces Zaitoon to transform from an optimistic schoolgirl into a captive married woman. The culture H restricts her self-expression because it requires her to put her family and husband's needs before seeking her goals or embracing her personality.

Moreover, the novel critiques the commodification of women within this societal framework. Women exist as trading assets which lose their worth to external alliances through marriage instead of demonstrating their innate personal qualities or aspirations. Arranged marriages demonstrate the restricted authority women experience because Zaitoon experiences her marital choice through her father's decisions and those of her male relatives. Through this commodification system of human trafficking, women become nothing more than tools which serve as honour symbols for their families.

Through its literal interpretation, *The Pakistani Bride* exposes violent societal truths about a tribal community that sets rules for feminine conduct and social practice. Through her experiences of loss, Zaitoon shares a compelling example of how women suffer in patriarchal societies. Through this reading, the reader gains awareness of the significant differences between urban and rural life while observing how social expectations shift dramatically between social contexts.

#### **Conclusion**

Through hermeneutics, this research investigates the hermeneutic dimensions of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*, a portrait of the intricate relation between societal mirrors and individual identities in a patriarchal setup. With the help of the frameworks of the key hermeneutic theorists – Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, we have demonstrated how the narrative by Sidhwa depicts the cultural norms as well as criticizes the systemic commodification and marginalization of women in the society.

The starting point in this work is the existence of hermeneutic dimensions which will shape their experience and understanding. Zaitoon's characterization as an example in Sidhwa is a powerful visualization of the duality the women felt confined between modern wishes and traditional expectations. The work of the novel presents how constricted social systems are in tracing the women's roles, particularly concerning men. This conclusion is consistent with the Schleiermacher idea of reading the text in its historical and cultural setting and that the experience of Zaitoon is not a unique thing about her but the account of such activities of a larger society.



Moreover, Gadamer's idea of "historical consciousness" makes it easier to view how the past shapes the identities and life choices of the characters and cultural heritage. In the framework of partition as a background, the novel's setting portrays the dynamics of the socio-political life of Pakistan at the time under the spotlight, which illuminates the intricacy of the way of forming the identity in the context of cultural upheaval. Sidhwa's refined image of Zaitoon and her links to the other characters create a constant difference between self-determination and other responsibilities and, therefore, rejects the idea of the overall identity.

Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" is, of course, an expansion of this necessity to question the power structures that direct interpretations of that which are to be regarded as gender and identity. By reading the text from this perspective, we uncover the (hidden) multiple layers of meaning that are present in Sidhwa's narration. This is not a reflection of their situations or the characters' lives. These, in turn, are conditioned by the ideologies and standards relevant to a patriarchal society. This criticism of cultural norms calls readers to question their thinking concerning gender roles and identities.

The consequence of such findings is not only to the study of literature; They are mirrors of continuous questions of gender and cultural representability. The commodification of women in *The Pakistani Bride* is an image of the kind of reductive forcefulness that makes it possible for people to reduce themselves to symbols of honour or property to societies. Zaitoon's shift from an optimistic schoolgirl to a married woman, constrained by patriarchal norms, is the paradigmatic form of the larger battle women face in such a cultural milieu. In this text, readers are urged to think about the never-ending struggle for self-determination and self-expression that continues to characterize women's lives.

Further, Sidhwa's discussion of marriage as a transactional institution also yields terms that explain identities and agency in the context of arranged unions. The novel criticizes the idea that there is intelligence embodied in the state of a female's marital relationship and argues that such societal expectations have adverse implications on individual development and satisfaction. Even though Sidhwa does so in the image of characters such as Zaitoon and Carol, the writer emphasizes the need for a deeper appreciation for the complexities of culture and the effect of cross-cultural dynamics upon the process of self-formation.

Finally, this hermeneutic study of *The Pakistani Bride* has unveiled helpful ideas about the interplay between societal representation and individual identity concepts. Using the lenses of key hermeneutic theorists in Sidhwa's text, we have unearthed the layers of meaning inherent in her rendering of gender and culture. The unearthed findings illustrate the influence of further literature and historical and cultural contexts in the construction of interpretations of literature and the persistent correlations of these with current arguments on gender, power, and identity.

Based on the research, we have realized the need for in-depth research on the complicated relations between literature and society. Future research could focus on other literary works concerned with similar issues of identity and representation in postcolonial contexts. By studying the universe, scholars can contribute to forming a more general outlook on the problems connected with gender and cultural identities in literature.

At last, Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* is a revivifying reminder of the oppressive realities that are sadly still present in the world of women in patriarchal worlds. Her rich





characterizations and riveting storytelling allow for a step backwards to reflect on the overall message of her story, where we may consider the specificity of the ways of thinking of our identity and agency as compared to the world where mean ascribed identities are still setting the reality. Beyond enjoying Sidhwa's work better through this study, it also triggers an ongoing debate on the use of literature and the works of literature in critiquing the multidimensional realities of human experience'.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and revelations revealed from the analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*, some recommendations can be drawn for follow-up research, education practice, and greater involvement in gender and cultural representation in the future.

### **Further Literary Analysis**

Research in the future will aim to explore gender-identity mapping in postcolonial literature. Bapsi Sidhwa and some of her contemporaries from similar cultures urge scholars to read more. Comparative studies might shed light on how different narrations treat the issue of gender roles, identity formation, and society's expectations. Extending the unfoldable analysis space to the male discourse and male relations to female characters can also help interpret the gender dynamics better.

### **Interdisciplinary Approaches**

Through interdisciplinarity, it will be possible to enrich the analysis of texts such as *The Pakistani Bride*, joining literary studies with sociology, anthropology, and gender studies. This complete picture can better produce an understanding of the cultural and historical background that shapes narratives. Investigators should avoid the danger of making use of the theories of intersectionality to address how the diversity of identities (i.e., race, class, or religion) overlap and have an impact on people's experience in the area of gender.

### **Educational Initiatives**

In pursuing the creation of consciousness for gender issues and issues on cultural representation in literature, educational institutions should include such books in their curricula, e.g., *The Pakistani Bride*. Teachers may create modules following the prompts of discussing such topics as gender roles, power relations, and the political context of phenomena and cultures. Their studies in hermeneutic analysis could allow students to interact with literature and learn more about varied accounts critically.

### **Community Engagement**

It pays off for the local communities and organizations to organize book clubs, discussion forums, or cultural events related to the works of Sidhwa and similar texts. Such platforms may contribute to the conversation on the issues of gender and identity, increasing the awareness and appreciation of the issue of the mode of life of women in patriarchal societies. Community engagement can also empower people not just to connect with people's experiences, including their own, but also to become personally lucid about their own by contributing to a sense of shared culture by making their own narratives public record.

### **Policy Advocacy**

This study's findings were urgent. There was a need to promote equality and women's rights in cultural contexts. National policymakers and social activists should use research results from literature analysis to guide their work in tackling problems in work based on gender. Literature narratives are needed to provide compelling examples of the things at



stake in society that can bring awareness campaigns on women's commodification and their need for autonomy and agency.

### Cross-Cultural Dialogues

Leveraging promotions of cross-cultural dialogues that discuss gender and identity in different societies can bring to people's consciousness the topics. Cooperation between authors, scholars of all gestures, and activists having different backgrounds can promote the experience exchange techniques for dealing with gender inequality. Such conversations may produce more or less the similarities and differences in which cultures confront complexities associated with identity.

### Conclusion

Finally, the recommendations presented here aim to enhance India's increased engagement with problems associated with gender, identity, and representation of culture in literature. Through interdisciplinary research, enhanced learning practices, and encouragement of community involvement, stakeholders will be able to contribute to a greater appreciation of the complexity of the problem at stake. Finally, such literature as Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* can even be the basis for serious dialogues and attitudes to activities directed at pursuing gender equality and cultural sensibility.

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