

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

DEPICTION OF THE STRUGGLES OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN THE WRITINGS OF PAKISTANI ANGLOPHONE AND URDU NOVELIST: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Fariha Anjum¹, Dr. Muhammad Shafiq², Muhammad Mohsin Khalid³

¹Lecturer at Bahauddin Zakariya University

²Associate Professor of English, Department of English, Emerson University Multan

³Instructor in English, Noukhez School System Multan, Pakistan

Corresponding Author's Email mshafiq3448@gmail.com

farihaanjum41@gmail.com, mohsinm9@gmail.com

Fariha Anjum, Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, Muhammad Mohsin Khalid. Depiction Of The Struggles Of Female Protagonists In The Writings Of Pakistani Anglophone And Urdu Novelist: A Comparative Study-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(1), 326-342. ISSN 1567-214x

Key Words: Female Protagonists, Hierarchical Structures, Struggles, Anglophones, Urdu Novelists

ABSTRACT

In the genre of English novel Pakistani female writers keep on emphasizing the struggles and hardships faced by women in male dominant Pakistani society. The main objective of this research is to examine and analyze that how the struggles of the female characters against the hierarchical structures are depicted in the fictional writings of the selected Pakistani female anglophone and Urdu writers. The present study deals with the comparative analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Umera Ahmed's *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan*. The female figure in Sidhwa's and Ahmed's fiction represents the oppressing attitude of the society towards the women to hinder their defiance along with the representation of the persistent behavior of female characters to endure the hardships. In the selected works, the female characters grapple with a variety of victimization experiences, exposing how men identify, control, and exploit women sexuality and bodies under the guise of their religious and socio-cultural customs. This research examines the different angles through which the females are presented in Urdu and English novels. Another underlying goal of this study is to emphasize the role of women's writing in giving female characters a "voice" in their battle against patriarchal norms by implying Butler's approach towards gender performativity and Showalter's feminist criticism. Such feminist English writings by female anglophone and Urdu writers are regarded as valuable contributions to the existing Pakistani literary body. Therefore, the work of selected

female writers is critically evaluated in order to comprehend their role and value in confronting, exploring, and developing solutions to the difficulties women experience in patriarchal system through the literary channel.

INTRODUCTION

Many Pakistani female feminist writers share their views about the condition of women in Pakistani society through their writings. It indicates the voice of a female raised in the consciousness of her exploitation at the hands of males. It's a protest against the patriarchal society that gives women minimal respect as individuals thus, allowing them to exist and be identified in relation to the male counter parts to whom they belong. Because of the elevation of the maleness and violent treatment towards women that is being justified in the name of cultural values and religious practices, Pakistani society can be regarded as patriarchal where men are born with respect, honor, and worth, whereas the women must earn this value by striving in the society. Women are viewed as bodies, while men are regarded as individuals with their own identities. As a result, a woman's ability to walk into public without being made aware of her body by the views or comments she gets from the strangers is nearly impossible. A female body is scrutinized throughout her life, by her father and brother(s) at home and outside by a number of males who think of critically viewing the women as their right. For a longer time, Pakistani women have been striving to affirm their worth as members of society equal to men in terms of rights, respect and honor, capable of achieving and contributing to the country's growth. However, there is still a long path to cover as the Pakistani tribal, feudal and political men insist on women having a humiliating place in society. The present study, which centers around the writings of Pakistani female authors, portrays the female figure in all of her complexities as she attempts to define herself against the complex patriarchal system in Pakistani culture.

In English-language Pakistani fiction, there are numerous opportunities for feminist insights of women living in patriarchal societies. Such literary discussions address a wide range of aspects related to women's roles in society. The analysis of literature from feministic aspect enables the reader to comprehend the position of the female character in the social boundaries in which she is represented, as well as the social changes that are occurring around her. Zia Ahmed (2009) emphasizes the importance of literature in depicting social changes. The female representation in literature makes a great contribution to evaluate the status of females in that particular society (Ahmed, 2009, p.90). Through traditions and cultural norms, the patriarchal society explicitly aims to control females. Purdah, humility, and shame are used to punish the feminine body, resulting in submissive, quiet, and subordinate women. Husain Haqqani's (2005) book *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* elucidates on some of Zia's legal regulations that deteriorated women, by restring women's sports and their participation in arts, and by rendering a woman's legal testimony to 1/2 the weight of a man's. Furthermore, before having a financial contract, females were obliged to have another female or a male who can be the witness to their signatures (Haqqani, 2005, p.144). Given Pakistan's linguistic and cultural diversity, women across the country were subjected to various forms of patriarchy, which hampered, and continues to

hamper, women's equal rights for participation in public domains. A woman from the Punjab province may find it a bit easier to obtain the basic education or enter the professional life in comparison to a woman from Baluchistan or NWFP where education for women is still considered as a taboo. The key purpose of this research is to identify the complexities of defining Pakistani women in their specific context, as well as their rebellious behavior towards patriarchal norms which aims at controlling her body and desires.

Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) in their book *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* reveals the complex interplay of language, culture, norms and religion that constitute Pakistani women. They pay close attention to how Pakistani women in various context are exploited and oppressed. They also examine the emergence of feminist movements throughout the country from its beginning in 1947 till the end of Zia's military government. Mumtaz and Shaheed's contribution was critical at the time because it gave a powerful response to the hardship of women brought on by Zia's pro-women policies. After that Pakistani English literature became a powerful tool for social as well as the political protest. The works of both males and females Pakistani English writers continue to make valuable and important contributions to Pakistani literature's expanding sector. Male writers such as Mohammad Hanif, Mohsin Hamid, Tariq Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Zulfiqar Ghose and Hanif Kureshi along with their female counter parts such as, Feryal Ali Ghuhar, Kamila Shamsie, Qaisra Shahraz, Bapsi Sidhwa, Uzma Aslam Khan, Monica Ali, and Sara Suleri are among the most well-known Anglophone Pakistani fiction writers. These writers have achieved widespread fame for their works, which have been published both within and outside their birth country (Pakistan). A few of these authors were born in Pakistan but now they live in other countries. As a result, their work may be viewed as an attempt to maintain their "sense of belonging" to Pakistan, as well as a strong desire to get recognized with and represent their birth country.

Shamsie's (2008) *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women* highlights the broader scope which Pakistani writings has acquired, and continues to achieve due to the migrants who settle into the English-speaking countries. From both inside and outside of Pakistan many writers are encouraged by the expanded scope of Pakistani English literature and its international horizons. Since English has become a more common mode of communication in Pakistan therefore, now Pakistani English literature is reaching a much wider audience. She implies that the influx of migrants into English-speaking diasporic communities, combined with the ease of travelling and the rise of digital media, has given a boost to Pakistani English writing, which now reaches a large Anglophone readership. As a result, Pakistani women who use English as a their medium to communicate to the world find themselves living between East and West, metaphorically and literally, and have had to fight to be heard and accepted (Shamsie, 2008, p.1).

This research examines and emphasizes the struggles of female characters in pursuit of self identity against man-made social and cultural taboos that have seized women in the guise of norms and religion. The female characters in the

selected works cope with a variety of socio-cultural challenges, presenting varied perspectives on how female bodies and sexuality become crucial in the exploration of their feminine identity. The following section discusses the research' conceptual framework, which incorporates feminist sociocultural viewpoints. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the chosen texts combined with literary critical analysis enables the researcher to identify the primary themes that run throughout the novels. To analyze the female character's struggle for identity, the researcher has employed the ideas of Muslim feminists such as Margot Badran, Fatima Mernissi and Miriam Cooke along side some Western critics and feminists such as Elaine Showalter, Rita Felski and Pam Morris. The researcher has also taken into consideration the contributions of Post-colonial critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Mohanty. For better contextualization of the identity of Pakistani women, it is critical to take insights from the perspectives of the above-mentioned feminists and critics. Pakistan is regarded as a post-colonial country that was once a colony of British hence retains Western cultural influences. However, in Pakistan Islam is the dominant religion which governs the basic ideology of the majority of population. Therefore, the feminists have been defining Pakistani women's identities at the intersections of secular and Muslim feminism. The authors and critics from the Western Second Wave feminism significantly contributed to the discussions of Pakistani literature. This wave helped in widening the scope of feminist researches in British. It also provoked new significant debates about women, sexuality and marriage. The feminist awakening's main goal was to liberate the bodily aspects of female from patriarchal dominance by giving women more autonomy over their sexuality and body. Novelists, writers, and critics of the time, like Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, were likewise vocal in their opposition to women's subordination. Theoretical insights and perspectives developed by the writers as well as the critics during this period of Western feminism can still be used to examine women's positions in present Pakistani society. South Asian females, particularly the Pakistani females, were fighting for their rights at the same time the females in the West were making significant success in creating a significantly better status for themselves in their communities. Pakistani women, as a part of the growing post-colonial nation, faced various difficulties. Since Pakistan is an Islamic state based on Islamic principles, any relationship with Western feminist views is considered as a difficult concept to maintain. Feminist views, which advocated for gender equality, were regarded as anti-Islamic, deceptive and encouraging women to quit their domestic responsibilities. However, both non-western and western critics and feminists agreed to common grounds in the universal human rights, criticism to patriarchy, male dominance, and, foremost, women's desires to exert more control over their bodies as well as sexuality. Female body in Pakistan became the battlefield on which religiously oriented and misogynistic dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq started the gender war. The non-existent distinction between adultery and rape made many women powerless. Pakistani women despised the political incarceration of their bodies within man-made laws to serve male personal interest, while western women recognized greater freedom and control over their bodies by gaining rights to marriage, contraceptive methods, abortion, and legalized divorce etc.

In the 1970s, when feminist movement second wave in the Western world emerged, feminist campaigns in South Asia gained steam as well. In other words, the expansion of global feminine activist movements stimulated Muslim women across the globe. On literary basis, the Pakistani writers travelling across the world began to write about the condition and struggle of Pakistani women, encouraged by the comparatively more freedom which women experience in the west. Many young Pakistani researchers were inspired by feminist literature and got involved in the task of producing some good content regarding the females existing in Pakistani society. Theoretical viewpoints on the cultural placement and significance of the female body have continued to evolve in West. Western women have worked to overturn institutionalized control over female body. Early Feminist writers like Simone De Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Betty Friedan's writings were studied and expanded upon by critics and writers like Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz. These thinkers, along with many others, have contributed to the expansion and development of study on issues concerning the female sexuality, gender and her body. These debates arose in order to better comprehend, highlight, and examine the significance and status of bodies and sexuality (particularly female) in social, theological, and intellectual discourses. The researcher has taken some of these theorists' theoretical ideas and concepts as a foundation for analyzing the sociocultural importance of the female body within the Western feminist paradigm.

Rosi Braidotti (1994) inclines that the body is regarded as the primary site in terms of location in the feminist paradigm. The body is a materially constituted being, not an abstract entity. It is not a natural thing; rather, it is a socially and culturally coded object. Instead of an essential thought, it is the place of junction of the physical, sociological, and linguistic, that is, of language as the primary symbolic representation of a culture (Braidotti, 1994, p.238). In the book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* Susan Bordo (1993) determines the effects of culture on the construction of a woman's body as a politically adorned entity, it is formed by norms and practices of deterrence and power, from child marriages and foot binding to rape and pummeling to compulsory heterosexuality, by intense body practices, dietary habits, as well as certain disorders (Bordo, 1993, p.21). Elizabeth Grosz (1995) lists two basic techniques employed by Western theorists to theorize the female body. She mentions first approach as "Inscriptive" according to which the body is regarded as a blank surface on which societal law, moral values and norms are imprinted; the second approach 'lived body' refers mostly to the experiences that body has lived in as well as the body's internal or psychological inscription (Grosz, 1995, p.33). In this article both approaches, contribute to framing the understanding of female bodies in relation to sexuality. As a distinctive kind of body, the female figures in this thesis experience their bodies as blank surfaces marked, scarred, altered, and written on or manufactured by the many contexts of organizational, discursive, and non-discursive power.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Male and female figures in the literature consciously and unconsciously play the gender roles within social limitations to comply to socially accepted norms

at different instances. Butler's analysis of gender performativity helps us better understand how and why males and females act and behave in patriarchal cultures where heterosexuality is considered a norm. South Asian feminists are increasingly drawing on ideas from Western feminists to frame their discussions of women's bodies, sexuality, and gender. These ideas can help to explain why women are still subjugated in patriarchal society, as depicted in anglophones' writings, where females are identified by their bodies and are capable of biological functions only and have no intellectual capacities. Elaine Showalter in her work *Feminist Criticism in the Wildernesses*, one of the prominent American feminist critics and theorists, describes two types of feminist criticism: the first one deals with feminists as readers, and the second one points out the women as writers, and is referred to as "feminist critique" and "gynocritics," respectively (Showalter, 1981, p.185). Showalter argues that a feminist critique is important because it reveals the misrepresentation of female identity in literature. She also emphasizes the importance of using female author's writing as the main source of research. As far as the Pakistani English literature is concerned, this shift in perspective has been observed. Feminist critics and writers are frequently taking up women writers' works to study the feminine experiences through their writings as the number of female writers continues to rise.

Showalter's theoretical models play a significant role in identifying and comprehending the scope, extent, significance, and status of women's writing. South Asian feminist literature, particularly in Pakistan, is determined by a variety of overlapping variables, including psychological, biological most crucially, cultural. Pakistani women who are focused with their biological capacity are further confined by a lack of linguistic flexibility. Female reproductive abilities have been sociologically shaped as a barrier for women and it is been misused to oppress them. Women, on the other hand, continue to resist this view, which can be a challenging task, particularly for women belonging to Asian cultures. The female character, portrayed in the works of Pakistani female anglophone and Urdu writers, live in man-defined environments that confine their lives in multiple ways, both physically and metaphorically. Their effort to break free from these restrictions, both physical and metaphorical, is a recurring theme in the works. Females in Pakistan are further victimized as their bodies become the center of emotional, psychological, and physiological confrontation on which their status is eventually decided. Pakistani women are diverse in terms of culture and language thus, divided, restricted within the patriarchal society. These female characters are split between their intention to take back control of their bodies and socio-cultural expectations. Trapped between responsibility and self-fulfillment, these women discover that their bodies are the battlefields where traditions and modernity collide. The issues in terms of the protection and articulation of religious identity is faced by Pakistani Muslim female writers. They continue to defy western notions of subjugated Muslim women by attempting to express through writing and thereby asserting Muslim female's intellectual capabilities. They construct characters who are willing to recognize and challenge oppressive traditions that obstruct their growth. These literary authors are doing everything they can to counter stereotypical depictions of Third World women.

ANALYSIS

Bapsi Sidhwa's The Pakistani Bride

Pakistani female Parsi author Bapsi Sidhwa's family shifted to Pakistan after partition. Her experiences in Lahore as well as Karachi, where she still resides, demonstrate the authenticity of Sidhwa's writing. Her family, called Bhandaras, had immigrated to Lahore in the previous century and had been a prominent business family for many generations. Therefore, Bapsi Sidhwa is regarded as a third-generation Parsi immigrant to North Indian communities who grew up hearing both fictional and factual stories about the forefathers of her community's business acumen. It's worth noting that Pakistani feminist icon Bapsi Sidhwa has waged a campaign against the country's traditional patriarchy. This research analyzes *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) to show how patriarchy uses the cover of traditions and religion as potent means to achieve its full command over women's bodies. The main issues addressed are those related to female devaluation and cultural standing, and attempts are made to show the bodily and gender-based existence of Sidhwa's female protagonist. Nobody can refute the reality that a woman's existence in a Pakistani society is valued as a sign of piety, innocence, love, and honor. However, in the name of morals, vales, religion, and culture, her body is soiled and humiliated.

All of Sidhwa's works are feminist examinations of the gender-based reality of Pakistani women, and they all feature female characters who reflect the concerns of female sexuality and resistance. Her novels present feministic worries about the female body. The topics of sexual diversity, conflict, and identity concerns are all bravely broached by Bapsi Sidhwa. The writings of Sidhwa illustrate the function of numerous Pakistani institutions as well as the function of the repressive patriarchal culture that engenders and objectifies the bodies of Pakistani women. In her works, women are shown to experience suppression and prejudice as a natural outcome of assimilating oppressive patriarchal norms. *The Pakistani Bride* presents the tragic journey of Zaitoon towards her freedom, a sixteen-year-old girl, beginning from her early years up until her escaping from an unhappy marriage. The narratives of the married females Zaitoon, Afshaan, and Carol are all connected by the story of "The Pakistani Bride." Each tale establishes the fixed role of society, religion, and patriarchal system in entrapping women and transforming them into obedient creatures and subordinate bodies. The author's main focus is on the life of the married women and the idea that females have to strive a lot to get an identity in a post-colonial culture. The novel's storyline is based on the true events that Sidhwa's spouse Noshir revealed to her after he had gone to a distant military camp in the Karakoram Range. Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* revolves around the issues of marriage, men honour, inequality, and female's struggles to get a place in a community controlled by men. It is important to highlight that the issue of violence carried on women's bodies by men who have a sado-masochistic, dictatorial mentality becomes the central point of this novel. The female characters Zaitoon, Shehnaz and Carol serve as examples of how the Pakistani women in harsh patriarchal society are unable to develop their own unique identities like men and must instead endure repression, physical

abuse, and estrangement. Her only function is reproduction, making her perpetually the "Other".

Zaitoon who was a young lively girl and Qasim who was a tribal man, are central figures of the novel's storyline as Qasim is the one who saved Zaitoon from an attack on train while the Muslim refugees were travelling across the border to get into the newly divided Pakistan. The next few years were spent by Zaitoon and Qasim in the city of Pakistan, Lahore where they made friends with Nikka and his wife Miriam, a couple without children. As Zaitoon grew up and became a young woman, Qasim made the decision to ask for her hand in marriage and bring her to his tribe. As a tribal Kohistani, Qasim traveled back and forth from Lahore to his tribe in Kohistan and vice versa, the story remains active.

The entire Kohistani region is known in Northern Pakistan for its chaos, volatility, and danger, as well as its deadly clashes with both internal and external parties, according to historical records (xi). A Tribal girl named Afshan was delivered to Qasim's father as payment for a debt that Afshan's father could not repay. Resham Khan had Qasim's father loan amount but Qasim was well aware that the virgin daughter of Resham Khan was significantly more precious:

“Resham Khan was promised as his daughter... The sturdy, middle-aged tribesman knew just how generous the offer was... Any girl- and he had made sure that this one was able bodied-was worth more than the loan due...”(p.7).

As a result, he gains sole ownership of Afshan and is permitted to deal with her anyway he sees proper. He gives Afshan to Qasim, his son, as though he was dividing up some battle spoils. The similar issues arise in the novel's following parts when Major Mushtaq considers Zaitoon, who is getting ready to wed a member of his clan. She was expected to give birth to numerous children who will make the family prosperous financially. In this cultural context, women held the same value as cattle, sheep, or other tradeable commodities. The female body is viewed by males as a prized asset, and Sidhwa's main point of emphasis in the book is the same idea. In the similar sense, Qasim views Zaitoon's marriage to Sakhi as a symbolic restoration to his heritage.

“It grieved to leave her, but it had to be...Her marriage to Sakhi would consummate an old fervent longing...Through their children she would be one with his blood...” (p.166)

Zaitoon's father does not consider her future, who is accustomed to the contemporary culture of Lahore, as he consummates her marriage. She is given to a tribal spouse who will be forced to endure unending anguish. Without consulting Mariam or Zaitoon, he makes the crucial decision on his own. The entire setting demonstrates how neglected women are in Pakistani society. Zaitoon observes in silence as Sakhi's father and Qasim argue passionately about whether or not to marry Sakhi while they wait for the trader who was going to take her.

“Nikka was talking to Qasim. They seemed to be arguing, and Qasim looked hard and cold Mariam... only with a chadar over her head instead of burkha came out and sat down with men...” (p.92)

Zaitoon's position in this moment is the representation of the passive status of women as she is viewed as an outsider among the men, regarded "other" in the manmade society, and carry no voice in the marriage decision. Mariam fiercely objects to the decision of Qasim's marriage of Zaitoon into a strange culture for financial gain, saying that her spouse and she would be ready to give him more money for his daughter. She begs Qasim to let Zaitoon marry her husband in an effort to protect Zaitoon from getting exploited at the hands of the tribal in laws. Zaitoon looked up to Nikka like her father, but Mariam objected, thereby exposing the hypocrisy of Pakistani culture

Why not marry her to my husband here?? Yes! I'll welcome her, look after.... We have no children and she'll be my daughter... She will bear Nikka's daughters and sons...” (p.94)

Zaitoon in this situation does see any hope. She is unable to express to her father her desire to remain in Lahore. Even Miriam's best efforts to sway his opinion remain ineffective. Zaitoon's inability to raise her voice is a tragedy in its own. It is a fair argument that how can girl who is raised up in Lahore would spend her life in mountains after marriage. But for Qasim, it was the matter of money and status. It clearly depicts the beginning of a girl's struggle brought by her own family. Females are expected to accept patriarchy and refrain from interfering with it. Women are viewed as a liability, and they must rely on male members of their family throughout their lives. The same thing happens to Zaitoon. When her mother and father die, Qasim raises her and marries her to Sakhi to look after her. Male dominance can be seen as a constant factor in Zaitoon's life.

“Hush Zaitoon, that's not way to speak to your father....
A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom she should marry him...
I've given my word.... Your marriage is to be a week from today....
I've given my word. On it depends my honour.
If you besmirch it, I will kill you with by bare hand” (Sidhwa 58)

This brief exchange between Qasim and Zaitoon demonstrates how social structures and norms have established the standards of one's sex particularly for women. These social norms are established in a male dominant society and are biased towards women. Women have a responsibility to follow the directions of their male counterparts. Without a doubt, in the whole tribe the men's code of dignity is based on the idea that males are superior and protectors of women which reveals the vulnerability and helplessness of women.

After their marriage, Sakhi abuses her by hitting and humiliating. To demonstrate his masculinity over her, he used to abuse her violently for a minor cause. Their marriage resultantly changes into hell. She finds it painful to continue living with her spouse in the same house. Zaitoon finally decides to escape from this domestic violence in search of peace but in this journey, she

faces great hurdles. “She knew that in flight lay her only hope of survival” (p. 186). She endures a lot of suffering after she flees for liberation. As a result of her violation of the tribal, barbarous, and patriarchal rule of conduct, Sakhi and his fellow men are seen searching for her. Zaitoon endures suffering, pain, and agony, and Sidhwa intends to let the readers witness it. She struggles to free herself from the severe and violent situation when her stomach is empty. Moreover, Zaitoon is raped and molested by a few Cheerkul men. When Mushtaq sees Zaitoon half-dead, he brings her into his camp, her fight for freedom from toxic masculinity ends for good. He convinces the members of Sakhi's tribe that Zaitoon has passed away. After hearing this

“Missri Khan's massive shoulders straightened... He thrust his chest forward and his head rose high... It was as if a breeze had cleared the poisonous air suffocating them and has wafted an intolerable burden from their shoulders...” (p. 224)

Umera Ahmad's *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* (My being, an Invisible Mote of Dust)

Umera Ahmad is a prominent female writer of postmodern time in Pakistan who is highly read and admired. Ahmad is best known for her novel *Peer-e-Kamil*, however, her screen plays are equally famous, particularly among females. Ahmad's works have been translated into a number of languages, including English, and her novels are also being dramatized on television. Ahmad's works reveal a culture of hatred toward women who challenge the traditional portrayal of Muslim women as submissive and weak. *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* is a story that examines the contradictions and limits that Muslim women face, particularly in regards to sexuality. This book is being translated into English language. Ahmad's novels are in Urdu language, which is one of the reasons that she is Pakistan's well known and widely read modern novelist. In Pakistan English language is used and comprehended by a small percentage of population, with women being even fewer. As a result, Urdu fictional writing carries a larger following in Pakistan. Additionally, Ahmad's middle-class background and upbringing enabled her to connect with and reach out to the women facing the similar situation through her writings. Ahmad does not confine her characters to a specific socioeconomic status, rather explores the possible challenges, invisible restrictions, and constraints that may be connected with people belonging to different backgrounds. Likewise, the female characters in her written works portray a diverse range of dynamic personalities, from working females to house wives, from meek, submissive, and silent figures to aggressive, strong, and daring women who have the ability to reject male dominance and develop strategies to do so. As the novel *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan* is still under the process of being translated, a basic plot description is given before an in-depth analysis.

The novel begins with the arrival of a young girl named Sara at her uncle's home. She hands over a letter to her uncle Arfeen to whom she has never met before. Arfeen reads the letter that was being written by Sara's mother Saba who is the protagonist of the novel. Through the letter Saba requests Arfeen to take care of Sara after her. Arfeen gets confused and happy at the same time to

find Sara, however the news of Saba's death made him upset. While living with uncle Arfeen and his son, Sara comes to know about her mother's past life. Over there she learns that Arfeen is not only the first cousin of Saba but also his first husband. Saba's mother in law made her the victim of envy. She destroys Saba's image in front of her husband by accusing her of the sin of adultery with another male cousin of Saba named Adil. She pledges over Holy Quran to prove her claim. Saba's adamant denials of guilt fall on deaf ears (no one could believe Arfeen's mother, a seemingly devout and holy woman, lying on the Quran). Arfeen gives divorce to Saba who later gets married to another man who is much older than her. This marriage does not bring end to Saba's problems. When she conceives, her husband left her as he was not willing to accept his child. Saba, who got divorced twice, who has been abandoned by her family, starts her working life as a housekeeper and later on as a factory worker after the birth of her child Sara. Her uncle (Arfeen's father) once approaches her so that her ex mother in law, who was dying of cancer, may ask forgiveness for her sins. Arfeen's mother apologizes and admits to planning against Saba. Saba hesitantly goes to her uncle's home to see her aunt dying of cancer. She quietly departs after forgiving them all, refusing to accept empathetic offers to get back to them. At that time Arfeen was a widower with a son, despite knowing this Saba rejects to remarry Arfeen. After that Saba along with her daughter Sara leaves her entire family feeling guilty and embarrassed.

Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan, the novel's title, translates to "myself is a speckle (small particle) that is unknown." In other words, the novel's major female character Saba is implying that she, as a woman, is given minor status in the broad sense of the word, and in the male-dominated world in particular, that it is difficult to identify and define. In patriarchal countries, females are given extremely little space, as the title suggests. It also represents a woman's desire to fight societal injustice by attempting to identify and create her own identity and status within a male-dominated society. Saba doesn't really lose hope when she is humiliated and left homeless; instead, she makes every attempt to maintain and support herself and her little daughter. Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan depicts the hardships of women in Pakistani society against the context of a deteriorating patriarchal culture. Deniz Kandiyoti defines Pakistan as being geographically positioned within a hierarchical zone where the social order is governed by "typical patriarchy," as indicated in Chapter 1. (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.278). The majority of Ahmad's male protagonists study or work overseas or in neighboring cities, while her female protagonists, such as Saba, seek for better education and financial stability. Ahmad depicts Pakistani society as being in the middle of a transition of traditional patriarchy. Saba's aunt, who afterwards becomes her mother-in-law, appears to be a woman who grew up in a conservative extended family and who despises Saba's educational ambitions and regards her as a wild woman. Saba's uncle, who retains absolute power over the family, makes both of his daughters married to persons with less education. However, he permits his son, Arfeen, to pursue further education in a foreign country. Saba's father has gone to the United States, and in his absence, Arfeen's father declares himself the charge of Saba's family. Saba must therefore ask her uncle's approval before enrolling in a university. Saba's unwavering dedication to her education makes her disliked among her extended family, especially Arfeen's parents.

Arfeen's mother is possessive for her son to a greater extent, and she is enraged when Arfeen returns from the United States and wishes to marry Saba. Saba's mother-in-law can't stand the fact that Arfeen intends to take Saba to the United States following their wedding. She perceives her son's romantic relationship as a danger to the mother-son bond. She is unable to persuade him otherwise, so she devises a scheme to ruin Saba's reputation by blaming her of adultery. The wedding of Arfeen's younger sister gives his mother with an opportunity to humiliate Saba in front of a big crowd of wedding guests. She accomplishes her goal by luring Saba and her cousin Aadil into a room under the guise of an errand and locking them within. She then summons her husband and collects other members of her family outside the room to demonstrate that Saba and Aadil have been captured together in a room. She notifies everyone that she was present when they committed their heinous act. As the situation becomes serious, Arfeen's father conducts a Kacheri, in which Arfeen's mother vows falsely on the Holy Quran just to justify her claim. Saba's pleadings fall on deaf ears because no one is prepared to believe her because vowing over the Holy Quran is recognized without inquiry due to the book's highest validation and devotion.

Through Saba's circumstances, Ahmad demonstrates how easy it is to exploit women's image through sexuality. Women are frequently put in positions where they are unable to disprove the allegations, even if the accusation is minor. Saba is not only separated from Arfeen as a punishment for disgracing the family's reputation, but she is also asked to marry to a considerably older man who was a widower with four kids. Numerous stories of women suspected of adultery being slain by family members (male members) in the name of honour exist. This is one of the most common forms of oppression against women, not only in Pakistan but throughout the Muslim world, and it requires a distinct, in-depth study.

Saba is a character who exemplifies patience, hardship, and perseverance. Saba's suffering is undoubtedly bigger than her guilt, which is subsequently proven to be false, but she endures it with remarkable strength and patience. Her determination becomes a distinguishing feature of her personality, elevating her status in audience's eyes. When her abusive husband Arfeen pushes her out of his house, she denies to fall to anguish or self-pity, though silently agreeing to the punishment of having a second husband considerably older than her. Saba's ambition for higher study in a co-educational atmosphere is seen by Arfeen's parents as something threatening to the traditional values of their family. Saba's quest for knowledge becomes a means of opposition to her family members' conservative ideas. She believes that education will enable her to comprehend the society and world, where she lives, in a better way. Saba, however, feels that confronting the male members in her family will be ineffective, so she decides to share her concerns with Arfeen, who had recently come back from the United States. What is the term called education? she asks when he visits her family. Arfeen is surprised by her question, yet he responds that education is important and must be obtained. Saba then asks if education is only important for males, to which Arfeen responds that education is important not only for men but also for the women. Saba then carefully puts her next query, then why is your father so opposed to women's education? He can send his own son to

the United States for higher studies, however he won't let me leave the house for sake of education (Meri Zaat Zar-eBenishan, p.25). Arfeen raises a concern that what would she do with a university degree, explaining that he is a man, he has to earn to maintain his family and life style. For this purpose, he needs to get better education. On this Saba replies that she desires to get education, not particularly to earn a livelihood, but to get awareness. Arfeen asks what would she do with that awareness. Saba claims that she will comprehend the world and the people living in it. (Meri Zaat Zar-eBenishan, p.26).

Saba employs a similar reasoning to refute her uncle's claim that she must practice purdah by wearing black burka in order to attend university. Saba suggests that a chador (a type of shawl that covers a woman's head as well as upper body) can be worn instead of the conventional burkha. She argues that she is going to attend university for further education, and she is conscious about her self-respect and dignity. She wants to wear a chador instead of going for burka. She will keep her head and body covered, but she won't be wearing the conventional burka. She asks her uncle, do you want to make me wear the traditional burka so that when I get to university, I may take it off and walk about unveiled? Saba makes her own norms for defining her Muslim womanhood. She does not completely oppose purdah; however, she does reject the customary and symbolic dress requirement. To put it another way, she opposes the symbolic use of a black burka established as a purdah standard for women belonging to Muslim community. Saba emphasizes in some ways that purdah of the mind is considerably more significant in this regard than simply covering a woman's body in a black burka. Rather than just imprisoning females within the limits of traditional clothing standards, Ahmad's protagonist is asking for women to acquire independence regarding all aspects of life, including female sexuality. She attempts to persuade the men belonging to patriarchal Pakistani society that women should be regarded with equal respect and rights as every human being deserves to have instead of considering them threatening, distrustful, and tempting creature whose sexuality is viewed as a socially destructive force. Farida Shaheed (1991) illustrates how masculine interpretations of Islam have been utilized to support patriarchal views. She emphasizes how this has led to modern Pakistani women unwillingly accepting an unfair and unjust social position (Shaheed, 1991, p.135). In Pakistani society, for example, female's education is controlled through the purdah notion. Shaheed discusses how women's entrance into medical and teaching is part of the purdah concept, which states that female clients should be handled by females (Shaheed, 1991, p.148).

Saba has a strong personality as a consequence of her writing and speaking abilities. Saba is also locked in a scenario where her language and voice fails to assist her because patriarchal society rarely tolerates such audacity in women. No one listens or believes Saba as her mother-in-law gathers the family members and accuses her of infidelity. On the other hand, her mother-in-law's fake cries, accompanied by a barrage of abuse, receives more attention.

“You wanton, witch, liar of a woman.... Why would I send you to this room? You shameless, brazen woman How dare you...carry out your evil

act in my son's room....” (Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan, p.52)

Both Saba and Aadil try to explain themselves, but to no avail. Aadil loses his temper and departs the scene, blaming his aunt, whilst Saba is stuck there, unable to move. Saba is subjected to physical as well as emotional violence, whereas Aadil easily exits the situation. The female character is subjected to more physical abuse, with Saba's uncle dragging her by her hair.

Being beaten by a footwear is a sign of humiliation and degradation. Saba tries to protect herself from public shaming and disgrace. Both Shahraz and Ahmad create comparable pictures of women being punished for perceived or claimed immoral behavior, with even supposed adultery having serious ramifications.

“Saba leaned against the wall... The crowd had surrounded her in a circle. She could not run away like Aadil, and neither did she desire to... She could not understand what was happening! She could not stand any longer so, she sat on the floor, hiding her face in her lap.... She suddenly realized why pigeons liked to close their eyes... in the face of danger (Meri Zaat Zar-eBenishan, p.53)

Shame is not only communicated through a person's body language, postures, and glances, but it is also stated and vocally imposed on females through abusive language and rejection. Saba is subjected to the same rejection and abuse by her mother in law. As Saba returns home after the tragedy, her mother, enraged and distressed, asks, “What have you come here for, after brazenly blackening your face? You shameless woman! Go and drown yourself to death...” (Meri Zaat Zar-eBenishan, p.62). Saba is reprimanded and mistreated without being given the opportunity to defend herself. She, does not allow herself to take action against the false allegations unlike Sidhwa's Zaitoon who chooses to bravely live through her suffering.

Saba remains firm in her position, maintaining her confidence, refusing to give in to pressure from family and so turning her grave into a battleground. Her steadfastness, on the other hand, suffers as a result of Arfeen's refusal to trust Saba's word. Saba cries out to him, begging him to trust and put faith into her words, but the evidence is stacked against her. Ahmad emphasizes here that how difficult it is for a female to prove her innocence, and how women frequently suffer as a result of a lack of proof. Ahmad also wants to convey a more profound message about the lack of faith in women's voices. Ironically, the same Arfeen who used to sing Saba's praises for her amazing letters and intelligence refuses to trust her. There appears to be a significant link between females, language, and silence. Saba's words, which Arfeen finds inspiring and meaningful on other occasions, fail to please his ego on that occasion. Her words become worthless, hollow screams incapable of persuading her husband as Arfeen yells, “don't give me your philosophy today Saba! talk to me in a language that I can understand...that can convince me of your innocence!” (Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan, p.64).

Ghulam Murtiza and Abdul Baseer (2011) claims that “language as a metaphor of power which becomes a metaphor of powerlessness for women” (Murtiza and Baseer, 2011, p.559). Saba's evident command over language, which she utilises to persuade her family and in laws, also fails here to give her dominion over her sexuality. Saba's effort for emerging as an intellectual woman with brains, rather than a distracted one who is obsessed with her body, is totally unwelcomed and rejected by society. As Murtiza and Baseer explains “Pakistani society cannot afford similarity between men and women because it wants to see a man as more than a man and a woman less than a woman. Any breach in this hierarchy of existence is profane” (Murtiza and Baseer, 2011, p.559). Ahmad expresses a similar sense of powerlessness when it comes to a woman's lack of credibility in a patriarchal society. Saba's voice, like Zari Bano's, is silenced, and her sexuality is suppressed by her marriage to a much older and an uneducated man. Saba's quest to become more than a woman by seeking knowledge and intellect is severely retaliated against by verbal and sexual violence. This certainly implies a woman's desire for education and presentation of knowledge being met with social antagonism and rejection. In a patriarchal society, a woman's access to learning is so constrained, restricted, and intensely scrutinized.

Saba's desire for further education is interpreted as the violation of her family conventions. Her admission to a co-educational university to study in a male-dominated environment is viewed as a sign of her sloppy morality. This reveals why Saba's uncle refuses to believe her claim of innocence. Saba's persistence and strong-willed attitude are linked to uncontrollable feminine sexuality, as evident. As a result, female's desire for education is frequently linked to their need to assert control over their sexuality. An intellectual woman would want to select her own spouse, will readily reject an arranged marriage, and will have no concerns about pre-marital or extra-marital intimacy, as Saba does.

At various occasions Saba refuses to surrender to peer pressure. She physically attempts to stop her uncle from hitting her while holding his hand. She also insists that he not make a public display of her by hitting her. Saba's rejection to accept pity or shame so becomes a kind of rebellion. Rather than feeling sorry for herself, she enrages with her mother and family for not trusting her and for abandoning her. She avoids communicating to her family and hence uses her silence to demonstrate her anger. Years later, after her aunt admits to scheming against Saba, Arfeen finds her and asks forgiveness after a long search “Please! Say something Saba, scream at me, yell at me, tell me to go away. Curse us all, curse us all to rot in hell. Tell me you hate me... Please Saba! Beat me like my father beat you’. He cried and wailed in anguish and Saba watched him silently” (Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan, p.62). Saba's unwillingness to talk to Arfeen and her silence presents her ways of resistance. Saba chooses silence at that moment, and it is through this option that Saba has to use both her words and silence as a medium of showing her power.

Sara forgives Arfeen and the rest of the family members for the injustice done to her at the end of the novel. For her own free will, she chooses to marry Arfeen's son and embarks on what appears to be a good future. She solves the

enigma surrounding her mother's silence and decides to break it by forgiving everyone involved in the destruction of her mother's life.

CONCLUSION:

This study puts light on how a Pakistani woman's identity is formed and affected by many of socioeconomic, cultural as well as religious influences. This research attempted to convey the picture of a female in Pakistani culture, which is determined by a variety of but always patriarchal and frequently conflicting ideas that dominate her existence, as depicted through Ahmad's female character Saba and Sidhwa's Zaitoon. As on one hand the female characters of both Urdu and English novelists present a lot of similarities in their conduct while on the other hand they portray different level of struggle in seeking their self-respect and identity. Throughout the story Ahmed's protagonist Saba has shown a very persistent behavior and dealt with all the accusation patiently with the hope of getting her name out of all the blames put by her family. She let her innocence to be justified by Allah in front of everyone as she did not consider any other way to adopt that may help her therefore, she decided to stay quiet instead of raising voice for her dignity and innocence. Although, it took many years to get the truth out in front of everyone but Saba did not lose her temper and kept on living being abandoned and falsely accused. By the end Saba presented the quality of being compassionate by forgiving everyone including her husband without inveigh which reflects the traditional side of a Pakistani female protagonist as expected by the patriarchal society. While Zaitoon, the protagonist of Sidhwa's novel, made immense efforts to put herself out of the cage of humiliation and torture by leaving behind her violent husband instead of waiting for Karma to be her savior. She faced the brutal and subtle ways used by her husband to repress her but she did not let herself wasted in the hands of the people who did not regard her more than a puppet to be controlled thus, by the end she was able to change her miserable fate. In terms of hope and support, Zaitoon initiates the hard journey keeping in mind the final destination that is her home as she knows she would be safe and secure at her father's home while Saba lacks such support as nobody believes her neither her husband nor her parents. Here it can be seen that the female characters of Pakistani anglophone and Urdu writers have gone through the domestic violence after their marriage but their approach towards dealing the unjust behavior of their family is different. Both of the protagonists have shown enough courage to sustain the hardships and strive to get their lost identity while keeping different mindsets. Saba goes through immense psychological pressure under which she spends years while Zaitoon bears the physical hardships which drains out all her energy but she survives by the end. Women's oppression cannot be universalized, but the overlapping patterns of retribution, shame, and honor rules addressing female sexuality across Pakistan are visible in Ahmad's and Sidhwa's novels.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, U. (2000) *Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan*. Lahore: Ilam-o-Irfan Publishers.
- Ahmed, Z. (2009). Pakistani feminist fiction and the empowerment of women. *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, 1(2), 90-102.
- Bordo, S. (1993) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. USA: Berkeley University of California Press.
- Braidotti, R. (1994) *Nomadic Subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Grosz, E. (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. London: Routledge.
- Haqqani, H. (2005) *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Washington DC: The Bookings Institution Press.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988) 'Bargaining With Patriarchy'. *Gender and Society*. 2(3), pp. 274-290.
- Mumtaz, K. and Shaheed, F. (1987) *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books limited.
- Murtiza, G. and Baseer, B. (2011) 'Sara Suleri's Feminist Stance in *Meatless Days*'. *European Journal of Social Sciences*. 25 (4), pp. 550-562.
- Shaheed, F. (1991) 'The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy'. In: Zafar, F. (eds.) *Finding Our Way: Readings on Women in Pakistan*. Pakistan: ASR Publications, pp. 135-158.
- Shamsie, M. (2008) *And The World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women*. New York: Feminist Press at The City University of New York.
- Showalter, E. (1977) *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers, from Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing*. UK: Princeton University Press.