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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Agonising Bonds: An Analysis of the Plight of the Tribal Women in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

Tehreem Zehra

Al-Barkaat Educational Society,
Aligarh (U.P)

Abstract:

Creating bonds and maintaining them is the essence of life. This universal plan is adopted by almost all the living organisms. Out of these, human beings are entitled to be the most rational, intellectual and responsible ones. Besides taking care of nature and respecting its capability for accommodating a variety of life, human beings are expected to maintain peace and harmony among themselves. Being cruel to their own race, shattering their mutual bonds and betraying their intimate relations, is the last and least that can be expected. The paper is an analysis of the plight of the tribal women who, having grown used to the muteness of their race against segregations and male brutality since centuries, are stoically adjusted without any need for self-awareness. In the midst of such atmosphere, a brown girl from the plains wakes to her plight and looks into the eyes of the mountain-spirit with her fragile body.

Keywords: *Tribe, Mountains, Pride, Partition, Clan, Plains.*

Introduction:

Creation of societal levels and coping up with them has become an indispensable part of human life. These huge structures (levels) have to be run by both the genders with children acting as the third dimension which speaks for the volume or the girth of any society. Though there was a time when the concept of society was not yet born and the dwelling groups comprised of communities or clans. Communities were and still are groups of people where accurately the same set of values is followed. The earliest forms of communities were mostly nomadic in nature. Gradually these clans expanded into tribes who travelled far and wide and with the establishment of towns and cities, some of the sceptical tribes remained secluded and maintained their nomadic nature. In some places 'colonialism' and in other places expansion of state 'marked the beginning of radical change in tribal situation. They feared that their 'land would be treated as commodity' to be 'exploited' for its resources. They retreated into forests and the obscurities of mountain ranges, thus continuing with their native values and rules of life. Most of them preferred mountain ranges as their dwellings because such areas are most unfrequented by the larger bodies of civilization. In an attempt to preserve their culture and tribal values, no matter how orthodox and barbaric these must be, the tribal people still lament 'forced displacement, land alienation and increasing marginalisation, eruption of violence and humiliation by the state'.

As far as the traditional values are concerned, some of them find no parallel in the contemporary sets of decorum. But some of them surely call for change, update, moral criticism and even rehabilitation to induce humanism. The above treatment accords for such tribes where change 'ceases' to be the law of nature; where barbarism and violence find their abode in the destiny of the

female victims. In such tribes, women are given and taken as part of business deals, as compensation for financial or emotional loss, a soothing elixir for timely thirst, an attractive exchange offer for pacifying a revengeful emotional as well as an easy and quick-to-forget sacrifice for honour killing. Such indifference towards other human beings or the opposite gender marks for the doom of mankind but the life goes on, stumbling and lost in the darkness of ignorance and a 'willing suspension' of brutal emotions, in spite of everything, in one's ownself.

These obscure faces of life are hardly known to the seemingly enlightened third world with all its advanced science and learning and its sophisticated technology. Not many writers have explored these hidden or shrouded places where the dwellers never invite any outsiders into their own life lest it should be decomposed by experiencing positive or negative changes. Surprisingly a female writer of Pakistani origin has dared to venture into the mountain ranges of Kush and Karakoram to treat the versatile themes of migration, human love, tribes, civilian job, loneliness, insecurity, barbarism and gender segregations. Moreover, the novel is set during and around the time of India-Pakistan partition – the greatest migration ever recorded in human history and the most horrible records of massacre. In this way, the paper is a partial attempt to explore the tribal traditions in particular with a backdrop of questions frequently rising in mind regarding the whereabouts of the basic human love.

Zaitoon – A Reminiscence of an Escapable Legend of Honour-killing Sacrifice:

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani writer, now lives in Houston, Texas is known for her sensitive literary works and most of her novels are concerned with the 1947 partition and its aftermath upheavals when both the hurt nations, India and Pakistan, were seething as well as sighing. Though the novel opens with a tribe that thrives in remote Himalayan reaches of Kohistan, Sidhwa takes her readers all the way to 'the hot fertile lands of Punjab' which was shortly to be 'butchered negligently' to mark the division between India and Pakistan, to have a glimpse of trains fully packed with migrants moving in totally opposite directions according to the place of migration.

A ten year old Qasim, a Kohistan youth, is gifted a gun by his father as a token for his to-be-attained manhood and is also promised a bride. Qasim targets his gun aimlessly in air; his father swells with pride at the mannish attitude of the son who proves the spirit of his tribe where 'gun is a part of their attire' and tells him about Resham Khan, a member of the neighbouring tribe who has failed to pay his debt. Qasim spits like a 'man' and threatens to kill Resham with the gun but his father tells him about the most surprisingly compromising deal; Resham Khan would give his own daughter in marriage to the debtor's any family member. Apparently Qasim's father has decided to betroth Qasim to Resham Khan's sixteen year old daughter, Afshan because he himself could not relish such a chance, being already married and a father to three sons.

In a week's time, Qasim's family members go through untracked rocky hills to the nearby village and bring the bride who discovers at her wedding night that her husband is only a ten year old 'child'. However, Afshan being a tribal girl herself and with somewhat favourable atmosphere at her in-laws, gets along easily treating Qasim as a young friend. Once Qasim attains puberty and develops attraction for the opposite sex when he himself is sixteen years old, he does realise the sort of relationship he shares with Afshan. The same year he becomes a father and in the

coming sixteen years the couple has six children out of whom two die during epidemics and one falls off a ledge. The remaining three also fall victim to smallpox, one after the other. Qasim's youngest daughter, Zaitoon, is closest to his heart and the novel describes her death in a heart-renting manner:

A few days later Qasim returned to find Afshan weeping by their hut. . . she forced herself to be calm, lest 'Mata' the dreaded Goddess, so easily enraged, do even more harm. . . 'Zaitoon is not eating, 'Mata' has honoured her with a visit.' Qasim loved his daughter. . . the five year old Zaitoon lay on the floor on a straw mattress. . . face and body were disfigured by a scabby eruption of pus-filled sores. . . child thrashed about in agonised frenzy. . . holy man. . . hurried from afar at the summons of the 'Mata'. . . placed amulets and sprinkled holy water. . . girl grew worse. . . finally, mercifully, she died. *(The Pakistani Bride, 13)*

In the end, Qasim loses his entire family, including his wife, to smallpox and is left to mourn the dead with nothing to console him except the will of God. But, here Sidhwa is trying to draw the attention of the readers towards the negatives of not expanding one's own connections towards the greater bodies of civilizations and lingering in ignorance and seclusion. Qasim's tribe survives in unknown harsh Himalayan ranges and refuses to intermingle with the city dwellers and also discourages migration. Moreover, naming smallpox as a visit by 'Mata' or her spirit as creeping into the diseased people is a sign of utter ignorance.

Qasim loses interest in life without his family around and one of his relatives takes him down to the plains, to Jullundur, in the then undivided Punjab before partition of 1947. Qasim's clansman secures him a job at an English bank. Political unrest increases and 'in 1946, a full year before Indian independence, a terrible cycle of riots begin, starting with Calcutta and going on to engulf many parts of the country. As the British rush to leave, thousands of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are brutally killed in communal violence.' In 1947, chaotic riots spread instability in the temperament of minority as well as the majority groups. Qasim is among the last Muslims to leave Jullundur (an abrupt ripping of Punjab reveals that Jullundur will remain in India) and board a train heading for Pakistan. Just before leaving Jullundur, Qasim uses his gun for the first and last time in the plains for killing a Hindu clerk at the bank for whom he has developed a dislike. Another family of four members boards the same train and the head of the family, Sikander makes his way for the family through the crowd on the Ludhiana railway station. People want to carry almost every part of their property with them but the throng of passengers cause them to forget everything except the members of their respective families. The cattle brought, lose the protective grips of their masters in the midst of the waves of the people and keep gazing mutely at their owners till they disappear behind the crowd that pushes them mercilessly to make way for themselves. Sikander's daughter, Munni wants her calf but it also has to be cast away and left at the station and Munni weeps inconsolably for her animal.

As the train speeds up into the darkness of the night towards Lahore through Amritsar, Qasim stares into the bleak flat landscape. After Jullundur, Lahore would be the second city he would see in his life. His future in Lahore is as uncertain and unamusing as the swaying motion of the train. As the train is at a distance of one hour from the border, Qasim senses something wrong

on the rail track. He urges his fellow passenger on the roof to jump down the train before the doom swallows them. Not caring about the terrified old person at his side, Qasim jumps off the roof and rolls down the sliding pavement of the rail track and hides in the shadow of the trees. From there he sees the train come to an abrupt halt and its engine crash into the logs strewn along the unaligned rails. Numerous people pour out from the compartments, footholds and rooftops and a massacre ensues with swords, knives, firing sounds and above them all the 'agonised shrieks'. He also witnesses the tragedy of another family, Sikander's family; its infant child slaughtered with a sikh's sword and waved at the end of the spear as a token of revengeful satisfaction, wife clutched and humiliated by a frenzied sikh and Sikander running towards her, grabbing 'her tormentor' and stabbing him till he himself is also slaughtered by another sikh. Qasim is horrified by the mass killing but resolves not to use his revolver for these people of 'plains'.

As the massacre end, the alive women and children are dragged away where worse fate awaits them and the place is nauseatingly filthy with crushed flesh, bodies' pulp and blood. Qasim hurries towards the border which has to be crossed before daybreak when a short figure shots out of the darkness and a sobbing little girl clings to his legs calling him 'Abba'. From her accent, Qasim discerns that the girl must be a Muslim as she tells him that she is called Munni. Her voice and sobs jolt Qasim and he feels his own Zaitoon echoing from distant past. Impulsively, as carried down by his tribal blood through generations, he needs no conditioners to exhibit his emotions. Spontaneously, he cradles the girl and rushes towards Lahore. Near dawn he touches the outskirts of Lahore but his aim is to secure himself and the girl by immersing into the dense muslims' dwelling points. He manages to make his way to a refugee camp in Badami Bagh to secure food and shelter.

Befriending Nikkah, a wrestler at the camp, Qasim begins an odd and poverty stricken life in Lahore. Nikkah is married but childless and Zaitoon grows up as a pampered child with the three elders to look after her especially when Nikka's wife, Miriam becomes her caretaker in the absence of Qasim. The tribal Qasim is not used to any business and also refuses to become a partner with Nikkah in his business of setting up a betel-nut platform shop in the neighbourhood of Qila Gujjar Singh where Qasim and Nikkah take adjacent rooms on rent on the second floor of a three-storied building. Zaitoon's childhood is happily spent in the lanes and the primary school of Gujjar Singh while Qasim takes up to odd jobs as a construction labourer and coolie. Nikkah, a hard working man, starts amassing wealth as well as fame as a wrestler and gradually becomes the talk of the town. He also manages to involve himself with some politicians and goes as far as murdering their opponents and gets paid. Thus, his living standard experiences an upliftment and he manages to afford to decorate his home.

In the meanwhile, Zaitoon attains puberty and at her first menstruation Miriam urges Qasim to stop sending her to school as she would be liable for marriage soon and should stay at home and learn house chores. Miriam becomes her sole companion and takes her to the neighbours' houses for visits where the world is like a large 'womb' with everything revolving around mothers, children, relations, sisters acting as half-mothers to their younger siblings and all such stuff. When Zaitoon is sixteen, a change suddenly comes over Qasim and he shows an increased concern for the tribals. Though he knows many tribal people who once migrated to Lahore and are leading well-to-do life there yet he invites a typical tribal from the mountains to his own place and seems to discuss some urgent as well as long-term matter as if it were some future plan. Zaitoon glances at the tribal

from her balcony and is somewhat thrilled as the mountains have always been a part of her fanciful imagination but she has never seen Qasim as obstinate and argumentative as this day with Nikka and Miriam.

On the other hand, the author, in precise words, tells her reader the reality of the matter. Actually, Qasim has promised Zaitoon to his cousin Misri Khan's son, Sakhi in marriage in lieu of a meagre sum of money. Miriam moves heaven and earth to stop Qasim from going ahead but in vain. In Miriam's words:

. . .how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different. . .savages, brutish, uncouth, ignorant. . .most of them are bandits. . .don't know how to treat their women. . .she'll be a slave. . .is it because a Pathan offered you five hundred rupees, some measly maize and a few goats? (*The Pakistani Bride*, 94 & 95)

Back in their small and dingy room, Qasim tells the adolescent Zaitoon about her marriage in simple and brief words. Zaitoon who partially lives in a world of fancy and imagination, copies the tricks of screen heroines, is unaware of the ruthless world of mountains and she seems to be zestful at the idea of travelling to 'the glorious home of her father's forefathers and of the lover her fancies envisaged'.

Gifted with gold ornaments and a wedding outfit by Miriam, Zaitoon parts with her foster parents, Nikkah and Miriam at the railway station and while carrying out her journey through the mountains, she listens to her father attentively who all the way sings praises of 'his people', ancestors, stark mountains where his race are a 'free and manly lot', free from government! Seeing the mountain ranges, Qasim revives his hawk-like spirit and fires at an army truck, bursting its tyre. Both the men inside it are rather dark in complexion and therefore it is clear that they are from the plains. The matter settles with the intervention of Zaitoon who tells them that it is her mistake as she asked her father to let her use his gun. The men are surprised to see a dark girl from hot plains of Punjab with a fair-skin mountain man. However, after fixing the tyre, the men give Qasim and Zaitoon, a two-hour drive to the army camp at Dubair. Major Mushtaq, the commander at Dubair, arranges for Qasim and his daughter's one-night stay at the camp. Here Zaitoon is somewhat fascinated by a US based Pakistan lady, Carol, at the camp, who has come to spend her holidays with her husband, Farrukh. Carol with her golden hair, light skin and tight outfits respects the eastern traditions but also wants to maintain her 'free-bird' status. She is cringed by the docile attitude and coyness of Zaitoon whose father sheepishly declares the occasion of his travel to his ancestral village in the mountains. Carol sympathises with Zaitoon's fragile position as the girl has no say in the matter and gifts her a shawl (stole). At the same time, she also mocks the eastern sexual urges which drive the so-called shy women 'to achieve one of the highest birth rates in the world by immaculate conception!' Apart from Carol, one of the men in the truck, the mechanic, Ashiq Hussain is also slightly enamoured by Zaitoon and really makes a daring effort when he goes near Zaitoon, just before their departure from the camp, and persuades her not to go to the hills among the murderers and family feuds. He also conveys the major's message that in case of any difficulty Zaitoon can approach them for help by crossing either the Dubair or the Pattan Bridge. For the first time, during her stay at the camp, Zaitoon has had experienced the feelings of being a stranger, not being real daughter to Qasim and she senses her status as an orphan for the first time in

her life. She badly misses her parents who would have, obviously not give her up to the mountain tribes and would at least ask her opinion regarding marriage before going ahead:

‘. . .Abba, I am not of the hills. I am not of your tribe. I am not even yours.’ .lying in a strange room. . .faced by a future unknown and baffling, her voice sounded forlorn. . . ‘My father and my mother are dead.’ (The Pakistani Bride, 140)

Sakhi, from a distant and elevated rock, sees a Kohistani and his brown daughter enjoying the tumultuous waters of the Indus. He also glances at how an army person helps the brown girl from the plains climb down the cliff to the chalk-white sands near the lagoon. The ‘resentment, fury and hatred’ burning in the eyes of Sakhi testify his feelings of ‘humiliation and jealousy’. The tribal boy leaves no doubt to his readers about his unlimited dislike for the civilians, defence personals and also a trace of his disturbed psyche.

Arriving at Pattan in the army truck, Qasim bids Ashiq Hussain farewell at Pattan bridge-head where Ashiq clearly notices the divided and somewhat wish-to-rebel feelings of Zaitoon when she stops half-way cross the bridge analysing the vigorous waters and contemplating the spot which is going to mark the change in her life.

Once Zaitoon stepped into the village she was shocked by the disillusion of her fancy. Right in front of her was the crudest reality of the ‘wilderness’, poverty and barbarism instead of her dreamy mountains:

. . .the mud-rampart of the village, each house spewed out its ragged human content. . . the children, their noses running. . .stared at Zaitoon. . .a spry, stooped old woman. . . led Zaitoon possessively. . .to her hut. . .a huge clay tray filled with flat maize bread was placed on the floor. . .breaking chunks of the rubbery bread, women dipped them in a pan of water and fell to eating. (Pakistani Bride, 156)

During the night Zaitoon’s subconscious spirit is restless. She recollects a nightmare which is signalling towards her upcoming doom:

‘She had been standing by the river, admiring its vivid colours, when a hand had come out of the ice-blue depths and dragged her in, pulling her down, down’. . .her experiences of the previous day crowded confusedly in her mind. A wakeful fear. . . With shrewd instinct of the damned, she sensed the savagery of the people. . .poverty and harshness of their fight for survival made them the way they were. . .her mind revolted to share their lives. . . (The Pakistani Bride, 156)

Zaitoon, time and again persuades her father to take her back to the plains but the stubborn hill-man goes as far as attempting to strangle her if she dares to oppose the ‘word he has given’. Thus, in the midst of drum-beats, group dances and gun-fire the marriage is solemnised and Zaitoon becomes Sakhi’s wife. As a shy eastern bride, in their new bedroom, she curls into herself under Sakhi’s surveying gaze but Zaitoon does not know that now begins her real ordeal:

Sakhi surveyed. . .with mounting excitement. Here was a woman all his own, he thought with proprietorial lust and pride. . .But the corroding jealousy of the past days. . .surged up in a murderous fusion of hate and fever. He tore the ghoongat. . .holding her in a cruel grip. . .he dragged her up and roughly yanked her red satin shirt over her head. . .tugged at the cord of her shalwar and the silk flew to her ankles. . .covering her chest and crotch with her hands, she screamed. . . ‘Abba save me’. . .Why didn’t Qasim come? (The Pakistani Bride, 160)

Zaitoon screams till Sakhi feels a sort of hesitation, ‘looks defeated and abashed’. He even averts his ‘from her mortified nudity’ and she bends ahead to pick up her clothes and dresses up in them. Even after all this violence Zaitoon seemingly sways with the anticipated promising result of her once felt ‘indefinable cravings and stirrings’. She recalls her fantasies about tribal lovers wooing and adoring her and now she is with one and certain that her needs would be fulfilled. During the night, the craving and aching adolescent welcomed Sakhi’s rough advances and his hungry thrusts.

Zaitoon regrets sharing Commander Mushtaq’s words with Sakhi and she realises that her husband harbours the bitterest form of hatred and contempt towards civilians. He frequently calls them abuses and she also senses how he mocks and looks down upon Qasim who opted for city life and allowed Zaitoon to experience a relaxed friendship with the military ‘jawans’. Qasim, longing to carry on with his hill-lineage through Zaitoon, waits to bid her farewell before he departs. Somewhere he is guilty for his hasty decision but he winds up thinking that time will heal everything. On the other hand, Zaitoon feels the hills as narrow as a sword’s edge, cutting cleanly between her ‘carefree past’ and her future ‘ice-blue water’ ordeal. The change is drastic and probably for the worse and she almost grasps its cursing nature. She wildly runs towards her father, pleads him to take her back and in a fit of despair cries that she cannot put up with a person she hardly knows. Qasim departs but Zaitoon’s fitful declaration leaves Sakhi’s inhuman side exposed in public and reveals her mistrust in him. Somewhere deep in his heart, Sakhi longs for revenge.

All the day, Zaitoon behaves hysterically, thwarts her husband’s persuasions, throws the bread and meat she is given and spurns her mother-in-law but beneath all her distress she experiences a sort of satisfaction, a sense of victory because her efforts send Sakhi’s savage-self into withdrawal. His worried gestures, wearied face and frequent pleas sprinkle showers of soothing drizzle upon her disillusioned self. Sakhi’s centuries old ruthless-turned-lowly bent reptilian pride timely submits itself before a brown girl from the plains. Sakhi’s brother, Yunus Khan comments on his brother’s inability to hold a woman within her limits and pities his situation as an impotent and rose-soft. Sakhi takes Yunus’ words to his heart and blindly ploughs the fallow patch of land and scarp some massive stones and rocks from the still uncultivated pieces when a half-buried rock hinders his work. He sets the ox to work but the plough does fail to dig it out even with the strained animal. Sakhi, frustrated as he is, befalls his wrath on the innocent beast and beats it mercilessly. His mother, Hamida comes out of the hut, hearing the sounds of the tortured beast and flings herself between Sakhi and the ox. Sakhi, till now assuming that he has been avenging his humiliation brought upon him by female, strikes his mother hard with his staff; Zaitoon soon comes out and tries to snatch his stick but is badly

thrashed. Hamida, accustomed to centuries of humiliation, recovers from the shock in two days and stoically relishes the massage given by Zaitoon and relates the tales of valour by her fierce ancestors and the blood feuds.

From the eventful day, Zaitoon becomes the target of Sakhi's anger and tyranny. She is beaten at the slightest pretext until she goes into habit of maintaining her self-seclusion until she is talked to or commanded. Her gestures also become as anxious as Hamida. Zaitoon is anxious to remain alive so that one day she will be able to go down to Lahore to deliver her first child, as per Qasim's promise. But her awaited day came in just two months after her marriage when one day the nostalgic girl is caught red-handed by Sakhi, right when she is playfully waving to a jeep tracking its way deep down the road. Sakhi, who attributes the 'jeep' with the 'jawan', spits at her, swears at her, kicks her and carries her 'inert body' to the hut. Zaitoon resolves to escape and spends two days tending to her injuries and gathering maize-bread for her journey. She covers herself with a blanket so that the people would mistake her with a male and sets out on the pretext of fetching water for the house. In the meanwhile, a suspicious and an emotionally insecure Sakhi remains vigilant at the place which was visited by Zaitoon the other day and he stares at the trucks moving along the road with disdain. Back at home, satisfied over his own triumph at crushing his woman's hopes and desires, Hamida tells him about the girl who went to fetch water but did not come back. At the stream, Sakhi finds the pitcher, full of water, peacefully kept at a stone and he curses Zaitoon's courage and blames his own lack of attentive measures. In agitation he empties himself by swearing, fisting the earth, lifting rocks and dashing them to the ground and surveying the landscape, he returns home, burning with shame.

Zaitoon treads the most difficult pathways into the hilly wilderness lest the armed search-parties should find her 'to salvage the honour of the clan'. Day after day, she walks heedlessly, in the midst of her prayers, through 'chaos of boulders', 'plateaus', 'dim passages', and most of the time, 'dark cold stony crevices' to assure least possibility of her being discovered. During nights she settles in the midst of a cluster of rocks, huddles into her blanket and her prayers conjure images of Qasim, Nikkah, Miriam and Ashiq and she is lulled to sleep. Back in the village, Hamida sits with other women who curse Zaitoon and are certain of her only punishment. Hamida hates herself for being a part of the mountain savages:

. . .the women could not see her tears course down the deep grooves on her face. . Honour! she thought bitterly. Everything for honour — and another life lost! Her loved ones dead and now the girl she was beginning to hold so dear sacrificed. . old woman was overcome by the memory of her three dead sons. . In each grief, a nameless dread: how many more lives would the dead one claim?. . Men and honour. And now the girl. . .

(*The Pakistani Bride*, 190-91)

The efforts of Sakhi and Yunus Khan are but an amalgam of shame and icy mockery as the two brothers frequently meet face to face on the heights of the sharp-edged stones which give clear views of the passers-by at Dubair Bridge. Misri Khan approaches Commander Mushtaq, discloses the news of the run-away girl and tries to make sure that she would be handed over to him in person, in case she happens to come to Dubair for help. Commander Mushtaq, deals with

the matter in an extremely diplomatic way and vows to himself that he would teach these tribals a lesson and sneak the girl to Lahore in safety, away from these hilly carnivores.

A major enlightenment has its cost and Zaitoon's journey is a similar cost that she has to pay to win her freedom. Moreover, her journey right in the caverns and chasms brings her the bitterest enlightenment against her misunderstanding and illusion regarding 'hills' of her father Qasim:

Mountains closed in on her like a pack of wolves. Zaitoon shook her head in disbelief. 'These are not the same mountains,' she thought in horror of the hills she had loved at sight – whose magic and splendour lived in Qasim's reminiscences. . .she was appalled at the country's sudden menace. She realised that Qasim's presence and even. . .Sakhi and the tribesmen had concealed from her a truth. . .the land she stood on was her enemy: a hostile inscrutable maze.

(The Pakistani Bride, 197)

Zaitoon's journey also unfolds for her a greater ugliness of a homeless woman. On the eighth day of her adventure in the mountainous landscape, on the sandy bank of an icy river, at Cheerkhil tribal village, she is raped by two men and is left unconscious in the wilderness. Regaining her consciousness, not knowing that she is just a few miles from Dubair bridge, she rushes through the mountains, her body 'racking with pain' but the sound of the tumultuous river helps her to keep her pace and direction. The news reach Sakhi's village; he sets out with his father and brother and Misri Khan intimates the Commander Mushtaq with the updates. On the night of the eighth day, Zaitoon reaches the bridge and recognises it by the Chinese carvings on it. She spends the chilly night under the bridge in a well of boulders and is alert to every movement above the construction. Next morning, Mushtaq accompanies Misri Khan and his sons to help them cross the bridge, though the guards had restrained them earlier on Mushtaq's orders only and also extra care is taken to enhance the safety for the run-away girl should she makes it to Dubair for help. Mushtaq, bidding them farewell, sits on the sand near the boulders when suddenly a chill runs through his spine as a weak and fragile voice calls to him in whispers from within the boulders. Mushtaq asks the voice to hush down and he runs in its direction, careful that the three tribals don't look back in time. He finds Zaitoon as a featherless fowl with skeleton exposing from her shreds and tatters. He takes off his coat, dresses her in it, wraps her in the blanket and hauls the five-year old girlish weight on his back. Sakhi glances at him suddenly and comes questioning; Mushtaq pretends to be holding roots and herbs that he is fond of collecting and asks his guards to walk behind him, hiding the bundle. Sakhi suspects the presence of a tribal-knit blanket with Mushtaq. In the meantime, the blanket bundle is cleverly handed over to Ashiq Hussain to take it to the mess. Mushtaq, with meaningful remarks, tells Sakhi that Zaitoon is 'dead' and he should bury her 'bad shaped' body, by which he means to say that Zaitoon is 'dead for him' and that he should 'bury the idea of her hunt' and that his game is over. A woman's will power soars triumphant over a badly beaten Sakhi as an 'understanding dawns' upon him and he 'turns ashen'. Finding Zaitoon's cloth-piece and threads from the blanket, Sakhi weeps for a 'humiliation he cannot avenge' and 'a sorrow he cannot share'.

In the camp, Mushtaq muses over his victory and sketches Zaitoon's peaceful future. He is anticipating putting her in the vehicle taking Carol and Farukh to Lahore; his plan is to give Zaitoon in the care of a confident lady like Carol as this US lady sounded very sympathetic when she heard of Zaitoon's been raped. According to Mushtaq, Carol would move to US, sooner or later as she already sick of Eastern culture and she might as well sneak Zaitoon to US. Another option would be Ashiq Hussain proposing Zaitoon for marriage as the guy seemed to have developed a like for her, but that should be after a considerable period of time. After all, the girl is just out of trauma and needs a period of purgation from her shock and fear. Special care will be taken that Qasim should never come to know about her being alive as the tribal will pressurise her to be back into her ordeals or try to kill her himself for the sake of 'Honour'.

Bapsi Sidhwa culminates her novel with the words of Commander Mushtaq, surprisingly, a neutral character but his role leaves the reader, after a jerk, purged of the evil malice in human beings. Our quest is somewhat complete as Mushtaq teaches us how to pick up goodness from the midst of evil and attempt to propagate it for the better future of the nation. In fact, every human being should behave like a sieve, thwarting the evil and giving goodness a unique stand. While Zaitoon and to some extent Carol are mouth-pieces of Sidhwa, Mushtaq is the universal solution and a declaration of war against Evil. As far as Qasim is concerned, no one could have known the value of nostalgia, the pain of separation from one's own place and the crudeness of mountains better than him. Therefore, he could have applied this theory on Zaitoon beforehand and known that if as a mountain tribal he had always hated plains, in the same way, how could a brown girl from hot plains love the mountains and accept them as her final settlement in life.

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