

PURDAH AND SEXUAL REPRESSION IN BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE* AND TEHMINA DURRANI'S *BLASPHEMY*

Dr. Asha S.

Assistant Professor,
Department of English & Comparative Literature,
Central University of Kerala,
Vidyanagar Campus,
Kasaragod, PIN- 671123

Abstract

Purdah, the system of female seclusion, is a salient feature of Islam as a religion. The physical confinement, the emotional, intellectual and cultural deprivations and the control and repression of female sexuality that accompany the observance of the purdah are highlighted in the sub-continental novels featuring Muslim life. The writers dwell more on the debilitating and repressive effects of the purdah than on its protective aspects. This paper seeks to examine the diverse ramifications of the purdah in two Pakistan-based Muslim communities – the Kohistani tribals and the society of the Pirs – as featured in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) and Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* (1998). Images of sexual repression predominate in the two novels. Bapsi Sidhwa and Tehmina Durrani project images of the victimized purdah woman, defenceless against the patriarchal power structure. The conclusion of the paper is that though purdah has diverse manifestations in the tribal and Pir societies, it becomes a weapon of control and victimization of the Muslim woman in both the texts. The novelists do not stop with recounting the oppression; they also document the women's attempts at emancipation, though their attempts are crushed/muted.

Keywords:- Purdah, manifestations, emancipation, Blasphemy.

The institution of the purdah, with its control of female sexuality and the regulation of female identity, is largely culture-specific. For a comprehensive picture of the purdah to emerge, it has to be examined against the socio-cultural background wherein it operates. This paper seeks to examine the diverse ramifications of the purdah in two Pakistan-based Muslim communities – the Kohistani tribals and the society of the Pirs – as featured in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) and Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* (1998). The two communities either directly practise the purdah or covertly accept it in spirit. The forms of purdah in the novels range from the *burqa*, the all-concealing cloak, to an ideology that exercises control over the Muslim woman's mobility and sexuality. The novels are heterogeneous, occupying different cultural,