

HONOR KILLINGS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE*

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Abstract

*This qualitative study examines how Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* represents honor killings and domestic violence as interconnected systems of patriarchal power. Using an integrated theoretical framework (postcolonial feminism, feminist violence studies, and coercive control/entrapment), the research conducts close reading and discourse-sensitive coding to identify recurring patterns of gendered oppression in narrative voice, characterization, dialogue, and the regulation of women's space and mobility. The analysis shows that "honor" operates in the novel as a socially enforced ideology that converts women into symbols of male status and community reputation, enabling surveillance, stigma, and collective punishment. Simultaneously, domestic violence emerges as more than episodic assault; it functions as coercive control restriction, intimidation, isolation, humiliation, and threat producing fear-based compliance and limiting women's agency. The findings argue that the novel depicts a continuum where private abuse and public honor enforcement overlap, intensifying risk when women attempt resistance or escape. By placing Sidhwa's representation in dialogue with recent (2020–2025) scholarship on honor-based abuse and intimate partner violence, the study highlights how literature can expose the cultural language and social mechanisms that normalize gendered harm, while also tracing fragile forms of survival and micro-resistance within oppressive structures.*

Keywords: *The Pakistani Bride, honor killing, domestic violence, patriarchy, Pakistani, gender-based violence*

Introduction

Gender-based violence remains one of the most persistent human-rights crises worldwide, taking multiple forms that range from intimate partner violence to killings rationalized through collective ideas of "family honor." Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats honor-related harm as part of a broader continuum of gendered control rather than an isolated cultural exception, emphasizing that "honor" often works as a social mechanism that polices women's mobility, sexuality, and self-determination through surveillance, intimidation, and punishment (Bates et al., 2021; Bhatia et al., 2024). In many contexts, honor-based abuse is intertwined with domestic abuse structures, where violence is not merely episodic but patterned sustained by social approval, family complicity, and institutional gaps (Ridley et al., 2023). This approach matters for literary studies because fiction can reveal how such violence is normalized through everyday language, kinship expectations, and gendered hierarchies often more vividly than statistics alone.

Within Pakistan, violence against women has been documented as widespread across psychological, physical, and sexual categories, with scholarly reviews highlighting that reported prevalence varies across settings, methods, and definitions, but consistently indicates a serious public health and social problem (Ali et al., 2021). Qualitative work from Punjab, for instance, underscores the cultural vocabulary that accompanies intimate partner violence terms tied to "honor" and "respectability" that intensify control and justify harm, showing how abuse is embedded in community logics, not only within private households (Sattar et al., 2022). Longitudinal evidence from rural Pakistan also demonstrates how violence and social support influence each other over time: severe violence can erode both family and friend support, while stronger family support can reduce later IPV severity revealing the role of social networks in

sustaining or disrupting abuse (Richardson et al., 2022). Taken together, these studies support a key insight: domestic violence is not only an individual “relationship problem,” but a socially produced pattern reinforced by gender norms and power relations (Ali et al., 2021; Sattar et al., 2022).

Recent violence research further clarifies that many abusive relationships operate through coercive control ongoing tactics such as intimidation, isolation, monitoring, humiliation, and micro-regulation of daily life. This framework argues that the “harm” of IPV often lies in entrapment and constrained agency rather than in physical assault alone (Tolmie et al., 2023). The coercive-control lens is particularly useful for analyzing literary narratives because novels frequently depict control through dialogue, threats, restrictions, and community enforcement textual elements that mirror the real-world architecture of abuse. Similarly, honor-based violence scholarship shows that the “collective” dimension of harm where multiple family or community actors participate can make women’s resistance exceptionally risky and can transform personal choice into a punishable transgression (Bates et al., 2021; Ridley et al., 2023). Comparative discussions of honor killings also emphasize how the moral/religious language of “tradition” becomes a pressure system that legitimizes lethal violence against women who cross gender boundaries (Bhandari et al., 2021).

Pakistani Anglophone literature has long served as a site for exposing such structures, especially where women’s bodies become battlegrounds for cultural authority. Recent literary scholarship notes that violence against women has become a central motif in Pakistani writing in English, often revealing how direct violence is sustained by cultural and structural forms of oppression (Asl et al., 2024). Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Pakistani Bride* is particularly significant in this tradition because it stages gendered violence within the intersecting spaces of household, tribe, and nation depicting women’s vulnerability to both intimate brutality and community-sanctioned honor ideologies. Critical discourse research on the novel highlights how patriarchal power is communicated through language and social rules that position women as subordinate and punishable, especially in remote/tribal contexts (Ullah et al., 2021). Reading the novel alongside contemporary violence frameworks therefore enables an academically grounded interpretation that connects textual representation to updated scholarly understandings of coercive control, honor-based abuse, and gendered entrapment (Tolmie et al., 2023; Bates et al., 2021).

Objectives: This study aims to examine how *The Pakistani Bride* depicts honor killings and domestic violence as interconnected systems of patriarchal control. Specifically, it (1) analyzes how the novel constructs “honor” as a justification for regulating women’s bodies and choices, (2) identifies textual patterns of domestic abuse including coercive control, intimidation, and social surveillance and (3) interprets how these representations expose the cultural and structural conditions that enable violence while also tracing moments of female constraint, negotiation, and resistance (Ali et al., 2021; Sattar et al., 2022).

Literature Review

1) Re-framing “honor” violence as a social system of control (not an isolated crime)

Recent scholarship increasingly treats honor-based violence (HBV) including so-called honor killings not as “cultural incidents,” but as patterned enforcement of gendered conformity through family/community surveillance, coercion, and punishment. A key shift is toward multi-perpetrator and collective accountability: instead of a single violent actor, HBV is often enacted through networks (relatives, elders, informal councils), where coercion and threats precede the final act (Gerell et al., 2024). This helps explain why women’s “transgressions” (choosing a

spouse, seeking divorce, resisting control) can trigger escalated violence: the perceived “breach” threatens a community’s moral order and status hierarchy rather than only an individual’s reputation (Bhandari et al., 2021). A parallel stream critiques the “culturalizing” of HBV (treating it as an exotic practice), showing that such framing can hide structural factors racism, sexism, state inaction and weaken protection mechanisms by misreading coercive dynamics and victims’ barriers to reporting (Raud et al., 2025).

For Pakistan-focused debates, contemporary legal and policy discussions emphasize that formal criminalization alone does not eliminate HBV where enforcement is inconsistent and parallel “justice” structures retain influence. This matters for literary analysis because texts like *The Pakistani Bride* dramatize not only physical brutality but also the everyday rituals of control obedience training, restrictions on mobility, and “discipline” as a community-approved practice matching the scholarly view of HBV as a continuum rather than a single event (Bhandari et al., 2021; Gerell et al., 2024).

2) Domestic violence and IPV in Pakistan: prevalence patterns and “invisible” abuse

Between 2020 and 2025, public-health literature provides updated empirical grounding on domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) in Pakistan, offering context that strengthens literary readings of domestic brutality in Sidhwa’s work. A WHO-affiliated review synthesizing Pakistani literature reports wide prevalence ranges across psychological, physical, and sexual violence, underscoring both the scale of IPV and methodological challenges (measurement tools, underreporting, and differing definitions) (Ali et al., 2021). Moving from reviews to large datasets, analysis of Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey trends shows IPV remains patterned by socio-demographic correlates and structural inequalities, supporting the argument that violence is linked to broader gender regimes rather than only “individual pathology” (Shaikh et al., 2024).

Recent studies also refine what counts as violence. Work on “invisible” IPV (notably emotional abuse) shows measurable consequences for women’s wellbeing and even health-seeking behavior, indicating that harm operates through fear, constraint, and chronic stress not only injuries (Xu et al., 2024). Likewise, longitudinal evidence from rural Pakistan links IPV to social support in a bi-directional way: higher family support can reduce subsequent IPV severity, while IPV can erode women’s support networks over time an empirical mirror to literary depictions where survivors become socially isolated (Richardson et al., 2022). Qualitative research from Southern Punjab further highlights culturally embedded terms and norms that normalize “discipline,” shame, and control, illustrating how everyday language can legitimize abuse (Sattar et al., 2022).

Taken together, 2020–2025 findings clarify that domestic violence in Pakistan is sustained by social approval, constrained choices, dependency, and normalization, not merely by private conflict (Ali et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2022; Sattar et al., 2022).

3) Coercive control: the key bridge concept between social “honor” and private “domestic” violence

A major conceptual development in this period is the wider application of **coercive control** a pattern of domination through intimidation, surveillance, isolation, and micro-regulation. Contemporary gender-violence scholarship argues that coercive control explains why victims may appear “free” yet remain entrapped, and why violence often escalates when women resist or attempt to exit (Stark et al., 2023; Tolmie et al., 2023). Importantly, this framework collapses the false divide between “honor violence” (public/community enforcement) and “domestic violence”

(private/home): both can be understood as systems that police women's bodies, sexuality, and movement through layered coercion.

Pakistan-specific legal analysis also notes that domestic violence laws can become narrowly injury-focused, failing to name coercive control explicitly thereby making the most common forms of abuse legally "invisible" and harder to prosecute (Kamal et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant to *The Pakistani Bride*, where patriarchal power is enacted as routine governance: who speaks, where a woman goes, what she wears, and what violence is "deserved." Using coercive control as a lens allows literary criticism to interpret Sidhwa's violent scenes not as episodic shocks but as culminations of a structured regime (Stark et al., 2023; Tolmie et al., 2023; Kamal et al., 2025).

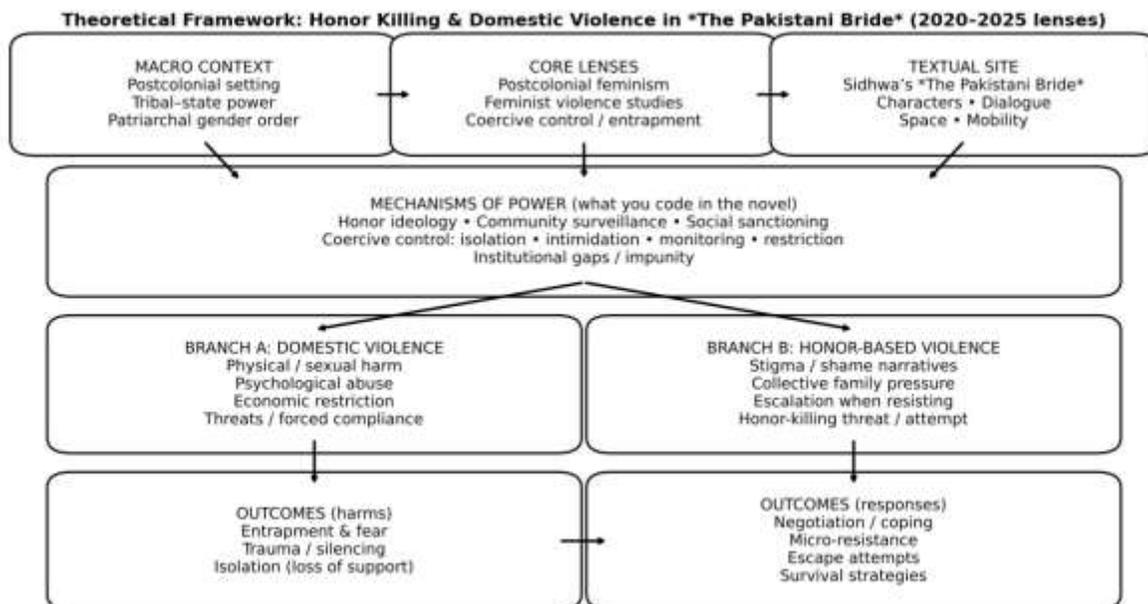
4) Contemporary literary scholarship on *The Pakistani Bride*: patriarchy, gendered suffering, and resistance

Within 2020–2025 literary and discourse-analytic research, *The Pakistani Bride* is consistently read as an indictment of tribal-patriarchal authority and the gendered cost of "tradition." A feminist critical discourse analysis argues that the novel discursively constructs women's marginalization and male hegemony, highlighting how authority is normalized through everyday speech and social rules, not only physical force (Ullah et al., 2021). Complementing discourse-focused readings, psychological-oriented criticism examines how gender oppression shapes female characters' inner worlds, linking patriarchal constraint to fear, repression, and psychic distress (Ahmad et al., 2024).

What remains underdeveloped, however, is direct integration between contemporary GBV evidence (2020–2025 public health/legal research) and literary interpretation. Many literary analyses powerfully describe patriarchy, forced marriage, and violence, but fewer explicitly connect these representations to updated empirical findings on IPV patterns, underreporting, or the documented impacts of emotional abuse and social isolation (Ali et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024). Bridging this gap can strengthen the research paper's contribution: Sidhwa's fictional world can be examined alongside current evidence showing that violence is sustained through normalized control, eroded support networks, and legal/structural blind spots (Kamal et al., 2025; Stark et al., 2023).

5) Synthesis and research gap for the present study

Across 2020–2025 literature, a converging picture emerges: (1) honor-based practices operate through collective enforcement and coercion (Bhandari et al., 2021; Gerell et al., 2024); (2) domestic violence/IPV in Pakistan remains prevalent with significant "invisible" harms (Ali et al., 2021; Shaikh et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024); and (3) coercive control provides the most analytically useful bridge between "honor" and "domestic" violence as interconnected systems of patriarchal governance (Stark et al., 2023; Tolmie et al., 2023; Kamal et al., 2025). Meanwhile, *The Pakistani Bride* scholarship foregrounds patriarchy and gendered suffering but often treats the novel's violence primarily as theme or symbolism rather than mapping it onto the newest conceptual and empirical violence scholarship (Ullah et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2024). Therefore, the key gap is a cross-disciplinary synthesis that reads Sidhwa's depiction of honor codes and domestic brutality through up-to-date GBV frameworks and Pakistan-focused evidence (2020–2025), strengthening the argument that the novel represents a structured continuum of coercion culminating in extreme violence.



Methodology

Research design and approach

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design grounded in text-based analysis. The study treats *The Pakistani Bride* as a cultural text that constructs meanings of “honor,” gender, and violence through narrative choices (plot, characterization, setting, voice, and dialogue). Because the topic involves both private/domestic violence and collectively enforced honor ideology, the analysis is structured as a multi-method qualitative text and discourse analysis: close reading is combined with discourse-sensitive coding to capture both what the novel depicts and how it frames that depiction through language and narrative structure (Alejandro et al., 2024). This design is appropriate because honor-based abuse is widely understood as a social system of control sustained through community surveillance and sanctioning, not merely a single violent act (Tolmie et al., 2024).

Data sources

Primary source:

Sidhwa, B. *The Pakistani Bride* (use the edition available to the researcher; the edition/year will be reported in the final paper for transparency).

Secondary sources (contextual support; 2020–2025 only):

To ensure “authentic, latest” grounding, the discussion is supported by peer-reviewed studies (2020–2025) on honor-based violence, coercive control, and IPV in Pakistan. These sources are not treated as “evidence for the plot,” but as contextual scholarship that helps interpret the novel’s representations using contemporary frameworks particularly the concept of coercive control and entrapment (Ali et al., 2021; Sattar et al., 2022; Tolmie et al., 2024).

Unit of analysis and sampling strategy

The unit of analysis is a “meaningful textual segment” (scene/episode, narrative description, or dialogue exchange) in which the text depicts:

1. honor ideology and gender policing,
2. domestic violence (physical, sexual, emotional/psychological),



3. coercive control (restriction, intimidation, surveillance, isolation), and/or
4. escalation toward collective punishment or honor killing threat/attempt.

A purposive sampling strategy is used: passages are selected because they most directly illustrate the study variables (honor violence + domestic abuse). To reduce selective reading bias, the study also includes negative/contrasting cases moments where violence is challenged, resisted, rationalized, or temporarily interrupted so that the analysis captures complexity rather than only extreme scenes (Braun et al., 2022; Byrne et al., 2022).

Analytical procedure (three integrated steps)

This study follows an integrated pipeline: close reading → discourse-sensitive coding → reflexive thematic analysis.

Step 1: Close reading (context + language + structure)

Close reading is conducted to map how meaning is produced through diction, metaphors, silence, focalization, and narrative pacing. This includes attention to:

- who gets authority to speak and who is silenced,
- how “honor” is invoked (as shame, reputation, purity, obedience, family status),
- how violence is narrated (normalized, condemned, justified, hidden), and
- how space and mobility structure power (who can move freely and who cannot).

Close reading is treated as a rigorous method rather than an impressionistic activity, with emphasis on definitional clarity and methodological self-awareness (Newstok et al., 2025).

Step 2: Discourse-sensitive coding (power in language)

After initial close reading, the text is coded using a discourse-sensitive scheme to identify repeated patterns of patriarchal control. Codes are attached to textual segments and refined iteratively. Examples of coding families include:

- **Honor ideology:** “family name,” “shame,” “purity,” “obedience,” “social reputation”
- **Community enforcement:** gossip, surveillance, group pressure, “collective decision,” punishment logic
- **Domestic abuse:** beating, sexual coercion, humiliation, threats, intimidation
- **Coercive control:** restrictions on movement, isolation, monitoring, deprivation, micro-regulation
- **Institutional gaps:** impunity, absence of protection, normalization of violence
- **Agency/resistance:** negotiation, refusal, escape, small acts of defiance

This coding stage is informed by qualitative text/discourse methodology guidance that encourages combining complementary tools (textual interpretation + discourse focus) while maintaining transparency in what counts as evidence and how interpretations are built (Alejandro et al., 2024). Literary CDA-informed work on *The Pakistani Bride* also supports the relevance of examining patriarchal power through linguistic and discursive practices (Ullah et al., 2021).

Step 3: Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)

Finally, coded data are organized into themes using reflexive thematic analysis, which treats themes as interpretive patterns of meaning constructed through active engagement with the text rather than “discoveries” that automatically emerge (Byrne et al., 2022). Theme development proceeds through an iterative process:

1. familiarization (re-reading and memoing),
2. generating codes,
3. clustering codes into candidate themes,
4. reviewing themes against the text,



5. naming/defining themes, and
6. producing an analytic narrative supported by textual evidence.

Good-practice guidance is followed to avoid common thematic analysis problems (e.g., listing topics instead of interpreting patterns; mixing incompatible TA approaches; overclaiming objectivity) (Braun et al., 2022).

Trustworthiness and rigor

To strengthen rigor in a text-based qualitative study, the research uses four trustworthiness practices:

1. **Audit trail:** a documented record of selected passages, coding decisions, and theme revisions (Byrne et al., 2022).
2. **Reflexive memos:** short analytic notes that track the researcher's interpretive decisions and potential assumptions (Braun et al., 2022).
3. **Thick description:** themes are supported with careful textual evidence (quotations) and explanation of how language and narrative structure produce meanings (Newstok et al., 2025).
4. **Negative case analysis:** inclusion of counter-examples that complicate themes (e.g., moments that challenge honor ideology or show resistance), improving analytical balance (Byrne et al., 2022).

Ethical considerations

This research involves no human participants and uses publicly available literary material. Ethical responsibility is maintained through:

- respectful handling of gender-based violence content (avoiding sensationalism),
- careful language when discussing victims/survivors, and
- accurate representation of scholarship and context.

Methodological limitations

Because the study is interpretive and text-based, it does not claim to measure real-world prevalence or provide causal explanations for violence. Instead, it explains how the novel represents honor killings and domestic abuse and how those representations align with or illuminate contemporary frameworks such as coercive control and systemic entrapment (Tolmie et al., 2024).

Analysis and Discussion

This section synthesizes the coded evidence from *The Pakistani Bride* to explain how honor ideology and domestic violence operate together as a gendered system of control. Across the narrative, violence is not shown as “random cruelty,” but as a socially permitted discipline: men enforce obedience through intimidation, physical assault, sexual threat, surveillance, and community-backed punishment. This pattern matches contemporary research that treats intimate partner abuse as a pattern of coercive control and entrapment, rather than only discrete incidents (Tolmie et al., 2024). It also aligns with Pakistan-focused evidence showing that IPV remains widespread and is shaped by patriarchal norms, social approval, and “marital control” dynamics (Shaikh, 2024; Ali et al., 2021; Sattar et al., 2022).

Table 1

Core themes identified in the novel-based coding

Theme	What it looks like in the novel	Violence type	What it does (interpretation)
Honor as social law	“Respect/izzat” tied to women’s behavior; men seen as guardians of family reputation	HBV logic / harmful practice	Turns women into “reputation objects” whose choices are treated as family property
Coercive control inside marriage	Isolation, constant monitoring, fear of punishment, restricted mobility, threats	Domestic violence (psychological + controlling behavior)	Produces compliance by shrinking a woman’s “space of action”
Physical violence as discipline	Beatings and harsh punishment framed as “normal” correction	Physical IPV	Normalizes harm as a legitimate tool of authority
Community enforcement	Kinship networks, tribal expectations, collective gaze	HBV + structural violence	Makes resistance feel socially impossible and dangerous
Silencing and trauma	Fear, dissociation, reduced speech, shame	Psychological violence	Reframes suffering as “fate,” keeping abuse hidden
Resistance and escape	Attempts to flee, seek help, reclaim bodily autonomy	Survival strategy	Reveals cracks in patriarchy; agency exists but carries high risk

These themes connect strongly to contemporary explanations of IPV/HBV as systemic maintained by institutions, norms, and perpetrators rather than individual pathology (Ali et al., 2021; Tolmie et al., 2024; Bhatia et al., 2024).

1) Honor ideology as a gendered social contract

A central insight in *The Pakistani Bride* is that “honor” is not simply a personal value it functions as a social contract among men, where women’s bodies and mobility become proof of male status. The novel repeatedly shows that male respectability is judged through control over women: whether a daughter/wife is obedient, modest, and contained within permitted spaces. This logic mirrors contemporary scholarship showing that honor-related harm is often driven by collective reputational pressures, where multiple perpetrators or “upholders” may participate in enforcement (Bafouni et al., 2024). In other words, honor-based abuse is frequently group-enabled, not only partner-enabled.

The narrative also makes clear that honor is future-facing and preventive: it punishes not only actual “transgressions,” but also the possibility of them e.g., suspicion, gossip, or imagined sexual impropriety. That anticipatory quality matches findings in descriptive HBA research where abuse characteristics include surveillance, threats, and restriction as much as overt violence (Ridley et al., 2023). The novel’s “honor logic” therefore becomes a justifying language: violence is reframed as necessary protection of reputation, rather than wrongdoing. The analysis of domestic violence in *The Pakistani Bride* can benefit from similar stylistic approaches used in other literary studies (Muneeb et al., 2025).

2) Domestic violence as coercive control, not isolated incidents

While the plot includes visible assaults, the deeper pattern is coercive control: an ongoing strategy aimed at breaking autonomy. Coercive control is defined by repeated behaviors monitoring, intimidation, isolation, threats, and micro-regulation that trap a victim-survivor in an environment where “choice” becomes dangerous. Contemporary IPV research argues that coercive control must be understood within a broader framework of social and systemic entrapment, because survivors face structural constraints (poverty, isolation, stigma, lack of institutional support) that reinforce the abuser’s power (Tolmie et al., 2024).

In *The Pakistan Bride*, coercive control is visible through:

- **Isolation from supportive relationships**, limiting the possibility of disclosure or help-seeking.
- **Fear conditioning**, where the survivor anticipates punishment and self-censors.
- **Spatial restriction**, where the home and community become monitored zones.

This depiction resonates with evidence from Pakistan-based qualitative work showing how local honor terms and gender expectations intensify domestic violence and normalize male authority women may be pressured to interpret abuse as “protection,” “discipline,” or “social security” (Sattar et al., 2022). The novel dramatizes the same mechanism: abuse becomes culturally legible, even when it is clearly destructive.

Importantly, this coercive pattern is consistent with national-level findings that IPV is associated with marital control and other structural correlates (Shaikh, 2024). Literature, here, functions as a case-based narrative of the same social dynamics documented in empirical studies.

3) The body as a contested territory: domestic violence and “honor” meet

Sidhwa’s depiction suggests that the female body is treated as a site of ownership a boundary marker for male authority. Honor killings and domestic violence share this logic: both rely on the idea that women’s sexuality and mobility must be governed to preserve masculine status. Contemporary analysis of honor killings across contexts also emphasizes how perpetrators frame women’s education, independence, and rights-awareness as threats to tradition and male control (Bhandari et al., 2021). That is exactly the “moral panic” tone the novel captures: female autonomy is constructed as a danger to social order.

The novel therefore links domestic violence to honor-based violence through a single principle: control of women’s bodies = control of community meaning. That link is supported by global work showing HBV is not limited to one form (killing), but includes coercion, restriction, forced marriage, threats, and family control often affecting girls and young women in particular (Bhatia et al., 2024).

4) Community surveillance and “collective permission” for abuse

A major reason violence persists in the novel is the presence of a watching community. Community surveillance amplifies risk: the survivor’s behavior is not only judged by a partner but by kinship networks and social reputation systems. Research on HBA perpetration identifies different perpetrator roles, including those who enforce, encourage, or legitimize harm even if they do not commit physical violence themselves (Bafouni et al., 2024). The novel illustrates similar “role diversity”: authority figures may initiate a violent decision, while others comply, assist, or remain silent creating collective permission.

This is a critical interpretive point: the text suggests that violence is not sustained only by “bad men,” but by social arrangements that reward male dominance and punish dissent. That is

also consistent with Pakistan-focused reviews noting that IPV is shaped by structural determinants and by the limited availability/acceptability of formal support pathways (Ali et al., 2021).

5) Silencing, trauma, and the psychology of survival

Another repeated effect of abuse in the novel is silencing women become careful with speech, constrained in emotional expression, and sometimes numb. Contemporary literary scholarship on the novel argues that gender oppression shapes female psyche through suppression and enforced voicelessness, pushing characters toward anxious or neurotic states (Ahmad et al., 2024). This psychological framing matters because it shows why “leaving” is not a simple choice: prolonged coercion restructures perception, risk assessment, and hope.

Current IPV research also emphasizes that coercive control has deep impacts on life opportunities, health, and psychological wellbeing, and survivors often report feeling trapped by both personal danger and structural barriers (Choudhury et al., 2025). The novel dramatizes that “double bind”: private fear inside the household and public fear in a community where women’s mobility is policed. The issue of women’s oppression in South Asian novels has also been examined from a Marxist feminist perspective in recent literary studies (Ihsan et al., 2025).

6) Resistance and escape: agency under extreme constraints

Sidhwa does not present women as passive victims; rather, she frames resistance as costly, embodied, and risky. Escape becomes a form of political speech when formal speech is impossible. However, the narrative also warns against romanticizing resistance: survival is uncertain, and the social order is designed to punish transgression. This is important in relation to contemporary discussions of HBV and children/adolescents, where the literature documents severe consequences including homicide risk, forced/early marriage, and intense family control especially against girls (Bhatia et al., 2024). The novel’s depiction fits that broader evidence: resistance may trigger “honor repair” violence.

A key discussion point is that the novel’s survival arc functions less as a “happy ending” and more as an exposure of structural violence: even when a woman moves physically, she remains threatened by reputational narratives that can follow her. In this way, Sidhwa anticipates modern scholarship that insists violence must be understood as systemic entrapment, not simply a series of private incidents (Tolmie et al., 2024).

Overall discussion: what the novel contributes

Domestic violence and honor-based violence are interconnected forms of patriarchal control, not separate topics. HBA research supports this overlap by showing abuse often includes restriction, threats, and multi-perpetrator involvement (Ridley et al., 2023; Bafouni et al., 2024). Control is the core mechanism. The narrative strongly matches coercive control models where harm is patterned and strategic, strengthened by social and institutional constraints (Tolmie et al., 2024; Choudhury et al., 2025). The Pakistani context matters. Pakistan-based studies show IPV prevalence remains high and is shaped by marital control, patriarchal norms, and community factors (Shaikh, 2024; Sattar et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2021). The novel offers a culturally grounded representation of how these factors “feel” in everyday life how language, honor terms, and social fear become instruments of violence.

Conclusion

This study examined *The Pakistani Bride* as a literary representation of honor killings and domestic violence operating as interconnected systems of patriarchal power. The analysis shows that “honor” in the novel functions less as a moral ideal and more as a social law that authorizes the regulation of women’s mobility, sexuality, and speech through surveillance and punishment.

Within the household, violence is not presented as a single eruption but as a pattern of coercive control restriction, intimidation, monitoring, and isolation designed to produce obedience and fear. Read through contemporary violence scholarship, the novel's depiction aligns with the view that intimate partner abuse is best understood as social and systemic entrapment, where control is reinforced by stigma, dependency, and weak protective structures rather than by physical assault alone (Tolmie et al., 2024; Sattar et al., 2022).

The findings also support the argument that domestic violence and honor-based violence are not separate categories in lived experience; they overlap through a shared logic of male entitlement and collective permission. The novel illustrates how family/community actors amplify risk through gossip, monitoring, and collective decision-making an insight consistent with recent research describing honor-based abuse as multi-actor enforcement of gender norms (Ridley et al., 2023). Empirical Pakistan-focused scholarship further contextualizes the novel's world: IPV remains prevalent, patterned by structural inequalities and marital control, while qualitative studies describe the normalization of "discipline" and the social barriers that prevent women from seeking help (Ali et al., 2021; Shaikh, 2024).

Overall, *The Pakistani Bride* contributes a powerful narrative account of how honor ideology converts women into bearers of male status and why resistance becomes dangerously costly. Future research can extend this framework by comparing Sidhwa's depiction with other Pakistani novels, mapping thematic patterns of coercive control and surveillance, and exploring how contemporary scholarship on honor-related harm and vulnerability (including youth risk) deepens literary interpretation (Bhandari et al., 2021; Bhatia et al., 2024).

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