

## A Comparative Analysis of the Female Characters in 'The Pakistani Bride' and 'Fasting, Feasting'

**Khadim Nawaz**

MPhil English, Department of English, Northern University, Nowshera, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Email: khadimnawaz@gmail.com

### Abstract

*The primary purpose of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of the female characters portrayed in 'The Pakistani Bride' and 'Fasting, Feasting'. This study utilizes the Marxist Feminist theoretical framework to delve into the portrayal of women in these literary works. Thematic analysis serves as the methodological approach to gather primary data. The key findings highlight the differential levels of oppression experienced by Pakistani and Indian women, particularly in areas such as education, domestic violence, and socioeconomic challenges. The study underscores the urgency for Pakistani women to have improved access to justice and equal education opportunities. These recommendations aim to address the systematic inequalities that perpetuate the marginalization of women in society.*

**Keywords:** Marxist Feminism, Pakistani Bride, Fasting-Feasting, Female character, thematic analysis, Indo-Pak women.

### Introduction

Bapsi Sidhwa, a renowned Pakistani novelist celebrated for her critique of patriarchal structures, explores the themes of unhappy marriages and the subordinate position of women in her novel 'The Pakistani Bride'. First published in 1983 following her acclaimed work 'The Crow Eaters', this novel explores the harsh realities faced by women in traditional Pakistani society, portraying suppressed identities, brutal customs, and isolated lives shaped by oppressive norms. Similarly, Anita Desai, an Indian-born feminist writer, shares thematic parallels with Sidhwa, focusing on the intersection of gender and societal constraints. Her novel 'Fasting, Feasting' (1999), which won the Booker Prize, centers on the victimization of women within the oppressive frameworks of Hindu patriarchal culture, highlighting their struggles both within and beyond the household.

Both 'The Pakistani Bride' and 'Fasting, Feasting' reflect the shared experiences of women in Indo-Pak societies under patriarchal dominance, revealing how domestic violence, economic challenges, and social boundaries confine their lives. Across diverse cultures and religions, women encounter similar forms of marginalization, with their movements, choices, and even basic aspects of life such as dress, food, and opportunities often controlled by male authority figures. These issues underscore the universality of female oppression, regardless of geographical or cultural differences.

Feminist scholars have extensively analyzed these works. For instance, Karam (2022) has highlighted how 'Fasting, Feasting' critiques the gendered oppression inherent in Indian society, emphasizing issues like dowry and social limitations. Similarly, Prasad (2015) recognizes Desai's work as a powerful protest against societal norms that mold women to serve the needs of men. While these studies offer valuable insights into individual novels, they fall short of drawing a comparative analysis that examines the nuanced portrayal of gendered oppression across Indo-Pak contexts.

The present research addresses this research gap by offering a comparative study of female representation in 'The Pakistani Bride' and 'Fasting, Feasting', analyzing how women navigate patriarchal oppression in terms of domestic violence, marriage, education, and social interaction. The analysis is rooted in the Marxist Feminist framework of Heidi Hartman Robinson, focusing on the intersection of gender and class oppression in male-dominated societies.

Conducting this study is highly significant because it highlights the shared cultural and social challenges faced by women in Pakistan and India, despite their distinct religious and historical contexts. By exploring the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of gendered oppression, this study contributes to feminist literary discourse and provides a deeper understanding of how literature mirrors and critiques the systemic marginalization of women in South Asia.

The novelty of this research study lies in its comparative approach, which has not been extensively addressed in existing literature. While previous studies have focused on individual works, this research study bridges the existing research gap by examining the shared and contrasting elements of patriarchy in the two novels. To this end, the current research study offers fresh insights into how Sidhwa and Desai use literature to critique and resist patriarchal norms, highlighting the resilience and agency of their female characters in oppressive socio-cultural settings.

The remaining study proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 explains the methodological framework employed in the study; Section 4 presents a comparative analysis of the female characters in the two novels; and Section 5 concludes the study, present major findings, discusses academic and policy implications, and offers suggestions for future research.

### 1. Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism, or ‘third-world feminism,’ emerged as a critique of Western mainstream feminism, which primarily focused on the issues of Western women. Western feminism often neglected the social class, feelings, and sufferings of colonized women in third-world countries. Postcolonial feminism rejects the concept of Western feminism, arguing that it predominantly addresses European women's concerns while overlooking the unique challenges faced by women in colonized regions (Mishra, 2013). It expands its focus beyond patriarchy as a source of oppression, examining how social inequalities are constructed within political, historical, cultural, and economic contexts.

In the postcolonial period, women writers faced numerous challenges in asserting their identities but succeeded in making significant contributions to Indian literature. Indian women writers, for example, have historically been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions favoring male authors. Anita Desai, in her psychological novels, portrays the image of women as suffering and deeply introspective individuals within male-dominated societies. However, when she moved to the US, her focus shifted to immigrant issues, distancing herself from Indian realities (Kumar, 2022). Similarly, African feminists contend that colonialism exacerbated existing inequalities in traditional African societies, perpetuating these limitations even today (Al-wazedi, 2021).

Various theoretical frameworks have been employed to study female characters in literature, including Gynocriticism, psychoanalytical approaches, radical feminism, *écriture féminine*, and Marxist feminism. Among these, Marxist feminism stands out for its emphasis on the exploitation of women under capitalist systems (Dewan Hossain, 2016). It examines how patriarchal traditions operate as tools for capitalist exploitation, subordinating women in society. For instance, research on Pakistani lady health workers highlights how patriarchal norms intersect with capitalist structures to exploit women, concluding that Marxist feminist analysis is crucial for identifying materialistic barriers faced by women in Pakistan (Mojab, 2019).

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* offers a vivid portrayal of the harsh realities faced by women from different cultural backgrounds, emphasizing how their lives are controlled by male-dominated decisions (Maseeh, 2017). Similarly, domestic violence studies in Pakistan reveal significant disparities between urban and rural women, with rural women facing higher rates of

sexual violence, honor killings, and acid attacks. These studies recommend improved education, legal protections, and increased social and political participation to address these issues (Ashraf, 2017; SEV'ER, 2001). Moreover, feminist theoretical research underscores the marginalization of Pakistani women, particularly Punjabi women, within academia, advocating for greater inclusion to bring positive societal change (Choudhry, 2019).

Comparative analyses of other authors reveal varying perspectives on women's roles and relationships. For example, Anita Desai focuses on psychological struggles and familial conflicts, portraying alienation and suffering in Indian families, while Nirupama Borgohain emphasizes strong familial bonds (Bania, 2015). Similarly, George Bernard Shaw's intellectual and witty female characters lack practical solutions to their struggles, contrasting with Ernest Hemingway's depiction of women as bold, fearless, and resilient in his works (Bashir & Supervisor, 2018). Psychoanalytical studies of Alice Munro's works reveal how societal pressures surrounding marriage create psychological burdens for women, leading them to seek temporary escapism through affairs while ultimately prioritizing family life (Permata, 2015).

Anita Desai's portrayal of male and female characters often glorifies men, presenting them as central to significant life experiences, while women are depicted as dependent on men during challenging times. This dynamic reflects the duality of women's experiences—suffering caused by men but also protection offered by them in difficult situations (Chaudhari, 2020). Her novels address key themes such as love, marriage, and internal conflicts, portraying Eastern women as alienated and unfulfilled, while Western women are busy yet similarly dissatisfied. Marriage emerges as a central theme, symbolizing both societal necessity and personal conflict, underscoring the universal struggles of women across cultures (Dubey, 2008).

Although individual analyses of Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* exist, there is a notable research gap in comparative studies examining the representation of female characters in these works. The existing literature focuses on isolated analyses, leaving the shared and contrasting experiences of women under patriarchal influences in Pakistani and Indian contexts largely unexplored.

This study addresses this research gap by offering a comparative analysis of female characters in the two novels. By applying the Marxist Feminist Theory of Heidi Hartman Robinson, this research provides a deeper understanding of how patriarchal and capitalist structures shape women's lives in both societies. The study explores themes such as domestic violence, marriage, education, and social interactions, highlighting the systemic forces that influence women's experiences. This comparative approach not only bridges the gap in existing literature but also contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial feminism and feminist literary studies, offering valuable insights into the universal struggles of women across cultural contexts.

## 2. Methodological Framework

The methodological framework for this study employs a Marxist Feminist perspective to examine the representation of unpaid domestic labor, commodification of women, and gendered oppression in selected literary works. This approach integrates textual analysis with a critical examination of socioeconomic and cultural contexts, providing a lens to understand how patriarchal structures perpetuate women's subjugation within capitalist systems.

### 3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopts a qualitative paradigm, as it focuses on interpreting and understanding social realities through the lived experiences of women depicted in the novels. The Marxist Feminist framework allows for an in-depth analysis of how capitalism and patriarchy intertwine to

reinforce systemic gender inequalities. By employing this approach, the study seeks to reveal the socio-economic forces that render women invisible in both public and private spheres.

### 3.2 Textual Analysis

The primary data consists of two selected literary works: *'The Bride'* by Bapsi Sidhwa and *'Fasting, Feasting'* by Anita Desai. These texts are analyzed for their portrayal of women's experiences, emphasizing themes of unpaid domestic labor, forced marriages, dowry practices, and economic exploitation. Through close reading and thematic analysis, the study identifies instances of oppression and resistance, mapping how these experiences align with Marxist Feminist critiques of gender and class dynamics.

### 3.3 Theoretical Framework

Marxist Feminism serves as the theoretical backbone of this study. This framework views gender inequality as a product of both economic systems and cultural ideologies. The theoretical framework of the study highlights the following key points:

- (a) **The Role of Labor:** Women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labor is essential for sustaining capitalist economies yet remains undervalued and unrecognized.
- (b) **Commodification:** The treatment of women as commodities through practices like dowry and arranged marriages reflects the economic and social exploitation ingrained in patriarchal systems.
- (c) **Alienation:** Women's emotional and psychological alienation from their labor, identity, and agency underpins their subjugation within familial and societal structures.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Sources

This study relies on secondary data in the form of literary texts, complemented by relevant scholarly articles, books, and reports. Selected excerpts from the novels provide qualitative data for analysis, contextualized by historical, cultural, and economic information from peer-reviewed sources.

### 3.5 Analytical Approach

The analysis involves:

- (a) **Close Reading:** Detailed examination of textual elements, including characters' dialogues, narrative descriptions, and symbolic representations of gender roles.
- (b) **Thematic Analysis:** Identification of recurring themes related to unpaid labor, commodification, and systemic oppression.
- (c) **Contextual Interpretation:** Situating the findings within the broader socio-cultural and economic realities of South Asian societies to draw connections between fiction and real-world issues.

By employing this methodological framework, the study bridges the research gap between literature and socio-economic critique, illustrating how literary works serve as a mirror and critique of societal structures that perpetuate women's oppression.

## 3. Comparative Analysis

### 4.1 Unpaid Domestic and Reproductive Labor

Marxist feminism critiques two interconnected systems: capitalism and the domestic sphere. Women's labor within the home, often unrecognized and uncompensated, sustains the family and the larger economic system. A woman frequently works as much as, if not more than, her husband, juggling the demands of childcare, domestic work, and, in some cases, external employment. For single women, the burden doubles as they must manage these responsibilities independently.

Marx and Engels noted this inequality in their critique of capitalism:



*"The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production... He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at [by Communists] is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production" (Marx & Engels, 1988, p. 50).*

In literature, the portrayal of women as overburdened and alienated resonates with these realities. For instance, in *Ice-Candy-Man*, the domestic sphere is likened to a reproductive factory, described as "stepping into the gigantic womb, the fecund, fetid vortex of the womb." Similarly, the forced pregnancies and male-child preferences are exemplified in Mama's grief upon discovering her pregnancy:

*"Mama's eyes were swollen with crying as she lay across her bed and wept. Papa scowled his concern and embarrassment" (Desai, 1999, p. 14).*

The unpaid labor women perform encompasses not only household chores but also agricultural and caregiving work. As described in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*:

*"Subsisting on baked maize and water, supplemented occasionally by a little rice, she labored all day, chaffing, kneading, washing, and tending the animals" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 144).*

Uma's narrative in Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* echoes similar struggles. Despite her relentless labor, her family criticizes her:

*"I do my work all the time, every day," Uma cries tearfully. 'Why can't I go out sometimes? I never go anywhere...' (Desai, 1999, p. 64).*

This lack of recognition and agency fosters alienation and despair. Institutionalized sexism, such as Pakistan's Hudood Ordinance, further entrenches women's oppression by codifying inequities that benefit patriarchal capitalism.

#### **4.2 Women's Commodification and Emotional Toil**

In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, daughters are often viewed as economic burdens. Their marriages are treated as financial transactions, with dowries serving as leverage to settle debts or social disputes. Sidhwa captures this in *The Pakistani Bride*:

*"Anyway, this will not lead to a feud. Resham Khan has promised us his daughter!" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 14).*

Similarly, Desai critiques the dowry system in *Fasting, Feasting*:

*"Mama gasped, ... 'And the dowry? The dowry? What about that?' The merchant ... told them that it had been spent on the house" (Desai, 1999, p. 47).*

This commodification of women leads to horrific consequences, including dowry-related violence. According to Patra et al. (2015), Pakistan has one of the highest rates of dowry-related fatalities globally. The dowry system, deeply embedded in South Asian culture, perpetuates economic and emotional exploitation of women, reinforcing their subjugation within patriarchal frameworks.

Women are also commodified emotionally, often reduced to outlets for male frustration. For instance, in *Fasting, Feasting*, Uma's emotional suffering is vividly depicted:

*"When Uma turns to look, she sees Mama's eyes are closed and there are tears on her cheeks" (Desai, 1999, p. 84).*

The woman is not considered a normal human being, but the word "woman" is associated with domestic responsibilities rather being a common member of the family. The violence against women is not always physical but sometimes it's in the form of mental torture and keeping them under control. Limits are defined for women by the men around them to prove their supremacy in Indian society. . It was the moment when she was constantly pointed out by her parents in front of the guests for no reason at all, "She screams at them silently" (Desai, 1999, p. 75).

Violence against women is in different shapes and it is totally dependent on which country they belong and which culture and religion they follow. All these things matter, when it comes to women's sufferings in society. Violence may change according to the country, religion and culture but it's always the woman who endures all these hard realities of life (Abo-Elfetoh & Abd El-Mawgod, 2015).

#### **4.3 Exploitation and Women's Oppression**

Exploitation extends beyond economic or gendered discrimination to encompass silent suffering in familial and societal contexts. In *Fasting, Feasting*, Anamika's brilliance and Oxford scholarship could not shield her from patriarchal oppression. Her life ended in tragedy when she was subjected to relentless domestic abuse and eventually killed:

*"They had tied her up in a nylon sari, poured the kerosene over her, and set her on fire"* (Desai, 1999).

Such violence is not confined to India or Bangladesh; acid attacks, forced prostitution, and domestic abuse are normalized in many patriarchal societies. Often, victims accept these as their fate, with few seeking justices due to societal pressures (Berger & Guidroz, 2007).

The denial of education and autonomy further entrenches women's oppression. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Zaitoon's father, Qasim, halts her education, remarking:

*"What will she do with more reading and writing—boil and drink it? She's not going to become a baboo or an officer!"* (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 44).

Even when women attempt to assert their agency, they are met with resistance and violence. Arranged marriages, often devoid of the bride's consent, exemplify this systemic oppression. As Sidhwa illustrates:

*"A decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom he should marry her"* (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 133).

In our society, women have constantly been subjected to oppression. Nevertheless, despite numerous achievements in empowering women, they play a tiny part in political, social, and economic life.

The researcher emphasized how the authors of both works portrayed women concerning men, emphasizing their economic situations within a Marxist Feminist theoretical framework. The patriarchal family structure was the fundamental reason for women's subjection in the home. Miriam could not stand the full five years of basic education of Zaitoon and even Qasim tried to learn from her but when she started to write in the book and learned the alphabet of Urdu, he gave up learning from her. At that time Miriam told Nikka that Qaim should not send Zaitoon to school anymore because she is a girl, not a boy. So in this way she stopped her education.

*"What will she do with more reading and writing—boil and drink it?"*

*She's not going to become a baboo or an officer! No, Allah willing, she'll get married and have children."* (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 44)

According to Bandyopadhyay (2008), education and employment status contribute to women's empowerment. When Zaitoon reached the region of his father and saw the poor condition of those people from the hills, she begged her Abba to take her back to the plains with himself because she was unable to live in such drastic conditions. It was that time she cried in front of Qasim and emphasized that she will die here. But her tears brought no changes in the emotions and approach of Qasim towards her daughter. He even considered it rude that a girl can't demand from his own father her security and a safe place for living. It was the rich people and corrupt leadership who put these areas in extreme poverty that made it impossible for the women to live

under such a pathetic condition and Qasim called it “the way of living” rather than accepting the reality of being poor.

*“A decent girl doesn’t tell her father to whom he should marry her.”*

*“But father..... I’ve given my word. On It depends my honor. It is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands.” (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 133)*

Arranged marriages are common in Pakistani society because fathers or brothers organize the marriages of girls and women. Girls and women who want to choose their life partner or reject an arranged marriage are routinely attacked to dissuade them. Article 16 points 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that adult men and women have the right to marry, and that marriage should only be consummated with the consent of both spouses (WHO, 2014). However, the rule of law in Pakistan, particularly under these situations, is hardly worth the paper it is printed on.

Marriage inequality is one of the fundamental problems that women confront. The average age of females for getting married, is 20 years in urban areas of Pakistan and this limit further decreases to 18.5 years in rural areas, while the reproductive age ranges from 15 to 49 years (Shahzad, 2017). The marriage institution confers independence and sexual power to men (Bernard, 1982). The institution of marriage maintains that men are exempt from household duties. In contrast, women, bound by marriage vows to provide men with domestic, caring, emotional, and sexual services, lose their independence, become dependent on them, and empty themselves of personal agency.

Pakistani women are imprisoned in a cycle of old patriarchal standards (Awan, 2016) because they are not allowed to make decisions about their own lives, including decisions about marriage, divorce, parenthood, mobility, inheriting property, education, and professions. Controlling a woman in every field of life which in other words may be termed as subjugation of women is considered a common trait of society. The Sakhi’s brother told him that you are unable to control his wife and confronted him with the following words.

*“You know, she requires a man to control her ...” he murmured in thin-lipped scorn... (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 142)*

After that incident, he was working recklessly fast and was full of fury. His encounter with his own mother and wife during the beating of animals led to their own beatings. So he first struck his own mother and then wife. During this his mother said, “For God’s sake stop it,” she wailed. “For God’s sake, you’ll kill her!”, then he gave heavy blows to the Zaitoon saying, ... Sakhi struck her on her thighs, on her head, shouting, “You are my woman! I’ll teach you to obey me!” (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 143).

After getting hard beatings from Sakhi, she lamented to the Zaitoon about her pain, because both were women, and they had a better understanding of each other. ...she whispered, “Zaitoon, I think I will die soon.” (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 144)

A fundamental human rights violation is violence toward women and girls. Every nation in the world has it. It permeates every aspect of society and affects people of all ages. Every day, women face a variety of forms of violence, including sexual assault by family members, strangers, and government officials; domestic violence, which includes the murder of one’s spouse and being burned, distorted with acid, abused, and terrorized; ritual Honor killings; and torture and abuse in detention centers.

Fathers and husbands are responsible for 82% of domestic abuse against women in the Punjab brothers. Because it occurs so frequently, wife abuse is seldom even acknowledged as deadly violence towards women. Even when women suffer significant injuries and wish to file charges,

the police urge them to make up with their spouses because any marital conflict would reflect poorly on them.

The abuse of women starts when they are young. They are not permitted to play games that would aid in the quick growth of their minds and bodies like males do. If a woman is accused of having an extramarital relationship, she may also have her nose chopped off, which is a procedure that is widespread in Pakistan. Physical abuse and other forms of sexual assault of women continue to rank among the most frequent crimes. According to the Human Rights Commission, rape occurs every three hours. However, there is no way to quantify how many incidents go undetected

#### **4.4 Denial of Women's Inheritance**

Holden & Chaudhary (2013) highlight that the efforts of social activists striving for gender equality in South Asia have increased awareness regarding women's empowerment and legal rights. Family laws have undergone significant reforms, at least on paper, to better accommodate women's rights, including inheritance rights, even when such reforms challenge traditional norms. However, they also observe that women worldwide have historically faced violence, exploitation, and systemic denial of basic rights, including property ownership, which perpetuates gender inequality (p. 187).

In Pakistan, Section 498-A of the penal code explicitly prohibits actions that prevent women from inheriting property, whether liquid or land-based, during succession. The law mandates severe consequences for violators, including imprisonment for up to ten years and a fine of one million Pakistani rupees. Despite this legal framework, the implementation of these rights remains a significant challenge, highlighting a gap between legal provisions and societal practices.

In *The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa, there is no reference to Zaitoon's inheritance rights, reflecting her depiction as a commodity rather than a fully realized individual with legal entitlements. This portrayal underscores the broader societal reality where women's inheritance rights are often rendered symbolic rather than practical. Multiple factors contribute to this denial:

- (a) **Illiteracy and Lack of Awareness:** Many women are unaware of their legal rights to ancestral property, particularly in rural areas where education levels are low.
- (b) **Dependence and Fear of Antagonism:** Cultural norms discourage women from asserting their property rights due to fears of disrupting familial harmony, especially with male relatives like brothers.
- (c) **Male Dominance and Patriarchy:** Patriarchal structures perpetuate the prioritization of men over women, maintaining male control over familial wealth and decision-making.
- (d) **Social and Economic Barriers:** Women are often discouraged from pursuing legal claims due to the high cost, complexity, and lengthy procedures of the judicial system.
- (e) **Coercion and Intimidation:** In many regions, men actively pressure women to relinquish their inheritance rights, employing coercive tactics to maintain control over property.

These structural and cultural barriers reveal how women's legal entitlements are systematically undermined, maintaining the gendered disparities entrenched in patriarchal societies. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and the persistence of deeply rooted societal norms highlight the need for not just legal reforms but also robust educational and awareness campaigns to empower women to claim their rightful inheritance.

#### **4. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

Having analyzed Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* within the selected paragraphs, this study underscores how these novels represent the distinct



cultures of Pakistan and India while revealing shared and divergent experiences of women in these societies. The central theme of the study is to explore the sociocultural portrayal of female characters in South Asian literature, focusing on gender-based oppression and its manifestations. The analysis reveals that while both authors depict their female protagonists as products of patriarchal societies, the level of suppression faced by these characters differs significantly.

Major findings of the study indicate that female characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's work face more severe challenges related to domestic violence, forced marriages, limited access to education, and social marginalization than those in Anita Desai's work. For instance, Zaitoon is forced to abandon her education after the fifth grade, coerced into an arranged marriage, subjected to severe physical abuse, raped by villagers, and even faces an attempted honor killing. In contrast, Uma, the protagonist in Desai's novel, though confined to domestic work and deprived of autonomy, is not physically abused, does not experience threats to her life, and lives under relatively less oppressive circumstances.

Both authors draw heavily on their personal experiences and the sociocultural fabric of their respective countries. This comparative analysis highlights the critical importance of female autonomy and individuality as portrayed through literature. The study emphasizes that addressing gender inequality and oppression in South Asian societies requires a multidimensional approach that includes educational opportunities for women, legal reforms with prompt justice, and robust media campaigns to raise awareness about women's rights.

Academically, this research contributes to the understanding of how South Asian literature reflects and critiques societal norms, particularly those surrounding gender roles. By examining the depiction of women in Pakistani and Indian literature, this study sheds light on the lived experiences of women in these societies, making it a valuable addition to the fields of feminist literary criticism, cultural studies, and regional literature. To safeguard women and ensure gender equity, policymakers must:

- (a) Prioritize access to education for women, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to assert their rights.
- (b) Strengthen legal systems to ensure swift and fair justice for cases of gender-based violence and inheritance disputes.
- (c) Implement awareness campaigns through media to educate communities about women's fundamental rights, challenging traditional norms that perpetuate inequality.
- (d) Promote gender-sensitive training for law enforcement and judicial personnel to address patriarchal biases in the justice system.

Besides the significant contribution of this study, it also offers limitations. The research focuses solely on the female protagonists of *'The Pakistani Bride'* and *'Fasting, Feasting'* and does not analyze male characters or their roles in perpetuating or challenging patriarchal norms. This limited scope restricts a holistic understanding of gender dynamics in the novels.

There is a notable gap in the literature on the representation of male figures in Pakistani and Indian novels, which merits further exploration. Future research studies can analyze male characters in regional literature to provide deeper insights into how South Asian authors portray men in relation to societal norms and gender dynamics. Additionally, comparative studies involving other South Asian writers and their treatment of gender roles can expand the understanding of cultural and literary diversity within the region.

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