



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Honor killing and the cycle of social influence: A study of the Pakistani bride through Albert Bandura's social learning theory**Muhammad Asif<sup>1</sup>, Hanene Lahiani<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad I. Alhourani<sup>2</sup>, Ahmad M. Al Mahamed<sup>3</sup>, & Mohammed A. Abou Adel<sup>2\*</sup> <sup>1</sup>Alasala Colleges, Dammam, KSA<sup>2</sup>Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi, UAE<sup>3</sup>Abu Dhabi University Abu Dhabi, UAE\*Correspondence: [mohamad.abouadel@aau.ac.ae](mailto:mohamad.abouadel@aau.ac.ae)**ABSTRACT**

This research employs Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory to analyze honor-related violence as presented by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel *The Pakistani Bride*. Honor killings are often committed and justified under the guise of preserving the family's honor. This study aims to explore how such violence is modeled, reinforced, and sustained through social observation, cultural norms, and intergenerational transmission. The application of Social Learning Theory demonstrates that honor related violence is not genetically transferred, but it is learned and reinforced by societal rewards and punishments. The novel portrays male, well-known figures who engage in violent behavior as role models for future generations, while women are subjected to subservience as a result of cultural norms. This research also clarifies the phenomenon of legitimization of the honor-based violence by vicarious reinforcement and fear of ostracism in the society. The findings underline the need for cultural and educational programs to question these negative social conventions. By adding to the larger conversation on gender-based violence and the underlying systems that support it, *The Pakistani Bride* helps to advocate a radical change in societal views of honor and gender roles.

**KEYWORDS:** Bapsi Sidhwa, gender-based violence, Honor killing, Pakistani Bride, Social Learning Theory

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## 1. Introduction

The heinous crime of killing a family member in the name of saving the honor of the family, in most cases a woman, by her male relative is called honor killing. The victim is blamed for dishonoring and bringing a bad name to the family. There can be many reasons, like marrying of her own will without the consent or agreement of the family, engaging in adultery, or seeking divorce, that can be a cause of dishonor for the families in a patriarchal society (Asif, Rashid & Saleem, 2020). It becomes essential for the male members of the family to redeem their honor in society and it can only be possible by killing both the charged woman and her male partner or at least the woman (Jafri, 2008; Rahim, 2017). It is difficult to believe that the culprit takes pride in killing his close relative in most cases sister, daughter or wife and is also praised by society for following the traditions. The offender in most cases is able to bypass the law as the act is backed by family, relatives, and society.

Honor killing is a worldwide phenomenon but most of the cases are recorded in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries. These cases have been reported from countries as varied as Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, and the United Kingdom. Amnesty (2016) quotes the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) saying that 5000 women are killed around the world every year. These estimates are not considered accurate as there is no authentic mechanism to report and register all the cases.

Pakistan tops the list of countries affected by the evil of honor related crimes. The human rights organization, Amnesty, reported in (2016) that approximately 1000 women are killed every year in Pakistan. Many of honor-related crime cases go unreported as a large number of people in Pakistani society (30%), especially people in remote areas, believe that it is not a crime to kill a woman if she engages in an out of the marriage sexual relationship (Sahgal & Townsend, 2014). Honor killing is a complex phenomenon and there are various motivators, several reasons and numerous ways of committing this crime in Pakistani context. This study, through the application of social learning theory, attempts to understand how honor related violence is modeled, reinforced, and sustained in the patriarchal societies as depicted in the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*.

### 1.1 The Novelist and the Novel

Bapsi Sidhwa is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning Pakistani-American novelist. She is a central figure and the pioneer of English fiction in Pakistan. She was born to a Parsi family in 1938 in Karachi, but later her family moved to Lahore. When she was two years old, she fell prey to polio and could not go to school until she was fourteen. She learned English at home and extensively read British fiction. She earned her bachelor's degree from Kinnaird College for women in 1956. She was married to a businessman and has three children. She migrated to America in 1983 and is now an American citizen. She has been teaching creative writing courses at different universities like Columbia University, St. Thomas University, the University of Houston, and Mount Holyoke College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Sidhwa was awarded the highest Pakistani civil award in arts, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, in 1991 (Naeem, 2010; Magill, 1997).

*The Crow Eaters* (1978), was Sidhwa's first published novel, although she wrote *The Pakistani Bride* before *The Crow Eaters*. It was published later in 1981, followed by *Ice-Candy-Man* in 1988, *An American Brat* in 1993 and *Water* in 2006. *The Pakistani Bride*, the novel selected for this study, is based on a true story the novelist heard during her visit to the northern areas of Pakistan. It is a story of the patriarchal oppression of a Pakistani woman. Qasim, a central figure in the novel, belongs to the far-flung district of Kohistan in Northern Pakistan. He works in Lahore at the time of Indian partition. Zaitoon, a child of four years, lost her parents during the violence of partition. Qasim adopts Zaitoon and raises her with love and affection. Qasim arranges Zaitoon's marriage with his nephew Sakhi in their mountainous tribal area. At first, Zaitoon is happy as she thinks that the people of the mountains are nice and simple. After realizing the reality of people and the customs of the area, she tries to refuse marriage. However, Qasim tells her that now he has given his word and that the tribesmen can kill people for their word. In the end, Zaitoon marries Sakhi who treats her as an instrument of pleasure. He beats her several times in their two months married life. At last Zaitoon decides to run away from home unaware of the fact that in tribal customs, the punishment for such a woman is only death. Zaitoon spends two weeks walking without food and shelter. She faced death many times during this time, was raped by unknown men, but she ultimately reached an army camp and was rescued by the army personnel. Sidhwa

gave a hopeful end to this gloomy story as in reality the woman was killed by her husband and the tribesmen. This story depicts the miserable lives of women in tribal areas where they are treated by men just like household items. The patriarchal structures are so deep in the tribal areas that women are left with only one option; obey men (Kumar, 2016).

## **1.2. Introduction to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

Bandura (1977) proposed his Social Learning Theory which provides a basic framework to understand that observation and imitation are the key sources for individuals to learn behaviors, values, and social norms. Bandura (1977) emphasized that although people learn from their own experiences, they also learn by observing the actions of other people and the consequences of those actions. This theory emphasizes four main processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. An individual adopts or avoids the behavior based on the observation of whether the behavior is rewarded or punished.

Bandura (1986) contends that social environment is one of the major factors in shaping an individual's behavior. He marked family, peers, and community leaders as the network of influence for an individual's behavior. Cultural values and norms are reinforced through this network, which creates a cycle where certain behaviors are normalized, for example violence against women is normalized in many patriarchal societies. This framework is very useful and relevant to analyze traditions and rituals which are part and parcel of the fabric of a society and are preserved through generations. The Social Learning Theory helps to explore how socio-familial factors continue harmful practices, such as honor killing, by modeling, reinforcing, and legitimizing aggressive behavior within a specific cultural context.

## **1.3 Research Question and Thesis Statement**

This study aims to answer the following question: How does *The Pakistani Bride* demonstrate the continuance of honor related violence through social learning mechanisms, described by Albert Bandura in his Social Learning Theory?

This research study argues that *The Pakistani Bride* adeptly depicts the vicious circle of honor-based violence as a behavior acquired and sustained by societal observation and reinforcement. This analysis, grounded in Social Learning Theory, will illustrate how characters in the novel are shaped by cultural norms surrounding honor, how violent behaviors are both exemplified and reinforced, and how this fosters an environment where such violence is regarded as an acceptable method of safeguarding familial honor.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review has been divided into two sections. In the first section, the available literature on honor killings in Pakistan has been reviewed and in the second section, we provide an analysis of the studies carried out on the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*.

### **2.1 Honor Killings in Pakistan**

Honor killing is a country-wide phenomenon in Pakistan though most of the cases are reported from interior Sindh and southern Punjab. According to Gauhar (2014), the main reasons responsible for an act of honor killing are illicit relationships, immoral behaviors, love marriage, out of caste relationships and customs like child marriages and Watta Satta (exchange marriages). She concluded that honor is embedded in Pakistani society and a woman is seen as the "honor of the family". So if the honor comes at stake the woman is punished severely as a woman depends on the male members of the family. Zafar and Ali (2020) believe that honor killings are the result of tribal codes, customs, and traditions mixed with the misinterpretations of the religion. They argued that men's ego, power, desire or domination and hatred towards women also contribute to this heinous crime against women. They disputed the idea that honor killings are related to Islam.

Laghari (2016) studied the elements responsible for honor killing in Sindh province in her Ph.D. dissertation titled, *Honour Killing in Sindh: Men's and Women's Divergent Accounts*. She interviewed thirteen men and thirteen women directly involved in the act of honor killing. Her study revealed that honor is not always the reason of women killings but the traditions, customs, and religion along with the weak social, legal and economic position of women result in the crime known as honor killing.

The Pakistani justice system is a question mark when it comes to the crime of honor killings as most of the cases are solved through local councils (Jirga and Panchayat) and criminals never get punished. Iqbal (2007) studied the inefficiency of the Pakistani justice system in his study titled, *Honour Killing and the Silence of Justice System in Pakistan*. He concluded that Hudood ordinance, inefficient police, and powerful tribal councils are responsible for the increasing number of honor killing cases. Bhanbhro, Wassan, Shah, Talpur, & Wassan (2013) identified the influence of feudal lords on law enforcement agencies as a reason for honor killing in Sindh, Pakistan. They argued that the influential landlords use their influence to misrepresent and manipulate the honor killing cases to benefit or harm a certain party and the police act according to the narrative built by these feudal lords. For a clean and clear investigation, the influence of these landlords needs to be reduced.

Rahim (2017) studied the attitudes of people towards honor killing in her study, *Attitude toward Honour Killing Among Honour Killers, Murderers, and a General Population Sample*. She studied male and female students of colleges and universities along with accused honor killers and murderers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. She concluded that honor killers and murderers have the same criminal thinking and honor killers are not the victims of rage or societal pressure. She concluded that viewing honor killing positively is a primary cause of this crime.

Shaikh, Shaikh, Kamal & Masood (2010) studied the perspectives of men and women, residing in the capital city Islamabad, related to the honor killing. They conducted a survey including 601 men and women from Islamabad. The result showed that the majority of men and women considered it justified to kill one's wife in the name of honor. The participants were not in the favor to forgive or divorce the woman engaged in sexual relations out of wedlock. Shaikh, Kamal & Naqvi (2015) studied the perspectives of the university students from the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. They surveyed 989 male and female students and concluded that male students were less unequivocal against the honor killings as compared to the female students. In total, 83% of the students believed that honor killings were not always justifiable. The result is in total contrast from the previous studies of common people from Islamabad and Peshawar, but keeping in mind that the participants of this study were educated university students, results are still alarming.

## 2.2 The Pakistani Bride

Sidhwa is one of the pioneers of English fiction in Pakistan. She started her career with the novel, *the Pakistani Bride*. Sidhwa's art of fiction is well researched as it provides a voice to the suppressed Pakistani women. Kavitha and Usha (2018) studied the struggle for survival of the female characters in the novel, *the Pakistani Bride*. The novel provides an insight into the treatment women receive in the patriarchal, tribal society of northern Pakistan. The centuries-old traditions, arranged marriages and the barbarism of men cause a lot of suffering for the female characters of the novel. Sidhwa concluded this novel on a positive note and tried to teach women that they can cross the "bridge" to pass their desired life provided that they struggle and do not accept defeat. Kumar (2016) argued in his article, "*The Pakistani Bride*": *Women as Beasts of Burden and Instruments of Enjoyment*, that the women are treated as commodities in *the Pakistani Bride*. They are bartered, tortured and sold just as the property owned by men.

Maseeh (2017) discussed *the Pakistani Bride* as a novel that represents the common misery of womanhood. The women of cities, mountains and foreign lands, the educated and uneducated women, mother, sister or wife are treated with the same yardstick in this novel. They are treated as a precious commodity at the hands of men in the patriarchal society. This novel demonstrates the common plight of all Pakistani women. Srivastava & Singh (2015) argued that the autobiographical elements in the novels *the Pakistani Bride* and *My Feudal Lord* speak about the atrocities women face at the hands of men in the patriarchal Pakistani society. They argued that the writers showed the courage to talk about the injustices faced by women due to the customs and traditions in patriarchal societies.

Imran and Gull (2017) studied the theme of honor killing and respect for the family in the novels, *the Pakistani Bride* and *the Wandering Falcon*. They argued that honor killing is a stain on tribal societies, yet the judiciary and the law enforcement agencies tend to be lenient, considering this crime as a cultural norm rather than a serious offense. Men demonstrate their ruthless power to subdue women without even distinguishing among their close relatives i.e. sisters, daughters, mothers or wives.

It is evident from the detailed review of existing literature on *The Pakistani Bride* that this novel has



not been discussed or analyzed through the lens of any social theory related to the emergence and continuation of violent behaviors of people in the society. Therefore, this study will prove to be a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge on honor killings and the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*.

### **3. Introduction to Social Learning Theory**

Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977, provides a detailed explanation of behaviors acquired and replicated by people within a social context. This theory is based on three main concepts i.e; modeling, reinforcement, and observational learning. The process by which individuals observe and imitate the behaviors of others is called “*Modeling*” in *Social Learning Theory*. Bandura brought attentions to the fact that the actions of role models, people who are respected or enjoy positions of authority in the particular society, have a deep influence on shaping behaviors. This means that individuals are likely to mimic these frequently observed behaviors, especially if these behaviors support the societal customs or expectations (1977).

Reinforcement plays a vital role in determining whether an observed behavior will be replicated or not. According to Bandura (Ibid), there are two types of reinforcement: direct and vicarious. Direct reinforcement occurs when an individual is punished or rewarded for a behavior, influencing whether they will repeat it in the future. On the other hand, vicarious reinforcement, occurs when individuals observe others receiving rewards or punishments, thereby learning from the outcomes experienced by others. In this way, people internalize cultural expectations and adopt behaviors that are likely to be rewarded or refrain from behaviors that could lead to negative consequences. Additionally, social influences—such as community norms, peer pressure, and cultural values—act as mechanisms that perpetuate specific behaviors within societies. Through these social structures, behaviors that align with cultural expectations are consistently reinforced, shaping collective norms.

Observational learning, another key area of the theory, sheds light on the cognitive processes involved in learning from observation. Bandura (Ibid) noted that observational learning occurs when an individual pays attention to the behavior, retains the details, reproduces the behavior, and is motivated to do so. The motivation to imitate behaviors is often influenced by the anticipated rewards or punishments and the desire to align with cultural norms or gain social approval. Thus, Social Learning Theory emphasizes the interplay between individual cognition and the social environment in the learning process.

Social Learning Theory also considers how cultural and social contexts impact learning and the perpetuation of behavior. Behaviors become normalized and sustained within a community when they are widely modeled and reinforced, creating a cycle of cultural transmission. Bandura (Ibid) emphasized that the interaction between individual cognition and environmental influences is key to understanding how behaviors are adopted and maintained within a society.

#### **3.1 Justification for Applying Social Learning Theory to the Novel**

The application of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977) provides a sophisticated an understanding of the perpetuation of honor-based violence in a patriarchal society. *The Pakistani Bride* portrays a social system where the characters are deeply influenced by the social norms related to family honor which are learned and then reinforced through intergenerational transmission. By employing Social Learning Theory, this study can analyze how the behavior of upholding honor—sometimes through violence—is modeled and reinforced within the community. For instance, male authority figures in the novel often act as models, demonstrating behaviors that are either rewarded or socially sanctioned, thereby influencing others to adopt similar practices.

The relevance of this theory lies in its ability to explain how such violent behaviors are not innate but rather acquired through social observation. The characters in *The Pakistani Bride* exemplify how women and men internalize and perpetuate these norms, even when they are harmful or oppressive. Bandura’s emphasis on reinforcement and motivation further elucidates why some characters feel compelled to adhere to or challenge these norms: compliance often brings social approval, while defiance can lead to ostracism or violence. Thus, Social Learning Theory provides a robust framework for examining how the novel portrays the mechanisms of cultural transmission that sustain honor-based violence.

#### **3.2 Discussion of How Honor Killing Aligns with Bandura's Principles of Social Learning**

Bapsi Sidhwa portrays honor-based violence in *The Pakistani Bride*, reflecting how cultural norms and societal

expectations perpetuate violent practices. When applying Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* to the theme of honor killing, it points to the fact that these kinds of behaviors exhibited by the characters in the novel are not inborn but are learned and reinforced within a certain community. *The Pakistani Bride* demonstrates how male elders and authority figures act as "models" for younger generations, portraying that these behaviors ensure and preserve family honor. Therefore, these behaviors or actions are often observed and then proudly imitated by young people or generations, reinforcing the belief that violence is justified in protecting the honor of the family or tribe. Then these behaviors take the form of traditions which become the part and parcel of the society and people (male and female) have to obey and follow these traditions to survive in the society. Leghari (2016) obtained the similar results from her interaction with the people who were directly involved in the honor related crimes that mostly traditions and customs were the reasons of honor based violence.

Men, who uphold the honor of the family through harsh control leading to violence against women, are given respect and prestige in the society and those who fail to do so are marked as cowards and they are ridiculed by the community. This is an example of the concept of reinforcement. According to Bandura (1977) those behaviors which are depicted positively in a society are more likely to be adopted by the individuals. In the novel, actions of violence to preserve family honor are imitated by people because they are portrayed as necessary and even noble in the patriarchal, tribal society. When members of the community observe the positive consequences of honor-related crimes, as the perpetrator of these crimes is marked as brave and courageous, they accept these behaviors as cultural obligations necessary to be practiced. This phenomenon is marked as *vicarious reinforcement* in the Social Learning Theory. Rahim's (2017) study also approves this hypothesis as she marks that honor killers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan commit this crime because they consider honor killing as an act of honor or pride. Therefore, they proudly accept committing this terrible crime to be appraised in the society.

In addition, social factors like patriarchal norms, family's expectations, and the pressure of society builds an environment where honor related violence becomes a behavior which is learned and practiced in that particular society. The strong motivators of honor-killings are the fear of dishonor and strong emphasis on family's reputation in the society. Moreover, according to Bandura (1977) the social contexts shape individuals' understanding of acceptable behavior. In the novel understudy, honor killings are deep-rooted in the societal practices of the society. The mechanisms of social learning act as agents to normalize the violence initiated against women as depicted in the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*.

#### **4. Analysis of Honor Killing in The Pakistani Bride**

##### **4.1. Depiction of Honor and Cultural Expectations**

Sidhwa depicts honor as an unseen force that controls people's behavior and societal responsibilities in a rural Pakistani tribal setting. Maintaining family honor becomes the basis for social codes according to the novel; and more often than not, that code is rationalized with violence and abetted by ferocious patriarchy. It is taught to the members of society to adopt cultural values of male authority and female subservience (Zafar & Ali, 2016). These values are passed from generation to generation and they become the core of the society.

The character of Qasim in the novel *The Pakistani Bride* is an example of the innate influence of cultural norms on honor. Qasim raised Zaitoon like his own child, however once Zaitoon has grown up, Qasim feels it his duty to return back to his native tribal area, where honor is highly proclaimed and it is linked to identity and social status of the person. Sidhwa portrays this through the internal struggle of Qasim and his ultimate adherence to the tribal laws, "Qasim's life was a testament to the demands of honor, and he knew the price for defying it could be death" (Sidhwa, 1983 p. 145). The character of Qasim is a depiction of how the cultural values are learned and then reinforced in the society through social experiences, as embodied in Bandura's (1977) principle of observational learning, where individuals practice behaviors observed in prominent figures of the society.

Zaitoon's journey highlights the dire consequences faced by women who challenge or are perceived to threaten these cultural norms. Although Zaitoon shows resilience and struggles for her freedom, she has to succumb to traditional norms that elevate familial and male honor above female independence (Kavitha & Usha, 2018). Her marriage to Sakhi is a symbol of harsh patriarchal control prevalent in the society. Zaitoon tries to break these shades of control by escaping through this abusive bond, but she was unaware that that

Sakhi's violent pursuit of her is fully justified by the tribal laws of honor, as Sidhwa writes, "Sakhi's rage was not his alone; it was the collective fury of generations of men who had lived by this code" (Sidhwa, 1983 p. 237). This line highlights the normalization of violence through cultural and social reinforcement.

The novel vividly illustrates how younger men in the society acquire honor-based customs by emulating the behaviors of their elders, and respected men in the society. This corresponds with Bandura's (1977) claim that behaviors are sustained when they are demonstrated and vicariously rewarded. Sakhi internalizes the conviction that honor must be safeguarded by violence, a notion he has witnessed during his upbringing. Bandura's concept of vicarious reinforcement is evident as Sakhi observes the societal validation bestowed upon males who protect their family's honor, thereby motivating him to follow similar behavior.

Sidhwa further emphasizes how women are groomed to embrace their roles by means of daily interactions and cultural traditions supporting female subjugation. The struggle of Zaitoon shows the little agency given to women and the widespread threat of violence used to achieve compliance. Through meetings and community events, the tribal chiefs stress these expectations and point out that breaking social customs has severe consequences. The emphasis on maintaining family honor shows the influence of social and cultural elements on people, a concept Bandura (1977) further investigated by means of the interaction between cognition and environment.

Thus, *The Pakistani Bride* illustrates the cyclical nature of honor-based violence, perpetuated through modeling and reinforcement within a strict cultural framework. By applying Bandura's Social Learning Theory, it becomes evident that these violent practices are not inherent but are learned behaviors, passed down and legitimized by the social environment.

#### **4.2. Modeling and Transmission of Honor-Based Violence**

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* offers a nuanced exploration of the mechanisms through which honor-based violence is structured and perpetuated across generations. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) suggests that individuals acquire behaviors through the observation of others, particularly those in positions of authority or role models within their community. In the novel, senior male characters in the tribal society act as models, demonstrating violence as a necessary means to maintain and protect family honor, which the younger generation internalizes as a cultural obligation.

Qasim, a major character in the novel, presents a significant model of the violent code of honor in the society. He was a different man in city of Lahore, away from his native tribal society. He looks after Zaitoon with love and care. However, upon his return to his ancestral tribal society, he reverts to a conventional tribal man dedicated to adhering to the rigid cultural norms that regulate his community. Qasim's initial hesitation to harm Zaitoon is ultimately overshadowed by his commitment to tribal norms as he expects the potential of her escaping the scheduled marriage. Sidhwa captures this change, writing, "In Qasim's eyes, honor wasn't merely a choice but a responsibility passed down to him by his forefathers" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 201). Qasim's character serves as an example of how a lifetime of seeing and internalizing social ideals may cause someone to support violent behaviors even when they go against their personal beliefs.

Sakhi, Zaitoon's husband, models the transmission and reinforcement of aggressive behaviors through observational learning. Sakhi's conception of honor has been influenced by his observations of his father and other male elders, who exemplify violent conduct as a method of maintaining authority in the society. When Zaitoon attempts to escape, Sakhi's aggressive reaction exemplifies the influence of his role models, as he perceives her escape as a dishonor to his family. As Sidhwa writes, "For Sakhi, honor demanded blood; it was what he had been taught since he could remember" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 243). Sidhwa's portrayal of Sakhi demonstrates how youth come to associate violence with honor, rendering such behaviors almost instinctual within the traditional cultural context.

Bandura's (1977) concept of observational learning is demonstrated as younger men in the novel observe these actions and internalize them as culturally accepted behavior. Men who maintain their family's reputation and honor are esteemed, while those who fail to do so face disgrace. The cycle of violence continues, as each generation after generation observes, models, and replicates the honor-based practices prevalent in their society.

#### 4.3. Role of Reinforcement and Punishment

Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* illustrates the reinforcement of honor-based violence through societal rewards and punishments, in accordance with Bandura's principles of reinforcement and punishment within Social Learning Theory. Behaviors that reinforce family honor receive social rewards, typically manifesting as community respect and validation, while actions that contest these norms face significant repercussions.

An instance of reinforcement in the novel is the community's endorsement of men who uphold traditional values through violent means. Qasim acknowledges that failing to maintain his family's honor in the face of Zaitoon's potential defiance would result in communal disapproval. Sidhwa writes, "In Qasim's village, to be a man was to be feared and respected, and no man could afford to be seen as weak" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 215). According to Bandura's concept of positive reinforcement, people are prone to repeat actions that lead to positive social consequences (Bandura, 1977). Qasim recognizes that violent behavior, which is both observed and rewarded within his community, serves to maintain his reputation and, consequently, the honor of his family.

On the other hand, there is no punishment for the perpetrators of this violence because of the weak policing and judicial system in tribal areas of Pakistan (Iqbal, 2006). Ironically, women face punishment for breaking the established honor-code of the society, frequently in the form of violence or exclusion. This is best illustrated in the novel when Zaitoon decided to get rid from Sakhi's control and unpleasant marriage by fleeing from the home and village. However, her attempt was not welcomed as a survival tactic, rather marked as a disgraceful rebellion against the honor code of the society. Therefore, Sakhi aggressively pursued Zaitoon after her escape, indicating the harsh punishment meted out to those who threaten family honor. "To him, there was no choice but to bring her back or die in the effort, for the village's eyes would not forgive a dishonored man," Sidhwa writes of Sakhi's quest (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 239). Zaitoon's punishment not only strengthens the cultural expectation of complete adherence to honor-related norms, but it also serves as a warning to others, demonstrating Bandura's (1977) theory of punishment as a deterrent against all such efforts to break free the unjust cultural traditions of a patriarchal society.

Moreover, peer influence and societal pressure act as reinforcing powers for honor-based violence. People in the tribal communities observe throughout their lives that failure to protect the honor of the family brings ridicule and shame for the male members of the family while efforts, actions, and success to protect the honor is always respected and praised in the society. This combined reinforcement of violent behavior plays a fundamental role in maintaining the cycle of honor-based violence, as a society reinforces the values it wants to see upheld, and punish the members who deviate. Bandura (1977) emphasized that social environments strengthen cultural norms, resulting in a decreased likelihood of individuals to challenging accepted behaviors. Through these depictions, *The Pakistani Bride* demonstrates how honor-based violence is sustained by both social rewards for compliance and severe punishments for defiance, perpetuating a cultural cycle of violence that is learned, modeled, and continuously reinforced.

#### 5. Impact of Social Learning on Female Characters

Bapsi Sidhwa has vividly explored the harsh circumstances faced by her female characters like Zaitoon in the novel *The Pakistani Bride*. As Gauhr (2014) marks that a woman is seen a "honor of the family" in the Pakistani society, the lives of these characters are molded by the honor-based expectations through social learning. Social Learning Theory as propounded by Bandura (1977) advocates that behaviors are learned and then maintained through the observation of role models in the society, and this process significantly impacts the lives of Zaitoon and other female characters in the novel. The psychological and social repercussions of this violence are closely linked to the social and cultural context that perpetuates gendered norms.

The character of Zaitoon is a heartbreaking example of the subjection of women to the demands of honor in patriarchal societies. These expectations also affect the agency of women to work for change in their lives. In the novel, Zaitoon encounters the stringent realities of tribal honor codes, learning from a young age to equate her value with her adherence to these societal expectations. Sidhwa writes, "Zaitoon had watched the women around her, their lives framed by submission and an ever-present fear of dishonor" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 157). Zaitoon's observation of the submission of women to honor related traditions clearly corresponds to Bandura's theory of observational learning, as Zaitoon learns from her observation that any attempt to break



this honor-code can lead to severe consequences.

Zaitoon exhibits instances of resistance despite her exposure to these norms. Her attempt to escape from Sakhi illustrates a significant struggle for autonomy in a context that restricts women's control over their lives. The psychological effects of her environment, coupled with the trauma of violence, result in enduring scars. Bandura (1977) emphasizes the importance of vicarious reinforcement in behavior formation. This concept is illustrated by Zaitoon's heightened fear, which arises from observing the punitive measures imposed on women who challenge societal norms, resulting in a deep internalization of obedience and fear. Sidhwa examines the psychological conflict as Zaitoon contemplates, "The fear ran deeper than the bruises; it was embedded in her soul" (Sidhwa, 1983, p. 212).

The novel also shows the female characters are trained to accept their subordination at the hands of powerful men, and this phenomenon results in the limited agency of women (Kumar, 2016; Maseeh, 2017). Hamida, another female character, is supreme example of the internalization of patriarchal values. She warns Zaitoon of the consequences of disobedience to her husband and the prevalent honor-code. It shows that in the absence of agency women themselves may act as enforcers of these norms. Bandura (1977) marked this phenomenon as a form of cognitive reinforcement, where individuals conform to societal expectations in order to avoid any negative consequences, even if it means to sustain their own subjugation. Hamida's resigned acceptance of her fate exemplifies how cultural standards define and restrict women's identities and options, perpetuating a generational cycle of submission and fear.

## 6. Discussion

The cyclical nature of honor-based violence illustrated in *The Pakistani Bride* exemplifies the overarching cultural factors that sustain such violence. Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* offers a significant foundation for comprehending the continued existence of these cycles. Men such as Qasim and Sakhi exemplify aggressive behaviors to maintain family honor, leading younger generations to imitate these activities and perpetuate a culture that emphasizes male supremacy and female subordination. The novel demonstrates that these behaviors are not biologically inherited, but rather socially formed and perpetuated over generations.

Bandura's theory illustrates the way societal surroundings impact both offenders and victims of honor-based violence. In *The Pakistani Bride*, the men's actions are rewarded with social approval, while any perceived threats to honor are met with harsh punishment. These systemic systems of reinforcement and punishment prolong violence against women, making resistance practically impossible. As Bandura (1977) says, when individuals observe the consequences of others' actions, they internalize these outcomes and modify their behavior accordingly. This theory is crucial for understanding how cultural norms relating to honor and violence become firmly established and difficult to break.

The implications of this analysis go beyond the novel's fictitious setting, illuminating societal situations in which honor killings still take place in the real world. Comprehending the function of social learning in sustaining these practices might guide procedures designed to disrupt this cycle. For instance, community-based education programs that challenge traditional notions of honor and promote gender equality may help disrupt the transmission of violent behaviors. Moreover, if the culprit gets the punishment according to the law and there is no delay in the justice, it can serve as an example for the rest of the people and they can refrain from committing these crimes. Sidhwa's narrative, alongside Bandura's theoretical insights, emphasizes the pressing necessity for cultural, educational, and judicial reforms to address honor-based violence and advocate for women's rights.

## 7. Conclusion

*The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa explores the issue of honor killing, which is highly relevant since it highlights the damaging and widespread cultural practices that support violence against women. Sidhwa illustrates the profound consequences of a culture that values male honor above female autonomy through the experiences of characters such as Zaitoon and Sakhi. The novel illustrates the severe challenges encountered by women in patriarchal societies while also functioning as a provocative narrative that necessitates critical contemplation and action.

*The Social Learning Theory* of Albert Bandura offers a thorough framework for comprehending how

honor-based violence is passed down through the generations. Bandura's theory explains how people internalize violent acts as legitimate ways to preserve family honor by emphasizing important concepts like modeling, reinforcement, and observational learning. In this case, characters in the novel under-study, acquire motivation from seeing masculine authority figures who are incentivized for maintaining traditional norms via violence. In contrast, resistance or perceived dishonor incurs harsh penalties, hence perpetuating a culture of fear and subservience among women. This theoretical framework demonstrates that honor-based violence is not an outcome of individual pathology but a socially constructed and sustained phenomenon.

In the real world contexts, it is very important to address these social learning mechanisms in order to fight honor-based violence. It is crucial to understand the role of social influences in shaping behaviors and as a result the need of cultural and educational interventions is highlighted that can pose a challenge to the deep-rooted gender norms and promote alternative models of behavior. The launch of community programs focused on teaching men and women about gender equality and the need to resolve their conflicts peacefully can play a vital role in breaking the cycle of violence. *The Pakistani Bride* emphasizes the essential need to challenge cultural practices that perpetuate violence, highlighting the importance of transformative social change to protect the rights and safety of women worldwide.

## Public Interest Statement

This study fills a significant gap in the literature as it utilizes Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory to examine honor-based violence in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*. The study highlights how cultural norms and social reinforcement contribute to the perpetuation of violence across generations, offering insightful information to scholars and policymakers interested in ending gender-based violence alike.

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## Disclaimer Statement

This work is original and not copied from any submitted or winning thesis.

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### **Authorship and Level of Contribution**

Muhammad Asif: Guided the theoretical framework and initial conceptualization. Hanene Lahiani: Conducted literature review and analysis of gender-based violence topics. Mohammad I. Alhourani: Participated in important discussion and data interpretation. Ahmad M. Al Mahamed: Helped with structure refinement and reference checking. Mohammed A. Abou Adel: Organized the writing process, did the final editing, and correspondence with the journal.



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