Chapter III

Victimization of Womanhood

From a gynocentric viewpoint, this chapter focuses on the elements of feminism like forced child marriage, constrained prostitution and pathetic widowhood undergone by the women victims from the select novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. Sidhwa intensely reflects these feminist segments in the following novels: *Water, Ice-Candy-Man* and *The Pakistani Bride*. She vividly portrays the status of the women and their victimization both in the pre-independent and in the post-independent periods of the Indian society.

Literature is a mirror of all aspects of society. Occurrences of all types, passions and sentiments of people, their dreams and aspirations, their failures and fiascos, their tears and cheers find expression in Literature which makes people realise what happens to them in their lives. By depiction of human life, it attempts to remedy maladies, settles problems, refines people, ennobles and educates humanity. The study of literature would subject the masses to introspection on the basis of which they can eliminate their flaws and eradicate their shortcomings.

In this sense, Sidhwa’s novel highlights the various forms of injustice prevailing in society against women, particularly their experience of victimization, exploitation, suppression within the patriarchal society. Sidhwa’s women characters symbolise victims of suppression and oppression by the male dominated society. Sidhwa depicts the issues of direct and indirect suppression against women in the novels *Water* and *The Pakistani Bride*. In the novels, *Water* and *The Pakistani Bride* the novelist paints a picture of how
lack of education and employment and want of resources reduces women into
dependents on men.

It was because of their centuries old blind conditioning, where
women’s duty is confined within the walls of the house: to marry, to look after
the house and to bear children. In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir asserts in
his work *The Second Sex*: “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to
women by the society” (*Beauvoir* 445). This condition of women’s
marginalization is effectively brought to light by Sidhwa through the
discrimination faced by the women characters in her novel. They are
suppressed by the male dominated society and the inequality still prevails in
many parts of the world.

Sidhwa expatiates on the partial attitudes of the patriarchal society
towards women through her narration in her novels. The silent but powerful
voice of the author that even in these modern times injustice and
discrimination against women cannot be completely wiped out is heard. As
John Stuart Mill states: “…male is fortunate in having opportunities for
releasing his impulse to domination and the fury of his frustrated ego, because
he always has a wife whom he can treat as an inferior.” (*Mill* 40).

The travails of the subdued women in the male dominated society
governed by rigid norms and restrictions and their subservient position in the
society is highlighted by Sidhwa through her women protagonists. The female
oppression and discrimination is seen both in direct and indirect forms in the
society. The novelist illustrates by means of her characters how unfairly and
unjustly women are treated. In addition to that, Sidhwa exemplifies male-
chauvinism and prejudice wreaking havoc on the lives of women. Sidhwa remarks her feministic interpretation in an interview with Mannoni, as follows:

Eons ago pastoral societies were ruled by goddesses. Then came the warriors who created gods in their own male image. Because of superior physical strength, the patriarchs considered themselves superior to women. Men are by nature territorial and gradually they usurped all rights over women’s bodies and lives and created myths, to establish their dominance. (n.p.)

Sidhwa explains domestic violence, sexual abuse, marginalization, prostitution and child marriage as the major barriers in women’s development. She also underlines the traditional bondage of marriage which reduces women and obliterates their social consciousness. And it predomnately determines their code of behaviour in their life which makes them slaves under the locks of blind rituals. Both the novels, The Pakistani Bride and Water, provide an account of the postcolonial concepts of opposition to child marriage and abolition of forced prostitution in order to emancipate the women victims.

The theme of the novel The Pakistani Bride, emanates from a true incident of a Punjabi girl married to a tribal man near the mountain regions of Himalayas. Unable to cope with the harsh treatment inflicted on her, the girl runs away from the hills after a month from her wedding. And the tribal people, who considered this a serious crime and dishonour, killed her. And it is pictured by Sidhwa in her own lines from her autobiography, Why Do I
Write?, where Sidhwa elaborates the necessity to write this haunting story of the young woman victim from the tribal community.

She expresses how she gets affected when she learns about the cruel incident as “The girl’s story haunted me: it reflected the hapless condition of many women not only in Pakistan but in the Indian subcontinent. Telling it became an obsession.”(28). Thus taken aback by this story of injustice, Sidhwa felt it imperative to fictionalize it to reveal the hard realities in the tribal regions across the world. She also exhibits the inequality and subjugation of women in her another novel Water.

Through the novel Water, Sidhwa lucidly exhibits the forced child marriage and hard norms imposed by the society for the widows which prevail during the pre-independent era. She realistically sketches the society which inhumanly smashes the womanhood under the bare foot of blind traditions. And also Sidhwa gracefully describes the ugly side of the Indian society, tinted with bitter realities and blind traditions before the reader’s eyes. The novel is a sympathetic depiction of the deplorable widowhood underwent by the women victims, who fall as prey in the partial hands of the society.

In the very beginning of the novel, Sidhwa initially narrates the spark of the widowhood of a six year old child Chuyia, in an unfaithful forced child marriage with a sixty year old man. It is posthumously exposed through the conversation between Chuyia’s parents Somnath and Bhagya regarding Chuyia’s marriage. When Somnath expresses Hira Lal’s marriage proposal for Chuyia, Sidhwa vibrantly reveals the concern of a mother for her little girl.
through Bhagya’s words as “She is only six,...I have heard Hira Lal is a grandfather.” (Water 13).

With these words, Bhagya conveys her opposition for the child marriage though she is aware of the fact that talking against the words of her husband is considered as an unfair act in the Brahmanical tradition. But Somnath is very strong in his decision because Hira Lal’s family is of noble lineage, especially they don’t demand any dowry for the marriage. Hence he does not pay much attention to his wife’s words and also he feels honoured by accepting this marriage proposal even without considering his daughter’s young age.

Here the novelist dynamically reveals that Somnath just wants to follow the tradition in a blind way for the sake of the society without caring about the sensitive side of his own little daughter’s life. And his insensible attitude is clearly narrated by Sidhwa through his hot argument with his wife:

“In the Brahmanical tradition,” said Somnath, shifting into the soothing and at the same time authoritative mode he adopted when speaking to his clients, “a woman is recognized as a person only when she is one with her husband. Only then does she become a sumangali, an auspicious woman, and a saubhagyavati, a fortunate woman.” And, as if recalling a passage from a holy book, he half-closed his lids to add, “A woman’s body is a site for conflict between a demonic stri-svavahava, which is her lustful aspect, and her stri-dharma, which is her womanly duty.” (Water 14).
From the above mentioned lines, Sidhwa exhibits the dominant nature of the mankind and how vigorously it places women in an inferior level in the patriarchal society. Also Sidhwa uncovers the dictating mind of the man, with Somnath’s reference to the conflict in a woman’s body between her stri-svavahava, lustful aspect and stri-dharma, womanly duty. Through this description, Sidhwa exposes how the mankind views women as an object of temptation.

They believed a partial fact that, a woman can have her identification only with her marriage and apart from marriage she is not in a position to have any recognition in the society. And this is clearly illustrated by Sidhwa through Somnath’s words of anger towards his wife as “…you are aware of our traditions,…Outside of marriage the wife has no recognized existence in our tradition. A woman’s role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created: to have sons! That is all!” (Water 15).

Sidhwa also indirectly reveals the suppression of women in the patriarchal society through Bhagya’s words, where their own independence gets shattered under the dominating words of the man. As Sidhwa denotes: “I am sorry....She scampers all about the place like her name sake, Little Mouse. I need time to get used to the idea of her absence from our house. It will be as you say—you are her father.” (Water 15). With these words, Sidhwa represents the status of women in the patriarchal society, where even a mother is damped while she raises her voice for the welfare of her own daughter.

Here Sidhwa also describes the patriarchal decision making attitude of men in the family where they dynamically register their superiority. The
novelist expresses it in the depressed words of Bhagya, when she highlights Somnath’s position as a father, who only has the power of decision making in a girl’s marriage. Through the character of Bhagya, Sidhwa prudently showcases the helplessness of a mother who is unable to prevent her little child from the society’s injustice in the name of child marriage.

Bhagya burns all her distress and anguish within her heart because she knows very well that the stony tradition won’t give any importance to her valuable emotions. Sidhwa compassionately describes the silent grief of the woman as a mother: “Flesh of my flesh, the beautiful fruit of my womb: her gaze lingered on her daughter’s face.” (Water 17). Also Sidhwa unveils the importance given to sons rather than daughters in the society, when Bhagya affectionately watches her sleeping daughter out of pity: “Bhagya was not given to looking at her daughter so closely. She often gazed upon her sons as they slept….her heart brimmed over with love and the special pride that was her due as mother of sons….” (Water 16).

Even as a woman herself, Bhagya gives special concern only for his sons rather than her daughter Chuyia. She feels pride only about her sons but not on Chuyia and it vigorously brings to the fore the fact, that both men and women consider only the sons as the symbol of pride for their family. The sudden grief about her daughter’s marriage paves way for her to think about her partial attitude among her children and her guilty feeling is exhibited by Sidhwa in the following passage:

...Then why did she not lavish on her the affection and attention she lavished on her sons? Feel the same surge of love and pride
for her daughter? Was it because her heart knew that a daughter
was only a guest and never belonged to the house into which
she was born? As she looked down at her daughter’s baby face,
Bhagya’s eyes became moist and she was swept by a wave of
tenderness and pity she had not allowed herself to feel
before…. (Water 17).

The innocence of the little child Chuyia is exhaustively described by
Sidhwa with an incident during the day of her marriage with the sixty year old
Hira Lal. Sidhwa exposes the acquitted playful nature of the child as “I don’t
want to leave you and baba,” she cries, clinging to Bhagya’s sari. “I don’t
want to leave Mohan bhaiya and Prasad bhaiya or Tun-tun. I will have no one
to play with,” she said, weeping bitterly.” (Water 23). Here Sidhwa aptly
focuses on the partial attitude of the society in killing the innocence of the
childhood in the name of child marriage.

Sidhwa also subsequently envisions Chuyia’s risky future with the
bundle of grief which is imposed by the society on the little shoulders. The
novelist powerfully illustrates the restricted attitude of the society which easily
smashes the childhood under the name of child marriage and makes it
inextricable. And they view women just as a mere objects and this attitude of
the society is indirectly expressed by Sidhwa as follows: “Of all the
ceremonial gifts, the Kanya daan, or bride-gift, is considered to be the holiest.
Just as the giver can no longer lay claim to an object that has once been
donated,…” (Water 28). Under the name of tradition the society plays with a
little girl as an object in the game of injustice.
With the following lines Sidhwa abruptly exposes the controlling attitude of the society on women victims under the name of child marriage, even without considering their innocent childhood. Sidhwa writes:

Except for an occasional reprimand in the months following the marriage, there was no marked difference in Chuyia’s carefree life. When Bhagya remembered to, she would say, “cover your head, you’re a married woman now,” or, “You mustn’t go jumping in the pond and wandering off into the forest like this: if your mother-in-law finds out she won’t like it.” Chuyia would do as she was told for a few days and then return to her old ways until her mother remembered to scold her again.

(Water 30).

With these restrictions Bhagya controlled her daughter Chuyia; here Sidhwa intensely exhibits the forbidding attitude of the society which restricts the little child in the name of traditions. Sidhwa offers a vivid description of the blind norms that smash Chuyia’s carefree world. The restrictions imposed on her cripple the little child, who innocently likes to play with her little dog Tun-tun.

Sidhwa reveals the readers about Chuyia’s risky future as a widow with the following incident, when Chuyia’s parents come to know about Hira Lal’s depriving health, after a few days of the wedding. Through Bhagya’s words of fear for her daughter’s future, Sidhwa exposes the pathetic status of the widows as

…She and Somnath both knew that if Hira Lal managed to recover, Chuyia would be allowed to return home; but if he
didn’t recover she would be a widow and she would never return to them….She knew that in Brahmin culture, once widowed, a woman was deprived of her useful function in society—that of reproducing and fulfilling her duties to her husband. She ceased to exist as a person; she was no longer either daughter or daughter-in-law. There is no place for her in the community, and she was viewed as a threat to society. A woman’s sexuality and fertility, which was so valuable to her husband in his lifetime, was converted upon his death into a potential danger to the morality of the community. (Water 32).

In the above cited passage, the novelist dynamically replicates the restricted view of the people on a widow, where she is considered only as a threat to the society but not as a human being.

In this novel, Sidhwa showcases the mean realities underwent by the innocent girl child with the funeral event of her husband in the Ganga Ghat. Sidhwa hints at the near death of Hira Lal with Somnath’s conversation with his wife Bhagya as “Hira Lal may be dying….Chuyia’s mother-in-law wishes his son to die at the banks of the Ganges so he can liberate his soul and attain moksha. Hira Lal’s wife must be at his side.” (Water 31). Here Sidhwa has appropriately hinted the hostile approach of the people towards the little child by marrying her with a sick old man and direct her life in a perilous direction.

In their journey to Ganga Ghat, Sidhwa gaudily reflects the childlike nature of the innocent little girl, when Chuyia wants to play during their journey, unaware of the somber situation in her life. The novelist candidly
expresses the innocence of Chuyia as “She had little idea of what she was doing or where she was going. She knew the man they called her husband was sick and that she was on a journey with him...so long as baba was there to look after her, she felt secure.” (Water 34-35).

Sidhwa aptly exhibits the carefree attitude of Chuyia, who gets tragically locked in the cruel hands of fate, when she inconsiderately played with her dying husband’s leg. And this is given a thorough treatment by the novelist in the following passage:

…Chuyia quietly lifted the blue sheet and ran a finger down Hira Lal’s leg and ankle, and tickled the sole of his foot. Hira Lal’s foot twitched slightly. She repeated the action, and so absorbed was she in the game that she didn’t notice her father clear his throat in warning. As if to coax Hira Lal awake, Chuyia, suddenly impatient, rubbed the stick of sugar cane hard against the sole of his foot, and when his leg jumped up reflexively she burst into giggles....Angered by her inappropriate conduct, Hira Lal’s mother had whacked her head with her fan....Ignoring the sour old woman, Chuyia calmly bot into her sugar cane as if she didn’t have a care in the world. (Water 35-36).

With these lines, Sidhwa depicts the pathetic situation of Chuyia who is innocently involved in the play. And through her playful activities even without realizing her husband’s critical condition, Sidhwa gracefully uncovers
the bitter realities of the society which crunched the innocent childhood in a way of injustice under the name of child marriage.

Sidhwa sketches how the orthodoxy of the society wrecks the lives of young girls like Chuyia. Even before her understanding of what marriage is, she is reduced into a widow and she is plunged into eternal gloom. When Somnath informs his daughter about his husband’s death in the following conversation with her daughter, Sidhwa sensitively recounts the pathetic situation of Chuyia as a victim of cracked childhood because of the society’s evil norms:

Somnath didn’t know how to begin. Groping for words, his voice infinitely kind, he asked. “Bitiya, do you remember getting married?”

The question was of no great moment to the child, and Chuyia shook her head from side to side. “No,” she said in her clear voice.

“Your husband is dead,” said Somnath. “You are a widow now.”

“For how long, Baba?” Chuyia asked. (Water 40).

The above cited conversation between Somnath and Chuyia on her marriage and the subsequent demise of Chuyia’s husband is heart-rending. The child’s words shake even the stony-hearted. Also Sidhwa vividly exclaims the obvious innocence of the child through her words as “For how long, Baba?” (Water 40). Here the author sensibly exhibits Chuyia’s unawareness about the
acrimonious fact that she has to ride the rancorous widowhood till her death in a widow’s ashram.

Sidhwa intensely narrates the innocence of the little girl and her slow realization of things in a sudden child marriage. In *Water*, Sidhwa projects how even before the child, Chuyia acquires the understanding of world, relations and its meaning; her world has become extremely dark. She finds her life enveloped in the web of absolute darkness. But what is pathetic is Chuyia is not mature enough to understand the tragedy that is hitting her hard.

It is recited by the novelist with the following reference to the little girl’s immature mindset, which slowly grasps things where a slight memory about her marriage flashes in her mind, only at the funeral of her husband as "His body was wrapped in a white cloth,...With a child’s curiosity, she studied her dead husband....in a sudden flash of memory Chuyia saw him decked out as a groom, and thought, *That was my wedding day.*" (*Water* 41).

Through realistic approach the novelist explicates the callous things done by the society to a widow in the name of traditional sacraments. Sidhwa aptly showcases it in the following passage, when Chuyia’s mother-in-law forcibly smashed Chuyia’s bangles with a brick, which marks the first of many rituals designed to mark Chuyia’s descent into widowhood:

Suddenly, her mother-in-law loomed over Chuyia, and, before Chuyia had time to react, she jerked the *mangal-sutra* off her neck and the beads scattered on the ground. She grasped Chuyia’s hand and, using a brick, violently smashed the red glass bangles that hung from her wrist. Then, methodically,
with no more concern for the girl than if she were an inanimate object, she took the other hand and with the brick smashed the bangles on her other wrist. Chuyia, struck speechless, looked at her shattered bangles in dismay. She searched her mother-in-law’s face with astonished, questioning eyes. But her task accomplished, the aggrieved woman trudged off without a word of explanation or a backward glance…. (Water 41).

Even without considering Chuyia as a little girl, the society callously has treated her in a hard manner while they involve her in the rituals after her husband’s death. They also make her head bald to represent her widowhood to the world, which is also assigned as one of the passages into widowhood.

Sidhwa narrates how people followed the norms and rituals for the sake of the society, without considering the emotions of a human being. It is clearly exemplified by Sidhwa with the imprudent belief of the people for shaving the hair of the widows in the following lines as “It was enforced by the belief that if the widow did not shave her head, every drop of water that fell upon the hair polluted the husband’s soul as many times as the number of hairs upon her head.” (Water 44).

With these rituals Sidhwa reliably reveals the smashed childhood of a little girl under the cruel hands of the senseless society in this novel. And also Sidhwa effectually illustrates the phase of bitter widowhood undergone by Chuyia in the widow’s ashram. Sidhwa explicates the injustice imposed on the widows by the society with the following incident where Chuyia is forcefully submitted to the ashram by her mother-in-law. The incident constitutes an
innocent but a deep question asked by Chuyia during her conversation with the ashram’s head widow, Madhumati, as follows:

Unmoved by Chuyia’s grief, Madhumati continued her practiced spiel. “Our holy books say, ‘A wife is part of her husband while he’s alive.’ Right?”...The widows nodded their heads in solemn concurrence. ‘And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die.” She paused for effect and sighed dramatically. “So, how can a poor half-dead woman feel any pain?” she asked, not really expecting any answer....Chuyia, tears still slipping down her face, raised her head, and between sniffles, replied with a child’s innocent logic. “Because she’s half alive?” (Water 52-53).

In this above mentioned conversation, Sidhwa predominantly places a question before the readers through Chuyia’s acquitted words as “Because she’s half alive?” (Water 53). With this question she expresses the bitter fact that during that pre-partition period, people are not ready to consider a widow as a human being. And it is clearly depicted by Sidhwa with the sensible question through a child’s innocent viewpoint. She intellectually exposes the backward minds of the grownups with the juxtaposition of the child’s non-toxic but a broad mind of viewing a human as a human.

Through another incident in the novel, Sidhwa exhibits the patriarchal mindset of the society. It is pertinently narrated by Sidhwa through Chuyia’s influential question with the priest Sadananda during the preaching of Ramayana in the temple. From the crowd of the widows, Chuyia innocently
asks Shakuntala as “Didi, where is the house for the men widows?” (Water 97). The impact of the question makes a sudden astonished silence among the crowd.

The widows, who are unused to the revolutionary question from the small child, begin to react in a fury. And this is expressed by the novelist as “‘Good God!’ “What a horrible thing to say!” “God protect our men from such a fate!” “May your tongue burn!” “Pull out her tongue and throw it in the river....” (Water 98). In these lines Sidhwa clearly expose the conservative attitude of the people even the women, who are unable to think beyond the fixed patriarchal limits.

Sidhwa retrospectively demarcates the excruciating life of the widows under the pressure of the age old traditions and norms in this novel. She appropriately details the strict merciless conventions made by the society for the widows in the following passage:

According to the Manusmriti, the foremost Sanskrit text in the orthodox tradition, a widow’s head is shaved, her ornaments removed, and she is expected to remain in perpetual mourning. She is to observe fasts, give up eating “hot” foods in order to cool her sexual energy, avoid auspicious occasions because she is considered inauspicious (for having caused her husband’s death), and to remain celibate, devout and loyal to her husband’s memory. (Water 171).

The above passage firmly exposes the disfiguring of the widow’s body, which is enforced in order to reduce their attractiveness as women. Sidhwa also
dynamically reveals the attitude of the orthodox Hinduism, which mercilessly imprison them in hard rules in the name of punishment for their sinful past life. As Sidhwa remarks: “… the belief in the Dharma Shastra that widowhood was the punishment for a sinful existence in the past, and she atoned for it with prayer and the observance of fasts as prescribed.” (Water 66).

With the above mentioned lines from the Hindu holy text, Sidhwa strongly articulates the inherent indifference prevailing in the society with regard to gender. People impose rules for the widows to pray and fast for her sinful existence in the past birth which caused their husband’s death. But the same society partially set the widower free from these norms imposed by the orthodox Holy Scriptures. Sidhwa also conveys the sensible hard rules made by the heartless society for the widows even in their food habits. They should have two meals a day and it should not include fried foods and sweets in order to control the pleasure in their taste buds. And the following passage clearly exposes the minute cruelties imposed by the society in the name of traditional rules:

The latter Vriddha Hirata was more explicit, she should give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, taking food from a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying colyrium to the eyes; she should wear only a white garment, curb her senses and anger, and sleep on the ground. (Water 172).
The pitiable life of the abandoned widows is vigorously narrated by the novelist as “…and the widows were given a cup of rice and a fistful of lentils for every eight-hour session of singing and dancing. For many widows, this was their only means of sustenance. On those days when a widow was too sick to perform, she starved.” (Water 60). In these lines Sidhwa effectively describes the contemptible condition of the widows in the ashram. And she also expresses their pathetic physical condition as “The anemic looking widows were clapping as they pleased, singing and swaying clumsily without any effort to keep time….The widow’s discordant voices mingled with ringing temple bells,…” (Water 59).

The society also views the widows as bad omens and considers them as inauspicious without humanity. The people consider them as polluted souls and hence treat them as untouchables. And this gruesome fact is sturdily voiced by Sidhwa with reference to the following incident from the novel, where a widow Kalyani accidentally touches a married woman in the temple:

The woman groped at Kalyani,…“What filth” she hissed, an ugly expression distorting her harsh features. “You have no shame.”…A mangal-sutra [necklace worn by married woman] necklace that cut into her neck and the outside bindi [a red dot symbolizing good luck or marriage] blazing between her brows proclaimed her married status. She grabbed Kalyani by the arm and said, “You have no morals! You are a widow, and yet you run around like you are an unmarried girl?” then she yanked her arm away as if she’d been stung and hissed, “You’ve
polluted me. I have to bathe again!” She retracted her steps to the river. *(Water 73).*

Being a woman she is unable to make any room for a widow and Sidhwa dynamically expresses the inhuman behaviour of the people towards the widows through this small incident. Sidhwa mentions the words, ‘ugly expression’ in the above cited passage, in order to divulge the ugly ill-treatment enforced by the society towards the widows.

Even the society also treats the little girl Chuyia in the same inhuman way, which they get used to treating the widows. Sidhwa reveals it with an incident from the novel, where Chuyia innocently goes to the street of shops in search of her little dog Kaalu. The people around the shop shout at her to leave the place, as if they shout at an animal. As Sidhwa narrates: “…the cashier,…shouted after her, “Go back to the ashram, child.” And also the customer shook his head and remarks, “They shouldn’t allow widows to run around like this. They bring bad luck to our business.” *(Water 74).*

This cruel untouchability against the widows is vividly rendered by Sidhwa with the following incident, where even the shadow of a widow is considered to be pollution. Sidhwa vigorously uncovers the harsh backward attitude of the people which makes them not even to allow the shadow of a widow to touch them. The incident comprises the words of the priest Sadananda, who addresses the widow Shakuntala to walk away from the bride, in order to save the bride from the inauspicious contamination, during a marriage ceremony in the temple. Sidhwa denotes this incident in the passage as follows:
…she was charmed by a lovely young bride at the centre of a wedding ceremony….Shakuntala knew she should leave and go elsewhere to get the water, but something drew her toward the group. Perhaps it was the desire to witness the joy that radiated from the bride; perhaps it was just a wish to be among happy people. Shakuntala slowly descended the steps….The priest spoke sharply to Shakuntala. “Watch it! Don’t let your shadow touch the bride.” (Water 114).

Sidhwa also sensibly expresses the wounded emotions of the widows and their painful silence which get jailed within the heavily locked chains of norms in the society. This doleful situation of the widows is profoundly divulged by the novelist as “Shakuntala stood rooted to the step, in shock at being addressed this way by a priest. Lowering her eyes in apology, she turned her back on the group and ascended the steps with as much dignity as she could muster.” (Water 114).

The Hindu society treats the widows only as inauspicious elements not as human beings and it is stated by Sidhwa in this novel through the emotions of the widow Shakuntala. In an unpleasant way, people wound the hearts of the widows by treating them as ominous elements in the society. And it is profoundly represented by Sidhwa through the inner thoughts of Shakuntala as follows:

She remembered the time-honoured words known by all Hindu women, exhorting that the sight of the widow itself was something inauspicious, so inauspicious that if sighted at the
beginning of an auspicious venture, the venture itself had to be postponed. Shakuntala felt a tug-of-war within her. Her common sense pitched against these age-old traditions practiced simply because it was always so—these thoughts were running in opposing directions in her mind and heart. (Water 143).

Sidhwa not only portrays the wounded emotions of the elders but the little girl Chuyia’s crumbled feelings in the name of widowhood is also sketched by her in a realistic way. It is clearly showcased with an incident, where Chuyia feels a strong contrast when she meets a little girl of her age in the temple. Sidhwa expresses the classy status of the little girl as “The young girl, no older than seven, wore her brilliant red skirt and blouse proudly. A chain of white jasmine-buds adorned her long hair, and her hands were covered in bangles.” (Water 118).

The novelist describes the bangles and flowers worn by the little girl in order to symbolize the auspicious qualities of a woman which Chuyia feels lacking with her widow status. The playful attitudes of the little girl under the protection of her mother remind Chuyia of her own memories of carefree life in her village before her marriage. Sidhwa has provided the narration of how Chuyia realizes her cracked childhood when she contrasts herself with the little girl in the temple.

Sidhwa also exhibits the fury aroused within Chuyia in the following lines, when the little girl gives her a coin as an offering: “The girl stood looking at Chuyia solemnly for a moment, and then gave her the coin. Chuyia
felt the blood rise to her face, and her humiliation was like a blow that winded her. She clenched the coin tightly in her fist to contain her fury.” *(Water 118).* Sidhwa gracefully exposes the plight of the little heart which is unable to question the society, which made her a helpless widow begging for alms to lead her life.

The novelist strongly emphasises that it is only because of the society’s blind norms, the widows who get bordered from the normal life and forced to live a pathetic life away from their families. And this hatred towards the society and its blind customs can be indirectly revealed through her outburst towards Shakuntala: “As soon as the mother and daughter were gone from view, Chuyia turned to Shakuntala and hissed, “I hate you!”…She leapt up and ran away!” *(Water 118).* Here Chuyia’s words of hatred towards Shakuntala indirectly uncover the anger and rage towards the backward traditional rules towards the widows.

The unfair treatment undergone by the widows in the society is lucidly revealed through Shakuntala’s questions towards the priest Sadananda. The questions revolve around her mind when she recalls the following lines from a Holy book that, “The Brahmanical tradition in the *stri-dharma* says a widow has two options: She can commit sati and mount her husband’s pyre, or lead a life of self-denial and pray for her husband’s soul.” *(Water 184).* Her heart gets ruptured by the ill treatments in the society towards the widows, poured sympathetically the following questions: “Panditji, I have read the Holy Books without questioning them. But you have studied all the Holy scriptures . . . I have great respect for your learning…Panditji, is it written that widows should be treated badly?” *(Water 84).*
The simple but deep question makes the priest stand unanswerable with an urge for pity towards the wounded heart. Through this incident, Sidhwa exhibits the dumped questions, deep under a widow’s heart which is destroyed completely on the fuel of blind traditions. And Sidhwa also showcases the injustice laid by the society, against the widows in the following conversation between Shakuntala and the priest Sadananda:

“However,” he continued, “a law was recently passed which favours widow remarriage.”

“A law?” Shakuntala said, surprised. “Why don’t we know about it? Shouldn’t we have been told?”

Sadananda gave a sardonic, lopsided grin and replied, “We ignore the laws that don’t suit us.” (Water 185).

The above mentioned conversation realistically exposes the inequality and gender bias prevailing in the society. Sidhwa clearly represents the prejudice of the patriarchal society through the reply of Sadananda that, “We ignore the laws that don’t suit us,” (Water 185). It illustrates the unfairness implied on the widows by the orthodox society, though many laws have been passed for the widow’s welfare by the Government. Through this incident, Sidhwa dynamically exhausts the practical reality of the narrow minded humankind in the society, which will not change for the sake of laws, unless it is ready to think in a broad way by its own.

The pathetic life of the widows is incredibly demonstrated by Sidhwa not only through the character of Chuyia but also through other the widow
characters. The novelist provides a portrayal of the ugly side of the patriarchal society. It reduces the widows to wander as inferior creatures in the society only because of the distinction that they are women in gender. In this regard, Sidhwa explains the inhuman behavior of the society which makes the soul of the widows die more deaths in their lives with heartbroken pains. The voiceless widows suffer a lot in the hands of the callous society which does not even try to show a pinch of sympathy for them, but the people strictly focus on saving their pride for their traditions in the name of blind customs.

The helplessness of the orphaned widows is clearly exhibited by Sidhwa through the death of an old widow called Bua (auntie; used as a nickname for Patirajji), in the ashram. During the funeral, the other widows like Chuyia, Shakuntala and Kalyani stand powerless when the merciless Madhumati demands money for Bua’s cremation. Here Sidhwa sympathetically expresses the painful situation of a widow who once had a family, is now dead like an orphan, who does not even have money for her cremation.

When Kalyani comes forward to offer money for Bua’s cremation from her savings, Sidhwa also describes in parallel the bitter reality in a widow’s life where Kalyani saves money for her own cremation, in the forecast of fear to die among these merciless people. And this scene of inhumanity is sensitively rendered by Sidhwa as: “…Kalyani quietly opened a knot in her sari. She removed the few coins secreted there, and handed them to Shakuntala, saying: “Didi [sister], I was saving these for my cremation.”” (Water 136).
The abandonment of the widows from their families is realistically depicted by Sidhwa with Bua’s story of banishment from her family after her husband’s death. It is revealed through Shakuntala’s thoughts of grief in the following lines, when she remembers Bua’s wretched life after her funeral:

…she came from a family of landowners who had hounded her out of her house when her husband died. His brothers most likely didn’t want her to have a share in the inheritance, or their wives the care and feeding of this jinxed person whose karma it was to “eat up” her husband. Bua had told her that her two young sons had immediately been sent to another village, and whatever feelings they once had for their mother had dissipated over time. Bua was not allowed to write to her grandchildren because her sons found out that she sat on the streets of the Holy City with a begging bowl. (Water 143).

From the above cited passage, Sidhwa intensely displays the hardhearted dealings of Bua’s family members even her own children, have considered their mother as a symbol of shame to their family because of her condition of soliciting in the temples. Sidhwa powerfully questions the injustice caused by the society to the destitute widows, who are forced by their families into the state of begging under the name of punishment for their committed sin in their previous birth.

The novelist directly questions the society through Shakuntala’s effervescent inward questions which aroused within her, after watching the sympathetic ending of Bua’s life as “Who had turned her into a beggar if not
them?” *(Water 143).* The poverty of the widows and their pain for their day-to-day survival in the society is aptly enumerated by Sidhwa in the lines as follows: “Bua had been widowed when she was about thirty-five. She had sung her lungs out till she was seventy. What for? A cup of rice and an occasional cowrie-coin flung at her?” *(Water 143).* With the outburst of Shakuntala’s grief for the poor old woman, Sidhwa vividly showcases the prejudice prevailing in the society in the name of age-old traditions.

The novelist brings to light the imprudent minds of the people, which blindly give importance to the traditional norms without minding that the tradition itself originated to mould people in a humanistic way. Sidhwa practically illustrates the customs of the Hindu society which cannot be easily eradicated. And it is exposed through the following lines where Shakuntala expresses her grief of disbelief with the society which cannot get corrected: “And when she herself was an old cone, a younger widow would look at her and think, *Some day, I too will be an old crone like her and I will die unmourned.*” *(Water 143).*

Sidhwa exposes the mutual understanding between the widows for each other in their shared grief of the bitter widowhood, in a realistic manner. And it is described by Sidhwa through the following incident, where Chuyia brought *laddoo* (a sweet made of lentils) for Bua, which she always longs for like a child in her lifetime:

Bua’s rheumy, scrunched-up eyes widened in astonishment: two inches from her eyeballs sat the most scrumptious yellow *laddoo* in the world!...She was not sure if she was still
dreaming, or if this unexpected treasure was for real…. She lifted the laddoo gingerly, half-expecting it to vanish. It stayed firm and substantial between her fingers. She brought it to her nose and inhaled its fragrance: it was made in pure butter-oil. Then she quickly shoved the whole laddoo into her toothless mouth, and with her hand clamped her mouth shut. The gob of fudge stuffed her mouth so she could scarcely breathe. (Water 121).

In these lines of description, the novelist sagaciously expresses the inhuman stance of the people, who make merciless orthodox restrictions for the widows to avoid sweets, which is considered as one of the aspects to be followed in the widowhood. Sidhwa sketches the pathetic conditions of the widows, who longed for very little things in their life like Bua’s desire for laddoo. The futile norms imposed on the widows in order to control their desires even in their food habits showcase the inhuman behavior of the people in the Hindu orthodox society.

Little things become very big achievements in their life; often a dream for them like Bua and it is depicted by Sidhwa as “She was not sure if she was still dreaming, or if this unexpected treasure was for real…. ” (Water 121). The fragrance of the sweet kindles the memories of Bua’s past carefree childhood and her marriage, which she considers the happy years of her life. As Sidhwa describes: “…glorious buttery sweetness from it swamped her taste buds, waves of delight spread through her whole body… Bua reeling back into her past. Memories shaped themselves into images…transported her back across the span of years to her wedding day.” (Water 121).
Widows not only get humiliated mentally, but the society also violates them physically in the name of prostitution and this aspect is realistically exemplified by Sidhwa through the widow character Kalyani in this novel. Her forced prostitution in the ashram was elucidated by Sidhwa in the following passage:

Her childhood was in one box, and occasionally she opened it and let the happy memories spill out. Her meetings with Narayan were locked up in another box she kept close to her heart and opened frequently. She kept her nocturnal calls in a recessed box hidden even from herself and allowed it open only when she was doing business for Madhumati. “Learn to live like a lotus,” Krishna had said in the Gita [Hindu holy text], “untouched by the filthy water.” Kalyani had taken these words to heart and had learned to live by them. This way, her life was made bearable, and the transactions with the clients did not poison her day-to-day hours or her relationships with others. (Water 152).

The above mentioned lines clearly depict the injustice laid by the society towards the abandoned widows under forced prostitution. Through the character of Kalyani, the novelist reveals the most ugly and dark side of the society which has played with the emotions of the pitiable widows.

Sidhwa explains under what circumstances Kalyani is forced into prostitution and is made a scapegoat. She is victimised by Madhumati who states to her in order to strengthen the financial condition of the ashram she
has to do it. Hence Sidhwa describes her with the reference to *Bhagavad Gita* (Hindu holy text), which Kalyani follows in her life as per the sayings of Lord Krishna as “Learn to live like a lotus,...untouched by the filthy water.” (*Water* 152). Sidhwa expresses the violence against the widows by pushing them into prostitution with the sensible words of Kalyani as follows: “…she had learned to retreat to a place deep inside herself where her emotions could not be violated, despite what happened to her body.” (*Water* 90).

The discrimination and exploitation the widows suffer in the patriarchal society is convincingly explored by the novelist through some male characters who encourage prostitution. And this aspect is indirectly uncovered by Sidhwa by means of a conversation between the broadminded youth Narayan and his friend Rabindra, where Rabindra casually reveals to Narayan about his father’s involvement in prostitution with the widows. Sidhwa aptly exposes the partial hands of the men in the crime through Rabindra’s words of satire as “I know she is a widow,...The gentry here have an ‘unnatural concern’ for widows.” (*Water* 89).

The male chauvinism of the patriarchy is also revealed by Sidhwa with a heated argument between Narayan and his father Dwarkanath. Sidhwa represents the prejudice of some people in the society through the character of Narayan’s father, who is also involved in the prostitution crime. It is clearly declared by his words towards his son Narayan, who broad-mindedly wants to marry the widow Kalyani: “‘Narayan, perhaps you are not aware of this. Our Holy Texts say Brahmins can sleep with whomever they want, and the women they sleep with are blessed.’” (*Water* 201). These lines convey the cunning
attitudes of the patriarchal society which misuse the holy texts for their own sake in order to exploit the widows.

Not only men but some women are also involved in crimes against the vulnerable widows. It is rendered by Sidhwa through some incidents in the novel. When Narayan, a Gandhian in thoughts, declares his wish to marry a widow, his mother Bhagwati stands against the widow remarriage. As Sidhwa denotes:

“Hai Bhagwan [Oh God]! You’re serious! How will we show our face to the world? Weeping and wiping her tears on her sari, she scolded him, “Gandhi has turned you into a lunatic! Marry a widow? How can you even think of it? It’s a sin! You should know that!”...“Oh, God! What will happen to your sisters? Have you thought of that? Who will marry them?! No one wants a girl whose family spits on tradition and religion!” (Water 162).

With these words of anxiety, Bhagwati represents the logical consciousness of the people who are unable to cross the narrow minded walls of the society. And Sidhwa also exemplifies that people have their consideration only for the tradition and religion but not for the humans and their emotions.

Sidhwa depicts the outburst of the widow Kalyani, who at one point is not able to bear the violence of the forced prostitution against her anymore and thus she questions Madhumati as “Then why did you send me across the river? (Water 170). Sidhwa aptly reports the simple but deep fact in Madhumati’s answers that, “‘For survival! And how we survive here, no one can question.
Not even God!” (Water 170). With this furious conversation between the two widows Sidhwa effectively exposes the inhuman attitude of the society where families abandon the widows like orphans only because of their widowhood. Thus Sidhwa highlights the phrase “survival” in order to exhibit the struggle of the widows to survive in the society.

Sidhwa dynamically highlights the violence against the women through the following cruel incident where Madhumati maliciously cuts Kalyani’s hair and locks her in a room in order to stop her marriage with Narayan. This brutal violence unleashed on Kalyani, who wishes to break the heavy locks of forced prostitution to start a new dignified life, is realistically narrated by the author in the following lines as:

Before Kalyani knew what was happening, Madhumati grabbed her by her hair, and dragged her to the barsati, the storeroom next to Kalyani’s room. Withdrawing from her sari a pair of scissors, she sawed off a hank of hair in a surprisingly swift movement. Kalyani sank to her knee in shock, too numb to resist. Madhumati proceeded to hack off the rest of her hair until Kalyani was left with only sparse tufts. Kalyani sat immobilized, like a fledgling bird fallen from its nest…Madhumati stood at the balustrade looking crazed, the whites of her bloodshot eyes abnormally large. “We would have burned in hell because of her. I’ve saved you all!” she justified her brutality. (Water 170).
The above mentioned incident discloses the cruelty of the society against widows in order to prohibit the remarriage. And the novelist has represented Madhumati for explaining the way the society misuses some blind religious faiths to justify their brutality against the widows.

Sidhwa sensibly describes the pathetic conditions of the widows who get stuck with the locked walls of traditional norms, through Kalyani’s plight as “She went to the single barred window in the storeroom and looked out, realizing she was imprisoned as much by culture and tradition as by the bars and locks on her room.” (Water 179). Sidhwa also intensely displays the emotions of the helpless widows, who are crushed in the narrow minded society, where remarriage is considered as a sin. Hence they are unable to think in a broad way to liberate themselves from the inhuman clutches of the society and it is coherently expressed by Sidhwa with a philosophical conversation between Chuyia and Shakuntala as follows:


“To even think of marriage is a sin,” Shakuntala replied, her thoughts in turmoil—her love for Kalyani at odds with her deeply held religious beliefs.

“Why?” Chuyia asked innocently.

“Ask God,” Shakuntala snapped, impatient with herself for doubting what she believed was written in the scriptures. (Water 171).
The novelist also portrays the injustice of the society which plays a crucial role in the lives of the widows and it is powerfully illustrated by Sidhwa through the death of Kalyani. The following lines exhibit the disappointed stage of Kalyani, when she learns that Narayan’s father is one of the criminals whom she met during the prostitution business. Sidhwa expose this pathetic condition of the widow as “Her dreams and hopes of a future with Narayan had been blasted in one revealing instant, and the destructive potential of that horrific instant was still filtering in…” (Water 203).

The injustice of the society which plays a crucial role in the lives of the widows is depicted by Sidhwa through the tragic and doleful death of Kalyani. And these embarrassing moments of Kalyani is described in the following passage:

An ominous chill coursed through her blood and drained the colour from her face….the blood chilled to ice in Kalynai’s veins and turned her body numb. Dark blotches swam before her eyes, blocking out huge portions of the bloated building. The river appeared to heave, and she thought she would pass out. With a monumental effort, she willed herself to remain conscious. (Water 198).

By means of the above passage, Sidhwa highlights the oppression of the abandoned widows and their helpless pathetic situations. Sidhwa further explains how the vulnerable widows like Kalyani are victimized by circumstances. In spite of all her efforts to come out of prostitution to which she is pushed by Madhumati, she is unable to. All her hopes are shattered.
As Sidhwa remarks: “Her dreams and hopes of a future with Narayan had been blasted in one revealing instant, and the destructive potential of that horrific instant was still filtering in…” (Water 203). Sidhwa also indirectly exhibits the unfair treatment of the society against the widows. In this sense, Sidhwa effectively depicts the wounded heart of Kalyani, which urges for a positive change in her life as “Nothing had changed. And yet everything had. Her breathing was rapid and shallow. She was like an animal caught in a snare.” (Water 204-205).

The exploitation of women by the patriarchal society by means of evils like forced prostitution is uncovered by Sidhwa in the novel through the tragic end of Kalyani. Her wounded emotions and crumbled fate under the name of blind tradition is sensitively depicted by Sidhwa as follows:

Kalyani knew she had no choice: there was only one avenue open to her. Cast out in the streets she would die, but to live without Narayan and return to a life of forced prostitution would be a worse kind of death….Kalyani dragged herself listlessly through the dark alleys to the ghats [bathing area on the river]….The cool water seeped through her sari, but her body was so cold that it felt warm against her skin….Kalyani rose and walked slowly into the river until the water came up to her knees….She clasped her hands in prayer for a moment. Then she calmly walked into the river until her short hair floated in an inky stain on the water. Ma Ganga had claimed her daughter. (Water 205).
From the above mentioned tragic incident, the author showcases how the patriarchal society exploits a widow’s life by forcibly plunging her into prostitution against her will. Through these incidents Sidhwa charges the society with questions about justice for their partial acts in exploiting women in the name of religious rituals.

Sidhwa expresses the fury and anger towards the backward minds of the people in the society, who abandon the widows in a just-like-that manner for the sake of their own prejudice. This unchanging ill practice of the society is lucidly conveyed by Sidhwa through the fumed words of Narayan against the blind traditions and norms. Hence he speaks his heart out with Shakuntala during the funeral of Kalyani, with a sigh of air which symbolizes the tiredness of the Gandhians like him, who want to liberate the oppressed people from the clutches of the blind norms of the society. Sidhwa renders it in the lines as follows: “One less mouth to feed, four saris, one bed to let—somewhere a corner saved for another widow. There is no other reason disguised as religion.” (Water 209).

The novelist sketches the cruelty of the society which even indulges the little girl like Chuyia forcibly into the evil of prostitution. Sidhwa represents the brutal attitude of the people with the characters Madhumati and Gulabi, who has pushed Chuyia into the deep and dark wells of prostitution, even without considering her as a little girl. Sidhwa illustrates the violence against the little child in the following passage:

Gulabi stepped through a lace-curtained doorway, gently
pushing Chuyia ahead of her....Shaking her hand free of
Chuyia’s tightening grip, she quickly exited and shut the door behind her. Chuyia was suddenly alone…Her small heart pounding, she turned fearfully toward the room….As her eyes adjusted to the dim light, Chuyia could just make out the shape of a man leaning back against the cushions, drink in hand, puffing on a hookah….He didn’t speak, so she introduced herself….“My name is Chuyia. I’ve come to play.” (Water 214-215).

In the above cited passage the novelist aptly discloses the animalistic behaviour of the people who misuse Chuyia even without considering her childhood. Sidhwa sensibly expresses the innocence of the little girl through the words: “My name is Chuyia. I’ve come to play.” (Water 215). With this incident, Sidhwa gracefully contrasts the innocence of a child, which gets imprisoned in the mature adult world. The cruel violence against Chuyia is made clear by Sidhwa, when Shakuntala rescues Chuyia in a boat after the brutal incident: “Chuyia had been drugged. What had the beast done to a drugged child? Shakuntala struggled to pick up the inert body and, with great difficulty, hauled Chuyia onto the embankment.” (Water 218).

Sidhwa realistically illustrates the forced prostitution in her another novel The Pakistani Bride, and she also portrays the domestic violence against women by the patriarchal society. Sidhwa describes how the men use the women as a mere sexual objects by forcibly indulging them in prostitution. And this aspect is clearly captured by Sidhwa in the following passage:
A woman, bells tied to one twisted ankle, was hobbling around in the small enclosure....Now and again, a man standing with her in the enclosure shouted, ‘Naach pagli!’ – dance, madwoman – and jabbed her with a cane. At this she would raise her arms and twist her wrists in a grim caricature of dance movements. Her jaw hung slack in an expressionless face, and sick yellow eyeballs started unseeing....A man, obscenely shaking his body, called to her as to a monkey. A couple of men laughed, enjoying the sport.... (*TPB 65*).

These lines describe the merciless act of the men around the woman, who use her like an animal with conditioned reflexes. The lines: “A man, obscenely shaking his body, called to her as to a monkey. A couple of men laughed, enjoying the sport.... (*TPB 65*) aptly express the men’s attitude in treating the women as a performing monkey without considering her emotions.

The intense emotions of the women, who are forced into prostitution, are realistically rendered by Sidhwa in this novel, *The Pakistani Bride*. Sidhwa has illustrated the helpless situation of the women through the words of a victim as “that is our destiny, we automatically smile in the presence of men. We are taught to from childhood. I ‘d never allow myself to be moody before a man.” (*TPB 71*). These words exemplify the unrevealed wounds of the women, who are taught to smile artificially. Sidhwa exposes the unfair treatment against the women victims in the forced prostitution as follows:

Oh, let me stay in purdah – don’t lift my veil.

If my purdah is removed . . . My mystery is betrayed.
My veil has ten thousand eyes.

Yet you cannot see into mine.

But if you raise my veil even a bit –

Beware! You’ll burn.

Oh God – who can have made me? –

Whoever it is – even he doesn’t know me . . .

Allah forbid! – Allah – forbid! (*TPB* 73).

The above cited song lyrics sensitively express the crumbled feelings of the woman, and it is rendered by the novelist through the repeated words of call for God as “Allah forbid! – Allah – forbid!” (*TPB* 73). Sidhwa showcases the abandoned state of the woman who helplessly called God to forbid the brutal treatments against her by the stonehearted people in the society.

Sidhwa describes the feeble state of the woman, who begged anyone of the God from numerous faiths to save her from the mistreatment as “Oh God – who can have made me? – whoever it is – even he doesn’t know me . . .” (*TPB* 73). Through this incident, Sidhwa vividly represents the shattered lives of thousands of women victims across the world, which is unable to get rid of the cruel injustice done to them by the society in the name of prostitution.

Apart from prostitution, the novelist also exposes the brutal deaths of the women victims under domestic violence in the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*. And it is exemplified by Sidhwa through an incident where Carol, an American woman, watches a head of a tribal girl cut down along a riverside in
the mountain regions of Himalayas. Through the following questions of Carol, Sidhwa indirectly questions the society which treats the women in hard brutal ways without showing any kindness towards them:

Carol meanwhile lay in her room, staring into the dark....Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten-up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable law of nature. What had the tribal girl done to deserve such grotesque retribution? Or was she simply the victim of a vendetta?” (TPB 226).

From the above mentioned lines, Sidhwa reveals the social ill harassment faced by the women victims in the patriarchal society. From a gynocentric viewpoint, Sidhwa highlights the violence on women by various means of harassment in the society such as rape, murder and slavery and it is aptly exposed by Sidhwa in the lines as “Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved to get importunately impregnated, beaten-up, bullied and disinherited.” (TPB 226).

She uncovers the prevalence of insecurity in the society which make the women as victims. Hence the novelist mentions as “…immutable law of nature” (TPB 226), which implies that the unwritten laws of the patriarchal society in women’s exploitation and oppression cannot be totally challengeable through any efforts. Sidhwa deals with the insecurity for women, one of the burning issues of the society, both through familial and societal levels respectively.
The domestic violence against women is depicted by Sidhwa through Zaitoon’s forced marriage with a tribal man in this novel, *The Pakistani bride*. The brutality against women in the tribal society is demonstrated by Sidhwa with a malicious incident, where Zaitoon’s husband Sakhi cruelly trashes his wife because of suspicion. The novelist profoundly narrates the domestic violence imposed on the women victims by the tribal society in the lines as follows:

‘For God’s sake stop it,’ she wailed. ‘For God’s sake, you’ll kill her!’ she could hear the shrill remonstrance of the women close behind. She tried to take hold of the swinging stick. It knocked painfully against her knuckles but she caught it and tried to wrench it away. Sakhi struck her on her thighs, on her head, shouting ‘You are my woman! I’ll teach you to obey me!’ Zaitoon stumbled and sprawled face down…. (TPB 172-173).

Through this cruel incident, Sidhwa aptly conveys the inhuman behavior meted out to the women victims with Zaitoon as a representation. Sidhwa portrays how Sakhi treats his wife, beating her like an animal without any sort of kindness and mercy for her. And Zaitoon’s pitiable state of despair and pain is skillfully narrated by Sidhwa as “Zaitoon, trembling like a leaf, and moaning in pain, is helped to her feet by the women.” (TPB 173).

Sidhwa sketches the hard attitudes of the tribesman, who want to save their mere pride and prejudice apart from humanity. Sidhwa also describes the inhuman behavior of the tribal people, in order to save their honesty in the society. In this sense, they obviously do not consider the emotions of the
people especially women in a humanistic perspective. The following passage reveals the wounded emotions of Hamida, Sakhi’s mother, who feels despair for her lost sons in the revenge war:

Honour! She thought bitterly. Everything for honour—and another life lost! Her loved ones dead and now the girl she was beginning to hold so dear sacrificed….The old woman was overcome by the memory of her there dead sons: the weight of each child in her body for nine months, the excruciating pain, drudgery, sweat: and scant years later, the heartbreak when, one by one, each of her sons was carried home on a crude stretches swinging from the men’s shoulders, their faces grim with the weight of the corpse under an impoverished shroud. In each grief, a nameless dread: how many more lives would the dead one claim? . . . Men and honour. And now the girl . . . (TPB 191).

Sidhwa sensibly expresses the motherly feelings of the old woman which is not bothered by the patriarchal society in their revenge war. Sidhwa writes: “...the weight of each child in her body for nine months, the excruciating pain, drudgery, sweat....” (TPB 191). It sensitively conveys the plight of a woman and her valuable emotions under the depth of her heart, which always remains unrevealed to the society. In this way, Sidhwa uncovers the female oppression in the society. And she highlights this revenge issue from a gynocentric angle, to make the society not even respect or at least to consider the valuable emotions of the women in a family.
Sidhwa also exemplifies the narrow mindedness of the tribal society through an incident from the novel, when the protagonist Zaitoon honestly conveys to his father about her wish to marry a military soldier. Sidhwa realistically portrays the indirect suppression of the women in the family circle, where her wish is not taken into consideration by the parents, though she has a justified decision. And this fact was narrated by Sidhwa through the words of Zaitoon’s father Qasim as “‘Now understand this…’ Qasim’s tone was icily incisive. ‘I’ve given my word. Your marriage is to be a week from today….If you be smirch it, I will kill you with my bare hands.’” (TPB 158).

These words of fury lucidly illustrate the pressure exerted on the women in the society. They are forced to marry against their own will. And if they convey their wish with dignity to their family, they are not welcomed with broad minds. Instead they were forced to shut their mouths and swallow their words of wish, by the family with anger and this is denoted by Sidhwa as “‘Hush, Zaitoon, that’s no way to speak to your father…’” (TPB 158).

Sidhwa expresses the discriminated status of women in the tribal society, which ruins the lives of women in the name of marriage, through Qasim’s marriage with Afshan. In that marriage, Afshan is sold as a soulless object, because of her father’s failure to repay the loan which he borrows from Qasim’s father. Through this incident Sidhwa highlights the presence of gender discrimination and injustice against women in the tribal society, where women are viewed only as commodities but not as human beings. And this senseless ill-treatment of the tribal people against women is recited by Sidhwa through the words of Qasim’s father:
‘Son, you’re to be married!’...‘You know of the bad feeling between me and Resham Khan? It is because of a loan I made him last year. He hasn’t paid me yet.’...Anyway this will not lead to a feud. Resham Khan has promised us his daughter!...Any girl – and he had made sure that this one was able-bodied – was worth than the loan due....He ruffled the boy’s sun-bleached, matted hair. ‘My young bridegroom,’ he said playfully, ‘you’ll be fetching home a lovely girl. How d’you like that!’ (TPB 7).

With the above cited lines from the novel, The Pakistani Bride, Sidhwa explicates the irrational mindset of the tribal people, who term marriage as a commercial business, where women are sold for bride price. And this shameless fact in the senseless trade business is uncovered by the novelist as “…and he had made sure that this one was able-bodied – was worth than the loan due.” (TPB 7).

Sidhwa uncovers the gruesome tactics beyond the bride price tradition, where a woman once married to her husband obviously becomes a part of the property of her husband in the tribal society. Here Sidhwa interprets the helpless state of the women who remain as a soulless property in the commercial trade in the name of marriage. She also conveys the unfair treatment meted out to the women victims, who do not receive due respect and have freedom of choice in her marriage.

The novelist also represents the male chauvinism with the following thought of Qasim’s father, where absolute injustice is reflected in the lines as
“To begin with, he had thought of marrying the girl himself. He had only one wife; but in a twinge of paternal conscience, he decided to bestow the girl on Qasim.” (TPB 8). Here Sidhwa illustrates the bigotry and bias of the patriarchs in the tribal society, where they are able to marry any women at any time without any age restrictions.

The theme of constrained child marriage is elucidated by Sidhwa in her another novel Ice-Candy-Man. This misfortune undergone by thousands of the girl child victims is represented through the character of a little girl Papoo, daughter of Lenny’s sweeper woman, Muccho. Sidhwa narrates the injustice done to the little girl Papoo in her marriage, through the innocent eyes of Lenny. Sidhwa expresses: “Papoo, cowed by all the unwonted attention, sits glowering in a corner of their quarters like a punished child,…” (ICM 184-185). Sidhwa pictures the unfair treatment against the child Chuyia in the form of forced child marriage in the novel Water and it is expressed by the novelist through Lenny’s eyes in the following passage as follows:

I sit quietly beside the bride. The women from the groom’s family lift her ghoongat and comment indulgently on the innocence that permits the child-bride to sleep through her marriage….The caterers provide a separate china plate for the bride. Muccho shakes her daughter awake, urging: ‘Come, doll, sit up and eat, doll.’ I study Muccho’s face with curious eyes. There is a contented smile on her lips – smug and vindicated. As Papoo struggles groggily to sit up, her eyes swivel weakly under her half-open lids….Papoo chews slowly, absently, her childish, lipsticked mouth slack….And though the tone of voice
calling her an opium addict is disarmingly facetious, it suddenly strikes me that Papoo has in fact been drugged. (*ICM* 187-188).

With the above mentioned lines, Sidhwa lucidly uncovers the trap of mystery behind the unfair child marriage, where Sidhwa recounts that Papoo is drugged with opium in order to restrain her revolt during the marriage ceremony. The extent to which the society goes in controlling the passions and feelings of small girls like Papoo is expressed in the lines following: “And though the tone of voice calling her an opium addict is disarmingly facetious, it suddenly strikes me that Papoo has in fact been drugged.” (*ICM* 188).

Through the cunning deeds of Papoo’s mother, who drugs her own daughter for the marriage, Sidhwa exemplifies how women themselves connive with the injustice done to fellow women. Here in the case of Papoo, her own mother goes to the extent of drugging her daughter to make her accept marriage. Without thinking about the harm drugging will do to her daughter, the mother becomes brutal enough to drug Papoo only to suppress the protest of Papoo against marriage. With the line, “Come, doll, sit up and eat, doll” (*ICM* 188), the novelist clarifies Muccho’s deceitful thought which considers his daughter only as a lifeless doll.

Sidhwa explicates the domination in the patriarchal society, where little girls are forced to marry old age men, against their own will. This unbalanced facet is dynamically displayed by the novelist in the lines, when Lenny saw Papoo’s bridegroom: “He is no boy! He is a dark, middle-aged man with a pockmark-pitted face and a small, brash, kohl-blackened
eye….There is a slight cast in the close set of his eyes, and the smirk lurking about his thin, dry lips gives an impression of cruelty.” (ICM 187).

With Lenny’s keen observation, Sidhwa exemplifies the bitter reality of the partial society which does not protest against the forced child marriage instead celebrate it with joy. The lack of concern for women in the society is remain rooted to the dirt floor, unable to remove my eyes from him, imagining the shock, and the grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo.” (ICM 187).

Sidhwa not only highlights the evil violence by the society against the women victims in this novel, but also reproduces some positive energy with a reference to the lines from the Iqbal poem. And the following lines are recited by Carol’s husband Farukh, when Carol develops a panic feel after watching the cruel murder of the tribal girl:

\[
\text{Khudikokarbulanditna,}
\]

Heighten your ‘Khudi’ to such majesty.

\[
\text{Ke hartakdeer say pahaylay}
\]

That before every turn of fate

\[
\text{Khudabanday say khudpoochay,}
\]

God himself asks man –

\[
\text{‘Butaterirazakyahai?’}
\]

‘Tell me, what do you wish?’ (TPB 229).
The above mentioned passage from the Iqbal poem efficiently depicts the prayer for God in asking the willpower for the human beings. When Farukh recites these poetic verses from the Iqbal poem to Carol, in order to relax her mind from the brutal incident, Farukh explained Carol about the meaning of the word ‘Khudi’ as willpower. As Sidhwa denotes: “Khudi . . . It’s your willpower. No, more than just willpower…” (TPB 229).

The above mentioned sense of willpower in women gets exhibited Sidhwa through some women characters like Lenny’s mother and Lenny’s Godmother Rodabai, from the novel, Ice-Candy-Man. In this novel, Sidhwa realistically sketches the horrific incidents during the India-Pakistan partition war, where women become easy victims in the communal riots. And this aspect is clearly discussed in Chapter II, with numerous incidents from the novel which highlight the women’s victimization during the partition violence.

Sidhwa has portrayed her women not only as victims, but also as saviours and it is efficiently conveyed through the bold deeds by Sidhwa’s women characters in the novel, Ice-Candy-Man. By narrating the background of the novel, Sidhwa exposes how the gruesome partition traumas prevailed during the partition days created an insecure space for women in the society. And she also gallantly records the sufferings of the women victims and the multifaceted ordeals which they undergo during the unsettling horrific days of struggle. Sidhwa scrutinises the horrific details of the ugly side of the subcontinent’s history which has comprised the exploitation and molestation of women during the Hindu-Muslim communal chaos. Through Lenny’s eyes, Sidhwa sketches how the communal hatred of men, who indulged in the mob violence, turned them into beats leaving no room for humanity.
The domination and male chauvinism of men in the society lingers through their cruel attitudes in sexually assaulting women and celebrating victory over women’s corpse during the vehemence of the partition. Sidhwa describes the tragic transformation of the human mind which gets easily corrupted with the influence of communal prejudice. This made them to corner the innocent women souls for their tit-for-tat fury during the violence and obviously Lenny’s Ayah too became a victim in the struggle. Sidhwa made women saviors to save the women victims to rescue them from the clutches of the patriarchal society.

Women’s willpower and strength to help another woman in the process of liberation is conveyed by Sidhwa with the characters of Lenny’s mother and Lenny’s aunt. They both played the humanitarian act by helping the women victims to make them run away from the kidnappers by making fire during the nights in Lahore. And it is narrated through the words of Lenny’s mother to Lenny in order to clear Lenny’s accusation against her: “We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away...And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your Ayah, to their families across the border.” (ICM 242).

From the above cited dynamic acts of Lenny’s mother in helping women’s rescue, Sidhwa projects through Lenny’s mother that beyond domesticity women should have a noble purpose in life which should be developed in order to liberate the subordinates in the society. Sidhwa portrays Lenny’s Godmother as the most towering personality among her women saviors in the novel. In spite of her old age, Sidhwa exemplifies her as a powerful person who earns people’s much respect and admiration for her.
Sidhwa represents Godmother as an ideal figure for the women community, which powerfully declares that women should not be confined within their boundaries and they can break the clutches with their willpower and courage, with which they are blessed. Godmother’s bravery and guts gets revealed by Sidhwa with the following incident, where Ayah fled free towards her homeland from the clutches of prostitution, in the following passage:

The long and diverse reach of Godmother’s tentacular arm is clearly evident. She set an entire conglomerate in motion immediately after our visit with Ayah and single-handedly engendered the social and moral climate of retribution and justice required to rehabilitate our fallen Ayah….Everything came to a head within a fortnight. Which in the normal course of events, unstructured by Godmother’s stratagems, could have been consigned to the ingenious bureaucratic eternity of a toddler nation greenly fluttering its flag…” (ICM 274).

In the above cited lines, Sidhwa evidently depicts the real power of the women, which lies not in her mere powerful words but in her dreadful deeds which should reveal her individuality. Hence this chapter, which deals with the feminist components and ill treatments meted out to the women victims in Sidhwa’s novels, also conveys some spark of positive lights regarding the liberation of the women in the society.