

Constructing Voice against Silencing: A Standpoint of Postcolonial Feminism with Reference to Sidhwa

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Abstract

Voicing the silence of women is an important theme of the female writers and this paper aims to explore the standpoint of postcolonial Feminism with reference to Sidhwa's work. She has raised the issue of voicelessness of Pakistani women to get attention of the world to this wretched creature. Voicing the quandary of the voiceless has been a major concern of the postcolonial writers and they particularly give voice to the oppressed who have suffered due to their voicelessness. Sidhwa has pin pointed and criticized the techniques employed by the patriarchy which try to keep women silent.

1. Introduction

Achebe, once said in defense of his impetus to write for Africa from African point of view, that 'the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned' (1964, p.157). This statement could be used to refer to the intention of writing for women in the modern and post-modern era.

Telling of tales had come to be traditionally associated with the female (Curti, 1998). Its first strong literary metaphor is believed to be the character of Scheherazade in *The thousand and one nights*, who tells tales to save her life. Similarly, since Wollstonecraft (1791) and Woolf (1998), many blue stocking women have taken up the task of writing to ensure the survival of their *voice* and *presence* within the literary, critical and historical canon.

Women characters have been portrayed in the literary, philosophical, political, historical, cultural and religious discourses but they have been presented as *objects* of male discourse (rather than being the subjects) and, thus, *Silenced* (Spivak, 1985). Representation of women in literature and other fields has been constructed through male gaze or male consciousness which marginalizes women as the *other* (as the opposite), that is, emotional, weak, submissive, dependent, impulsive and chaotic body in contrast to men, who are rational, strong, authoritative, independent and ordered (Seldon, 1989).

Since the inception of the third wave of feminist movement in the 1960's, many women have come forward to challenge their representation in literature, language, religion, history, culture and politics etcetera countering the male voice with a female one. They have taken up the pen to voice their silenced presence by writing unique experiences, sensibilities, silence, shame and other problems of women. They have also used their writings to explore the notions of female self, identity and subjectivity to present their own world view and, finally, turning their gaze inward to show that female, itself, is not a homogenous term. They have also pointed out that factors like race, ethnicity, color and economy affect the way it is seen and it sees itself (Moi, 1985; Ruthven, 1984; Legates, 2001).

Within literary circle, women writers have used writing to find out their own *voice* which may challenge their position represented by the male authors (Curti, 1998), and the way female writers have been excluded from the traditional literary canon, and, thereby, showing how their writings have shaped /enriched the existing reservoir of literature. They have also particularly engaged themselves in projects exploring issues which have been 'sensitive' for women: for example, the issue of violence, oppression (domestic and public), rape, shame and silence etcetera.

2. Silence

Silencing is an effective device used by the dominant/powerful for wielding power on the dominated/powerless objects, and maintaining interpersonal and societal hegemony. Silence on the part of the oppressed results in marginalization of the oppressed. Women's silences is, particularly, detrimental to gain their identity as Durrani (1995, p.374), who has suffered the worst physical and mental oppression during her marital life with Khar, states; 'silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy'. She further says that due to silence the oppressor thrives. She claims that she has decided to write the book *My Feudal Lord* (1995) 'to break the traditional silence' (ibid, p. 375).

The feminist writers, particularly, strive to break the silence and have challenged that women have been a silent portion of humanity since inception of the civilized patriarchal societal structures and language. They have been showing the other side of the profile by pointing out the conditions which have made women voiceless. They have described the devices, attitudes, discourse and language which condone their voicelessness. They criticize the structures which prevent women from becoming human beings in a true sense as Achebe (1964) states if one cannot tell where one's sticky situation began one is unable to rectify the position.

The feminist writers have tried to arouse a sense of self-consciousness among women, by giving voice to their experiences, to ensure a secured future for women. They have illustrated the stories of women as until they tell their stories, as Achebe (1975) observes, the oppressor will remain innocent. They have told the stories of women to rectify the prevailing situation through arousing awareness in them: '....with the anticipation of a reconciled future in which one hopes that justice and harmonious relations might be secured' (Simon et al. 2000, p. 4).

2.1 Literal Silence

In the past women have been kept ignorant and away from education and, hence, writing so that they may not be able to express their experiences (Woolf, 1998) and tell their tales because men knew that the words have great potential. Men kept the means of communication in their control, as 'the book and the pen are the keys to power' (Ashcroft et al. 2003, p. 84).

Till the 19th century women faced severe hurdles in getting education, in writing and then getting their creative writings published (Woolf, 1998). For example, Mary Ann Evans, got her work published through her male penname, George Eliot. The pen and book encroached by patriarchy have become interchangeable symbols of domination. Such a silence on the part of women has served a pedagogical purpose in shaping the attitude of society towards them (Pettman, 1989; Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 2003).

The writings by women about their experiences have been considered a shameful act. Durrani (1995, p. 374) states that, 'our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets, but would not be silence be a greater crime?' She declares voicelessness of women a big crime. Being voiceless, women remain powerless. They are considered contented with their position and status. Till the mid 19th century, the women have been as were labeled by men. Some courageous ladies have raised voice against stereotypical identity of women. They have challenged the voicelessness enfolded the sentiments of women.

One of the many causes of voicelessness among women is incapability of language appropriateness. As the prevailing language is patriarchal, it is problematic to give vent to their feelings through the discourse of the dominant patriarchy (Smith, 1990; Woolf, 1998) as women have not been well-versed in this mode of expression. Millet (1977) opines that in order to be able to speak about something, one must be able to name and define it. Feminist writers and theorists recommend finding/redefining words capable of reflecting and recording women's experiences (Luke, 1994).

2.2 Silence and the Feminist Writers

In the present times, the feminist writers are challenging the prevailing voicelessness on the part of women to bring them to a reasonable position in the centre/andocentric milieu. They are painting the predicament of the wretched of the earth, women. Luke (1994) observes that the concept of voice as a means of empowerment for women has been a key element in feminist theory and practice since the beginning of the 'women's movement. Though Feminist movement/writings ensued in the Western countries, the female writers from postcolonial areas could not help being influenced by this wave. The writers from the subcontinent like Anita Desai (India), Sidhwa (Pakistan), Suleri (Pakistan), Roy (India), Nasrin (Bangladesh) and many others are giving voice to the experiences of women of the sub-continent.

It is unnatural for a courageous person to remain silent against the injustice and oppression on the fellow human beings. Sidhwa declares at the outset of the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* by quoting the translation of the poem of Iqbal Shikwah (Complaint) that she cannot help raising voice against unjust and humiliating treatment of women. She claims that she is not like a senseless object. She is a human being. She announces:

*Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear?
Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year?
The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me more to be faint.*

.....
(Sidhwa, 1989, p. 1)

3. Theme of Silence in Sidhwa's Works

The silence about the singling out and defilement of women prevailed in history as well as in literature before the inception of feminism writings. Among them a female writer from Pakistani origin, Sidhwa, also has tried to give voice to what has not been told of. Sidhwa has made the reader feel for the women victimized during partition and '... has placed upon the reader the weight of a forbidden story that is never meant to be told' (Bahri 1999, p. 228).

3.1 Historical Silence about the Experiences of Women

The theme of silence has run rampant in the novels of Sidhwa. She propagates the view that women remain silent in idyllic as well as tumultuous circumstances. The incident of partition reveals that silence and shame reside as a fate of women even after the trauma of partition. Molestation of women remains unaddressed. Historical narratives fail in capturing their plight. Their predicament has not been given proper space in the pages of history.

In an interview with Rajan (Monsoon Magazine¹², 2000) Sidhwa concedes the fact that little has been said about violation of women during partition. She counts a few books on partition — Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Kesavan's *looking through Glass* and Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*'. Sidhwa further says that the last two writers have focused on the historical perspective. She also mentions the compilation of interviews of the women who were abducted during the partition for research project by Menon in *The Other Side of Silence (1998)* which has been written after 41 years of the event.

For the description of the troubles during and after the partition women have no words to articulate what has happened to them because they cannot appropriate patriarchal language to express the mishaps. They are unable to say anything lest they should lose the vestige of identity/honour. They remain silent due to the shame inflicted on them by the discourse of the patriarchal society. This attitude exacerbated the situation.

The point worth-noting is that, in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Hamida's plight is told through Godmother. Ayah's quandary is also brought to the surface through Godmother and the cousin of Lenny. Ayah requests Godmother to liberate her from her so-called husband. The Godmother asks if Ice-candy-man mistreats her. She replies in two sentences, 'Not now.....But I cannot forget what happened' (1989, p. 261). She cannot narrate what happened to her like many wretched victims of the partition. The narrator of Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Lenny, narrates the cataclysm of Ayah; 'I heard she's converted into a dancing girl' (1989, p. 243). It is mere a hearsay. So it is tri-remote from reality. Godmother guesses from Ice-candy-man's remarks; 'he has christened our Ayah Mumtaz' (ibid, p. 260).

The few sentences spoken by Ayah to persuade Godmother for her emancipation are: 'I want to go to my family' (ibid, p. 261). And then she says, 'I will not live with him. I'm past that, I'm not alive' (ibid, p. 261). This heart wrenching version of Ayah steers the reader's mind to reach a conclusion what has happened to her while she/he ponders over it keeping in view the lustful nature of the male and that how women are bound to remain silent. The few utterances about her singling out, disgrace and dehumanization depict that literature and history are silent in representing the abducted women's angsts during the turmoil of the subcontinent.

Butalia (2006, p. 200) has interviewed the women who were abducted during the partition. She avers that they lacked words and the interviewee would say, 'I have no words' and they tried to

¹²http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html

cry'. She observes that when she is conducting interviews of the women victimized during partisan violence for her research the words would fall short suddenly: 'Memory encountered something painful' (ibid). The interviewee would say, 'how can I describe this'? There are no words to do so' (ibid). Butalia (2006) says that shame would lock their faculty of articulation and in this way the telling remains incomplete as she is unable to force them to speak in such a situation. It is literal silence when a person is unable to find the appropriate words and bring to surface the real accounts after the catastrophe. One is left to mere supposition and speculations. The sufferings of Ayah are conveyed to the reader through other person/s as even the writer, Sidhwa, lacks appropriate vocabulary.

An indirect approach to represent women's molestation during the sectarian violence is evident in the Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1990) - a translation from Bengali to English by Chatterjee as *The River Churning* (1995). This novel is about a young girl Sutara, orphaned during sectarian violence of the partition. After her parents' death by the mobs, she is taken away by her Muslim neighbours. They care for Sutara and manage to return her to her family in Calcutta but she is rejected by her family. There is similarity in the recovery and repercussions of Sutara and Hamida who have been recovered legitimately being Hindu and Muslim women as the property of a standardized religious masculine citizen subject. Their rejection is due to andocentric assumptions imposed on women that they have been touched by the opposite religion. The concept of honour associated with to women's sanctity makes them refugees in their own home land.

In Sutara's case, there is no conclusive evidence whether she were sexually assaulted or not when there is attack on her house. She cannot even recall the events of the attack. She remembers that she falls into the pound and then becomes unconscious. She feels feverish and aching all over in the following days. It is evident that patriarchal assumptions are powerful enough to assume that she like Hamida has been sexually assaulted and raped by the mobs. Her brother Sanat laments at the death of his parents only and neglects Sutara; 'his letter displayed no particular anxiety towards her' (Chatterjee, 1995, p. 16).

When she comes back to her family, her brother's mother-in-law forbids her to touch her feet saying, 'No, no, don't touch me now. You have not changed your clothes' (ibid, p. 31). She condemns her because her clothes are touched by the Muslims, and her virginity is not pure. Now the question arises what her fault is. Would the same society impose any restriction like this on those who touched the Muslim women during partition? Why is sanctity only for women? But this question has been unanswered. Kidnapped women like Sutara, Ayah and Hamida have been/ are being discarded without any justification.

3.2. Silence in Connubial Matters

Sidhwa has pointed out that silence on the part of women prevails in domestic, social and matrimonial life as well. Women remain voiceless throughout their life. They are taught in their early age that their survival lies only in the success of their nuptial life. Girls are taught particularly to remain silent in the homes of in-laws. For example, in *Water*, when Chuyia demands fish, she encounters her mother's justification; her mother reprimands her that she would bring shame for the parents if she speaks in the same manner to her in-laws.

Any encounter in the house of the lord husband can break the nuptial bonds. The breakage of marriage reflects deficiency and failure of the woman. Durrani (1995, p. 29) says that she and her sisters were 'taught that marriage is a sacred and irrevocable institution'. It is a common notion in the subcontinent. So women spend their whole energy in winning this goal. Durrani says that girls are advised by the parents that if the husband turns out to be a brute, it is duty of the wife to preserve her marriage until she changes his mind. Women bear battering and privations to make the marital life successful. In the description of Lenny's mother it is evident that her husband bruises her body when she tries to check him from going to another woman. Though she is a powerful and liberal character yet she is battered by her better half. She does not raise a voice against it. She endures it to avoid cracks in her marital bond.

Durrani (1995) also endures the inflictions and battering of her husband Khar to save her nuptial bonds from breaking. She feels ashamed for what she has done to come close to him. So she is bound to remain silent to avoid disgrace of being called a divorcee once again. She writes, 'the humiliation of not being able to keep my husband happy and of falling short of my mother's definition of the ideal wife is becoming more frightening than the beating' (p. 131). She is advised by her mother that if a husband treats his wife in a strange or unreasonable manner, she should treat him like a sick human being who needs medical care. So she has to tolerate Khar in all the ways. She has to remain silent to hide the sexual advances of Khar towards her younger sister Adila as well. She fears that if her parents get a wind of the illicit liaison, they would brand her as a bad influence on their family and keep her apart. In the course of story the reader can infer that silence on the part of Durrani causes the breakage of marriage. If she had nipped the evil in the bud she would have saved her nuptial life.

Sidhwa points out that woman accept every order of the superior (male) docilely. From education to marriage all the matters concerning women are decided by men. A woman who does not create any fuss is considered chaste and well-mannered. But if she ever raises a voice she is either killed or made silent in the light of normalized social and religious teachings.

In *The bride* when Zaitoon is perturbed to see the miserable ways of the living of the tribesmen, she dares suggest her father not to marry her to a tribesman as she is from the Punjab and alien to the customs of the Kohistanis traditions. Upon her humble request Qasim, 'groped for her and his hand closed round her throat (2006a, p. 329). His tone becomes icily decisive and he asserts, 'you break my words, girl, and you cover my name with dung! Do you understand that? Do you?' (ibid). Zaitoon withdraws her claim and lies quite still, 'Yes, she croaked, her will utterly defeated' (ibid). This incident explains the condition of women how they are treated and married against their will for the honour of men or family like dumb creature or for coveting money and how they are forced to obey the decisions of the male members.

Women are forced to marry in exchange of money or sometimes for social status of men. Afshan, the wife of Zaitoon's father Qasim, is married to him when he is yet a minor. Afshan is a fully bloomed woman when she is sold to a man Arbab like a commodity for a bad debt of her father. He offers the gift to his son, Qasim, who is just ten. Afshan is quite amazed to see her so-called husband in the form of a child and, '. . . tears of disappointment rolled down her cheeks' (ibid, p.

217). She does not protest against this injustice but accepts it as her lot cheerfully. She remains silent and endures everything patiently during the while Qasim grows into a man.

In *Water* (2006b) Chuyia's marriage is decided by her father when she is just six. His wife Bhagya, on raising objection, is gagged for uttering blasphemy to her husband. Somnath, the father of Chuyia, gives his consent to the mother of Hira Lal who is 44 years old in contrast to Chuyia who is six. Chuyia's father does not feel it necessary to consult his wife. Even the mother is not allowed to have a glimpse of the proposed husband of her daughter as the money was involved. The life and matrimonial bliss of the daughter is irrelevant. He accedes to this marriage due to the social status and affluence of Hira Lal.

Somnath argues with her wife that a woman is recognized as a person only when she is with her husband (Sidhwa, 2006b). Only then she can be an auspicious and fortunate woman. Moreover he cites from the holy book of his religion to make his wife speechless. He tells her that the whole life of a woman is a conflict between her lustful aspect and her womanly duty (ibid). He avers that 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!' (ibid, p. 8-9).

In *The Bride*, Miriam opposes Qasim's decision about Zaitoon's marriage with Sakhi but verbally. She pleads that the hill men are barbarous and Zaitoon is unfamiliar to their ways and civilization. But Qasim insists that he has given his words. Miriam tells him that his claim of giving word and his view of honour has nothing to do with the life of the child: 'what have your words to do with the child's life (ibid, p. 280). But instead of reconsidering the matter he stiffens and says stubbornly, 'I have given my words! I know Zaitoon will be happy. The matter should end now' (ibid, p. 281). He is not ready to hear a single word against his decision. His words are more valuable than the life of an orphan girl. Another notable point is that although Miriam has played a big role in the upbringing of Zaitoon yet Qasim is her sole owner. The honour of his words is that he has sold Zaitoon for 'five hundred rupees- some measly maize and a few goats' (ibid, p. 286). He is selling her like a merchant. Nikkah finishes the discussion that the girl should be consulted. He says that Zaitoon is daughter of Qasim. Miriam pleads and argues with Zaitoon that she should refute her father's decision. She tries to feed her fascination that they would marry her to a decent Punjabi man. But Zaitoon remains silent. She simply says that she cannot cross her father.

Sidhwa depicts that in most of the affairs regarding marriage the girls stay silent due to either shame or submission to patriarchal notions. They are trained to be shy and silent in the matters concerning their marriage. Sidhwa demystifies the prevailing notions and suggests that women should challenge the patriarchal assumptions practically instead of mere arguments as Miriam¹³ or Bhagya did. They should have taken action instead of mere pleadings because silence in the matrimonial affairs leads to quandary as it happens in the case of Zaitoon or Chuyia.

¹³Miriam is the wife of Nikkah who is a sincere friend and well-wisher of Qasim. Zaitoon grew at her home. She reared her like her daughter.

Widows like Madhumati, Kalyani and Chuyia in *Water* have been married in their girlhood but they become widows before their husbands touch them. Their stories and their sufferings reflect the prevailing silence: how much they are deprived and ill-treated in guise of Suttee.

As the story of the novel is unfolded it comes to the surface that the suttee is a ritual not a religious obligation. It has an economic backdrop. As a character Narayan observes the reality: 'one less mouth to feed, four saris, one bed to let— somewhere a corner saved for another widow. There is other reason. Disguised as religion, it's just about money' (ibid, p. 181). The bitter reality is that even women are abiding by this cruel tradition because the effects of this tradition are too strong. Women are misbehaving and violating women.

Madhumati, the administrator of the ashram, is also a victim of the indifferent patriarchy. She informs another widow that she is married to an old bastard who instead of coming onto her ' . . . went straight to heaven! Bastard! Pleasing himself in heaven . . . And me, stuck in this hell' (ibid, p. 70). She is brought up like a queen and brings a large dowry to her in-laws. But after her husband's death she is forsaken by her in-laws. When she demands her share from the ancestral inheritance which she could live off, her mother-in-law ordered her two sons to give her due share who humiliate her, rape her for a week and throw her in the jungle twenty miles away from the house dying of starvation. Gulabi says that when they found her, 'they spotted the shorn creature, covered in blood and half dead in starvation, lying in a ditch on the edge of the forest (ibid). She is barely fourteen when she is brought to ashram, and, then, fetched to the clients.

Kalyani's mother, a poor fellow, dies when she is just one. She is the youngest of her siblings. Her dazzling beauty attracted men in the area. She is married to the highest bidder at the age of six. Kalyani is allowed to remain with her parents till she gains puberty. But her so-called old husband dies and she is brought to the Ghats and turned into a widow. Later on Madhumati permits her to grow hair and then she begins to use Kalyani for prostitution to earn money to run the ashram.

The pathetic stories of Bua and Shakuntala reflect the prevailing silence. Bua, from a family of landowners, becomes widow at thirty-five. She joins the ashram as her brothers also refuse to give her share because her karma had 'eaten up' her husband. She is estranged from her two young sons who have forgotten the love of their mother. Her family despises her as, then, she sits in the street with a bowl in her hands. But it is worth considering who made her a beggar; if it is the fault of Bua. Patriarchy remains dumb in such matters and enjoys its wont.

Shakuntala also suffers the same indictment. Though her husband loves her most but she is despised for being infertile. She has all the facilities at home which other girls are denied. But after her husband's departure she is target of the disdain of her in-laws. At last she is forced to lead her remaining life in misery imprisoned in the ashram. Her brothers have given her due share. That's why she has got a reasonable place in the ashram.

3.3 Silence due to Religion

Sidhwa highlights that women have been exploited in the name of religion. Men do not lead their lives according to the teachings of the religion but they delimit the life of women in the name of religion. Women remain silent to gain eternal salvation in the heaven. For example, in *The Colour Purple* by Walker Celie is victim of the sexual and physical oppression of her so-called father and

the husband. Her husband beats her daily as if she is a child. Her Sister Nettie advises her, 'you ought to bash Mr. _____ head open, she say' and that, 'Think about heaven later' (Walker, 2004, p. 40). Celie refuses to do so lest she should suffer from the wrath of God and says: '. . . Honor father and mother no matter what . . . this life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways . . . (ibid).

In *Water* the objection of Bhagya to the decision of Somnath about Chuyia's marriage becomes invalid when Somnath cites the duties of women from the holy book. She has to surrender before the arguments of her husband from the holy book as she could not say against the scripture. But Somnath does not think of his own folly; if it is in accordance with the teachings of the holy book or against it; is it reasonable to a marry girl who is not yet mature enough. Bhagya surrenders to the will of her husband.

Silence on the part of Bhagya is disabling. Considering it her religious duty, she becomes an ally of her husband in engendering the distress and quandary of Chuyia through marriage. She starts preparing Chuyia's mind through the fanciful dreams of marriage. After marriage Chuyia remains with her parents. A few months later Lal dies of typhoid. It is a myth in the Hindu religion that husband's death is a consequence of the women's sinful existence in the past.

Chuyia is transformed into a widow without relishing the bliss of connubial relations. Her head is shorn and is forced to wear unstitched white Sari. Cooked, sweet or roasted food becomes proscribed for her. She is forced to live in an ashram on the bank of the river Ganges¹⁴. Everything happens smoothly. There is no objection or protest against the unjust cruel treatment of Chuyia. Only her mother laments at her daughter's impending calamity but she is helpless before the religious commandments.

The women in *Water* remain silent and accept the patriarchal normalized tradition and canons as a religious duty. It is Chuyia who thrills a new spirit in the ashram. Kalyani is ready to remarry. Even Shakuntala, who had never questioned the norms, revolts against the ritual of suttee. Earlier she told Chuyia that even imagining of marriage by a widow is a sin. She believed that 'widowhood is a punishment for a sinful existence of the past' (ibid, p.146). But Kalyani's plight shakes her faith. She realizes it is right of Kalyani that she should marry. She snatches keys from Madhumati and unlocks Kalyani. She allows her to go and meet Narayan.

Shakuntala ensues questioning the authority of the scriptures. She questions the priest if ill treatment of widows is in accordance with the scriptural teachings. She asks: 'I have great respect for your learning. . . Pandit-ji, is it written that widows should be treated badly?' (ibid, p. 157). When he tells that a law in favour of widows has been passed, she is quite disgusted with Madhumati. She protests that the widows should have been informed about that law. But those laws are ignored which do not suit the interests of the powerful.

Even the teachings of Gandhi that widows are strangers to sex and no one should be stranger to sex were ignored. He argued that widows should not be confined to the boundaries of ashrams

¹⁴Ganges is a sacred place in Hindu mythology. They burn the corpses of the dead there and believe that it causes the salvation of the soul of the dead. The widow is left the salvation of husband's soul through austerity and seclusion from the worldly bliss.

rather they should be allowed to live as useful members of the society. He also preached that the widows should re-marry.

The British government passed a law in 1938 for abolishing the rite of suttee (ibid) but the Hindu fundamentalists were not ready to abide by this law and they neglected it. Through these descriptions it can be inferred that women have no value without husband in Hindu community. They are born for men and after their death they are valueless just like a scrap lying in the dung heap. When Chuyia appears before Madhumati for the first time in the ashram, Madhumati informs her, 'a wife is part of her husband while he's alive'... And when our husbands die, God help us, the wives also half die' (ibid, p. 42). She further says that a woman who is half dead cannot feel any pain. So a woman's only useful role is to produce sons for the husband. Without this role she is considered valueless and useless. Fertility is a complementary characteristic of women. Shakuntala is despised by her mother-in-law for her infertility. '. . . Each month Shakuntala is disappointed to see the depressing evidence of her failed fertility. She desperately longed for a child' (Sidhwa, 2006b). She is discarded after the death of her husband. In *The Bride* Marrium is constantly worried about her infertility. She has the apprehension that Nikkah Pehlwan would leave her and remarry. In spite of the assurances of Nikkah she is fearful of her future as she is unable to fulfill the required function of a woman. Nikkah tells Qasim, 'I know she cries her eyes out thinking I will get myself another wife' (Sidhwa, 2006a).

The position of widows in *Water* reveals that after the death of their husbands their role is gone. They are not only accused of the death of the husband but also viewed as a threat to the husband's family as it is perceived that she has polluted the spirit of her husband simply because of her vital womanhood and potential sexuality (Sidhwa, 2006b).

Sex is prohibited for a widow. She is given the food which helps to make her asexual. But the reader can see the irony that Kalyani is sent for prostitution to earn money to run the ashram. When Kalyani is going to marry Narayan and her wedding is disclosed, the reaction of Madhumati is very severe. She dishevels her hair, locks her in the room and bans her going out. She argues that sex is prohibited and if she marries she will pollute the whole ashram. She states, 'shameless! You'll sink yourself and us! We'll be cursed. We must live in purity, to die in purity' . . . (ibid, p. 144). Here the encountering reply of Kalyani is quite touching and a severe criticism on the tradition. She asks if sex pollutes why she sends her 'across the river' (ibid). She gives vent to her sentiments. Through this dialogue Sidhwa points out the duality and hypocrisy prevailing in the Hindu patriarchy. On one hand, sex is prohibited for a widow and she is provided with a food that may make her asexual; on the other hand, young widows are sent to the Seths and the rich persons for prostitution. In this case sex of the widow is not a curse.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that women endure atrocities of the patriarchy silently and patiently as a commandment as they are trained in their childhood like Lenny, Ayah, Kalyani, Rana's sisters and Chuyia. They never dare challenge that societal norms lest they should fall short of the standard of acceptability as it is evident in the case of Shankuntla, Hamida, Ayah and Madhumati who seek salvation in submission to the andocentric norms. The concepts like honor, shame, womanhood, religious duty and salvation are the major factors which make women voiceless. Sidhwa has

attempted to give awareness, as she declares her intention in the epigraph of *Ice-Candy Man* (1987) that silence on the part of women is a hindrance in getting their identity as a human being. Sidhwa propagates that women must raise voice against the marginalization and exploitation instead of saying, 'I'm past that, I'm not alive'' (c.f. 3.1) as silence condones injustice (c.f. 1.1). She also preaches that women would undergo subservience to andocentrism unless they raise voice against it.

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