

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER DYNAMICS IN "ICE CANDY MAN" BY BAPSI SIDHWA

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ABSTRACT

Ice Candy Man, a seminal work of literature authored by Bapsi Sidhwa, offers a rich narrative exploring themes of identity, gender, and power dynamics in a patriarchal society. Through the close reading of the novel, the current research paper examines the oppression and subjugation of women in such a social set up using Simon de Beauvoir's (1988) feminist theoretical perspective. By foregrounding the voices and experiences of women, Sidhwa exposes the role of male dominance and highlights the struggle of women in escaping their submissive roles. Underscoring the impact of women's silence on her exploitation, She implores women to become aware of their oppression to resist it. The study reveals that Sidhwa makes an audacious attempt to empower women to break free them from their domestic confines, advocating that women must voice their resistance to avoid lifelong suppression.

KEYWORDS: *Feminist Theoretical Perspective.*

INTRODUCTION

Society acts as the primary programmer of attitudes across all levels of human life. It shapes, cultivates, and sustains the mentality of both men and women (Beauvoir, 1988; Bourdieu, 1977). Society has established a gendered mind-set that defines men as dominant, powerful, and superior, positioning them as the owners and controllers of women. In contrast, women are perceived as submissive, inferior, passive, weak, and as the property of men (Babur, 2007; Verma, 2013). These gender-specific social attitudes are deeply ingrained in society's programming. This continuous reinforcement has fostered a superiority complex and a sense of dominance in men, subjecting women to various forms of oppression, including domestic violence and the denial of their social, economic, and political rights (Dar, 2013; Habib, 2013; Ehsan, et al., 2015). In "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir (1988) asserts that society equates masculinity with superiority and femininity with inferiority. Women are marginalized and forced to adhere to male-constructed moral and ethical standards, which are imposed to maintain male superiority. Beauvoir argues that in a patriarchal society, women are considered objects, with their oppression hidden behind the guise of domesticity and marriage. Patriarchal society enforces double standards to oppress women. Additionally, women's silence perpetuates further oppression and exploitation. Beauvoir emphasizes that women's awareness and realization are crucial for resisting their oppression. This study uses Beauvoir's ideas to analyze Bapsi Sidhwa's novel "Ice Candy Man" from a feminist perspective.

ROOTS OF PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy can be understood as a societal system characterized by male privilege, dominance, identification, and centrality. In a patriarchal society, men maintain control through various means, including force, coercion, norms, customs,

laws, language, etiquette, education, and the division of labor. This system dictates the roles women can or cannot play, effectively subordinating women to men in all aspects of life (Bennett, p. 55).

Tracing the history of patriarchy, Engels (2008) notes that early societies were matriarchal, where women played a central role in cultivating land and producing food for their families. As the primary food producers and breeders, women held significant recognition and esteem within the social order. They were self-sufficient and formed relationships with men on their own terms. Women controlled property, and descent was traced through the female line.

Over time, as men learned agricultural techniques, the power dynamics in agriculture shifted from women to men. Consequently, women's social harmony and power were diminished. Their status worsened further when they were enslaved and reduced to mere instruments for childbearing. Men became the controllers of property, and inheritance began to be traced through the paternal line instead of the maternal line. This transition marked the end of the matriarchal system and the rise of the patriarchal system. Engels describes this shift as the "world-historic defeat of the female sex" (Engels, 2008, p. 67). Thus, society became patriarchal, granting absolute power to men.

Further, the institution of monogamy stripped women of any rights of their own and, over time, internalized the self-destructive values imposed upon them by patriarchal ideology.

RISE OF FEMINISM

Revolting against the patriarchal mindset and societal programming, many writers have raised their voices in opposition. Among the various movements initiated by the oppressed throughout different periods in human history, one notable movement is 'Feminism' (Walker, 1990; 1992). Feminism is a social, intellectual, and political movement that acknowledges women's oppression and advocates against it. Its goal is to liberate women from oppression, inequality, and patriarchal attitudes (Dar, 2013). Consequently, it strives to establish equal political, economic, and social rights for women, free from gender bias.

Scholars and feminists such as Chafetz and Dworkin (1986); and Walker (1992) have divided the feminist movement into three waves. First-wave feminism, spanning from 1848 to the 1920s, primarily advocated that women should be recognized as human beings and not treated as property. Second-wave feminism, lasting from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, focused on achieving total gender equality in social, political, economic, and legal spheres. Third-wave feminism, which began in the 1990s and continues today, seeks to address the issues and challenges faced by women in various societies and fields, beyond the predominantly white, middle-class concerns of the first two waves.

Different feminists have persistently sought to elucidate the origins and causes of women's oppression. Some feminists, like Marx (2009), Engels (2008), and Beauvoir (1988), argue that the institution of monogamy and the nuclear family system, where men hold dominant positions, are the root causes of women's oppression and exploitation. They assert that women's oppression emerged at a specific stage of social development and was institutionalized through a particular form of the patriarchal family. Moreover, they emphasize that women's oppression is social rather than biologically imposed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Ice Candy Man" has been extensively discussed and analyzed from various perspectives, provoking numerous questions across different research paradigms including political, social, religious, psychological, postcolonial, and feminist viewpoints. This novel delves into nearly every facet of human life. Researchers have employed various critical theories to explore its themes. Below is a summary of some notable studies on the novel.

Hai (2000), in her study "Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*," examines the novel from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Drawing on theorists such as Bhabha and Spivak, Hai analyzes the oppression of women, particularly focusing on Ayah, a maid in "Ice Candy Man." She posits that Ayah is a representative figure of female violation, objectified by men to satisfy their carnal desires and used as a pawn in racial conflicts (p. 390). Men are depicted as agents of violence, while women are portrayed as victims confined within domestic boundaries.

Gida (2006) offers a more recent feminist study with a comparative analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa and Namita Gokhale. She contrasts the portrayal of female oppression by both authors. Gida discusses Sidhwa's depiction of the 'woman-as-victim' paradigm, noting that all the victimized women in Sidhwa's narrative strive to resist rigid customs but are ultimately constrained by patriarchal dominance. According to Gida, these women "try to fight the rigid customs but are restricted by the patriarchal dominance. They don't have a significant role to play. Cultural impact is observed to an extent" (p. 64). However, Gida points out that the novel ends on an optimistic note, a characteristic of Sidhwa's writing that transforms macabre situations into hopeful ones.

Ahmed (2009) focuses on the postcolonial feminist perspective, analyzing how postcolonial women are doubly marginalized. Ahmed discusses Ayah as not just a singular victim of the partition but a representative of thousands of Hindu, Muslim, and other minority women who were raped, killed, or mutilated due to the repercussions of British imperialism. He highlights the courage and determination of these women, who manage to survive despite such traumatic experiences.

These studies illustrate the multifaceted analysis of "Ice Candy Man," revealing its complex portrayal of gender, identity, and socio-political dynamics within the context of colonial and postcolonial India.

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Kleist (2011), in her study "More than Victim: Versions of Feminine Power in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*," examines the novel from a feminist perspective, focusing on women's familial and communal connections to effect change and bring healing. Kleist argues that Sidhwa's women are not solely victims but possess distinct power and agency. For instance, Lenny exhibits narrative agency, although her moments of agency largely occur before the Partition. Similarly, Ayah enjoys influence over the male community before Partition, primarily based on her physical appeal, allowing Sidhwa to comment on the temporal and limited nature of sexual power and physical attraction (p. 69-70).

Waghmode (2011), in the study "Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*: A Feminist Artifact," emphasizes the dynamics

of human experiences, particularly the man-woman relationship in the novel. Waghmode believes there is poetic justice in the characters' lives, where corrupt and short-sighted individuals are defeated, and virtuous women are triumphant. Sidhwa is praised for depicting a powerful world of female characters, placing men and women side by side. Waghmode asserts that Sidhwa demonstrates that women are not inferior to men and, given the chance, can prove themselves as capable, if not more so, than men (p. 03).

Dar (2013), in his study "Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Feminist Perspective," highlights the plight and exploitation of women in a patriarchal society, contrasting it with male discourse. Dar exposes how men establish their masculine power and fulfill their desires by assaulting women, who endure the resulting pain and humiliation. He praises Sidhwa for empowering women like Lenny, her mother, and godmother, portraying them not only as victims but also as saviors who perform heroic duties to restore order in a disordered world.

Parmar (2015), in the study "Feminine Aspects in Bapsi Sidhwa's The Ice-Candy-Man," examines the novel within the socio-political environment of the Partition, focusing on its impact on women. Parmar highlights Sidhwa's cause for women and her strong voice against patriarchy during the turbulent times of Partition.

RESEARCH FOCUS

The present study adopts a qualitative approach by utilizing the close reading method to analyze the proposed novel. Close reading is deemed suitable for gaining a deep understanding of textual material (Cuddon, 1999). Through this method, the meaning of a text is elucidated by closely examining its specific tone, language, characters, symbols, and the novelist's point of view. The text of the novel is scrutinized to identify, measure, describe, and infer specified characteristics inherent within or reflected by the written text (Lenz, 2010, p. 279).

Building on these perspectives and considering women's plight alongside Sidhwa's efforts to reveal women's power, this research explores "Ice Candy Man" through a feminist lens based on Simone de Beauvoir's (1988) theoretical framework. This analysis follows de Beauvoir's four ideals:

- In a patriarchal society, women are considered objects, and their oppression is veiled in the name of domesticity and marriage.
- Patriarchal society establishes double standards for men and women to oppress women.
- Women's silence invites further oppression and encourages their exploitation.
- Women's realization of their condition is essential for resisting their oppression.

Using these principles, the present research delves into Sidhwa's depiction of women's roles and resistance within the patriarchal structures portrayed in "Ice Candy Man."

Story Line of the Novel

The novel unfolds against the backdrop of the pre- and post-Partition scenario, depicting the oppression and victimization of women in various contexts. Women face persecution both within and outside the confines of their homes, with conflicts often resulting in women becoming the immediate casualties. The Partition of the subcontinent exacerbates these miseries, subjecting women to a series of brutalities.

The story of the novel is presented through the eyes of an eight-year-old Parsee girl named Lenny from Lahore, Pakistan. Lenny, the protagonist, provides a detailed and insightful portrayal of women during the partition. She is cared for by her Hindu Ayah (Shanta), who is the center of attention for men from various occupations and religions. Among her suitors, Ice Candy Man (Dilnawaz) and Masseur (Hassan) are the most serious.

During the partition, heinous and terrible violence erupts. PirPindo, a Muslim-majority village, is attacked by Sikhs, and the women are dragged away, raped, and brutally killed. A train from Gurdaspur arrives in Lahore filled with mutilated bodies of Muslim men, containing no women but two sacks full of breasts. This horrifying sight incites fury among the Muslims, especially Ice Candy Man, whose sister was on that train. Driven by a desire for revenge, he smothers his love for Ayah, abducts her from Lenny's house, and takes her to a brothel where she is dragged, defiled, gang-raped, and forced into prostitution. Although Ice Candy Man later marries her, Ayah loses her spirit and trust in her close relationships. She is eventually rescued with the help of Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi, and her Godmother, Rudabai.

Following Ayah's abduction, Mr. Sethi brings another ayah, Hamida, to care for Lenny. Hamida, another victim of the partition, lives in a Rehabilitation Camp because she was dishonored during the riots and is now unacceptable to her husband. Mrs. Sethi and Godmother play pivotal roles in rescuing and aiding partition.

Throughout the narrative, women such as Ayah, Hamida, the women in PirPindo Village, the fallen women in the rehabilitation camp, and the victims of the Gurdaspur train endure defilement, abduction, rape, and molestation. Sidhwa portrays a spectrum of oppression faced by women, stemming from the customs and rites entrenched in patriarchal society.

Woman as a Machine of Reproduction

Patriarchal society has established customs, traditions, rites, and norms that serve to marginalize and subdue women, reducing them to objects for men's use (Beauvoir, 1988; Shree, 2002; Babur, 2007; Noor, 2013; Habib, 2013; Ehsan et al., 2015). This theme is vividly depicted in the novel, illustrating how women are confined to domestic roles and treated as mere objects, often denied their humanity.

Mr. Sethi, Lenny's father, epitomizes this attitude by viewing his wife as an object that exists solely to serve him. He treats her as if she were a machine, expecting her to fulfill his every need and obey his commands without question. Mrs. Sethi dutifully assumes the role of an obedient wife, massaging his feet upon his return home and attending to his every comfort. Remarkably, Mr. Sethi rarely engages in direct conversation with his wife, prompting astonishment from Lenny when he addresses her directly for the first time, rather than conversing with the inanimate objects in the room (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 237). This interaction highlights the dehumanizing treatment of women within patriarchal structures, where they are relegated to the status of objects rather than equal partners in marriage.

In the patriarchal society depicted in the novel, women are viewed primarily as machines for conceiving and delivering the next generation, regardless of their health or personal preferences. This is exemplified when Ice Candy Man (Dilnawaz) assumes the role of "Allah's telephone man," and a woman approaches him with her four daughters. Despite her frail and weakened state of health, she pleads with Ice Candy Man to intercede with Allah for a son (p. 98-99). This poignant scene underscores the desperation of women trapped within patriarchal norms, where even after bearing four daughters, they are compelled to seek validation and hope for a son.

In this societal order, a woman's identity is inexorably tied to her relationship with a man. She is defined solely in

relation to him, lacking an independent identity. Women are seen as objects in relation to men, always measured against male standards. Any deviation from the perceived traits of rationality, strength, protectiveness, and decisiveness is deemed unwomanly, reinforcing the entrenched gender hierarchy within patriarchal structures.

Women as guardians of Chastity and Honour

Chastity and honor are often depicted as ornaments of womanhood, with women expected to protect them at all costs, even at the expense of their lives. In the novel, when there is a threat of attack by Sikhs in PirPindo village, the men of the village order their women and girls to gather at Chaudry's house, douse themselves in kerosene, and set themselves on fire rather than face exploitation by the Sikhs (p. 208). This harrowing scene illustrates how a woman's life and chastity are viewed as objects to be controlled and manipulated by men.

In the eyes of patriarchal society, a woman's worth is often contingent upon her chastity. Any compromise to her chastity is seen as a stain on her honor, rendering her virtually worthless in the eyes of society. Women are conditioned to believe that if they are touched, willingly or unwillingly, by someone other than their husbands, they lose their right to exist in society. Thus, the women of PirPindo village are ordered to sacrifice their lives in order to preserve their honor, highlighting the extreme measures women are expected to take to safeguard their chastity in a patriarchal society.

Household Boundaries: The Silent Chains

The narrative vividly portrays the societal trend of grooming girls for domestic roles from a very young age. Even girls as young as Khatija and Parveen, who are only slightly older than Lenny, are burdened with heavy domestic responsibilities that far exceed their tender years. They mimic the mannerisms and behaviors of their mothers and aunts, busying themselves with chores and carrying baskets of grain, thus embodying the emblematic image of women desired in patriarchal society (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 53). This upbringing reflects Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman."

In Beauvoir's view, marriage is portrayed as a thinly veiled form of oppression and slavery of women, wherein men assert dominance and strip women of their individuality, relegating them to a subordinate position. Similar to the perspectives of Beauvoir and Friedan, Sidhwa highlights the plight of women ensnared in the bonds of marriage. She exposes the oppression women face under the guise of marriage, where men, such as Mr. Sethi, Ice Candy Man, and Hamida's husband, treat their wives as inferior beings. Lenny recounts the distressing scenes of her parents' nightly battles, with her mother reduced to tears while her father's harsh words remain indecipherable (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 222). Hamida, a victim of Partition violence, is rejected by her husband because he cannot bear the thought of another man touching her (p. 225). Meanwhile, Ayah is left desolate and broken, having been defiled and forced into prostitution by her husband, Ice Candy Man. Additionally, Papoo, a mere child who still plays with dolls, is married off at the tender age of nine to a middle-aged man. These instances corroborate Beauvoir's assertion that marriage is a form of enslavement, wherein "the woman is the husband's prey, his possession" (1988, p. 184). Marriage confines women within the domestic sphere, rendering them dependent on men and diminishing their chances of achieving true freedom.

Reinforcing Patriarchal Ideals

Sidhwa's narrative effectively illustrates patriarchal thinking, aligning with Beauvoir's (1988) perspective, by demonstrating how even educated men perpetuate women's subordinate status. For example, a doctor named Col. Brucha

advises Lenny's parents that she will be suitable for marriage and childbearing after her polio-affected foot is treated. He dismisses any further concern for her well-being, reassuring them that she will be able to walk well enough to fulfill her societal roles. He rationalizes this by asserting that she will lead a carefree and happy life by marrying and having children (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 15).

Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, the ideal wife internalizes her husband's oppression and subjugates her identity to his. This is evident in an interaction between Lenny and Hamida. When Lenny asks why Hamida is not visiting her family, Hamida responds that her husband disapproves of it. Despite being abducted and raped, Hamida's husband not only refuses to see her himself but also denies her access to their children, thereby preventing her from seeking solace with her own family (p. 232). This portrayal illustrates how women are expected to conform to their husbands' wishes and relinquish their autonomy, further perpetuating patriarchal power dynamics.

The Muted Voices of Women

The oppression and victimization of women begin with their silence. Women quietly endure the frustrations of patriarchy and serve the indifferent men in their lives. "Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience, and fosters a malignant hypocrisy" (Durrani, 1995, p. 374). Jaidhka (2004) similarly argues that women's silence is a barrier to recognizing their true identity as human beings. To challenge this silence, Sidhwa writes to empower women and reveal their strength. She criticizes women's silence and advocates breaking it to escape the constraints of a male-dominated society. Supporting Jaidhka's (2004) perspective, Sidhwa outlines three responses for women in her novels: finding an escape, submitting to dominant powers, or suffering. Sidhwa asserts that the fundamental cause of women's victimization is their silent acceptance of oppression. Women have internalized society's destructive values. This silence permeates their domestic, social, and marital lives. Women remain voiceless throughout their lives, taught from a young age to be silent before men, ultimately internalizing this silence as their destiny. The fallen women in the novel remain silent, accepting their dishonor as fate and not challenging their imposed conditions. Hamida labels these women as "poor fate smitten" (Sidhwa, 2005, p.213).

Sidhwa asserts that women must reject cruelty and stand up for themselves. Believing in women's emancipation, she argues that freedom will not be given to women; they must seize it. This will only be possible when women recognize their value in society and speak out against their victimization. Women need to raise their voices against the restrictions imposed on them. If they do not take this initiative, they will remain subservient to patriarchy. Therefore, the first step for women to unveil their power and combat oppression is to realize their own worth.

Self-Awareness on the part of woman

Sidhwa challenges the patriarchal and traditional definitions of womanhood by portraying unconventional female characters who reject the roles assigned to them by men. She highlights the importance of self-realization among women by depicting two types: those who recognize their value in society and those who do not. Women who understand their worth resist and oppose the entrenched anti-women attitudes of patriarchy, freeing themselves from the constraints of traditional femininity. Conversely, those who fail to realize their value remain oppressed and subjugated throughout their lives. By emphasizing women's self-awareness and assertive power, Sidhwa provides a comprehensive view of feminine roles. Her female characters, who acknowledge their position and stand against victimization, are discussed as follows.

Lenny Sethi: a feminine agent

Among the bold women in the novel who transform their lives, one is the protagonist, Lenny Sethi. She moves beyond traditional female roles with a keen awareness and perception of women's exploitation in a patriarchal system. Lenny deviates from conventional female roles, acting as a feminine agent who perceives victimization, observes women's miseries, and provides a womanly understanding of social institutions. From her childhood, she recognizes the unequal treatment of men. When a doctor advises her father not to worry about her schooling, she instinctively realizes that her freedom is being suppressed and that the doctor has sealed her fate (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 15). However, she resolves never to let anyone limit her freedom. Sidhwa presents Lenny as a resilient woman who defies oppression and questions every unjust attitude. Kleist (2011) notes that Lenny demonstrates increasing agency by consciously distancing herself from social norms. As she discovers the constructed systems that limit her freedom, she carefully chooses whether to conform to or diverge from these systems. For instance, she freely embraces her "manipulative power of limp" (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 56) and feels no shame about her physical condition.

In contrast to the patriarchal demand for women to remain silent, Lenny persistently questions the attitudes of men. When she inquires about various topics, her mother discourages her by saying, "when little girls ask too many questions their tongues drop off" (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 119). Similarly, Ayah advises her to "stop asking too many questions, men don't like so much talk" (p. 132). Despite these warnings, Lenny continues to question and challenge established meanings and attitudes. She refuses to internalize traditionally imposed norms, remaining assertive and determined to maintain control over her life. Through Lenny, Sidhwa highlights the assertive role of women and encourages them to recognize their position and stand against the autocracy of men.

Sidhwa asserts that women who stand up for themselves can never be defeated, and their resistance to patriarchal norms will lead to emancipation and the recognition of their "self." Through Lenny's inquisitive nature, Sidhwa emphasizes that a woman's awareness of her discourse and realization of her potential enable her to challenge women's oppression. This awareness and assertiveness are key to overcoming the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society.

Sidhwa conveys that it is essential for women to become aware of their oppression and victimization and to voice their opposition to the social order. This is exemplified through Lenny, who challenges male dominance, centrality, and exclusivity. In her interactions with her cousin, Lenny defies traditional feminine expectations of compliance and observance. Instead, she proves to be self-confident and exercises an unusual degree of control (Kleist, 2011). She does not capitulate or surrender to her cousin's wishes, using forthright and direct expression to reject his authority over her. Demonstrating her will, she pushes him back and holds him at arm's length (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 243). Lenny is portrayed as a bold, courageous, and strong girl who never yields but remains curious, lively, daring, and demanding as time progresses.

Mrs.Sethi: Recovering from Domestic Role

Following Lenny, Mrs.Sethi emerges as one of Sidhwa's strongest female characters, recognizing her own value and breaking free from her domestic role to challenge patriarchal social norms. She becomes a catalyst for change in the lives of victimized women, embodying Sidhwa's concept of the recovering woman as she steps out of the confines of domesticity and societal expectations. Initially perceived as a submissive wife, Mrs.Sethi transforms into a social activist, dedicating herself to rescuing fallen women and helping them reintegrate into society or find alternative support. She demonstrates extraordinary compassion and heroism, even risking her safety by smuggling gasoline for her friends to cross

the border safely (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 254). In her efforts to rescue these women, Mrs.Sethi transcends the traditional role of a housewife (Kleist, 2011).

Lenny notices a significant change in her mother, who becomes restless and secretive, no longer content to remain at home all day but instead appearing busy and preoccupied, darting in and out in her Morris car while her father toils away on his bicycle (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 182). This reflects Mrs.Sethi's newfound energy, efficiency, and dedication to her cause. By portraying Mrs.Sethi's active role, Sidhwa underscores the notion that women should not be confined to domestic duties alone but should instead pursue meaningful endeavors that utilize their abilities to the fullest. Mrs.Sethi embodies the heroic role of a woman leading a revolution against inequality, abuse, and social injustice, not only for herself but also for other marginalized groups in society (Sethi, 1999). Through Mrs.Sethi's actions, Sidhwa asserts that women should have a purpose in life beyond domesticity and should strive to make a positive impact in the world.

Godmother: A Powerful Woman

Godmother is a powerful and influential figure in the novel, with a profound understanding of women's victimization. She exerts a significant feminine influence on the women around her. Through Godmother's character, Sidhwa highlights the qualities of a woman who crosses social boundaries, explicitly challenges patriarchal norms and attitudes, and plays a crucial role in rescuing and supporting victimized women. Women who break free from the chains of patriarchal society and utilize their abilities become assertive, influential, and dignified, much like Godmother, who single-handedly confronts men's malicious intentions. She alleviates people's suffering, which is why they bring her their "joys and woes and show her their sores and swollen joints... she secures wishes, smoothes grief and prevents mistakes" (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 223). Godmother is an activist and a great helper to her friends. Lenny acknowledges her power, stating that "she can move mountains from the paths of those she befriends and erect mountain barriers where she deems it necessary." (p. 223) This illustrates Godmother's formidable influence and her ability to significantly impact the lives of those around her.

Godmother has the most notable feminine influence in the narrative. By opposing the traditional notion of women's passiveness, she proves that a woman can change individuals' circumstances and save them from life's miseries.

Fate-Smitten Women

To highlight the importance of self-realization for women, Sidhwa contrasts influential and empowered women with those who remain silent and suffer because they do not recognize their worth. Characters like Ayah, Hamida, Papoo, Khadija, Parveen, and the woman with four daughters exemplify this. Hamida never recovers from her victimization because she believes her disgrace is an unchangeable part of her fate, thinking that women are "poor fate smitten... There is nothing they can do. What can a sorrowing woman do but wail?" She blames her fate for her sufferings, saying, "it is my fate that is no good we are puppets in the hands of fate" (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 224).

Papoo, another character, is married off at an early age to an elderly man, accepting this unequal marriage as her father's will. The woman with four daughters remains oppressed by her husband because she has only daughters and no sons, having internalized the anti-woman norms and never resisting.

By portraying these characters, Sidhwa advocates that women who do not recognize their place in society and fail to raise their voices against subjugation not only remain perpetually oppressed but also perpetuate this cycle of oppression. To break the shackles of patriarchal dominance and oppression, it is crucial for women to recognize their "self" and speak

out against their oppression, which will ultimately empower them.

FINDINGS

Analyzing the novel from Beauvoir's feminist perspective reveals that Sidhwa empowers her female characters to rise above their subservient roles, as suggested by Beauvoir (1988). In a society created by men for men, women must struggle to survive and prove their strength. Sidhwa advises women to reject the patriarchal gender roles imposed on them (echoing Beauvoir's ideas) and demonstrates that women are not inherently inferior, weak, or submissive; rather, they are made to seem so (as Beauvoir asserted in 1988). She empowers characters like Lenny, Mrs. Sethi, and Godmother to advocate for women's assertive and influential roles, stressing that unless women speak up, they will remain oppressed and victimized throughout their lives.

This paper explores Sidhwa's efforts to highlight the struggles of women in the subcontinent, particularly during the partition. She frankly portrays the brutal reality that women were mercilessly crushed, raped, and killed during the chaos, solely because they were seen in relation to men. Sidhwa emphasizes the need for women's liberation from the constraints of traditional femininity, rejecting the notion that masculinity should be the standard against which women are measured.

Through a close reading of the text, the analysis shows that women's continued silence in the face of male dominance perpetuates their oppression, as exemplified by Hamida. Conversely, women who speak out and make decisions, like Lenny, her mother, and Godmother, are shown to be just as assertive and powerful as men. They are not mere objects but capable beings who reinforce the cause of women's empowerment.

Sidhwa emphasizes the need for women to recognize their own voices, aiming to give a voice to the voiceless and break the silence that keeps women shackled in a male-dominated society. She believes that women's silence is a significant barrier to achieving their true identity as human beings.

Unless women raise their voices, they will remain subservient to patriarchy. The novel demonstrates that women's victimization is not a matter of fate, as believed by characters like Hamida, the women in PirPindo village, and those in the Rehabilitation camp, but rather due to unequal treatment in a patriarchal society. Sidhwa asserts that even if it were a matter of fate, "we can change our fate, if we want to" (Sidhwa, 2005, p. 232).

CONCLUSION

This research examined the novel *Ice Candy Man* through the feminist lens of Beauvoir (1988), who asserts that in a patriarchal society, women are treated as mere objects, and their oppression is masked by concepts like domesticity and marriage. Patriarchal society enforces double standards to subjugate women, and this subjugation is intensified when women remain silent, inviting further oppression and exploitation. Thus, women must become aware of their oppression and resist it actively.

Drawing on Beauvoir's principles, this study analyzed how Sidhwa portrays women's awakening to their rights and societal value. Sidhwa encourages women to speak out against victimization and reject the patriarchal norms and traditions imposed upon them. She argues that women who internalize these norms and remain silent about their oppression will continue to be oppressed.

A close reading of the novel reveals Sidhwa's efforts to highlight the issues faced by women in the subcontinent, especially during times of conflict. She portrays the harsh reality that women are oppressed and marginalized in such societal setups, having no intrinsic value and being identified only in relation to men. By depicting these different facets of women's oppression, Sidhwa shows that women are often reduced to objects in the context of marriage and domesticity.

By featuring unconventional women like Lenny, her mother, and Godmother as protagonists, Sidhwa challenges the patriarchal definitions imposed on women. These protagonists are assertive, refusing to let others control their lives, and they consistently fight for their rights and question injustice. Through the depiction of these resilient and determined women, Sidhwa emphasizes the necessity of struggle in a woman's life to achieve freedom. She argues that freedom will not be granted easily; women must fight to attain it.

Sidhwa exposes the labels and stereotypes imposed on women and highlights the double standards of a society that oppresses women under various guises. She concludes that until women themselves raise their voices against oppression, they will remain suppressed. Women who reject patriarchal norms remain independent and empowered.

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