

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Subversive Conscience in Aphra Behn's *The Rover***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Sujan Acharya**

**University Campus**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**March, 2012I.**

**Subversive Conscience in Aphra Behn's *The Rover***

**– Sujan Acharya (March, 2012)**

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Subversive Conscience in Aphra Behn's *The Rover***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Sujan Acharya**

**University Campus**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**March, 2012**

**Tribhuvan University**  
**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Sujan Acharya has completed his thesis entitled “Subversive Conscience in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*” under my supervision. I hereby recommend this thesis for examination to the research committee as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in English.

---

Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha

Supervisor

Date: -----

**Tribhuvan University**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled "Subversive Conscience in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur by Sujan Acharya, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

Central Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

The present thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha, Lecturer of Central Department of English at Tribhuvan University for his invaluable scholarly guidance and encouragement throughout this research work.

I am grateful to Associate Professor Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, the Head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University for his perennial inspiration to complete this research work.

I am even grateful to my lectures Dr. Bireendra Pandey, Dr. Shiva Rijal, Mr. Badri Acharya, Mr. Bal Bahadur Thapa and Mr. Shankar Subedi for their insightful suggestions and counsels to shape the final form of this thesis.

I would heartedly thank Mr. Prakash Mudvari, Himalayan Pokhrel and Indra Kala Acharya for their friendship and encouragement during the development of this research work.

.

Sujan Acharya

## **Abstract**

This research work focuses on defiance against restrictive social codes and conventions in Aphra Behn's play *The Rover*. Behn subverts the traditional gender discourse created by patriarchy through her strong female characters. Behn defies patriarchy by creating witty, independent, attractive, strong, active and assertive female characters. She vehemently criticizes and blurs the stereotyped view of gender roles in *The Rover*. Behn with her brilliant stagecraft and carnival setting subverts the gender based ideologies of her contemporary seventeenth century society. Behn's own version of carnival which departs from traditional and religious carnival provides opportunity for female character to get liberation from patriarchal domination and exploitation. They could spontaneously transgress the civility of normal behaviour and ideologies of existing social conventions and express their social desire freely. Utilizing all the features of Restoration Comedy, Behn's heroines and whores subvert the male-created narratives of marriage, love, courtship and prostitution. Behn's strong, intelligent and assertive heroines and whores in the play successfully deconstruct the gender hierarchies created by male discourse to control, oppress and exploit the female.

## Contents

I.	Feminist Outlook in Aphra Behn's <i>The Rover</i>	1
II.	Carnival as a Metaphor to Subvert Patriarchy	13
III.	Conclusion	38
	Works Cited	

This research work makes an attempt to explore the idea of defiance against patriarchy concentrating feminist perspective developed after 1960s to challenge the male hegemony which is the main cause of women's exploitation and marginalization. It concentrates on blurring the traditional gender roles as expressed in the text *The Rover* by Aphra Behn. To highlight the socio-economic status of mid-seventeenth century society women in England, Behn foregrounds the issues of women such as love, sex, marriage, romance, prostitution and commodification of women under the strict patriarchal restriction. She vehemently criticizes the patriarchy which she finds the main obstacle for women empowerment in her society. Patriarchy, the system of male dominance excludes women from rights of inheritance, education and equal pay in the case of labour and enjoying of equal rights. It leaves women out of structure of power and equality in the society with demeaning women with male-domination. Almost all the female characters in this play are dominated, suppressed and victimized by male characters. Behn tries to give voice, identity and agency to her female characters to express their feminine qualities eloquently.

*The Rover* is Aphra Behn's most successful Restoration play written in mid seventeenth century in England. After several seventeenth century revivals, it was acted in every season which consists of two parts clearly. The first part is set in Naples during the annual carnival and the second part takes place in Madrid where the male characters are enjoying their holiday where they encounter the female characters.

The central male character Willmore is a rake who wants to exploit the women for his sexual satisfaction. He is a rover in two cases because of his sexual inconstant

as he tries to exploit more than one woman with his bohemian lifestyle and he is also the follower of Charles II, king of English people dethroned by Commonwealth government after the political upheavals of 1640s, banished from his country and taking shelter in another country. He is in Naples at carnival time with his friends Frederick, Belvile and Blunt, a country fool. Belvile is in love with beautiful young women Florinda. In the first scene of the play, the two young sisters Hellena and Florinda are discussing about their future life disobeying what their father and brother ordered to them. Hellena who is more passionate among two is destined for nunnery rejects it for her own wish and desire. Her family's plan for her to become a nun is clearly contrary to her natural wish because she is more interested in men than in God. Her sister Florinda is in love with Colonel Belvile.

The brother of these two sisters, Dan Pedro wants Florinda to marry with wealthy nobleman Don Antonio, discarding her own wish and desire. Such domination by male members of family under the patriarchy is rejected by both sisters in the next scene of the drama. Defying against the authority which is restrictive for female liberation and freedom of their brother and father, the unhappy sisters disguised themselves with different identity, attain the carnival where they encounter Belvile, Willmore and Blunt.

Willmore is immediately attracted to Hellena who is disguised as gypsy in the carnival. Before he meets Hellena, he was in a romantic affair with rich courtesan Angellica Bianca. Angellica Bianca the beautiful and expensive to afford prostitute prides herself on her profession, falls helplessly in love with the rover, who exploits her and she becomes helpless at last.

The play, *The Rover* contains many characteristics of Restoration drama as Aphra Behn is successful for her presentation of engaging protagonists, clear, amusing, interesting or scintillating dialogue with intrigue and use of farce. Due to these features, this drama became the widely read of Behn's large bodies of literary works. Her play was the significant part of the repertory of the restoration period and early eighteenth century theatre. *The Rover* was performed in London virtually every year from 1703 to 1750. She is equally successful for using the slapstick comedy to create fun and laughter for the theatergoers of her time. To quicken the pace of her plays and to create a visually stunning performance, Behn took full advantage of movable scenery, which was a recent innovation in the late seventeenth century. Commenting on the Behn's use of dramatic devices and stagecraft Christopher D. Johnson describes in his essay: "The Rover or Banished Cavaliers Masterplots II" as:

Scenery, painted on large shutters, was quickly moved offstage to reveal new characters and a new location. Thus, in part I, the action can move, for example, instantly from the street to Blunt's apartment . . . utilized the intimacy of the proscenium stage, which allowed the actors to perform only a few feet from the audience. Much of the play's exposition and comedy are contained within the asides that the characters share with the audience but conceal from one another. (4-6)

Aphra Behn uses stagecraft for effective and lively performance of her play. As drama is a performative art, it could capture the audience's eye and emotion. In such case Behn's technique is highly praiseworthy. Her dramas became successful for colourful stage design which could capture the sense, sentiments and emotion of the audience with longlasting effect in audience's mind.

It is quite hard to categorize in which genre the play, *The Rover* falls into but it roughly falls into the general category of Restoration comedy written after the Restoration period in England. The play uses sexual innuendo, intrigue and wit. More specifically, the play has been categorized as one of the sex comedies popular in 1670s which focuses on the rake or libertine who criticizes marriage as an institution which controls free sexuality and pleasure in the interest of property. In this play too the male character, Willmore, the rover is a rake or libertine who exists outside the moral and social structure of society. He searches for liberty and pleasure; making explicit criticism on the marriage because for him this institution universally controls sexual desires by incorporating it into the economic system. Willmore and Hellena are attracted to each other's love of pleasure and wit. Hellena persuades him to marry her in spite of his former critique of marriage an institution for controlling the free sex and pleasure. But even after the marriage it is not clear that he will truly love to her as he is a rover as well as a rake who wants to get a sexual pleasure by sharing a bed with other women.

Aphra Behn is one of the most successful comic writers in the great age of English comedy when her life history and literary career is revealed. She produced eighteen to twenty one plays which were very high in number in terms of her male counterparts of the same age and most of her plays were successful and held the stage for centuries. She was an extraordinary woman who was not confined by the boundaries normally accepted by seventeenth century women whose spheres of influence were not domestic and private. She spent her life with full independence and publicly. Commenting on her life and literary career of Behn, Katharine M. Rogers writes in her essay entitled "Aphra Behn" about Aphra Behn as:

. . . she was the first women to make her living as a writer. A highly competent professional, she held her own in the tough world of the Restoration Theatre. She didn't modestly conceal her authorship, and then attacked as a writer or as a women, she defended herself with vigorous counterattacks. (6)

It is evident that Behn is the first professional women writer involved in creative art and writing in England eventhough she was not the first women to publish her writings. She didn't mentioned pseudonym and boldly assert her female gender in such male dominated society. She rejects the patronage to sell her works to get popularity. She defended the charges and criticism made by literary and theatrical society of London of her time where she had a wide acquaintances and had a good relationship with other reputed professional authors such as John Dryden and Thomas Otway. For nineteen years she made her living successfully involving with the genres such as drama, translation, poetry and prose writing.

Aphra Behn associated herself with theatre and developed the skills necessary to be a playwright. She was the leading first-generation of English women to participate as a writer and performer equally and representation of women characters in the theatre. Her first play was *The Forced Marriage* which was produced by Duke's company at Dorset in 1670 is a tragic comedy which deals with pathetic and suffocating condition of women who faces forced and loveless marriage in her life in the society which is completely based on male domination. Male domination is the prime cause for the victimization and marginalization of women in every sphere of their life. The heroine, Erminia is granted by the king and her father upon Alcippus as a reward for his success in battle but Erminia had love affair with Philander while

Alcippus is in love with another woman, Galatea. Erminia should marry Alcippus in obedience to her father. This play centers on the painful consequences of enforced marriage under the strict system of patriarchy.

Aphra Behn is also famous for her fiction *Oroonoko* which is published in 1688 which is the first treatment of black slavery in English literature. Behn combines the Enlightenment ideas on the noble savage and exotic local colour of colony which is controlled by Europeans in the apex of English imperialism with realistic details and fusion of heroic drama. The central intent of this novel is the examination of racial catastrophe in the life of tragic hero, Oroonoko in slavery. The story unfolds the life of noble African prince who is betrayed into worse captivity slavery in the British colony of Surinam, destroyed by the attempts to gain liberty. The young native prince is untouched by colonization who is born into a royal family Surinam is enslaved by British colonizers in the period of colonialism. He struggles to gain liberty. His life becomes horrible when he kills his own wife Imoinara to save her from the evils of slavery.

*Oroonoko* becomes important because of its setting in Surinam and narrated in the first person by female narrator triggering at the angst due to tyrannical practice of colonization. The female narrator relates with her mother and brother. She accompanies her father to Surinam where he is to be Lieutenant General, but he died untimely in the voyage. In the colony she stays in the best house, where she meets a slave whose unsuccessful revolt is the subject of the plot. Contrary culture is felt in the colony where she stays because native people have their own primitive culture and way of life and colonizers' culture is also flourished as the colony is ruled by them. The primitive native people live in an exotic way enjoying the gift granted by nature,

making intimate relationship with the natural surroundings. They are untouched by so called sophisticated and so called superior culture of Europeans. This novel highlights the devastating consequences of European colonization which ruins the primitive, healthy and exotic cultural celebration and civilization of native islanders.

The carnival setting plays the significant role as a metaphor for deconstruction of patriarchal privilege in the play, *The Rover*. Aphra Behn's use of this setting shows her eloquent protest against forced, loveless as well as unemotional marriage. So this setting provides her position as a leading feminist distinctively. Dagny Boebel in her essay, "In the carnival world of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's *Rover*" criticizes the play highlighting the carnival setting Behn used as:

Behn dissolves binary structured discourse, effecting such chaos through liberative disguise in the form of carnivalesque circumstance and subverted political phallicism. In the carnival world of *The Rover* signifiers break free from their former moorings in phallic discourse, as Behn liberates the female characters to signify solely themselves. (8)

The female characters are liberated and could escape the domination maintained by patriarchy. It is Behn's shift of setting which provides the female liberation and carnal liberty which she used to satirize masculine notion of carnival liberty. Behn has a strong positive view of female sexuality and taste for wit and bawdiness. She deconstructs the earlier patriarchal notion of only highlighting masculine sexual desire and bodies by bringing at the centre of feminine sexual desires and bodies. Her carnival setting provides her with an opportunity to create her own carnivalesque displacements, showing how arbitrary the male system of signification is.

As the plot of the play forwards, the two sisters Hellena and Florinda go out in disguise to join the carnival celebration where Florinda disguises herself in a generic carnival habit while Hellena becomes a gypsy. The mask is a powerful image in Restoration drama. In 1960s some women began to wear masks when they attained the theatre. But the prostitutes also began to wear masks due to which the distinction between prostitute and respectable women become blurred. The mask became a sign of the prostitute, but a sign with its offer of anonymity, could offer some freedom from conventional roles for any women who wore it. In this regard, Anne Elizabeth Russell comments the text relating it with Behn's liberating strategy with the use of mask as: “ In *The Rover* masks are both subversive and liberating for the women characters on the other hand, they also place some of the women in dangerous situations because of the association of the mask with the prostitute” (95).

The using of the mask, disguising themselves by Hellena and Florinda and the assertive sex desire they got while wearing it have both liberating and subversive too.

Behn's criticism on loveless and forced marriage is distinctively feminist perspective eventhough she lived in the era where female were denied their rights and freedom. Her deconstruction of patriarchy by her art is further commented by leading critic Dagny Boebel as:

First Behn privilege women's speech, in her opening scene, she gives her female characters both the power to construct masculinity according to their desires and the power to signify themselves. In doing this she reveals how arbitrary, how imoored in any metaphysical reality, are the definitions, classifications, and used man have created for the feminine. (27)

The play opens with female characters wittily deconstructing patriarchy and discussing man solely with respect to feminine desire. Hellena praises Belvile, Florinda's lover. She disobeys her fathers and brother's plan to make her a nun. She boldly asserts her desire and her tongue couldn't be silenced by the male members of her family. Likewise, Florinda, who is less outspoken in nature than her sister courageously condemns the marriage that has been arranged by father and brother: "I hate Vincentia, Sir, and I would not have a man so dear to me as my brother follow the ill customs of our country and makes a slave of his sisters" (66).

It shows Behn is able to give voice for female characters in the play. Florinda shows defiance against the male authority and corrupt social convention. It reveals her feminine independence and sexual freedom of choice. Both sisters critic their oppressed and confined position in their family where male domination is at apex in the society.

There are three options mainly imposed for women in patriarchal society: marriage, nunnery and prostitution. In the case of *The Rover* too, the brother and father of two sisters try to arrange the marriage of them viewing their own political and financial benefits. Brother of Florinda, Don Pedro tries to make marriage of Florinda to his own friend than to their father's candidate for her husband. After the marriage the wife moves from being controlled by the men of her family to being controlled by her husband. Women's status remains only in confinement and only in the bedroom. The female characters are escaped from deadly confinement in their life as they defy the authority of the family.

Hellena's fate earlier determined not by her natural wish but by her male family members to become a nun. Nun's position like the wife's is arranged by family

and has some element in common with marriage. She is given a dowry to take to the convent, where she is called a bride of Christ. In the play, Hellena characterizes the nun's life by the image of confinements such as the grate and cell from where she can't come out again. Nunnery is a like a prison house for her where every freedom is restricted. But defiance against such male restriction is seen in the beginning scene in the play by strong and assertive female characters. Christopher D. Johnson mentions the use of such characters in the beginning of the play to oppose the restrictive and sterile male patriarchy as he critic:

. . . Behn avoids her contemporaries' practice of reducing women either to virginal commodities or to corrupt whores, the female characters in *The Rover* are complex, intelligent women whose values is not compromised by sexual desires, they share with male characters. Behn's satire is not directed towards women but rather towards hypocritical social conventions that reduce romance to competition and women to possession. (3)

Behn presents the vibrant, assertive and bawdy female characters with their own vibrant feminine aspect and gives liberation to females, attacking the suffocating male domination for the empowerment and equality to female race hitherto suppressed from time immemorial.

Twentieth century feminism which developed as a social and political movement attacks patriarchy because it rejects the subjectivity and identity of female. Feminism is applied in Behn's play as we revisit her text. Behn's play brings the issue of female writing to subvert the patriarchy as a French feminist brings the concept of "Ecriture feminine". *Ecriture feminine* is a radical practice or female writing that

attacks patriarchy vehemently. It views that existing signifying linguistic structure developed by male is unable to articulate the voice of female or feminine aspect. Such female writing practice developed new form of language to inscribe femininity. It is a female domain that crosses the symbolic language exists in male-dominated world. *Écriture féminine* fundamentally believes that women are different from men. For the advocates of such radical view, femininity is qualitatively different from masculinity due to which alternative form of language is necessary to express femininity as masculinity doesn't give space for female.

Helene Cixous argues that binary opposition in language “Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Father/Mother, Head/Heart”(115) creates supremacy to create order through fixed and unchanging language which embodies cultural codes. The hierarchal fixed structure is the characteristics of logocentrism. Logocentrism which is based in fixed hierarchy and phallogocentrism which speaks the discourse made by masculine is referred as phallogocentrism which totally excludes women's domain. It excludes the femininity from the operation of language which is organized by phallus. Irigary criticizes the phallus as restrictive, monolithic, singular and fixed entity. She subverts the fixity of phallogocentric meaning arguing that women are getting benefit from multiple sex organ rather than men gets a sexual pleasure through singular phallus.

So, instead of monologic, rational, fixed discourse of phallogocentrism, Irigary purposes an alternative form of feminine discourse which will be continuous rather than transhistorical and could embrace the multiplicity in its nature to guarantee feminine. This will be the practice of female writing where space and presence of female is inscribed.

Aphra Behn, though represents the different era when such feminist perspective was not developed explicitly had conscience to inscribe femininity. Her female characters Hellena, Florinda, Lucetta and Angellica Bianca challenge the patriarchal ordering of language to create feminine space. They subvert the patriarchy and male discourse circulated in their society. The conventional definition of conjugal life, sex, prostitution, and nunnery is challenged by those female characters as an alternative to assert their femininity with their bawdiness and self-assertion of feminine sexual desired.

Behn through her feminine version of carnival setting too subverts the masculine version of carnival where there is only focus of male violent sexual desire. In such carnival males aggression and desires turns into rape, crime, asserts terror and horror to female subject. But her feminine carnival gives validity to vibrant female bodies and their sexual desire.

Several critics have analyzed Aphra Behn's *The Rover* from various perspectives. Some of them have analyzed from the feminist perspective and some of them have investigated it from the perspective of gender ideology. But critics have missed to analyse the carnival aspect in it. So this research focuses on carnival setting too to subvert the patriarchy.

This project is tentatively organized into three sections. The first part deals with Aphra Behn's feminist conscience backgrounding her play and life simultaneously. The second part approach the text by applying the theory of French Feminism and radical feminist perspective developed in late 1960s simultaneously. Carnival and feminism are parallely contextualized with the evidence from the text. Lastly, the final section sums up the research work as a whole.

## II. Carnival as a Metaphor to Subvert Patriarchy

*The Rover* is Aphra Behn's most popular and respected play written in Restoration period which stands for three centuries with least tarnished by unending critical contention over the originality of her work. This play explores the issues of love, marriage and courtship in male dominated European society in mid-seventeenth century. It skillfully incorporates intrigue, disguise and slapstick which are the features of Restoration comedy into a complicated plot which ends in marriage of central male and female characters. The central male character is a rake and libertine exiled from his country England as other Cavaliers due to political upheavals. He searches liberty and sexual pleasure making an explicit criticism of the socially approved institution of marriage. For him marriage suppresses sexual desire by incorporating into the economic system.

The play opens with a discussion of central virginal women Hellena and Florinda at their marriageable age. Hellena and Willmore are attracted to each other's love of pleasure and wit when they encounter in carnival at Naples. In the end of the play Hellena persuades Willmore to marry her in spite of his former critique of marriage as an institution that blocks the sexual freedom. Behn subverts the patriarchal social order and authority by depicting strong female characters who defies such repressive male domination. Patriarchy marginalizes and subjugates the women without giving them any space in society but Behn's characters defy male created ideologies throughout the play.

Aphra Behn presents the witty, independent and bold female characters who reject patriarchal social codes and conventions. In the first scene of the play, Hellena and Florinda are discussing about their future that has been laid out for them by their

male family members: father and brother. Hellena, the passionate among the two sisters is destined for a nunnery after the carnival. This decision taken by her family is completely contrary to her natural curiosity as exhibited in her questions to her sister Florinda, regarding becoming a lover and her exclamation that she loves mischief and wilderness. The contrariness between her desire and what has been chosen for her is evidenced from the first part of the play: "What an impertinent thing is a young girl bred in nunnery" (171). Considering the nunnery in the contemporary period when the playwright Aphra Behn lived could refer to either a place where nun reside or in slang, a brothel. Florinda remarks on "bred for nunnery" would mean submission to authority in the society and a hindrance from all thoughts of the free wills of women. Nunnery becomes problematic for women's expression of natural and spontaneous desires and wishes.

In the initial line, Florinda refers to Hellena as an impertinent which is a strong remark against the current social convention prevalent in male-dominated society. Hellena has no intention to follow the decision made by her father and brother and vehemently resists:

A passion for me? T is more than e' er I saw, or he had a desire should be known. I hate Vincentio, sir, and, I would not have a man so dear to me as my brother follow the ill customs of our country, and make a slave of his sister, and, sir, my father's will I'm sure you may divert. (172)

Florinda openly and strongly resists the patriarchal orders and decisions over her. It is her defiance against the higher authority that is prevalent in the social sphere. Florinda articulates her defiance of male authority. For her male decisions are "ill customs" which makes a woman the "slave" of her male relations. Her assertive

feminine desire and wish configures the conflict between a patriarchal ordering of the world and the natural needs and desires of individual women. Aphra Behn's female characters in the play boldly make defiance against patriarchal imperatives. They wittily deconstruct the patriarchy. Elin Diamond writes about the revolutionary character of Hellena;

Aphra Behn's Hellena... rejects not only her brother's decision to place her in nunnery but also the cultural narrative of portion, jointure, and legal dependency in which she is written not as a subject but as object of exchange. (68)

Florinda is rebellious against the forced marriage imposed by parental authority. The one-sided absolutist concept of marriage defined and imposed by male authority without understanding women's feelings make the women as the objects of exchange rather than women's autonomous right to choose her life partner. So Florinda demonstrates rebellion against patriarchal system which considers women as a commodity, objects to be exchanged with economic value in capitalistic society.

Hellena transgresses the boundaries between religious carnal discourses and displaces the socio-religious hierarchy. Hellena deconstructs the patriarchal and religious conventions in which male take decision about the future of female and their destined role and work in the society which is predominantly male dominated.

Hellena's challenge to masculine and religious authority prevalent in her society led their brother Don Pedro to declare both of them "mad!" (204)

Both sisters associate the madness with carnival jouissance; joyful expression of feminine pleasure and desire. "Jouissance" is an archaic form of expressivity

originating in the body of the mother. Both sisters escape with their disguised form to join carnival and to "be as mad as the rest" (175) defying their brother's restriction.

The French feminists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous developed the concept of feminine ways of thinking that defy the logical forms and binary oppositions of 'phallogocentric' thought. Feminine ways of thinking are based on women's sexual pleasure which is scattered through out the body that cannot be comprehended within male discourse. For Irigaray madness enjoyed by female which remains the logical syntax of patriarchal discourse helps to rescue the feminine from destruction. Hellena and Florinda's madness becomes the outlet to express this kind of feminine envisioned by Irigaray.

To challenge the male domination and to subvert the violent hierarchy created by patriarchy, feminism has played the great role. It is a political in nature. It is politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society which structures all areas of life such as the family education, socialization and so on. Feminism is a political theory and practice to break the patriarchy. C. Kaplan defines feminism: "Feminism has developed . . . a political language about gender that refuses the fixed and transhistorical definitions of masculinity and femininity in the dominant culture" (6).

Feminism came into existence as a political movement, expressing social, economic and cultural freedom and equality between men and women. It resists fixed gender roles created by male ideology. Feminism opposes gender roles because it is defined against biological sex which represents the socially acceptable and socially imposed forms of being either male or female. It is a social construct that is based on male-female dichotomy where male is 'superior' and female is 'inferior'.

Modern radical feminism developed in late 1960s sees oppression of women as the most fundamental and universal forms of domination and its aims to understand and end the domination. Such radical thought views women as organized group have interests opposed to those of men which unit them in a common sisterhood. Such bond transcends the division of class or race and means that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation. Radical feminist thought insists that male power is not confined to public worlds of politics and paid employment but it extends into private life too.

For radical feminist traditional concept of power and politics are challenged and extended to personal areas of life as the family and sexuality, both of which are seen as instrument of patriarchal domination. The key concept of patriarchy which hinders the female's emancipation is introduced by Kate Millet into the modern feminist thought. She argues that in almost all societies the relationship between the sexes has been based on power, and that they are therefore political. This power takes the form of male domination over women in all areas of life. Sexual domination is universal, ubiquitous and complete that it appears 'natural' and hence becomes invisible. She asserts that it is "perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power" ( 25).

Patriarchy is fundamentally maintained by process of conditioning which starts with childhood socialization, within the family as a basic unit of society and is reinforced by education, literature, religion and other ideological state apparatus to such an extent that its values are internalized by men and women. Due to patriarchy women develop self-hatred, self-rejection and acceptance of inferiority. So, the radical feminism which is fully articulated in 1960s states that the man's patriarchal

power over women is the primary power relationship in human society. For it power is not confined to the public worlds of economic and political activity but that is characterizes all relationships between the sexes.

The young women Hellena and Florinda conclude their discussions of their oppressed and confined situation in an act of resistance as they go out in disguise to join the carnival celebrations. Every female character in the play wears different costumes and masks at the carnival to disguise them which helps them to liberate their gender identity. They could hide their real identity. Florinda disguises herself in a generic carnival whereas Hellena becomes a gypsy. The anonymity of true identity of female character is possible by carnival disguise function. It gives freedom for female characters to observe the patriarchal social world minutely disobeying the family restriction. It also gives opportunities for them to meet the men to whom they will marry.

Hellena and Florinda, the two sisters search their sexual autonomy defying the male domination as they are destined for a convent and an arranged marriage with the trap in the roles that have been assigned to them. The carnival represents the opportunity for women to escape these destined roles fixed by patriarchal social order. Hellena establishes a deep relationship with her former lover Belvile whereas Willmore is attracted to Hellena when they join carnival celebration. As the play set in 1660s, Behn's male characters are banished cavaliers who are at Naples to celebrate carnival festival who search sexual pleasure and freedom. Hellena and her governess, Callis illustrate their self-conscious knowledge of the opportunities provided by carnival:

CALLIS. What, go in masquerade ? "Twill be a fine farewell to the world, I take it. Pray what would you do there ?

HELLENA. That which all the world does, as I am told : be as mad as the rest and take all innocent freedoms. Sister, you'll go too, will you not ? Come prithee be not sad. We'll outwit twenty brothers if you'll be ruled by me. Come, put off this dull humour with your clothes, and assume one as gay and as fantastic as the dress my cousin Valeria and I have provided, and let's ramble. (175)

For Hellena and Florinda carnival celebration provides opportunity to liberate their identity and provided abundant freedom. Hellena suggest that carnival liberates her sexuality. Kate Aughterson contents that "to Hellena it is a space for alternatives for, for inversion and disguise for adventure and sexual discovery" ( 369). Carnival provides both sisters to express their natural feminine desire and make their own choices. Carnival shakes up the authoritative version of language and values, making room for a multiplicity of voice of meaning.

The Russian critic Mikhael Bakhtin gives the definition of carnival and its liberating effect in his work *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin argues that carnival is a literary or linguistic mode in which inversion of normal hierarchies; celebration of the body is used as a way of criticizing the status quo. The carnival subverts social hierarchies and power structures oriented around positions of "high" and "low"(11). It destabilizes and to makes comic that which is taken seriously within social order through the form of parody. Carnival reveals or celebrations are adapted to the church and religious calendar in Middle Ages and in the Renaissance period but it has a very early history. Bakhtin investigates the history of carnival celebration which has the

root in early stages of "preclass and pre-political social order" (7). It is an egalitarian order where official hierarchies constructed by society are broken. In carnival normal identities are inverted and activities could be celebrated and played with where normality and official boundaries imposed by patriarchal order become nonexistent. It encompasses the disguise, noise, sexual and bodily excess. It is the form of popular counter-culture. Bakhtin states further that during the time of Middle Ages and Renaissance "a boundless world of humour forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (4).

According to Bakhtin carnival is manifestation of a counter culture which is popular and democratic where there is the oppression of all formal hierarchical official culture. It is an egalitarian concept of primitive and spontaneous cultural phenomena which is deemed to express a common oppositional or counter culture. It goes against the serious, formal and restrictive medieval religious codes and conventions as well as the feudal culture of Medieval Age. Bakhtin further contends that carnival has a radically dehierarchizing effect:

All the symbols . . . are filled with . . . the sense of the gay relatively of prevailing truths and authorities, we find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" of the "turnabout" of a continual shifting from top to bottom from front to rear. (11)

It shows that in carnival there is no firm distinction between actors and spectators and during the carnival it perfectly embraces all the people and there is no life outside of it. The restrictive social hierarchies of "rich" and "poor" and "superior" and "inferior" are blurred completely. So utopian dream is possible during carnival celebration.

In the play, *The Rover* by Aphra Behn carnival is central to setting, plot and theme. Behn transformed the setting of Thomas Killgrew's 1654 closet drama *Thomaso* from Spanish inquisition to Neapolitan carnival. The carnival setting serves as a metaphor for Behn's deconstruction of patriarchal privilege. Behn successfully dissolves binary structured discourse, effecting chaos through libertine disguise in the form of carnival circumstance and subverted political phallicism. In the carnival world of *The Rover* signifies break free from their former moorings in phallic discourse as Behn liberates her female characters to signify solely themselves. The active female protagonists could escape the system of domination as J. Thompson states that "significations [that] serve to sustain relations of domination" (146).

Behn's witty heroine Hellena strongly opposes the patriarchal notion that male as active agent in society and female as passive possessions. She is against the decision taken by male members of family on the issue of her marriage Don Pedro, brother of Hellena imposes his decision to marry wealthy Don Vincentio to his sister but she rejects it:

PEDRO. Yes, pay him what you will in honor, but you must consider  
Don Vincention's fortune, and jointure he'll make you.

HELLENA. Let him consider my youth, beauty and fortune, which  
ought not be thrown away on his age and jointure. (173)

The above extract illustrates that Aphra Behn's heroine Hellena opposed her brother's decision to place her in the cultural narrative of portion, jointure and legal dependency in which she is written not as subject but as object of exchange. Through such oppose Hellena could save the commodification of women. In this regard Elin Diamond further writes that "Aphra concentrated her energies on decoding the

exploitation of women in the exchange economy, and added vividly to contemporary discourse protesting women's oppression in marriage market" (63). Hellena could save her commodification by subverting the idea of marriage arranged by father and brother for their own political and financial benefit without understanding her true feelings and emotions.

Patriarchy is the main cause of suppression and marginalization of women in society. Kate Millet further argues that "Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male. Power is directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women" (137). Patriarchy becomes the root cause for inequality among male and female and it should be overthrown to create equality in human society.

Aphra Behn, creating the more witty, independent and assertive Hellena, gives space for female autonomy to choose her decisions defying the patriarchy. Behn inverts the violent hierarchy by privileging autonomous space for women. She gives the power to her female characters to construct masculinity according to their feminine desires and the power to signify themselves subverting the oppressive hierarchical structures created by male-dominated society.

Aphra Behn juxtaposes the exuberant opening introduction to carnival from the women's point of view in scene II of Act I by the play's action and by the contrasting behaviour of men during the carnival and the atmosphere it creates. The three male characters Willmore, Belvile and Blunt are banished cavaliers exiled from the country join the Naples' carnival. They want freedom in sex and enjoy the carnival festival with full pleasure. They make conversation with each other who are

wandering the street during the carnival looking for adventure in their life. For

Willmore it is an opportunity to express his freedom:

. . . I am glad to meet you again in a warm climate, where the kind sun has its god like power still over the wine and women. Love and mirth are my busines in Naples, and if I mistake not the place, here is an excellent market for champmen of my humour. (177)

The above extract illustrates Willmore's approach to carnival which differs from women's approach to carnival. The playwright, Aphra Behn presents men's approach to carnival immediately subsequent to women's approach to the carnival which displays the masculine environment and point of view. Carnival becomes a suitable platform for men to free from authoritative civility of their standard moral behaviour towards women of quality, enabling sexual desire and lust to be fully and freely expressed.

Willmore thinks that women in the street in the carnival unambiguously available for sex. For Willmore women are sexual available and objects to be enjoyed by male. Wilmore's language at carnival focuses more explicitly on sex with euphemisms which are conventional and explicit one. When he talks to successive women about looking for love he means indirectly nights sex to be enjoyed as an object. His love becomes the tool to exploit and dominate the female sexually. Male bias, prejudice, controlling nature and violent erotic desires are embedded in his expression of love to other female characters. He uses the women's euphemism: "Roses for every month" (177) and extends the metaphor into further explicit reference to sexual organs: "I . . . stew such roses over me and under me . . . give me

leave to gather at your bush this idle month; I would go near to make somebody smell of it all the year after" (178).

Willmore's view on female shows patriarchal domination. It views women as an object to be enjoyed. It devalues the essence of female sexuality. His excessive sexual desire that is expressed in the exciting atmosphere at carnival totally neglects the women's sexual desires and freedoms.

Behn makes us aware of men's approach to the carnival is dangerous eventhough their approach gives opportunity to express their love freely. She clearly demonstrates that their approach to the carnival constrains women's autonomy. It gives excessive freedom to male to express about their sex at the cost of women's autonomy. Male freedom in carnival is achieved at the expense of women's loss of freedom. For her it is dangerous and sinister. In the play, *The Rover*, Willmore and other male characters' freedom they exercised in carnival kill the women's sexual feelings and freedoms due to which Angelica Bianca, the expensive courtesan, Hellena and Florinda gets the suffocating experience in men's approach to carnival. So men's approach to carnival is suffocating and exploitative to women's subjectivity rather than emancipatory of female desire. Dany Boebel contents in her article In the Carnival world of Adams Garden about the carnival of Willmore as:

Willmore represents himself as a spokesman of feminine sexual liberation, but his brands of carnivalesque liberty merely reasserts, and even intensifies, the culture's dominant male authority structures. It is a mask behind which he seeks violently to reassert masculine authority. (3)

Boebel demonstrates that Willmore's approach to carnival elevates male bodies and masculine sexual desires but it denies women's rights to their own bodies and their own desire.

Aphra Behn's life history should be studied to understand her use of carnival setting in her play, *The Rover*. In her youth Behn had lived in Surinam with her father Johnson, a gentleman in Canterbury before her marriage. She is believed to have had a romantic relationship with a lawyer named John Hoyle, an association which has let many critics and biographers to speculate about her sexual life. She is an outspoken, Tory, the political doctrine which advocates conservative ideas and strong supporter of monarchy. She had some social and professional connections with members of English court of king Charles II.

Aphra Behn relied on the plays written before 1642 for her plot, ideas and character types like many Restoration dramatists for the taste of contemporary audience in England. *The Rover* has all the features of Restoration comedy such as innuendo, intrigue and wit. It focuses on the rake or libertine who critiques marriage as an institution which controls sexuality and pleasure in the interest of sexuality and pleasure in the interest of property. The play has link with a number of other genres and style. It employs many of the conventions of Spanish comedy which is characterized by complicated plots and full of intrigue in which imprisoned girl in patriarchal social order wins the right to choose her lover or husband. In *The Rover* too Hellena convinces Willmore to marry and Florinda is successful to establish relationship with Belvile whereas Angellica Bianca, the prostitute shows the independent feminine qualities.

Many of the episodes in *The Rover* are adaptations of scenes from Thomas Killgrew's play *Thomaso*. The protagonist and the hero of *Thomaso* is a royalist supporter of the future Charles II who is exiled to Europe during the Interregnum, the period when England is ruled by parliament under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. Behn mentions in the postscript that she takes so many ideas for plot, setting and action from *Thomaso*, that she feels obliged to defined herself against changes that the play was *Thomaso* altered: "That I have stolen some hints from it, may be a proof that I valued it more than to pretend to alter it "(248).

Behn makes an honest response in the postscript for the great deal of the situation and plot materials in *The Rover* derived from *Thomaso*. But Behn's creativity is ingenuous because instead of Killgrew's rambling and ten act play with less praiseworthy stagecraft, she manages five act play with sophisticated dramatic structure and stagecraft. *The Rover* displays Behn's characteristics pre-occupations on the perspective of women characters on love and marriage which is lacked in Killgrew's *Thomaso*. In Killgrew's play, a romantic heroine named Serulina evades the repressive brother and several characters will rape her before she is finally married to her man of her choice, Thomaso, the wander. But Killgrew's romantic heroine is not the central concern of the play for much of the action focuses on the sexual adventures of group of exiled English cavaliers. Thomaso seeks sexual freedom and adventure with famous prostitute Angellica Bianca. Angellica Bianca tries to experiment with the love relationship but she is deceived by Thomaso.

But in *The Rover*, Behn shifts the focus from male to female characters. Behn skillfully splits Killgrew's romantic heroine Serulina into two sisters Florinda, who resembles Serulina and Hellena, witty heroines who pursues the man of her choice

and wins him as a husband. Behn contrasts the romantic and relatively passive "serious" lovers in Killgrew's play with the playful and witty lovers Hellena and Willmore.

In 1677, Behn transformed the setting of Thomas Killgrew's 1654 closet drama *Thomasso* from Spanish inquisition to Neopolitan carnival. Behn's shifts of setting makes her to satirize masculine notions of carnival liberty. Behn makes clear that Puritan Commonwealth government which is led by Oliver Cromwell up to 1660s and the Whig party which supported the liberal rules are repressive in its doctrine. Likewise, carnival freedom understood and celebrated by Royalists and Torries, supporter of monarchy opposing puritanism is too is a repressive one. Royalists and cavaliers who appreciated the theater and carnivalesque freedom lock women into a sexual double bind as oppressive in its way, as the moral and spiritual double bind that puritan preachers inflicted women under the guise of liberating them.

Behn's attraction to carnival is consistent with her radical feminist outlook which significantly differs from contemporary cavalier festive practice followed by church calendar institutionalized by religious authority of that time. Behn has a strong positive view of female sexuality and taste for wit and bawdiness which is not given space by Whig promoters the followers of puritanism and Torries, the follower of monarchy. Behn's experience in Surniam inspired her to develop her own brand of carnival as George Woodcock mentions: "She had been radicalized by her experience in Surinam, which made her critical of law, religion, slavery, racism and institutions of marriage and let her to assert that women should have equal opportunities with men" (*The English Sapho*, 150).

Behn as a leading creative writer of the time couldn't escape from socio-historical reality. She noticed the repressive system imposed by English people in its colony-Surinam. She resists such system with her creative writing.

The Carnival setting serves as a metaphor for the deconstruction of patriarchal codes and autocratic conventions. Behn's shift of setting provides genuine chaotic liberation for female characters and satirizes masculine notions of carnival liberty. In the epilogue to *The Rover* Behn attacks the Whings, who were strongly challenging Royalist power in 1670s in England by associating them with repressive Commonwealth: "With canting rule you would the stage refine, And to dull method all our sense confine, With th' insolence of the commonwealths you rule" (247).

For Behn Commonwealth authority is a repressive system which is based on hypocrisy. It is a monotonous discourse. It freezes all the dynamics of vibrant human qualities. The fluid, unpredictable, transgressive and dehierarchizing language of carnival is missed in it. Against 'canting rule' Behn set in her epilogue: "A popish carnival ! A masquerade ! The devil's in't if this wil please the nation, in these our blessed times of reformation" (247).

Carnival, in its multiplicity, in its fluidity and in its absence of hierarchy, is not "popish" and not representative of masculine dominance and authority. For Behn the language of carnival should address the joyful expression of feminine pleasure and desire. In *Rover* Behn gives her version of carnival setting that provides her with an opportunity to create her own carnivalesque displacement; exposing the arbitrary male system of signification of codes and conventions. Her version of carnival is subversive one. Bakhtin argues the importance of carnivalesque which has deconstructive and subversive effect. "Official" authority is subverted most of all by

laughter, a current of slippery ambivalence. The hierarchic divisions are completely blurred by laughter and creating parody as he mentions: "the world is seen anew, no less profoundly than when seen from the serious stand point . . . certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter" (66).

The serious aspect of class culture i.e. "high" and "low" culture based on hierarchy and official and authoritarian system are resisted by the creative power of laughter. Laughter challenges the official system based on limitation, prohibition and violence. All violent hierarchies are blurred by laughter; so it is subversive in its quality.

Behn is able to dramatize the contemporary social and political issues. She draws our attention through the class, gender and politics of Restoration period. In the carnival the libertine Willmore, Belvile and Blunt talk about Angellica Bianca. Their conversation about Angellica Bianca reveals that they are guided by patriarchal system which commodifies human body:

WILLMORE. See there the fair sign to the inn where a man may lodge  
that's fool enough to give her price.

BLUENT. [ . . . ] I am sure we're no chappmen for this commodity.

FREDERICK. Thou art none, I'm sure, unless that could not have her  
in the bed at a price of a coach in the street.

WILLMORE. [ . . . ] A plague of this poverty, of which I he'er  
complain but it hinders my approach to beauty which virtue never  
could be purchase. (186)

The above extract shows that the men's attitude to women. For them women are objects that are purchased and marketable commodities. Such masculine attitude

to women reduces them to economic currency and devaluation of their identity. Behn satirizes such exploitative thought of masculinity which defines women as a matter of economic exchange in the capital market. Carnival provides an opportunity to free man from their normal behaviour and to express sexual desire but it doesn't give justice to rights of female. It actually reduces women to sexual object. But in Behn's approach of carnival female characters are sexually active and show their intelligence than the men. They express their sexuality with the appropriate mode of self-determination.

The masks and costumes used by female characters while they join in carnival are subversive and liberating for them. Due to mask worn by female characters it is difficult to identify them as respectable women and the real prostitute. It places women in dangerous position. Hellena and Florinda faces problem in carnival due to their mask as Florinda is nearly raped by her brother Don Pedro, Willmore and Blunt. The association of mask places them in the dangerous situation because it is very difficult to identify who are virgins and who are whores in the carnival. Use of masks blurs the male constructed ideology of that time that only prostitute wears masks but in Behn's time women of Royal family also join the theatre wearing masks as Florinda and Hellena the respectable woman also join the carnival due to which their brother Don Pedro and other male characters try to rape them in carnival.

Behn highlights the female constructed rape narrative to challenge the male constructed myth of rape in *The Rover*. The traditional notion of rape that it is normal activity of male instinct is blurred by Behn in this play. Behn refuses to consider it as a normal human behaviour that is inevitable and natural part of carnival. In the sexual relation and encounters male sexual excitement turns into brutality to women. Men

don't attempt to ensure the enjoyment of their partners. The threat of violence by male is always present in male-female sexual relationship, without giving space for female pleasure. On *The Rover* Boebel argues that virtually all male characters are rapist or potential rapist. There are three near rapes attempt to Florinda.

In Naples the first assault upon Florinda occurs at night in supposedly private place, while she waits in her garden for Belvile. In the darkness he sees only "a woman . . . a very winch" (207). In the patriarchal system of signs, once she is loosed from her signification as his friend Belvile's mistress, Florinda becomes a sing of generalized women for Willmore, equated only with her biological essence; "a very winch". Willmore tries his attempt of seduction and rape:

WILLMORE. [. . .] Let it suffice I am here, child come. Come kiss me . . . come I say, why thou, mayst be free with me. I will be very secret. I'll not boast who 't was obliged me, not I; for hang me if I know they nature.

FLORINDA. Sir, let me go, I conjure you, or I'll call out . . . I'll call murder, rape or anything, if you do not instantly, let me go! (207-208)

It illustrates the vulnerable situation of women due to male violence, such rape is a violence Willmore uses to Florinda as an object without her own will or desire.

In male-constructed narrative of the naturalness of rape views man is led on beauty of women is an artless sincerity of natural passion. Susan Brownmiller argues that the rape is a crime of passion touched off by female beauty. For him such male constructed myth "is given credence, and women are influenced to believed that to be raped . . . is a testment to beauty" (333-41). Such male constructed narrative of rape is

dangerous for female because it creates terror, terrifying situation, condition of horror and violence. Rape is the expression of a violent masculinity.

Willmore is rapist not aroused by the beauty of their victim. He is drunk in the dark and even may not see Florinda very clearly. Behn deconstructs the male constructed myth that rape is an expression of uncontrollable natural sexual desire of European society. It is a violence done to female and punishment given to them for the crime of being of female simply.

Behn subverts the phallic discourse and gender hierarchy by associating madness with carnival jouissance. In *The Rover* madness is defined as resistance to erasure of feminine sexuality in phallic discourse. Madness gives space for female for their self-assertion with the different range of experience they couldn't get in patriarchal social syntax. Hellena and Florinda's bold assertion that lead their brother to declare them "mad" and the women manages to escape from their brother's clutches and they want to "be as mad as the rest", is the bold expression of their sexual desire that resists Don Pedro's authority. Unlike Ophelia, the heroine of William Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*; and herself assertion of madness, who gives the death punishment by herself.

Behn's Hellena and Florinda's self assertion by expressing strong sexual desire lead them to resist the male authority. Ophelia's self assertion in passive resistance to male authority but Hellena and Florinda's self assertion becomes more active resistance in *The Rover*. Hellena and Florinda could give validity to their madness by challenging the prevalent discourse and deconstructs the truth about madness that is institutionalized by male patriarchy of then period.

The distinction between whore and virgin or "lady with the quality" and prostitute is blurred in *The Rover*. Boebel further contents that: "Through her self-signifying nun, Hellena and her self-signifying prostitute, Angellica Bianca, Behn unites the two extremes of two sexual possibilities for women" (5). Behn gives some lines that in Killgrew's play *Thomaso* were spoken by prostitutes. Hellena declares adultery preferable to forced marriage and she rejects constancy as an ideal. She tells Willmore, "When I begin, I fancy I shall love like anything and have a new man to seek" (246) . Whereas the rich prostitute Angelica Bianca signifies herself a virgin when she meets Moretta:

ANGELLICA. Oh, name not such mean trifles. Had I given him all.

My youth has earned from sin,

I had not lost a thought nor sigh upon't

But I have given him my eternal rest,

My whole response, my future joys, my heart !

My virgin heart, Moretta ! Oh, tis gone !. (347)

The prostitute Angellica Bianca states that she is still virgin. Her bold assertion of her virginity contradicts and subverts male constructed truth of virgin. For her, she lacks chastity from a masculine as she is exploited by many male physically. But she views herself as spiritually still virgin or spiritually undamaged. In this regard Szilagyi Stephen writes: "Angellica . . . paradoxically, embodies both whore and virgin" (448). Physically she is polluted as she has given her body to other males but she has not given her "virgin heart" to any one which shows her subversion of male constructed notion of whore and virgin.

Behn's Angellica Bianca holding a pistol to the breast of Willmore blurs the thematic opposition between masculinity and femininity which is created by patriarchy. Angellica is showing masculine courage to give threat to men. The traditional gender myth which considers women are passive creature is subverted by Bianca. Pistol at the hand of Bianca is the assertion of women's power against a man. Her masculine role is seen when she draws a pistol and "holds it to his breast" (237) to kill Willmore. The pistol is desperate and assertion of women's power against man. It is a phallic power appropriated by women to challenge patriarchal domination. It is the pistol that should be at the hand of male to threat women is now is in the hand of Angellica Bianca to threat the men. So the traditional gender discourse of masculinity and femininity is subverted.

Lucetta also shows her courage to destroy Blunt. She subverts the conventional power relations in which man possesses power and women lack it. She sexually exploits Blunt. She asserts her sexual power to dominate and control male. So she goes beyond the traditional gender myths. She destroys the property, privilege and prestige as well as total power of Blunt as she says; "A rich coat; sword and at; . . . gold watch. . . . A bunch of diamond rings . . . the family arms!" (306).

Blunt is humiliated at the hands of Lucetta. He has lost all his wealthy possessions: cloths, watch and diamond rings. He is only dressed in ragged underwear. Lucetta is playing the role of male, subverting the conventionalized gender roles based on hierarchy where men is active agent and women as a passive material possession.

The distinction between whore and virgin is blurred by Angellica Bianca's cross-gendered female roles. Nancy Copeland argues that Behn attempted to minimize

the difference between the status of the virgin and whore. To subvert the patriarchal hierarchy Behn gives the different role to Thomas Killgrew's Angellica Bianca in *The Rover*. Unlike Killgrew's Angellica Bianca who is a patriarchal model of the good whore who passively accepts her doubly subservient place as both female and prostitute, Behn's Angellica Bianca appears based on a fraternal model of female subjectivity and independent agency.

Aphra Behn dramatizes the patriarchal social and political structures which commodifies the identity of women. In the carnival Belvile, Blunt, Federick and Don Pedro reduce the subjectivity of women to economic exchange:

BELVILE. See there the fair sign to the inn where a man may lodge  
that's fool enough' to give her price.

BLUENT. How, to be sold ! Nay, then, I have nothing to say her, sold !

WILMORE. . . . A plague of this poverty, of which I ne'er complain  
but when it hinders my approach to beauty, which venture ne'er would  
purchase.

PEDRO. Fetch me a thousand crowns, I never wished to buy this  
beauty at an easier rate. (217)

This extract depicts the commodification of female body in patriarchal society. Patriarchy reduces the women's value to an economic currency. The language of trade and market place is common to all five men's expressed attitude in the above extract. Masculine attitude toward female is evident as for them whores and aristocratic women are marketable commodities. For them female are objects that could be bought in the market as they consider women as "price", "commodity" "purchase" and "portion". It shows inferior position of female who are exploited as objects

consumed in patriarchal society. Such society defines the women's values and considers their body as object to be consumed perpetually. Male authority, domination and exploitation are conditioned in patriarchy due to which women have to face violence and humiliation forever.

Behn subverts the male constructed narrative about the prostitution profession which is only limited to female. Angellica Bianca defies the idea that prostitution is a female profession where women sell their bodies. She deconstructs this idea explaining to Willmore that male too sell their bodies to the wife who can pay the most in matrimonial and sexual relations:

Angellica. Pray tell me, Sir, are not you guilty of the same. Mercenary crime, when a Lady is propos'd to you for a wife, you never ask, how fair - discreet - or virtuous she is; but what's her fortune - which, if but small, you cry - she will not do my business and basely leave her, thou she languish for you - say, is not this as poor ? (202)

Angellica's remark vividly shows the cross gendered definition of prostitution. Man and women should make negotiation in social as well as sexual contact. Such negotiated or prostituted contact is crucial for all socio-political contracts in patriarchy. The sexual contact is not merely associated only with the private sphere of male. Patriarchy itself is not located in private sphere too. Prostitution is a body politic because, women and men are associated in both prostitution and marriage with sexual access and property which are contractually exchanged. In prostitution both male and female are contractually exchanged where there is equal participation of both sexes. Willmore himself appears prostituted when he accepts five hundred crowns from Angellica as whores demand money to satisfy her customer. Behn's

witty, bawdy and assertive virgins and whores deconstructs the stereotyped hierarchal discourse created by patriarchy which controls, oppresses, exploits creating violence and terror on female.

### **III. Defiance against Patriarchy and Subversion of Gender Ideology**

The Restoration comedy, *The Rover* tells the story of exiled cavaliers from their country, marriageable women who defy patriarchy and prostitutes who subvert the conventional gender roles. Behn's witty and bawdy, intelligent and self assertive heroines Hellena and Florinda, openly criticize their father and brother's imposition about the future of their life. Florinda opposes forced marriage whereas Hellena opposes nunnery. Both sisters defy patriarchal social codes and conventions which restrict the natural feminine desire of women. For them patriarchy is the prime cause for the victimization of feminine sexuality and freedom.

Both sisters join carnival in disguise where they meet Belvile, Willmore and Blunt. Behn uses carnival setting as a metaphor for the liberation of female wish and desire. Carnival provides opportunity for man and women to conceal their real identity and to study the psychology of others. Behn's use of carnival is different from religious festive carnival. In religious carnival male are assertive, active and strong to control and create violence on women. Male occupies dominant position to express their sexual desires discarding the desire and wish of female. Behn's version of carnival is more egalitarian than male's approach of carnival where official hierarchies made by patriarchy are completely blurred. In such carnival female could eloquently express their sexual desires. Willmore, Blunt, Belvile and Don Pedro represent masculine version carnival whereas Hellena, Florinda, Angellica Bianca represent the feminine aspect of carnival. Willmore and Blunt's aggressive sexual assault to Florinda in carnival indicates that masculine carnival doesn't give space for sexual freedom for women. It only creates terrific situation for female because it only exploits women with aggression and violence. But the feminine carnival is more

appropriate for women because it praises natural and god gifted sexual desire of women. Angellica Bianca, Hellena and Florinda with their bold assertive, active and vibrant body represent the qualities of feminine carnival that subverts the masculine use of carnival which turns into masculine violence and rape.

The traditional gender convention of virgin and whore is subverted by the protagonist Hellena and Florinda. Angellica Bianca is a whore according to male discourse. She should share bed with many people and earns her living with it. But she challenges to this socially conventionalized discourse as she boldly asserts that she is still virgin for her. She has made physical attachment with other males but she has not serious involvement with any male in terms of selling emotions and feelings for true love and sexual relations. Emotion, devotion and physical attachment of body and soul should be merged but she has made only unemotional relationship with others. As a virgin girl she has saved her feminine chastity. At the end the protagonist Willmore even though criticizes the marriage which hinders the sexual desire marries with Hellena. Florinda starts the conjugal life with Belvile. The play with multiplying plot, carnival setting and assertion of vibrant female bodies, Behn is able to subvert the patriarchal hierarchy, domination and conventional gendered myths and ideologies that control the spontaneous femininity.

## Work Cited

- Aughterson, Kate. *Aphra Behn: The Comedies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage, 2008.
- Bertens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basic*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Boebel, Dagny. "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's Rover." *Gale*, 2007. 54-70.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.
- Bryson, Valerie. *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Paragon House, 1995.
- Carlson, Susan. "Cannibalizing and Carnivalizing: Reviving Aphra Behn's 'The Rover'." *Theatre journal*. 47.4 (Dec.) 1995): 517-539.
- Cixous, Helene. "The Laught of the Medusa." *Signs* (Summer 1976): 875-91.
- Clark, Anna. *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845*. New York: Pandora, 1987.
- Diamond, Elin. *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre*. London. 1997.
- Eliot, Shanti. "Carnival and Dialogue." *Folklore Forum* 30 (1999): 129-139.
- Green, Keith and Lebitian. *Critical Theory and Practice: A Course Book*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Arnold, 2000.

- Irigary, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Up, 1985.
- Johnson, Christopher D. "The Rover : Or the banished Caraliers Masterplots II." *Women's Studies Quarterly*. 26 (2003): 1-15.
- Kaplan, C. *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*. London: Verso, 2003.
- McMillin, Scott. Ed. *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*. New York. W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. London: Virago. 1985.
- Moi, Toril. Ed. *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*. Oxford: Babil Blackwell, 1987.
- O'Donnell, Mary Ann. *Aphra Behn: An Innotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. New York: Garland, 1986.
- Pacheco, Anita. "Rape and Female Subject in Aphra Behn's 'The Rover'" John Hopkins Up. 65.2 (Summer 1998): 323-345.
- Rogers, Katharine M. "Aphra Behn". *Gale*, 2007.
- - - . "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko." *Studies in the Novel* 20 (Spring 1988): 1-15.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. New York: Methuen, 1985. 77-97.
- - -. Ed. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Szilagyi and Stephen. "The Sexual Politics of Behn's Rover. After Patriarchy." University of North Carolina Press. 95.4 (Fall, 2001): 435-455.
- Thompson, J. *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Berkeley: U of California P. 1984.
- Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

Woodcock, George. *The English Sappho*. New York: Black Rose, 1989.

- - -. *The Incomparable Aphra*. London: Bordman, 1948.