

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**"Sexism and Violence" in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice***

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis entitled **Sexism and Violence** in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* picturizes the predicament of the protagonist, Sophie, a central female character in the novel and shows the evils of the patriarchal social system in the world in general and Poland and American South in particular. To show the systematic bias of patriarchal society, Styron has created characters like Sophie, Nathan, and Stingo. To make Sophie pitiable Styron presents her as submissive, obedient and a sufferer of the male biased world. Styron presents the male in general as learned, objective, factual, and scholars, whereas female as simple minded but obsessed and hysterical. They are also represented as being obsessed with sex and their own desirability to show the actual nature of sexist/patriarchal social structure. For that Styron presents Sophie as a pitiable female victim of patriarchal society.

## CONTENTS

|  | <b>Page No:</b> |
|--|-----------------|
| <b>Approval letter</b>   | <b>I</b>        |
| <b>Abstract</b>  | <b>II</b>       |
| <b>Acknowledgement</b>   | <b>III</b>      |
| <b>Chapter I: Historical overview of the Holocaust in <i>Sophie's Choice</i></b> | <b>1-19</b>     |
| Historical background  | 1               |
| Biological purity and strength of the "Superior Aryan Race"                      | 3               |
| Resistance uprising and resettlement   | 4               |
| Depiction of women in novels of William Styron                                   | 6               |
| Life and style of William Styron   | 8               |
| Critical synopsis of the story   | 13              |
| Literature review  | 15              |
| <b>Chapter II: Feminism: An Overview</b>   | <b>20-36</b>    |
| Introduction   | 20              |
| The Revolt for Womanhood   | 26              |
| Empowerment of Womanhood   | 28              |
| The class of Womanhood   | 31              |
| Patriarchal Social Structure in <i>Sophie's Choice</i>                           | 34              |
| <b>Chapter III: Sexism and Violence in <i>Sophie's Choice</i></b>                | <b>37-63</b>    |
| <b>Chapter IV: <i>Sophie's Choice</i>: Woman's Exploitation</b>                  | <b>64-66</b>    |
| <b>Works Cited</b>   |                 |

## **I : HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE HOLOCAUST IN *SOPHIE'S CHOICE***

### **Historical Background**

*Sophie's Choice* is the fourth novel by William Styron, which was published in 1979. This is a poignant and dramatic account of the Holocaust. It is the story of a Polish catholic woman who lost her children in Auschwitz. Also in this novel Styron has depicted along with the suppression of woman the combined character of the Nazis crimes against humanity. In October 1945, Styron chooses an assignment at the Naval Disciplinary Barracks on Harts Island in Long Island Sound, a naval prison in which he was commander of the First Guard Platoon. It is Styron's first experience with imprisonment and helps him to better understand the Nazi concentration camps.

The Holocaust also called Shoah in Hebrew refers to the period when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany from January 30, 1933, to May 8, 1945. During this period, Jews in Europe were subjected to progressively harsh persecution that ultimately led to the murder of six million Jews (1.5 Million of these being children) and the destruction of five thousand Jewish communities. To convey the unimaginable, devastating scale of destruction, postwar writers referred to the murder of the European Jews as the "Holocaust".

On January 20, 1942, an extraordinary 90-minute meeting took place in a lakeside villa in the wealthy Wannsee district of Berlin. Fifteen high-ranking Nazi party and German government leaders gathered to co-ordinate for carrying out "the final solution of the Jewish question." Chairing the meeting was Lieutenant General Reinhard Heydrich, head of the power full Reich Security Main Office, a central police agency that included the secret state police. Heydrich organized the meeting on the basis of a memorandum he had received six months earlier from Adolf Hitler.

Herman Goring, was assigned as the deputy which conformed his authorization to implement the "Final Solution."

The "Final Solution" was the Nazi regime's code name for the deliberate, planned mass murder of all European Jews. During the Wannsee meeting, government officials discussed "extermination" without hesitation. Heydrich calculated that 11 million European Jews from more than 20 countries would be killed under this plan.

During the months before the Wannsee Conference, special units made up of the elite guard of the Nazi state, and police personnel slaughtered Jews in mass shootings on the territory of the Soviet Union that the Germans had occupied. Six weeks before the Wannsee meeting, the Nazi began to murder Jews at Chelmno, an agricultural estate located in the part of Poland annexed to Germany. Here commandants and police personnel used sealed vans into which they pumped carbon monoxide gas to suffocate their victims. The Wannsee meeting served to expand the implementation of "Final Solution" as state policy.

During 1942, trainloads after trainloads of Jewish men, women and children were transported from countries all over Europe to Auschwitz, Treblinka and four other major killing centers in German-occupied Poland. At the end of the year about 4 million Jews were dead. During World War II the Germans and their collaborators killed or caused the death of up to 6 million Jews. Hundreds of Jewish communities in Europe, some centuries old, disappeared forever.

Century of religious prejudices against Jews in Christian Europe, financial insecurities, fear of communism and so-called race science were the backdrop for the Holocaust. Hitler and other Nazi ideologies regarded Jews as a dangerous "race" whose very existence threatened the "Superior Aryan Race".

### **Biological Purity and Strength of the "Superior Aryan Race"**

The first systematic murdered of German and Austrian Jews occurred after the Nazi's organized riot known as *Kristallnacht*, when approximately 30,000 Jewish men were deported to Dachu and other concentration camp, and several hundred Jewish women were sent to local jails. The wave of arrests in 1938 also included several thousand German and Austrian Gypsies.

Between 1933 and 1939 about half the German Jewish population and more than two thirds of Austrian Jewish fled Nazi persecution. They emigrated mainly to the United States, Palestine, elsewhere in Europe, Latin America, and Japanese-occupied Shanghai. Jews who remained under Nazi rule were either unwilling to uproot themselves or unable to obtain visas, sponsors in host countries and found no emigration. Most foreign countries, including the United States, Canada, Britain, and France were unwilling to admit very large number of refugees.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began within weeks. The Polish army defeated the Nazis and began their campaign to destroy Polish culture and enslave the Polish people, whom they viewed as "Subhuman." Killing police leader was the first step: German soldiers carried out massacres of university professors, artists, writers, politician, and many catholic priests. To create new living space for the "Superior Germanic Race" large segment of the Polish population were resettled, and German families moved into the emptied land. Other Poles, including many Jews, were imprisoned in concentration camps. The Nazis also kidnapped as many as 50,000 Aryan-looking Polish children from their parents and took them to Germany to be adopted by German families. Many of these children were later rejected as not capable of Germanization and were sent to special children's camps where some died of starvation, lethal injection, and disease.

During the war, ghettos, transit camps, and forced labour camps, in addition to the concentration camps, were created by the Germans and their collaborators to imprison Jews, Gypsies, people of racial and ethnic origins, as well as political opponents and resistance fighters. With the invasion of Poland, 3 million Polish Jews were forced into approximately 400 newly established ghettos, where they were segregated from the rest of the world. Large number of the Jews also were deported from other cities and countries, including Germany, to ghettos and camps in Poland and German-occupied territories further east.

In Polish cities under Nazi occupation like Warsaw and Lodz, Jews were confined in sealed ghettos where starvation, overcrowding, exposure to cold, and contagious disease killed tens of thousands of people. In Warsaw and elsewhere, ghettoized Jews made every effort, often at great risks to maintain their cultural, communal, and religious lives. The ghettos also provided a forced labour pool for the Germans and many forced labourers died from exhaustion or maltreatment.

The methods of murder were similar in the killing centers, which were operated by police. Jewish victims arrived in railroad freight cars and passenger trains, mostly from ghettos and camps in occupied Poland. On arrival, men were separated from women and children. Prisoners were forced to undress and hand-over all valuables. They were then forced into the gas chambers, which were disguised as shower rooms and either carbon monoxide or zyklon was used to asphyxiate them.

### **Resistance Uprising and Resettlement**

Resistance existed in almost every concentration camp and ghetto of Europe. In addition to the armed revolts, Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto led to a courageous uprising in April and May 1943 despite a strong restriction on German force. That was a predictable doom of superior German force. In general, rescue and

aid to Holocaust victims was not a priority of resistance group, but their principal goal was to fight the war against the German. On April 19, 1943, member of the national committee for the defense of Jews, in co-operation with Christian railroad workers and the general underground in Belgium, attacked a train leaving the Belgium transit camp of Malinas headed for Auschwitz and succeeded in assisting Jewish deportees to escape.

After the war turned against Germany and the allied armies approached Germany in late 1944, the police decided to evaluate outlying concentration camps. The German tried to cover up the evidence of genocide. In May 1945, Nazi Germany collapsed, the police guards fled and the camps ceased to exist. Even the Allies moved to bring Nazi offenders to justices, but the looming refugee crisis threatened the resources of the Allied forces. Within months of Germany's surrenders in May 1945 the Allies send back more than 6 million displaced people to their home countries.

In the following years, the postwar Jewish refugee crisis ended. In 1948, the US congress passed the Displace Person Act, which provided up to four lakhs special visas for displaced people uprooted by the Nazi. Some 63,000 of these visas were issued to Jews under the DP Act. When the DP Act expired in 1952 it was followed by a Refugee Relief Act. In 1948 Israel became an independent nation. Palestine was voted into a Jewish state and an Arab state.

In the time of Holocaust at Auschwitz and Bricknew, female also participated in the secret revolutionary group against the Nazi's oppression. A lot of female revolutionary group were formed like Home Army in Warsaw. Though there were lots of female awareness seen about the exploitation, the heroine of the novel "Sophie" can't come out of the grip of patriarchy. The novel shows Sophie's refusal to help the Home Army in Warsaw, and even her children out of fear. Through our

identification with Wanda and the Resistance Movement, we come to regard Sophie as not only morally weak and irresponsible, but also a coward. Hence, in the novel Styron carefully develops the comparison between Poland and American south to show the double-edged exploitation of female "domination over female."

### **Depiction of Women in the Novels of William Styron**

Elizabeth Ermarth has written in her *book Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* with insight on the phenomena of female casualties in realistic fiction by men. She explains that:

In representational fiction there is preoccupation with the conflict between individual and societies or between individual and what Ermarth calls the "Prevailing Consensus" (Ermarth 1983, 10). She states further that the relatively high proportion of important female casualties results primarily from situation in which women's psychic needs are not understood and therefore not met in this prevailing, inevitably patriarchal, consensus. In such fiction, the heroine is out of from the chief resource in her community. These breakdown/casualties are fatal to a surprising number of heroines who reached at the stage of suicide. Because of their extreme victimization, fictive heroines do not participate in the objectifying consensus but instead they are objectified by it. So they are represented in the margins of social existence, becoming irreversibly isolated from the main stream and thus cut off from the life world of the community. If a woman, despite of a narrators sympathy challenges the system she may given to a psychic suicide, a denial of her will, of which physical death is at times only a final solution.(Quoted in Hadaller, 9)

Significantly, this phenomena of psychic/physical death of important female characters is portrayed in each of William Styron's novels. Consistent with Ermarth's thesis, a patriarchal social consensus drives Styron's women characters to the margin of social existence. That sort of situation is seen in the novels of Styron, like in *Lie Down in Darkness*, *Set this House on Fire*, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and *Sophie's Choice*.

In *Lie Down in Darkness* we examine first the women who are compelled to live a life as stated by the Elisabeth Ermarth. If we observe closely the specific language and structural devices, in *Lie Down in Darkness* especially we find the fragmenting of narrative chronology used in the portrayal of Peyton-a heroine and her mother Helen. All the female characters in the novel suffer from the patriarchal social structure. Helen, Dolly, Peyton are treated as an object. They did not get chance to decide their fate. Dolly gives birth to a male child, who came as a photocopy of his father. Milton was taken as a centre of all issues. Peyton and Dolly are presented as hysterical characters. Styron tries to peel away layers, which compels female to have extramarital relation to improve her social status.

As such, *Set This House on Fire*, could be seen as an exploration of the language of males as they recount tales of violence against females, they have known or whom they themselves protect and attack mentally and physically. Styron lays bare the inner feelings of men, although they may believe themselves sensitive and open to the struggle of women, are in reality accomplices in the violence and abuse aimed at their lives. In fact, *Set This House on Fire* is the first of Styron's novel that delves so deeply into the presentation of male directed first person point of view. Examining Styron's novel, it is useful to remind ourselves that common tool used by feminist is an assumption that language is part of the political and ideological power of the male.

Hence, we come to know that language is in the control of male who define female by using their own language. So the representation of women in fiction is not the real. In the novel of William Styron no female interior monologues were presented. So the reader hears the voice of men and abused women through men who themselves are implicit in the system, which allows and even encourages violence against women.

Styron's novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* recognizes that women in Nat Turner's time were regarded little more than chattel themselves. Women are marginalized and their access to the language in patriarchal semantic authority severely curtailed. An approach to Nat Turner based on feminist dialogues examines the nature of language. The novel uses fragmented language to portray women and the smooth language to portray men. In the novel Nat revolted to assert his manhood and his dignity as a man. He wants to become as powerful as white man and wants to have a white woman, to fulfill his fantasies. In this sense Nat is not revolutionary with regards to women's role in society, instead he wants the freedom to own the women. He tends to view women as an object of lust. The same way patriarchy wants.

In the depiction of female characters in *Sophie's Choice*, we see how much a patriarchal social structure oppressed the women. In the novel female is presented as a liar, but at the same time as hysterical, simpleminded and obsessed with sex and their own desirability. All female characters suffer undue treatment from the male. They are inflicted with injustice and violence which is often meted out upon them.

### **Life and Style of William Styron**

William Styron, a southern writer, was born on June 11, 1925 in Newport News, Virginia. He was the only child of William Clark Styron, a marine engineer, and Pauline Margaret Abraham. Descending from "Stiorings" they came to Virginia as early as 1650. Styron's ancestry includes Scott-Irish, Welsh, Swiss, and English

forebears. Styron learned to read well before he entered the first grade. Styron started writing short stories at the age of thirteen and publishing them in the high school newspaper, "Typhoon and The Tar Bay" are of his earliest pieces, was an admittedly unabashed imitation of Joseph Conrad.

Styron began writing seriously in 1942 when he attended Davidson College, contributing frequently to the school newspaper and composing poems for the literary magazine. He left Davidson to enlist in the Marine Corps, shortly before his eighteenth birthday as an officer candidate in the Marine's World War II V-12 program, he transferred to Duke University in the summer of 1943, and inspired by professor William Blackburn, he became passionately interested in writing. Styron published a number of short stories in *The Archive*, Duke's literary magazine, and for the first time he considered writing professionally as a possible career.

From 1944-1945, Styron served as a lieutenant in the Marines, reaching Okinawa just as the war was coming to a close. Once discharged, he completed his B.A. at Duke, and in 1947 headed for New York to work as an associated editor for Whittlesey House, then the trade division of McGraw-Hill. Having been recommended by Blackburn to Hiram Hayden of the New York School for Social Research, Styron enrolled in the New School's writing course, where Styron benefited greatly from Hayden's criticism and professional encouragement.

Styron began to work on his first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness* in 1947 after McGraw-Hill fired him for tossing a balloon out of an office window. In a letter to his father after having lost his job, Styron wrote, "writing for me is the hardest thing in the world, but also a thing which, once completed, is the most satisfying ... I am not a prodigy but, fate willing, I can produce art." (1)

It took Styron two and a half years of "extremely painful" composition to reach the memorable soliloquy which is the climax of his first novel. *Lie Down in Darkness* demonstrated none of the immature apprentice work often associated with new novelists, and Styron's reputation, as one of the leading authors of his generation was firmly established.

In 1952, Styron meets Rose Burgander at Johns Hopkins University. At that time Rose was working on her Masters Degree at John Hopkins and wrote thesis on Wallace Stevens. She was also a poet.

Living in Paris in early fifties, Styron continued writing and helped George Plimpton and Peter Matthiessen get the Paris Review off the ground. A novella entitled, "The Long March" appeared in the February 1953 issue of *Discovery* which was published by Modern library in 1956, and was included in Charles Fanton's important "The Best Short Stories of World War II". Styron's second large-scale novel, *Set This House on Fire*, a long, complex though carefully structured and articulated work, was published by Random House in 1960.

Seven years later, the highly controversial and commercially successful *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a novel that entered the mind of the mysterious blackman who had led the only significant rebellion in the history of black slavery, was published in 1967. In the story a white southern man had attempted to understand the working of the mind of a black slave. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 and Styron received the Howells Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1970.

Styron published his fourth novel *Sophie's Choice* in 1979- a poignant and dramatic account of the Holocaust conveyed through the story of a Polish catholic woman who lost her children in Auschwitz. Ever concerned with man's capacity both

of evil and self redemption, Styron depicted the ecumenical character of the Nazis crimes against humanity. Powerful and gripping, *Sophie's Choice* got the 1980 American Book Award.

A select collection of essays *The quite Dust and Other Writing* was published by Random House in 1982. The loyalty of Styron's audience, composed of both critics and layman, is unswerving.

In the summer of 1985, Styron was struck by an illness once called melancholia, but today referred to as clinical depression. According to Edmund Moris, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* is an example of art refined in the fire of experience. The writing is so pure one is hardly aware of the ink on the page." *Darkness Visible* is far from depressing. It is a salutary work that uplifts with its sense of catharsis, offering a probing look at an illness that affects millions but is still widely misunderstood.

*A Tidewater Morning*, three tales from youth told in the voice of a young boy who grew up in a tidewater town in Virginia, was published by random house in 1993.

William Styron has been married to Rose Styron since 1953. They have four children, three daughters and a son, and they have lived in the same house in Roxbury, Connecticut, for twenty-nine years. He is the recipient of the commandeur de l'Ordre DES Arts et des Letters, and the Commandeur Legion d'Honneur. He was awarded Duke University's Distinguished Alumni Yale University in 1964. Mr.Styron is also a recipient of the 1993 National Medal of Arts, awarded to him by President Clinton in October. He is a member of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Academy of Arts and Letters, and he is an honorary consultant for the Library of Congress.

Avoiding the post-modernist's obsession with technique, Styron views that language character and narrative are interconnected, in an almost an inseparable way. Styron has attempted to create characters whom people do not want to consign to oblivion. That is found in his hunting portraits of Peyton Loftins, Nat Turner, and Sophie Zawistowska. About the narrative technique Styron believed that a great book should leave you slightly exhausted at the end.

*The Confessions of Nat Turner* is textured in the most important area that is the psychology of the characters. The book starts of with Nat in jail and then, it starts with the fictional narrative of Nat Turner's life. Building back after starting in the future, it is a technique most used in movie and it is used to great effect in 'Confessions' as for psychology of the characters, everything they do is basically built and foreshadowed.

The style of *Sophie's Choice* progressing logically through the summer of 1947, but with frequent flashbacks through Sophie's eyes to either her pre-war and war time experiences or her relationship with Nathan. Slowly we learn of her past, the events that shaped her childhood and the horrors she experienced in the war that led to her overwhelming sense of guilt at surviving. At the same time, we discover more about her relationship with Nathan, simultaneously her salvation and an extreme source of violence during Nathan's bouts of jealous rage. Styron meditates frequently in the historical dimension of the Holocaust and how such a thing could happen, letting the matter resonate with his own knowledge of oppression that occurred in the American South.

The characters are powerfully and engagingly drawn, often with wit and humour and the novel speaks with great humanity. The structure of *Sophie's Choice* has a most intriguing effect as well. Styron offers two stories that are separate but

interrelated. In the first narrative we may find Stingo a very uninteresting character whose love life is fumbling and sometimes intentionally laughable. Stingo's youthful frustrations are meant to contrast with the energetic full-hearted love making of Nathan and Sophie. The polarities may not be perfectly realized in Styron's art but they provide a foundation for the whole work.

### **Critical Synopsis of the Story**

*Sophie's Choice* is one of those rare books that stay with you long after you have read it. A story of suicide and mental illness set against the backdrop of pre-war Poland, post-war New York and the Holocaust, and it is as depressing as the subject matter suggests.

The story is told through the eyes of Stingo, the author as a young man, struggling to find his feet as a writer in Brooklyn, New York, in the summer of 1947. It tells of his friendship with Sophie, a Polish refugee and Nathan, a local Jewish man. Through Stingo's friendship with the couple, we learn of Sophie's childhood in pre-war Cracow, her time in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and her roller coaster relationship with Nathan, at turns adoring and loving towards Sophie and best friend to Stingo and at others, a dangerous, paranoid schizophrenic.

Sophie Zawistowska, a gorgeous Polish woman living in the same house where Stingo lived, is a troubled survivor of the concentration camps during World War II. Throughout the book her story is revealed through the monologues and stories told by Stingo, the narrator. Sophie is shown as a vulnerable character, a lover of music and her boyfriend. Sophie is never given the opportunity to grieve properly for her loss of father, husband, son and daughter. Instead, she is casted into a world where she has no choice but to be happy. One thing that gives her hope for true happiness outwardly is Nathan, a man she meets in the library one day. Nathan plays the role of

her hero. He is a biologist who has plenty of financial resources. He nurses her back to health and two become lovers. Nathan is excessively addicted to drug and drinks. More than once he is thrown into a rage caused by a chemical imbalance in his brain, he hits and screams at Sophie and anyone else near him. He threatens to leave Sophie.

Sophie, the fun-loving Polish girl, has been twice widowed and lost two children. One day while driving Nathan goes out of control, because he is high on drugs. Sophie, who goes along for the ride, wants to scream and tell him to stop the car, but like many who suppress their problems. Sophie too chooses to suppress her scream. She is as it is traumatized by her past experience, hence can not take much violence from external situation. Therefore, the internal pressure resulting from suppressing one's feelings inevitably leads to catastrophe. The last pages of the book are filled with shocking details of Nathan and Sophie's fate. After a spontaneous and intimate night with Stingo, a good friend of Sophie who indirectly falls in love with her is the participator in this tragedy of a love story of Sophie and Nathan at America. Sophie leaves Stingo's farm in Virginia to return to Brooklyn, and to Nathan. Sophie states "I love Nathan but now feel this hate of life and god. Fuck god and all his Handwork. And life too. And even what remain of Love" (580). Her anger finally burst inside of her and all of the issues within her could no longer be suppressed and both Nathan and Sophie committ suicide by taking sodium cyanide. When Stingo returns to Brooklyn he finds police, an ambulance, and a room of shocked people. He came to know that Nathan and Sophie took their own lives by taking sodium cyanide together.

In the novel *Sophie's Choice* Styron tries to show the role of sexual oppressor, that links all men and the use of sexism as a paradigm to connect Nazi Germany to postwar America, extended to the reader as well. One of the most remarkable

successes of Styron's attack on sexism comes from his ability to implicate the reader himself in the system that victimizes Sophie. The male is forced to see as authentic since all readers, male or female, will be forced to see Sophie from a masculine perspective. Our limited popular and generally sensationalist knowledge of history prepares us to suspect Sophie's involvement in sexual crimes. Styron's technique effectively exposes the reader as participants in the same system of sexism the novel as a whole reflects. At the moment we learn the true nature of Sophie's "Choice" or "Crime". We are forced to confront the discrepancy between the truth and our assumptions.

### **Literature review**

Sexism, racism, Anti-Semitism etc are some of the topics William Styron deals with. Sexism is the most important topic Styron has tackled in. *Sophie's Choice*, his fourth novel, which was published in 1979. It has drawn attention of numerous critics and controversies as well, since its publication in 1979. The novel is basically critiqued for its issues of race, Anti-Semitism, psychological characteristics of the protagonist, narrative technique etc. So, now I would like to envisage critical reviews delivered by some critics on *Sophie's Choice* as follow:

The novel is seen as a problem of egotism. Stingo shows his ego to become a writer. In this regard, the critic William Heath opines:

When we first meet Stingo he is an ambitious young novelist of twenty-two who is experiencing his first case of writers block- "I had the Syrup, He says but it would not pour". His dreams are of destined fame but his lowly job involves reading isolated manuscript for McGrew-Hill with the sprite that seems to make the literary world go around,

Stingo rejects every single submission, “all of them so frightened with hope and clubfooted syntax” taking a sadistic delight in his work. (73)

When Styron is talking about his persona Stingo, he tends to forget that the central story of the novel is Sophie’s tragedy not Stingo’s voyage of discovery.

Although the novel’s title is *Sophie’s Choice* Styron gets so caught up in his fable of how his narrator writes a novel, wins manhood and conquers grief that the novel might just as well be called *Stingo’s Progress*. For Stingo’s point of view Sophie and Nathan are merely crewman on his voyage of discovery. They teach him about the complexity of human nature, the evils of Auschwitz, the splendors of love and the horrors of madness. They become, in a sense, surrogate family for Stingo.

The elder Stingo in describing his preparations to tell Sophie’s story displays the same egocentric pattern as his younger self. About the Stingo’s voyage of discovery a critic Roda Sirlin Says:

Stingo’s self-assessment at the beginning of the voyage is this: It was true that I had traveled great distance for one so young, but my spirit had remained landlocked unacquainted with love and all but a stranger to death. Stingo knows he needs a voyage of discovery. But little did he suspect at twenty-two that he would so quickly become acquainted with love and death in so strange a place to him as Brooklyn in 1947 (170)

Though love and death are strangers to Stingo at the age of twenty-two, at his older age when he lived in Brooklyn in 1947, he becomes acquainted to both love and death. He became the participator of the tragic love story of Sophie and Nathan and also one of the viewer of their suicidal death.

Through the alternation complementary but quite different narrative perspective the reader encounters with Auschwitz. In this regard Richard G law opines:

Because of its literally almost unspeakable subject, the manner of the unfolding of the tale is an exercise in overcoming or putting to sleep, reader resistance. To keep the readers imagination from evading the nature of Sophie's experience Styron employs a varieties of stratagems some simple other Byzantine in their elaborateness (136).

The unfolding of the narrative is a kind of trick which simultaneously carries us towards and hides its destination in *Sophie's Choice*. The whole narrative is skillfully crafted to get us in a frame of mind where we can't evade or fall to imagine the experience of genocide from the point of view of one of its victims. Talking about the technique another critic Nancy Chin says:

The use of quotations, especially as epigraphs, to a novel is a technique that Styron has employed throughout his career. His last novel *Sophie's Choice* published in 1979, contains twelve passage from fiction or poetry, including two epigraphs from Rilk's *Fourth Duin Elegy* and Andre Marlowe's *Lazarus*. The range of these sources from the Bible to Lazarus, is consistent with the scope of the literary allusion which permeate the novel (3-4).

While historical passages distances the reader from the story by disrupting the narrative, the literary quotations not only are part of the fabric of the story, but also suggest that the novel is as much about Stingo as it is about Sophie. Of the five unidentified quotations, only one concerns death: all five are references to Stingo's

lack of experience and clearly show the necessity of experience to a writer. With experience, the older Stingo is able to tell both Sophie's story and his own story.

The novel is also looked from the angle of Christianity by Samuel Coole. He says: "The most common norm of human values, Styron undermines Christianity, at the same time uses Christian imagery appropriately without irony to describe the scope and mythical archetypes of his materials" (17). Styron disregards Christianity directly but indirectly, he brought the references of Bible and Christianity to make his story reliable and strong.

Likewise *Sophie's Choice* is seen as an exploration of the inner psyche of the protagonist. In this matter Elizabeth Harion-Sarafidls says:

*Sophie's Choice* is also again a narrative deeply engaged in exploring consciousness, in speaking the unspeakable in the charity of a quest for self-knowledge: The Sophie of the title is yet another fragmented self one more protagonist torturously enmeshed in feeling of guilt, like Nat Turner "pursued by an obscure, unshakable grief... shivering in the knowledge of the futility of all ambition." What he sought to recreate, Styron explained in an interview, was the "agony" of the life of the women who was the inspiration for Sophie (96).

The extent to which Styron's Sophie is an emotional cripple, someone whose identity has been irrevocably shattered, is a matter which is discussed only gradually to the Stingo whom she befriended one summer in New York in her life.

*Sophie's Choice* has been studied how the dialogic worlds are working and Govin Colagne-Brooks says:

In *Sophie's Choice* Styron is overtly and not, in dialogic with other accounts of Auschwitz and with Langer's view of the kind of art

necessary of representing the world after the Holocaust. In this sense, the novel adheres to Langer's view that the need is to place disparate world in a single, disjunctive frame (24).

The direct references to schizophrenia, leading up to the news that Nathan is a paranoid schizophrenic are part of this dialogic worlds.

Issues of ego, journey of the narrator as a mature man, narrative technique, quotations used in the book, Christianity, Protagonist as a fragmented self and dialogic worlds have been talked by different critics but no one has studied *Sophie's Choice* as one of the prominent novel written by Styron who draws our attention towards the Sexism and Violence. Every chapter of the novel is loaded with the suffering of Sophie because of sexual harassment and violence done upon her by males, physically as well as mentally. So, my thesis is going to show how Sophie suffers from sexual harassment and violence in a patriarchal society in pre-war Poland, and post war America as well.

## II: FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

### Introduction

Before 1920's, women were confined only to the hearth. They were supposed to live passively inside home. They were obliged to accept what the male member of the family provided them. Women were oppressed, so their voice was not heard. Gradually, women started to write their feelings and desires on diaries, pamphlets, love letters etc.

1960's saw the emergence of feminist group which advocated for women's liberation and social and political union. They fought for women's rights to vote and to receive education. This movement coincided with goals of other reform movements of the time, which included improved medical care, socialized property ownership, and class equality. Moreover, the works of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792 and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) supports the thesis of these movements.

Feminism began as a political movement in 1960's and slowly it gained momentum and integrity and started to become popular. Toward 70's it entered into the academia as a theory, or it was imperative to take it up to analyze various texts to see where women were repressed / suppressed. Feminism became a tool for reading text. These readings enhanced questions such as: Should women be allowed to receive higher education? Should they be allowed to vote and take part in politics? Should women be employed equally with men in business world? What about the role in relation to their husband in the domestic spheres? And these questions emerged from disciplines as diverse as philosophy, theology, medicine physics and mathematics.

Feminism is the organized movement which promotes equality between men and women in political, economic, and social spheres. Feminist believe that women

have been oppressed due to their sex and this they say is the dominant ideology of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the system which elevates men to positions of power through the notion of pater or father, placing men in an economic and social executive position within the family unit, the market place and the street. Patriarchy represents all system of male dominants and is regarded as the root of most social problems. In other word, patriarchy has a male cultural form that wherever it is pre-eminent it has oppressed and dominated women, of all socio-economic classes and races. Throughout history men have had greater power in both the public and private spheres. To maintain this power, men have created boundaries and obstacles for women, thus, making it harder for women to hold power, it is the male always in supremacy.

Feminism studies women as people who are either oppressed or suppressed or deprived of the freedom of personal expression. All writers who struggle against patriarchy in favour of womanhood are generally considered as feminists. In this relation, feminism is also a political theory and practice to break the social bondage of patriarchy. Focusing on this aspect, Toril Moi, states: "The word feminist or feminism are political levels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement" (135).

At the same time, Toril Moi, makes clear what feminist criticism is in her book *Feminist Literary Criticism* saying: "Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of political discourse, critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature" (204). These lines show that she has focused on the nature of feminist criticism which concerns gender differences and likewise its development as theory and its application

which are useful to learn social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes.

Likewise, Elaine Showalter in her book *Literature Of Their Own* focuses on not only the reorganization of women's writing but also on rethinking the concept of literary study. She says:

Feminist criticism has demanded not just the recognition of women's writing but a radical rethinking of the concept of literary ... feminist criticism is international in its resources and feminist critics criss-cross national boundaries. (181)

Feminists today have finally recognized that the world they have described is not the whole world because its central concern is social distinction between men and women. So, it is committed to eradicate the ideology of domination and discrimination.

The marginalization of women role is itself become the central focus of female thought and they tried to raise voice against male domination. The feminists who talked about subverting male roles put women in equal rank. They study female space and try to place them in equal status, whether it is in social, political moral or artistic sphere.

Feminism examines the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Feminism seeks female identity, raises voice against patriarchal trait of pronounced like 'inclusive he'. They question on the differences what possible differences could it make if we continue to use the 'inclusive he' to refer to member of both sexes? Women have been misrepresented /misinterpreted in social, political, cultural, biological, religious

world and in the works of art and literature by generation of people to justify and maintain patriarchal system.

By the time women became conscious of their position in society and discrimination between men and women, many feminist emerged who forced upon women's mind, their well being and emancipation. They emerged from different nations, focusing on various aspects responsible for women's suffering and secondary position in society. Patriarchal society has indeed been well served by masculinist images, where all images of women have been male centered.

Misogynist distrust of women is an integral part of patriarchy. It includes the belief that women are stupid, petty, manipulative, dishonest, silly, irrational, incompetent, castrating, overemotional etc. Such misbeliefs can easily be seen in the views of Aristotle, St. Aquinas, Freud, and other philosophers and writers as well. In this regard Aristotle, a prominent philosopher, declared that "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (134 Selden). So, feminist view that such beliefs must be controlled, dominated, subdued as well as eradicated.

The notion that women are physically weak by nature was universally accepted in patriarchal society and it had become a means of controlling women in every sphere-social, political, and even literary. Focusing on this aspect Raman Selden writes:

Women have been made inferior and oppression has been compounded by men's belief that women are inferior by nature. However the abstract notion of equality receives lip service but demands for real equality will usually be restricted. (Selden 135)

Feminist writer view that 'feminism' is a second and cultural constructive form of women. When women reach a certain age and understand their gender, they are

loaded with concept of femininity which is set of cultural norms reserved for females. Society considers women as objects rather than human beings of flesh and blood. In this concern Beauvoir says, “Femininity is a cultural construct. One is not born a women, one becomes one” (209). The role of women in society is cultural construct because female infants do not know what they are: they are just like clay and it is the society which shapes them as females.

However, it is not an easy task to remove the deep rooted structure of society. It has taken a long time to realize and establish women’s identity. The feminist view is that since women are equal participants in social construction, they should be included not treated as outcasts. So, feminism aimed to end the notion that one’s biological sex is superior or inferior to the other.

The first blow on patriarchal structure, however, was given by Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room Of One’s Own* (1928). She said women always had to face social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions. She was very conscious of the imposed limitations on her own education. In this book, she explores deeper concerns of men’s anger at women, misunderstanding between sexes and above all psychological conditions under which women are brought up. She says that to write anything at the time was considered a sin. Their attempt was not only criticized and condemned but also at the same time they were disfigured and deformed. Society prevented women writers from writing openly. She writes: “She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest and their married life – perfection” (819). Due to lack of separate writing room, women writer had to do her writing in a common sitting room.

The prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century critic Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The second sex* projects the idea of female and calls her the Second Sex. She projects male writers usually assume and represent female as a negative “object” or “other” to man. They are supposed to be the dominant and defining subject whereas a woman as the dominated, passive object. In her essay *The Second Sex* the writer Beauvoir writes :

The ‘other’ is particularly defined according to the particular manner in which the One chooses to set himself up. Every man asserts his freedom and transcendence but they do not all give these words the same sense. For Montherlant transcendence is a situation: he is the transcendence, he soars in the sky of heroes; women crouches on earth, beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her and throws her back; never does he lower himself down to his realm of silmy shadows. [ ...] A woman is lost, where are the women? “The women of today are not women at all !” we have seen what this mysterious slogan’s mean. In men’s eye-and for the legion of women who see through men’s eye- it is not enough to have a woman’s body not to assume the female function as mistress or mother in order to be a “true woman”. In sexuality and maternity woman is subject can claim autonomy: but to be the “true woman” she must accept herself as the other. (994- 1000)

Thus, Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf both are concerned with the identity of women. Both found women sexually exploited, morally degenerated and physically weakened. They found no space of women rather found women’s identity in under-eraser.

They saw women were viewed, and judged in terms of masculine value system. Women were always identified in relation to man. It is the man who defines her according to their needs and beneficiaries. She has no right to make decision about herself. She is not free to choose wrong or right. She is trained to internalize the patriarchal truth as absolute and transcendent reality or unalienable aspect of her life. She has given up criticizing, judging, and investigating for herself by surrendering to male superiority.

### **The Revolt for Womanhood**

Feminism started as a general revolt to such domination and also to show the equal but opposite force, which can create meaning in literature. The germination of female authorial voice had in 17<sup>th</sup> century's female critic Mary Wollstonecraft. Her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792 well deserves its rank as the first great feminist work. She writes:

There are many follies, in some degree, peculiar to women: sins against reason of commission: as well as of omission: but all flowing from ignorance of prejudice, I shall only point out such as appear to be particularly injurious to their moral character and inadvertent on them, I wish especially to prove that the weakness of mind and body, which men have endeavored, impelled by various motives, to perpetuate, prevents their discharging the peculiar duty of their sex: for when weakness of body will not permit them to suckle their children, and weakness of mind makes them spoil their tempers – is women in a natural state. (396)

She advocates that it is essential for women to acquire rights and she thinks that men are responsible for women's deprivation and obligation. Women's repressed condition

was the result of lack of sufficient training and a neglected education. For her, women should be allowed freely to exercise and use their knowledge and abilities to govern their own conduct. Mary Wollstonecraft challenges the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women can receive same opportunities as men in education, work and politics.

The women's liberation movement which came through different phases, supported by abolition movement, suffrage movement, civil rights movement and liberation movement paved way to black feminists to form an autonomous black movement of 1970 in United States. Oberlin College of women's educational movement was established in 1833. American Woman Suffrage Association was established for the betterment of women. Nevertheless for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the American Women Suffrage Association fought for the emancipation and betterment of women. This culminated in the winning of vote in 1920 and feminist movement remained dormant for forty years.

Hence, feminist theories try to explore women's personal as well as common experiences of suffering, exploitation, oppression and their struggle for independence and liberation. Feminism tries to discover all forms of violence and oppression against women of all different socio-political context, its causes and consequences and provides favorable strategies for women's liberation. Despite the served dimension and diversities in feminist strategies, the autonomous movement of 1960's emphasized on the common goal of women's emancipation.

Elaine Showalter is feminist critic and Kate Millet, Carolyn Helburn and Judith Fellerly are some who followed Showalter. D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, also followed her ideological model. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual*

*Politics* expresses the idea about sexual differences which displays power relation and mechanism that expresses and enforces the relation of power in society:

She analyzes western social arrangement and institutions as covert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women. In her books she attacks the male bias in Freud's psychoanalytic and also analyzes selected passages by D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer as revealing the ways in which the authors in their fictional fantasies aggrandize their aggressive phallic serves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects. (88 Qtd. M.H. Abrahams)

In these lines Millet's expression of sexual politics is clear. For Millet, feminism is a political theory, a cultural and spiritual product where gender discrimination is wiped out and women are allowed to take free breath as men do in society. She opposed the hierarchy and studied institutional differences. Hence, her *Sexual Politics* opens a space for feminist reading in critical level.

### **Empowerment of Womanhood**

Power is an essential weapon in human society and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) emphasizes that women should be given power to develop their personalities, economic status and literary career. She claims that patriarchy is the main cause of women's suppression and it makes them inferior: "Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain women" (137 Selden).

Thus, feminist criticism politically is powerful tool whose main task is to make the patriarchal society realize their rigid rules and regulations and to make

women conscious of the age. And then only gender discrimination can be wiped out; so women can take free breath as men do in society.

During the eighties, a major text on feminism *The Mad Women On The Attic* (1979), by Gilbert and Gubar appeared, concentrating on the figure of the suppressed female. It is a kind of realization of female identity. By the eighties, women's experience is placed at the center of attention. Gilbert and Gubar locate the female territory in its larger context. They examine the boarder in which women writers defined themselves as free as men writers. They insist on "is a pen a metaphorical penis?" From this statement they protest against male writings, which does not give any authorial role to female in literature. Male activities they conclude for instance writing, reading, and thinking are not only alien but also inimical to "female" characteristic. Feminist criticism establishes the historical relativity of gender definition. The concept of patriarchy is revealed as man-made idea awarding the masculine purpose. Feminism exposes the true identity of patriarchy and thus realizes the significance of their own identity.

The three French Feminists: Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Irigary challenge the inherited worldview of patriarchal structures. They believe that western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. They also tried to deconstruct the language, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social practices and the culture. Thus, they deconstruct the male-centered thought. They claim that not only culture and religion support the male-domination but it is also the language which supports patriarchal domination.

French feminism is the result of culmination among post-modernism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist theory. And, it is also influenced by Lacan's psychoanalysis. In this respect, Selden writes, "French Feminism by

following Lacan's theories have overcome the hostility towards French shared by most feminist"(145).

French Feminist movement is radical and modern concept on women. It is a deconstructive reading of society from the perspective of Derridian philosophy of center and marginality. Helen Cixous argues that until female express their sexuality in the language, they only can overcome the phallogocentric approach. However, She deconstructs the relation of male and female e.g. Good /evil, sun /moon, nature and culture, and proves women can express and establish their identity by deconstructing the male space.

Julia Kristiva, important philosopher, focuses on the difference between semiotic and symbolic order of language. She questions femininity and prefers to see it as position. She opines that feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal. Semiotic is the stage where baby and mother are fused together inside the womb of the mother.

Luce Irigaray follows Cixous' footsteps on many counts. She begins by considering the cultural construction of female subjectivity. A woman in a patriarchal culture is defined not as what she is, but as what man is not. She examines the Freudian concept of penis-envy as an example which implies the same- that women are nothing more than the man's other. Her existence is only as negative mirror image of man. As such, she slips through the patriarchal net. This tends to make their writing, too characterized by fluidity. Finally, Irrigary connects female sexuality with a specific writing style and says that "her style" resists and explores all the forms, figures, notions, ideas and concepts established by the laws of patriarchal order. So, she emphasizes the need for the women language. Supporting Cixous, she says males think that their language is rational because their sexuality is centered on penis, whereas female sexuality is irrational, non linear, incomprehensive because female

sexuality is diffused over their body and therefore, the writing of female has a force which can overcome the patriarchal language.

### **The Class of Womanhood**

Marxism defines capitalism as the class system. Capitalism is a source of all oppression and views that the subjection of women will be due to oppression. It restricts women's subjectivity and opines the oppressive of women as needed. So all feminist argue of the dissertation of capitalism for the equality. So, when such capitalism is discarded from the society, then only the suppression of women will be removed from society. Marxist-feminists Heidi and Hartman argue sex as two separate but interlocking sets of social relations, capitalism and patriarchy. They view men in terms of class and race ideologies, class and race relations. Hence, many women working in leftist politics in the 1960s came into the feminist movement with Marxist and ethnic political roots, combining a radical feminist position with a Marxist one. In K. K. Ruthven's view Marxism also looks at the oppressed condition of women in society. He finds that Marx and Engles projects husbands as bourgeoisie and wives as the proletariat. He claims:

Marx and Engles opine that the first class oppression coincides with that of female sex by the male, thus legitimating the family equation of husbands with the bourgeoisie and wives with the proletariat.

(K.K. Ruthven, 29)

Hence, Marxism finds how the capitalism is the source of women's oppression in the capitalist society. When such capitalism is discarded from the society then only the suppression of women will be removed from the society.

In the late 1980s the most developed form of the feminism called *The Gender theory* emerged and was applied to the study of sexual differences. It views that

writings by men also can be feminist and our perception of gender does not go far from feminist theory. Feminist criticism is an analysis of gender and opens the textual field in discourse. Gender theory promises to introduce the subject of masculinity into feminist criticism. The distinction from traditional feminism is that it tries to bring men theorists, critics, and scholar into feminist criticism. Another aspect of gender study is that it brings feminist criticism from margin to the center in literary analysis. Showalter's alarm is that if the gender theory is defined within the framework of feminist concept, it can not result in the important expression of their work rather it leads to the displacement of de-politicization, for the betterment of gender theory, conscious struggle against sexism and racism is needed everywhere.

The overall view is that female literature is to free women particularly from patriarchal society. Feminists are of the opinion that only a feminist struggle will change relations between men and women on issues such as sexuality, violence and different cultural policies of dress. Hence, feminism explored female identity and role under the circumstances of hegemonic discourses of patriarchy. To raise voice of equality and freedom, the feminist thinker united in broad movement feminism.

For radical feminist, it is sexual rather than domestic exploitation within the family. Some argue that patriarchy is based primarily upon male violence and of women's sexuality. So, we can say that domestic violence and the sexual abuse of both women and children within the home is seen as the cutting edge of the patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and most aggressive form. In this regard a prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist critic Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* says:

As a matter of fact, the privileged position of men comes from the integration of his biologically aggressive role with his social function

as leader or master; it is an account of this social function that the psychological differences take on all their significance. Because man is ruler in the world he holds that the violence of his desires is a sign of his sovereignty; a man of great erotic capacity is said to be strong, potent-epithets that employ activity and transcendence. But, as warm and frigid, which is to say that she will never manifest other than passive qualities. (397)

Patriarchal society gives all power to the male and weaknesses to the female. In patriarchal social structure, men were taken as rational, active and superior beings whereas women were regarded as inferior, passive and kind. Such type of discrimination compelled women to take/accept sexual abuses and harassment as natural without objection.

It was said that male is always powerful, ruler and women should be ruled. Always men stood in centre and female position being subordinated appointed in periphery. Female is expected to fulfill men's needs physically, sexually and mentally. Hence, it is a kind of convention of thought in human civilization which always behaves women as second sex or lower creatures. To fulfill their goal, male creates myth about women. But Simon de Beauvoir criticizes male-made myth against women that myth is never more than a mirage that vanishes as well as draws one near to look at it. She further claims:

The myth of women is a luxury which can appear only if man escapes from urgent demands of his needs, the more relationship are concretely lived and less they are idealized... But along with luxury there is utility; surely most of the myths had roots in spontaneous attitude of man towards his existence, and the world around him. But

going beyond his experience towards the transcendent idea was deliberately used by patriarchal society. For purposes of self-justification, through the myths this society imposed its laws and customs upon individual in a picaresque, effective manner, it is under a mythical form that group-imperative is indoctrinated into each conscience. (999)

Hence, secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. Women, in general, have failed to occupy places of dignity with free and independent existence to associate with men on a plane of intellectual and professional equality. This condition has not only limited their achievement in many fields but also give rise to pervasive social evils that have had a particularly vitiating effect on the sexual relation between man and woman.

But today the situation does not remain the same. Women have become conscious of their secondary situation and have begun to question it. Thus, feminism is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of women to be taken as second class citizens. Domination is common for women of any color in patriarchy or male dominated male defined, institution, assumptions and values. Though Ruth criticizes the notion of patriarchy as: “Women as human beings substandard: less intelligent: less competent: less moral: less able physically and spiritually: small body, mind and characters: often bad and destructive” (96). Yet these rules no longer define women of contemporary world.

### **Patriarchal Social Structure in *Sophie's Choices***

William Styron also tries to show the evil of sexual harassment through his novel *Sophie's Choice*: because of sexual harassment, there is violence upon the

female. Though, Stingo and Nathan are weak in their characters, they are presented as strong, intellectual, truthful, and reliable. But, Sophie is presented as weak, initiator of sexual drive, liar and hysterical. Hence, in the society, which Styron portrays, women are reduced to an interchangeable object. Because sexist society denies women a personal identity, a sense of self, for every man Sophie encounters, she becomes an object of desire and a seducible prize. In the sexist world that Styron portrays, once Sophie has allowed herself to be seduced, she must be degraded as the whore. Her very submission to Nathan confirms the justice and accuracy of his accusation and marriage logically becomes the prize that Nathan draws upon, on the basis of his current beliefs about Sophie's sexual fidelity.

*Sophie's Choice* illustrates the respective roles of men and women in patriarchal society. Not only is Sophie's narrative punctuated with reminders of Stingo's presence, but in most cases Stingo and not Sophie actually recounts her past. In the process of telling the story "her story" becomes the "history of woman." From the narrative pattern we can find the female narrative different from male narrative. Sophie tells her story only when she is lying or confessing previous lies. Sophie's major lies involve her creation of a false childhood in Cracaw, a misleading representation of Nathan as a supporting and loving "Prince Charming" (168), her malignant misrepresentation of Wanda, and so on. Thus, the narration attributes unreliability to the female and reliability to the male. The voice of male becomes the voice of truth but the voices of female become the voice of false representation.

In the novel *Sophie's Choice* the male narrator is constantly obliged to identify with the female as liar. To prove Sophie as a liar he says: "but now it again become necessary to mention that Sophie was not quite straightforward in her recital of past events..." (158). It helps to show Sophie as a liar. She tells something at a time and

another thing at other time. Her study does not go smoothly because she has to tell lie about her past events.

The accusation of Sophie's lying about her sexual fidelity with Hoss at Auschwitz is further reinforced by Nathan's accusations when he was high in drug that she is a whore. Styron creates Nathan – a male in accordance to patriarchal definitions – and by using his voice to criticize Sophie undermines patriarchy itself. Styron exposes how patriarchy has been suppressing female. Though, Nathan is insane and a pathological liar, he has been established as credible. His insights, his power to predict correctly, are associated with the concept of patriarchy, which believes male as a possessor of knowledge.

*Sophie's choice* shows how patriarchy gives subordinate role to female and authorial role to male. The female lies but the male though false is represented as the provider of statistics, information, and facts. Nathan, the liar, is represented as a researcher of Nazi anti-Semitism and the cause of civil war and this function fulfills the vision of male as factual truth seekers and possessors of knowledge. The same happens in the case of Stingo as well. Sophie to hide her relation with male from the other males she has to lie. She accepts her female role as described by patriarchy that males are their promoter and protector. This is one of the most relevant myths that expose male dominating over female.

The novel also presents Sophie's father risking his life to save Jews though he is anti-Semitic. Casimir, former husband of Sophie at Poland as a generous, loving and intelligent, though he has followed the same path of Sophie's father. Nathan as a genuine and tender savior of Sophie, and Stingo as a devoted friend, though all of them exploit Sophie and have done violence upon her mentally and physically in one or the other way.

### III: SEXISM AND VIOLENCE IN *SOPHIE'S CHOICE*

To talk about Styron's novels, they are not oppressive but about oppression, not racist but about racism, not anti-Semitic but about anti-Semitism, and not sexist but about sexism. In *Sophie's Choice*, sexism serves as a pervasive model of oppression. In the novel, Styron carefully develops a comparison between Poland and the American South within which we see the double edged exploitation of women: domination over women. In *Sophie's choice*, we readers are compelled to agree accomplish with the sexist society and view women as subordinated, irrational, hysterical simpleminded, liar etc. Here, in the novel, the protagonist's situation clearly implies that women are liars, hysterical, simpleminded and either obsessed with sex and their own desirability.

When Sophie's representation as a bearer of truth is compared to that of key male characters, a stark differences emerge. Where Sophie's speech is necessarily deceitful or hysterical, Nathan's and Stingo's speech, though outwardly labeled as deceiving, is characterized paradoxically as truthful and rational. Nathan is declared certifiably mad, but his madness is presented in strikingly rational terms. The greatest sign of his madness is in accusing Sophie of loose sexuality and complicitious behaviours during the war. It is also revealed from Sophie's confession that she had done so at Auschwitz in the name of humanity to come out of the camp. But, patriarchal society labeled her as a whore. Nathan's paranoid accusations align with the text's rational discourse that is patriarchal discourse. Nathan's behaviour is considered rational and even Stingo by giving voice to Nathan's rationality is authenticating and validating patriarchal truths.

Sophie, a central female character, has been presented as passive and helpless. This character is illustrated when Wilhelmine, the prisoner – housekeeper of the

commandant's Auschwitz home, sexually assaults Sophie. She responds in this manner: "Having made her decision moments before Sophie was not about to resist or protest –in a kind of headlong auto hypothesis she has placed herself beyond revelation, realizing in any case that she was as helpless as crippled moth"(321). She sees herself as "helpless" and as she would not be able to resist decides to take thing passively.

The stereotype about women proves the accusation that the rational seeming female victim of male violence is passively helpless and perverse in patriarchal society, in place of masculine will to truth, woman is provided with will to deceive and will to succumb. So Sophie – a female is presented as irrational though she behaves rationally in the name of humanity because of such biased sexist value. Her rational behaviour is suspiciously tainted. So that, her rational behaviour is translated back into a kind of madness. Hence, Sophie is presented as irrational and accustomed with these stereotypes.

Sophie is also presented as a liar by sexist patriarchal society. In her very first attempt to gain Stingo's sympathy, she lies. In defense against Nathan's accusation that Sophie was a whore, she lies and claim that Nathan was "The only man I had ever made love to except my husband. And my husband is dead !" (105). Stingo latter learns that Sophie had in fact had a lover in between her husband and Nathan, and had had sexual relations with a woman as well. It proves that Sophie has not only physical relation with her husband, Casimir, at Poland and a Nathan, she had a relation with a commandant of Auschwitz- Hoss. That is reality is revealed latter but Sophie does not tell it directly. Throughout her narrative she alters the story of her past to disguise details that show that she was less a victim, than would otherwise be supposed.

Sophie's lies are revealed further in the text. Sophie claims that her father was a liberal pacifist who risked his life to hide Jews from a program; in fact, he was a virulent anti-Semite who wrote a hateful pamphlet against Jews. She also lies that she and her late husband were happy together, when he was contemptuous of her. Sophie specially lies not for to hide the truth, but to save herself at Nazi concentration camp. She presented herself as a anti-Semitic who helped her father's pamphlets typing and distributing against the Jews. She does not reveal until quite late in her confession that she had children and that she had chosen her son not her daughter to be spared from the gas chamber. Sophie's lies can also be cleared from the dream she had seen which is as follows:

So in the dream that has returned to me over and over I see princess Czartoryska in her handsome gown go to the phonograph and she turns and always says, as if she were talking to me " would you like to hear the Brems Lider? " and I always try to say yes. But just before I can say anything my father interrupts. He is standing next to the princess and he is looking directly at me, and he says please don't play that music for the child. She is much too stupid to understand: And then I woke up with this pain ... only this time it was even worse, Stingo. Because in the dream I had just now he seem to be talking to the princess not about the music but about ... "Sophie hesitated, then murmured." About my death he wanted me to die, I think. (508)

On at least three occasions in the novel, Sophie repeats the most fundamental of her lies which is most puzzling to Stingo.

The above lines of Sophie's dream also shows that Sophie is not telling truth about her father. She, at first, presents her father as a loving, truthful and handsome

but latter she says her father wanted her to die. He denies her to listen and learn music, which is her favourite hobby in life. Likewise, she presents her husband, Casimir, as a helpful but in reality, she does not like him who suppresses Sophie like her father. She also presents Blackstock as a loving husband to Sylvia, they are the boss of Sophie's office, though Blackstock calls Sylvia naming her a 'pet'. Which symbolizes the male way of treating women at the ground of animal not as a human being.

Sophie has no sense of self because her identity is entirely relational alienated in that of the men who control and protect her. Her only opportunity to experience self-esteem is to belong to men of whom she and other think well. When her hated father and the husband, who is his mirror image, are murdered, Sophie grieves not for their death but for her own, "her entire sense of self-of her identity—was unfastened" (273). Nathan offers Sophie an exact replica of her relationship with her father. She receives protections and identity at the price of childlike dependence, a total self-alienation that Nathan correctly identifies. Sophie's father kills Sophie's desire of learning music by employing her in the job of typing and distributing the pamphlet against the Jews. She should be satisfied in the desire of her father. Her intention does not get any place. She has to obey what her father says.

Likewise, in America – Nathan plays the same role by protecting and treating her as a submissive woman. She is compelled to feel happy in the desire of male. She accepts what Nathan gives. Nathan says:

"My darling, I think you have absolutely no ego at all ! (And she thinking as now: I would do anything for you, anything , *anything*. But now somehow his attempt to piss down on her begins to unloose his first panic in the day." Open your mouth wide," he orders her. She

waits watches, mouth agape, receptive lips quivering. But he fails. She shuts her eyes waiting there is only the sense of hovering above her, and the damp and the cold beneath." (371)

In this context, the story of Blackstock, a Jewish businessman in America and also the boss of Sophie's office and his wife Sylva is seen appropriate. Blackstock's adoration for Sylvia turns her into a pet, a doll, a pampered child. Sylvia destroys her self in an automobile accident. She never got chance to use her head but got chance to use her body and lust. Because Sylvia is treated as a doll not as a rational human being who can use his/her instinct. So, she becomes only the plaything of Blackstock. It also shows the tendency of patriarchal social values to give superior, truthful, authentic and factual role to male and presents male as less credible. Hence, they treat woman as a pet, doll, incredible, liar etc.

Likewise, Sophie's lack of credibility is directly and significantly linked to the lack of sexual fidelity, where women are presented as whores and liars. We can see the context in which the issue of Sophie's credibility is first raised: "Blackstock was a truly happy man. He adores Sylvia more than life itself. Only the fact he was childless, he once told Sophie, kept him from being absolutely the happiest man on earth... (104). By juxtaposing the first mention of Sophie's lying to the protestation of Blackstock that he is truly happy man who adores his wife, Stingo at last suggests that Sophie's lies may include her denial of sexual involvement with Blackstock.

In any case, Sophie's initial lie to Stingo falsely represents her sexual fidelity. Stingo says:

I note that Sophie told me a lie within moments after we first set eyes on each other. This was when, after the ghastly fight with Nathan, she

revealed upon me her look of desperation and declared that Nathan was the only man I have ever loved beside my husband.(105)

The possibility that Sophie may be lying about her fidelity is further reinforced by Nathan's accusations. Nathan accuses Sophie as a whore because he thinks that Sophie comes out of the concentration camp by putting sexual relation with the commandants, Hoss. Because of the structure of sexist society, Nathan's accusation proves true. Sexist society puts Nathan at the place of authority who defines women. This promotion of Nathan to a figure of authority permits Styron to expose the irrational bias of systematic sexism. But Nathan is established as credible though he is insane, pathological liar. He is presented as a researcher of the Nazi anti-Semitism, Civil War and the biologist. He has given the instance elsewhere on his presence, his insight, his power to predict correctly, and by general association with the representation of the male as the possessor of knowledge.

All these details show not only that Stingo's reassurances are suspiciously overdone, but they make it clear that truth is male defined as to merit belief. Sophie's story must receive male validation. Because of sexist social structure male writing gets authentic place but female writing does not get authenticity and they are less credible. So, Sophie delegates her story to Stingo.

Styron places Sophie in an impossible situation, which have particular metaphoric significance for women. If women prove appropriately selfless, they participate in their own alienation and destruction and if they make any claim of the right to self, it instantly backfires by proclaiming them to be selfish. For examples Sophie justifies her attempt to seduce Hoss as the disinterested and courageous effort of a mother to save her son. Sophie demands what she desperately needs and deserves which we are led to condemn her for her egotism, for telling to live up to the female

selflessness or motherhood. But Sophie can not win. When she acts as the good mother, she is also condemned for the same female sin of selfishness.

Both Sophie's refusal to help the Home Army in Warsaw, out of fear for her children's safety, and her inability to steal Emma's radio demonstrate the selfless other oriented traditionally required of women. But through our identifications with Wanda and the resistance movement, we come to call Sophie as not only morally weak and irresponsible but indeed as selfish. She uses her children as an excuse to hide her own cowardice. At last she is proved morally guilty of infanticide. Because she told Wanda she could not join the Home Army because she has the children. She has to protect them. But later when Jemand Van Niemand gives her a command to choose she left her daughter to die and choose a son.

Styron carefully constructs a globally sexist world. The "choice" that the Doctor Jemand Van Nemad imposes on Sophie marks the logical extension of all male behaviour towards women. Jemand Van Nemad fits into a clearly established pattern of sexist/patriarchal society. He makes Sophie the same proposition that virtually every other man in the novel implicitly or explicitly makes to her. He says: "I'd like to get you into bed with me" (527). When she fails to respond, he destroys her. Sophie, who always understood the necessity of female submission in a male world, fails to react quickly enough at the single moment. Stingo – a narrator of the story too wants to go to bed with Sophie. The fact of Stingo's intention towards Sophie can be cleared from the incident both Stingo and Sophie's night stay at the hotel where they had put physical relations. So, Stingo says:

I will never forget how eagerly and how naturally she moved to demonstrate to me her appetite and her devotion, planting her knees firmly between my legs like the fine craftwoman she was, then bending

down and taking into their mouth my no longer quite so shrunken little comrade. (54)

Their night of inexhaustible sex at hotel changes nothing except to conform how Sophie learns her lesson of sexual exploitation and submission at Auschwitz.

The role of sexual oppressor that links all men and the use of sexism as paradigm to connect Nazi Germany to postwar America, extend to the reader as well. In Nazi Germany, she is taken as a submissive woman who is suppressed by the male. In post war America, she suffers like that from Nathan and Stingo. And our knowledge of history, which is a sexist history prepares us/reader to suspect Sophie's involvement in sexual crimes at Auschwitz. One of the most remarkable successes of Styron's attack on patriarchy/sexism comes from his ability to implicate the reader and himself in the system that victimizes Sophie. All male or female are forced to view Sophie from masculine perspective.

Since male pronoun is authentic, our knowledge of history prepares us to suspect Sophie's involvement in sexual crimes at Auschwitz. The mysterious secret announced in the novel's title *Sophie's Choice* encourages us to believe that she participated more as collaborator than as victim. Nathan serves as a male representative in the text. He gradually plants the idea that Sophie's survival at Auschwitz is due to her sexual behaviour. This is made clear by Nathan's identifying Sophie with Irma Griese: "Hey Irma how many SS pricks did you suck to get out of there, how much master race come swallowed for Freiheit?" (367).

Styron's technique effectively exposes the reader as participants in the social system of sexism/patriarchy the novel as a whole reflect. Because the society is the sexist society and knowledge of the reader of that society also framed with the idea of

that society. When we learn the true nature of Sophie's "Choice or Crime" we are forced to confront the discrepancy between the truth and our assumption.

Women can be reduced to interchangeable sex object, because sexist/patriarchal society denies them a personal identity, a sense of self. Styron's novel locates the origin and the model of female oppression in the father dominance of the traditional family. Sophie's father reduces her to virtually menial submission though Sophie was interested in music. The representation throughout the novel of her identity, her individuality is gradually erased by the male:

This was the constant, overwhelming reality of her father, a man who had exercised over his household, and especially Sophie, a tyrannical domination so inflexible yet so cunningly subtle that she was a grown woman, fully come of age, before she realized that she loathed him past all telling. (258)

It clearly shows how Sophie's father ruled over the family members. All female members of the family are supposed to obey his demands without objection. Sophie's mother was genuinely disillusioned by her father. She is presented as a weak, unthinking, submissive woman. She could not get faithful love from her husband and Sophie being a daughter/female couldn't do anything but grieve for her mother's grief who suffered like her.

Likewise, Stingo suppresses woman. He is a good example of sexist male in patriarchal father dominated society. That sort of people sees women as a sex object only. For Stingo, "Little Miss Cock Tease" (131) epitomizes the era of the fifties and he assimilates to the standard male dualistic view of women. Stingo's division of the female sex into "Cock teaser" and "Cock suckers" shows the double view of male

towards female. The apparent idealization of women as pure and virginal reflects, in fact, a belief that such women are teases, frigid and inhuman.

Thus, Stingo's system that is patriarchal social system corresponds to an absolute degradation of woman. Non sexual relationships with women are inconceivable for Stingo. The "loneliness" on which he insists throughout the period of Stingo and Leslie's relation translates unambiguously as sexual frustration: "She could not know what she did to the loneliest junior editor in New York. My lust was in credible ...." (191). Stingo fantasizes the women as cock sucker and cock teaser. Stingo idealizes the female as sexual initiator and always responsive to male advances. In Stingo's social system women are allowed volition to want what man do or women get how much men provide them.

Stingo's initial encounter with Sophie occurs as Nathan defines her as "Cunt" and "Whore". Stingo's and Sophie and Nathan's rooms are in face to face. So, Stingo knows what happened at the room of Sophie. He heard, Nathan says: "Get out of here, you whore!" Sophie does not say anything, just lay there crying, I guess, and Nathan says, "Get your ass out of here, whore, I'm leavin'." It proves how Sophie and Nathan's relation is. Then Stingo's attention focuses immediately on her body and her sexuality. His desire to win the affection of Sophie marks at best a necessary step toward his real goal that is to share the bed abandoned by Nathan. Stingo finds Sophie most arousing when she is least erotic. Her tender, affectionate and vulnerable moments becomes an invitation to seduction.

During the desperate and exhausting flight south, to escape Nathan, the sight of Sophie asleep produces in Stingo a similar seizure of pure lust. Stingo says:

I lay down next to Sophie on the bed, which had become usurping in the middle, not so much allowing me as forcing me to roll towards her

as ... and her simple touch and proximity made me stir, squirm, fidget, unable to sleep. I heard a distant bell chime the noon hour, Sophie slept against me with lips apart ... (500)

Sophie stands apart from other women as an ideal she is the perfect women as defined and perceived in the male/patriarchal world. Sophie's behaviour perpetuates the particularly vicious myth that women respond to physical and mental violence as pleasurable. In the mist of an orgy of abuse, Sophie blissfully sucks Nathan's genitals and after hours of torture involving physical beating verbal abuse, and psychological assault Sophie welcomes immediately and without hesitation Nathan's invitation to have an intercourse. She says:

I was still ready for Nathan to piss on me, rape me, stab me, beat me, do anything with me that he desired. Anyway a long time passed before he spoke to me. Then he said "Sophielove", I'm insane, you know I want to apologize for my insanity: And after a bit he said want to fuck? I said right away without even thinking twice, 'yes oh yes'. And we made love all afternoon, which made me forget the pain but forget God too, and Jan, and all the other things I had lost. And I know Nathan and me would live for a while together. (376)

For everyman Sophie encounters, she becomes an object of desire a seducible prize. But in the sexist/ patriarchal world that Styron portrays, once Sophie has allowed herself to be seduced, she becomes a whore. Her very submission to Nathan confirms the justice and accuracy of his accusation according to the patriarchy thus marriage logically becomes a prize that Nathan withdraws on the basis of his current beliefs about Sophie's sexual fidelity.

Likewise, Stingo as a perfect member of sexist patriarchal society views Sophie as a sex object not as a human being. Stingo tormented for months by his desire for Sophie to have physical relation. He characterized her seduction of him on the beach as forthrightly lewd. Stingo describes the scene when Sophie turns and begin to scamper towards the beach:

"Come on Stingo", she cried. "take off your clothes and lets go in the water!" I got up then and watched her go, transfixed I mean it when I say that no chaste and famished grail-tormented Christian knight could have gazed with mere slack-Jawed admiration as the object of his quest than I did at my first glimpse Sophie's bouncing behind-a delectable upside-down valentine. Than I saw her splash into the murky ocean. (389).

When Sophie initiates lovemaking, immediately after her latest revelations about her past, Stingo implicitly condemns her for frivolity, capriciousness, and her inability to feel deeply, "The shift in mood- the grisly chronicle of Warshaw, followed in a flesh by this wanton playfulness. What in hell did it mean?" (390) Stingo had yet imagined and leads him to one of the novels relatively rare generalization about "women" "could women, then so instantaneously turn off their lust like a light switch?" (393)

In a sexist/ patriarchal social structure as Styron depicted, female has to play a sub-ordinate, submissive role. She should depend on male all the time. Her own desire does not get any place. She should be happy in the desire of male as her own. The typing and distribution of Sophie's father's murderous tract force, Sophie to acknowledge her tragic responsibility. Volition too strong to allow her the comforting status of victim but too weak to permit her to revolt:

And this terrible emptiness came over me when I realized just then there was nothing I could do about it , no way of saying no , no way possible to say, " papa I'm, not going to help you spread this things." ... And I was a grown women and I wanted to play Bach, and at that moment I just thought I must die- I mean, to die not so much for what he was making me so but become I had no way of saying no. (267)

Hence, Sophie is obliged to obey the father she is presented as the weak and coward to go against the desire of her father. She feels dominated but can not revolt. At last Sophie selects death over new loss of identity in the marriage and motherhood that Stingo offers because she now does not want more oppression from male.

Throughout *Sophie's Choice*, all questions of sex and sexism are linked to language and literature. For Stingo, writing and sex are interchangeable. To Stingo as the hero, the equivalence of language and sex becomes a source of almost unbearable frustration. He finds himself a sexual eavesdropper or a sort of oral voyeur. For Stingo, knowledge of the act of love is limited to the words other people pronounce during sex. The woman Stingo selects as his sexual initiator has a totally lingual sex life. Leslie only kisses and talks about sex and the single concrete result Stingo gleams from the adventures is an inflamed love.

To Stingo as a writer, sex is language in the most positive of senses. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in *The Madwoman In the Attic* postulates that the pen acts as a metaphorical penis. Stingo illustrates well their thesis that that male sexuality is the essence of literary power. The relationship of women to language in *Sophie's Choice* reflects their negative status. Women are degraded by the sexist-language. Man uses language to reduce them to their sexual anatomy e.g. a piece of ass. Because of such sexist language women are obliged to degrade themselves by the use of

language that patriarchy designed. The degradation of Sophie, whose linguistic ability far surpasses that of the male centered language. Though Sophie is fluent in German, Polish, French and Russian, Sophie finds herself in a situation to speak English.

" I want to write about Auschwitz," she said, "I want to write about my experiences there. I suppose I could write in polish or German or may be French but I'd so much rather be able to write in English..."(496)

Sophie has a intention to write her own history by herself but she is weak in English, though she is perfect in French Polish and German. Because of language she has to depend on male for writing her own story. So the single language English in which Stingo and Nathan retain total superiority. At our first encounter with Sophie, Nathan is accusing her for the parallel female sins of sexual and linguistic fidelity; "I can't be a cunt, you dumb fucking Polack. When are you going to learn to speak English?" (71) Nathan shows superiority over Sophie by only knowing how to speak a single language, that is English.

Nathan in his roles as knowledgeable reader, critic and literary history, predicts the coming of Jewish writing to replace southern writing. But Stingo and Nathan both can not see a tradition of women's writing:

Southern writing as a source is going to be over within a few years. Another genre is going to have to appear to take its place. That's why I'm saying you've got a lot guts to be writing in a worn-out tradition. [...] Oh, only that I'm quite certain that Jewish writing is going to be the important force in American literature in the coming years. (123-24).

Both Stingo and Nathan foresee the probability of southern writing and Jewish writing. Stingo believes southern writing as a source is going to make its place strong.

Likewise, Nathan forces on Jewish writing will be the important force in American literature in the coming year than the Southern writing. But, both of them do not talk about the coming female writing to replace patriarchal sexist writing of America. Hence, in the patriarchal social structures as Styron illustrates only the male history and the story is depicted, but no one talks about the female writing.

By the time Sophie expresses the astonishing desire to write a novel about her own experiences, her linguistic competence has been sufficiently prove to be incapable hence project her as an improbable and comic character. To make her English perfect and write her own story she has to accept the linguistic degradation by male:

You must begin to learn just what and when and where to add the preposition 'to' to the infinitive verb, and when to leave it out. And it is tough, you see, because in English there's no hard fast rule. You have to use your instinct ... "Stop it!" Sophie said, laughing. "Too much!" Too many word the English. In French is so simple. You just say "Vite" (71)

Hence, Nathan shows superiority through the medium of language. He says to know perfect English, one has to use instinct. Here, he wants to say that instinct is possessed by male (he). So, Sophie has to depend on the male. Since Sophie retains a terrible obsession with her personal history, she delegates her story to a man.

The story she believes she is assigning to Stingo's pen is in the process stolen from her. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, not only does western literary tradition gives priority to male writers, in the novel *Sophie's Choice* too, male has got the authority to write, but female has to depend on the male and their sexist language. In the novel *Sophie's Choice*, the female story ultimately turns out to be in the service of

that of the male. Stingo sees in Sophie the experience of love and death, which is useful for him to be a mature writer.

In patriarchal society female becomes a victim. Sophie's status as a victim is complicated by the multiple ways in which she is abused. She is not only compelled to choose between her children, but is also betrayed by a cruel father. She is married to a crude husband and later become a widow. In New York, she is raped in a subway train. She is both verbally and physically brutalized by Nathan. Finally even the sympathetic narrator Stingo uses Sophie's story to become a mature writer. Stingo patronizes Sophie and appropriates her story for his therapy and for his art.

The novel *Sophie's Choice* can be seen as a Sophie's sexual and emotional subjugation by the male characters. As Styron himself comments in an interview, "Sophie is almost an archetypal figure of the female who is beset upon by every male she meets" (Sirlin 111). Sophie's victimization before and during the Holocaust is delivered in part as sexual violence against her. Sophie's masochistic sexual life with Nathan would seem at least to represent her inability to emerge from that traumatic past and the sense of her own guilty complicity with it. Sexual obsessiveness and sexual violence also serve as the link between the stories of Stingo, the narrator, and the stories of Sophie. The novel's representation of patriarchal- sexual oppression of women and Sophie's masochistic participation in it has been read as the way all institutional systems of oppression compel their victims to participate in their own degradation.

In patriarchal social structure what women speak, is made confessional and what male/men speak, is taken as authentic and testimonial, though that is also the confessional. In *Sophie's Choice* testimony reduces to confession precisely in the sexualizing of Sophie's testimony. The representation of sexuality and sexual violence

against women is central to an understanding of the novel. It is through sexualized discourse that Sophie is represented as seeing an absolution that she does not fully deserve. Sophie's narrative is framed as confession rather than testimony because her secrets are represented as guilty, dirty secrets. Sophie's secrets as well as most of the disclosures made about her are related to her sexual encounters. Michel Foucault has argued that modern individuals are compelled, "to articulate their sexual peculiarity" (61), with the implication that our sexual secrets are understood to be the secrets truth of essential self. The secret truth of self is necessarily sexual. Foucault says, "one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles, one goes about telling the greater precision, whatever is most difficult to tell"(59). The focus on Sophie's sexual life thus in itself evokes an association with confession.

The confession is situated within a dynamic in which the one listening rather than the one telling has the authority to interpret and judge the content of the confession. As Foucault says:

Confession unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) a partner who's not simply the interlocutor but the authority who reserves the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and re-console [...], but in the one who listens and says nothing. (61-62)

For Foucault, confession, as a power exchange between teller and listener confirms the authority of the listener over the teller. It carries an implication of the teller's guilt. That is applicable to the case of Sophie and Stingo. Sophie tells/confesses her stories at Holocaust and American South to Stingo. Though Stingo is a listener, he has the authority to mend her story. So, he represents her secrets as guilty secrets. The idea of

Foucault that the listener takes over the speaker's agency, thus leaves the speaker open for accusation. Here too Sophie's confession is accused by the Stingo. He makes Sophie's story to suite his own Southern story of slavery. Male as a listener and female as a speaker, she has no authority over her own speech but the male has.

Styron may well intend his readers to recognize how the confessional structure amplifies Sophie's position of powerlessness. Right from the Sophie's and Stingo's first encounter, Styron finds comforting and even sexually alluring all the features that marks Sophie as dependent on his patronizing care despite his sympathy for Sophie. Possessing her denotes the intention of controlling her self-representation. He responds with pleasure, "the delicious inaccuracies of Sophie's English" (149). Near the end of the novel Sophie expresses interest in studying English so that she can write about her experiences but Stingo dismisses her idea of learning English and writing her experiences remarking that the only language schools are, "pretty far away from where they would be living" (553). So the feminist like Elaine Showalter raises their voice for equal education for male and female. Hence, Sophie's testimony is represented as arising from the presumed natural duplicity of the female sex. In fact, her testimonial credibility fails and her story succeeds in fulfilling a certain male fantasy of the ideal women.

By representing Sophie as a woman who not only tolerates but also seeks out and derives sustenance from sexual abuse, the narrative proves Sophie's status as an innocent victim. Sophie's sexual behaviour are examined as vulgar, erotic and unsuitable in the patriarchal society of Stingo, though they are like normal female behaviour. They emerge in the normal female ground just like women. Sophie has been oppressed from a verbal to a physical level in a violent sexual episode between Sophie and Nathan on a Connecticut Hillside. The abusive scene in which Nathan

accuses Sophie of Nazi complicity, violently engages Sophie in fellatio, viciously kicks her in the side and then tries to urinate into Sophie's mouth shows how female are abused, suppressed and violence done upon them by the male.

As Elaine Scarry in her book *The Body of Pain* says the process of physical abuse in the relationship of torturer to tortured is aimed at gaining control of the body for its own sake but in breaking down the body to gain the victim's voice and power. Likewise, Nathan wants Sophie to confess her Nazi sins, yet infact he has nothing to gain by getting information from her. He accuses her saying : "why don't you admit it, Irma? You played footsie with the SS, didn't you? Isn't that how you got out of Auschwitz? [...] *Admit it, you Fascist cunt !*" (408). Nathan focuses less on getting information out of Sophie than on more generally controlling her speech. On the drive to Connecticut Nathan cuts Sophie off in mid sentence ordering her to shut up:

As if he had slapped her she feels her head jerk sideways, then she turns, "darling, what do you –" But "shut up!" he roars, and now again the words flow forth as upon a spillway, undammed a babbling continuation of the jumbled semicoherence he has assailed her with since they left the Pink Palace well over an hour before. (363)

Hence, Nathan shows his superiority in the speech of Sophie too by cutting her at the mid sentence. It is the rule of patriarchal society, which does not give female to speak what she thinks. She has to control her speech.

In sexist world, female are compelled to accept violence upon them by male partner as natural:

(But not screaming when the point of the polished leather shoe strikes hard between two of her ribs, draws back, strikes again in the same place, during the breath from her lungs and causing a white blossom of

pain to swell beneath her breast.) "Nathan!" it is a desperate groan but not a scream, the hoarse flow of her breath merging in her ears with his voice coming in brutish methodical grunts: "*und die ... SS Madchan ... Spracht ... dot vill teach you ... dirty judinschwein!*" she does not really flinch from the pain but rather absorbs it, collecting it in to some cellar or dustbin deep within her being where she has stored up all his savagery: his threats, his taunts, his imprecations. (370)

Sophie accepts the violence done by Nathan on her as natural. She does not want to go against Nathan though he has done so. It is the rule of sexiest world and this is described by Styron.

Sophie is presented in a masochistic way to prove the sexual violence as natural. When Nathan forces Sophie to perform fellatio, her complicity brings her pleasure rather than pain:

Even with his crazy whispered rhyme repeated again and again-"Don't be a teaser, Irma Griese" –even with his hand remorselessly twisting her hair as if from its roots, even with his other hand at her shoulder clamped down with sickening pain and force [...]– even with the feverish fright engulfing her she cannot help but feels the old delectable pleasure as she sucks him and sucks and sucks and sucks. And endlessly loving sucks. (368)

Styron is trying to demonstrate the extent to which Sophie has learned to take a masochistic pleasure in her self-abasement. The narrative describes Sophie as taking pleasure despite the abuse. The fellatio is in itself so satisfying she can barely register the violence against her body. The narrative of this scene to Stingo shows not how much abuse she has taken from Nathan but how fortunate she is that Nathan

introduced her to the pleasure of fellatio. It is the good example of patriarchal social structure.

The following passage exemplifies the fine line that demonstrates how sexual violence against women can lead her to accept abuse:

And she thinks even now in her discomfourt, in her fear: yes, yes, he gave me that laughing he took away that guilt anyway when he said how absurd it was for me to feel shame about longing so madly to suck a cock, it wasn't my fault that my husband was frigid and didn't want me to and my lover in Warshaw wouldn't suggest it and I couldn't begin the thing [...] suck me, he always said, enjoy, enjoy! So even now with the cloud of fear around her, while he taunts her and abuses her-even now her pleasure is not mere mild enjoyment but the perennially recreated bliss and chill waves shiver down her back as she sucks and sucks and sucks. She is not even surprised that the more he goads her with the detested "Irma" the more gluttonous becomes her lust to swallow up his pricks and when he ceases, just for an instant, and panting raises her head and gaps "Oh God, I love sucking you." The words are uttered with the same uncomplicated and spontaneous order as before. (369)

The idea that "the more he goads her [...] the more gluttonous become her lust to swallow up his prick" seems designed to expose Shopie's pleasure as masochistic. Her lust increases with his taunting. It is the policy of male to do sexual violence upon female. We are compelled to understand that Sophie's unconscious desire would be literally to "swallow up his prick" and dispose of it. The idea of male to represent female as sexually obsessive to degrade them and make them accept sexual violence

upon them is cleared from the saying of Sophie: " I know as he [Nathan] said sometimes today, that I was a masochistic cunt and he was only giving me what I wanted" (368).

So, the narrative of the passage compels us to believe that Sophie is grateful for Nathan having liberated her sexual energies. *Sophie's Choice* as critique of how sexism demeans and destroys women, shows how sexist ideology can underlie and finally undermine well –intentional attempts to represent female victims of sexual violence, hence, Styron used fellatio to represent Sophie's oppression.

The older, wiser narrator lets readers understand that the virginal Stingo, "the prey of an ever-unfulfilled readiness" (424), is preoccupied to the point of being blind to his own participation in the kind of sexist patriarchal objectification of women that destroys Sophie. Stingo's obsessive lust rests to the representation of Sophie' having found an authentic liberation and fulfillment in fellatio. Stingo being the member of sexist patriarchal ideology feels that women who refuse fellatio are repressed and in need of liberation.

Styron has tried to make Sophie sympathetic but the characteristics of sympathetic women within a patriarchal logic of heterosexual desire are incompatible with those of moral credibility. Sophie's sexual desire depends both on her physical and moral vulnerability and on her sexual instability. These very features play against her testimonial credibility. Sophie's desirability and to her lack of credibility, ultimately testify against Sophie in the patriarchal narrative perspective.

Here, women's testimony has carried less credibility. Carol Rittnor and Jhon Roth point out that "most of the best-known account of the Holocaust tend to be by men," even though neither before, during, nor after the Shoah have women been silent about experiences that left them forever marked, if not destroyed by the 'Final

Solution" [3]. It is a product of general tendency to validate male writers over female or the patriarchal belief that women's speech can not get authenticity, because of that system Sophie delegates her story to Stingo.

In sexist patriarchal society female are taken as hysterical. Though male also are hysterical, their hysteria is not taken as degraded as female. In the case of Stingo and Sophie same thing happened. Having fallen asleep on the beach, Stingo dreams apparently hysterical dreams in which he feels as if he is "being turned in stone and most fearsomely buried alive" [525]. He feels "the sensation of helplessness, speechlessness, an inability to move or cry out against the inexorable weight of earth as he was flung in thud-thud- thudding rhythm against [his] rigidly paralyzed, supine body"[526]. But, Stingo wakes up to discover that children have literally buried him in sand. That sort of apparent hysteria of Stingo is just apparent but not actual. But female hysteria is actual. Male hysteria disguises fact where female experience hysteria.

To talk about the identity of women, she had not any fixed identity. "Names" imply identity but Sophie has more than one name in the novel. Legally she is Sophie Zawistowska, her maiden name was Bieganska, and Nathan affectingly calls her Sophielove, she is also called Zosia, her family's nickname for her (88). In Nathan's mad phase she is addressed as "Irma Griase" (359), epithet intended to implicate her in the Nazi crimes. Besides specific names, Nathan calls her a "whore" (46), " an anti-Semitic Polish Pig" (88), "that sweet siren of Cracow-that inimitable, that incomparable, that tragically faithless daughter of joy, Poland's gem and gift to the concupiscent chiropractors of Flatbush-Sophie Zawistowska" (202). Sophie's confused identity is evoked in part by the names or epithets other apply to her because Nathan calls Sophie "the coony chiropractic cunt of king's county" (207). Nathan's

brutal treatment of her echoes her father's own brutality. The two men are linked imaginatively when Nathan attacks Sophie she clings to him, "like a terrified child clutching at Daddy in the vertex of a mob" (202).

Sophie has the most complex identity problems of the three figures in the book she relies on other for her sense of self. Sophie's identity is entirely relational and dependent on the men around her. In her youth in Poland, she was tied to her father, a man who had "no more feeling for me than a servant, some peasants or slave" (246). She is a dutiful and respectful daughter:

On and on my father go about my intelligence failure of it, and I felt my face burning, but I shut up my ears, turn my hearing off. Papa, Papa, I remember saying to myself, *please*, all I want is a cup of tea! Then my father stopped attacking and went back to reading manuscript. (245)

She does not object the father's behaviour, she dutifully obeyed him. Later she becomes the wife of a man who appears to be a carbon copy of her father. When these men are killed, her sense of self is shattered. In such a state, Sophie is vulnerable to the pressure of Wanda, who urges Sophie to become involved in the resistance movement. When Wanda says: "I am appealing to you in the *name of humanity*. I am trying to appeal to your sense of decency to a sense of yourself as a *human being* and a *Pole*" (370). Her strategy is essentially plea for Sophie to consider her identity. Sophie responds to Wanda entirely in very specific term: "I can't risk it, with children – " (370).

When Wanda presses her, Sophie utters one of the strangest assertions of who she is: "I told you before, I'm not *other women* and I'm not in the Home Army... I'm myself! I have children" (370). Sophie here makes her choice in the name of

motherhood. Ironically and tragically it is her identity as a mother that is so cruelly assaulted when she is forced to choose between her two children at Auschwitz. As Stingo says: "that preservative and maternal passion of hers which in Warshaw... Wanda had deemed so selfish, so indecent, was something that, brought to its cruelest trial, Sophie could not overcome..." (399). It is the structure of sexist patriarchal society which frames the Sophie's mind also. So she chooses boys instead of girl.

This also shows that how female are preparing their mentality or unknowingly deserve the patriarchal norms. Hence, in sexist patriarchal society female is living in a situation of identity crisis and illusive world. When Sophie first arrives at Yetta's house she is disoriented:

She would for long seconds be so unable to name or recognize either herself or her surrounding that she felt herself to be in a somnolent trance, like the enchanted maiden in one of those Grimm fairy of her childhood, transported after a nocturnal spell to a new and unknown kingdom." (90)

The sleeping maiden of fairy tales is another central metaphor for Sophie. It suggests her great dependence on males. Sophie needs a prince charming to wake her. That is fulfilled by Nathan. It is the imagery of rebirth that fills Stingo's account of Sophie's early month in America. Before she meets Nathan, her life in America feels like a "rebirth" and she possesses "a great deal of the helplessness of a newborn child..." (91). Sophie really is born in America.

In Germany at Auschwitz she was experiencing death in life. She was assaulted every where. That was the place like a hell. All monsters were torturing Sophie. When she come to America and gets Nathan as a lover she feels like a new born child. With Nathan she started new life but later it becomes a tragedy for Sophie.

As Sophie was dependent on men in Poland, so she is in America. The two men she knows in Brooklyn, Nathan and Stingo play role as a protector and a guardian. She is wounded and ill and Nathan plays role of doctor. She is guilty and Stingo plays a role of spiritual confessor. Sophie's story is confession, and psychologically she strips herself down to the naked truth. Sophie goes to bed with Stingo in the Washington Hotel. Bare and naked in bed with Stingo, she has to chose Stingo who offers her, to love me! Love life! (349). Sophie has concealed her self sheltered and protected her secrets because she lacks the strength to face herself. Hence, Sophie is oppressed and dominated for all aspects of life.

However, Sophie's story is also a story of women and her lack of identity. Sophie is a victim who needs again and again a redeemer to save and protect her. Her father, Hoss, Nathan, Christ, and Stingo all disappoint and exploit her in one or the other way. She feels, her father will be her salvation if she shows his pamphlet to the Nazis. Because Sophie's father was a virulent anti-Semitic. He spread pamphlet against Jews. So, Sophie shows those pamphlets and tries to prove herself as an anti-Semitic but that does not help. Nathan has appeared to Sophie "like a redemptive knight from the void and restored her to life" (312), in the library. But, this also fails without reaching its goal. Stingo at last, comes as a father confessor, later proves to be obsessed with his own vision of her as, "the chatelaine of the manor, the mistress of his peanut farm" (490). Ultimately none of the men in Sophie's life can save her, nor can they be expected to provide her with what she lacks or needs. If they fulfill what she lacks that will be her identity but they only make her identityless woman victim of male.

Stingo, like Nathan, plays a role for Sophie. He is her savior on the beach of Coney Island when he swims out to save her from drowning her self. Stingo's most

important role for Sophie is as father confessor. Throughout their relationship, Sophie pours out her past to Stingo to absolve her of her grief. In doing so she delegates her story to Stingo which is more valuable to Stingo's literary career. But Sophie has to do nothing than to be exploited.

#### **IV: SOPHIE'S CHOICE: WOMAN'S EXPLOITATION**

William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* picturizes the predicament of the protagonist, Sophie, a central female character in the novel to show the evils of the patriarchal social system in the world in general and Poland and American south in particular.

Styron's novels are not oppressive but about oppression, not racist but about racism, not anti-semitic but about anti-semitism, and not sexist but about sexism. Styron speaks against those systems by presenting such system as inhuman and impractical and tries to show that such systems are disease for the healthy growth of society. The very novel *Sophie's Choice* is also not sexist but about systematic bias of sexism. Styron shows how Sophie suffers from the patriarchal social structure form Poland and American South.

Though Styron is a 20<sup>th</sup> century Southern writer, he avoids the post-modernist's obsession with technique. He views that language, characters and narrative are interconnected in an almost inseparable way. He has attempted to create characters whom people do not want to consign to oblivion. That is found in his hunting portrayed of Sophie Zawistowaska. About the narrative technique, Styron believed that a great book should leave the reader slightly exhausted at the end.

To show the systematic bias of patriarchal society Styron has created characters like Sophie, Nathan and Stingo. To make Sophie pitiable Styron presents her as a submissive, obedient and sufferer of the male biased world. By making Sophie pitiable sympathetic Styron proves how the sexist patriarchal society oppresses women.

Styron presents the male in general as learned, objectives, factual, and scholars, whereas female as liar, hysterical, simpleminded and obsessed with sex and

their own desirability to show the actual nature of sexist/patriarchal social structure. Styron tries to prove how sexist society presents Nathan as a scholar, knowledgeable and rational though he is a liar and paranoid schizophrenic. Nathan is proved as a researcher of Nazi anti-Semitism and the Civil War by sexist/patriarchal society, that is also the same in the case of Stingo too. But Sophie is presented as a liar, who tells lies about her father, husband, her relation at Auschwitz and even about her relation with Nathan.

*Sophie's Choice* shows how patriarchy gives subordinate role to female and authentic role to male. Sophie is presented as too dependent on male characters. To hide her relation with male, Sophie has to tell lies to other males. Patriarchal social structure presents Sophie's father as a man who risked his life to save Jews though he was an anti-semitic. Casimir, former husband of Sophie at Poland as a generous, loving and intelligent, though he has followed the same path of Sophie's father. Nathan as a genuine and tender savior of Sophie, and Stingo as a devoted friend, though all of them exploit Sophie and have done violence upon her mentally and physically in one or the other way.

Styron in the novel *Sophie's Choice* attributed reliability to the male and unreliability to the female. The voice of male becomes the voice of truth and the voice of female does not get authenticity and that becomes false representation. From the narrative pattern of *Sophie's Choice* we can find the female narrative pattern different from male narrative. Sophie tells her story only when she is lying and confessing previous lies. Sophie's major lies involve her creation of a false childhood in Cracow, a misleading representation of Nathan as a supporting and loving prince charming, her malignant representation of Wanda and so on. In the novel *Sophie's Choice* Styron

makes male narrator constantly obliged to identify female as liar to show the systematic bias of sexism/patriarchy.

*Sophie's Choice* presents well the roles of men and women in a sexist literature and society. Not only is Sophie's narrative punctuated with reminders of Stingo's presence but in most cases Stingo, not Sophie, actually recounts her past. Because of the presence of Stingo, a male "herstory" becomes "History" which is helpful to make Stingo, a mature writer.

In this way, the hypothesis of this dissertation: sexist attitude serves pervasive model of male oppression which makes the female character in one or the other way victims of violence.

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