

## Chapter 1

### Patriarchal Ideology, Misogyny, Wesker and Albee

#### Patriarchal Ideology and Misogynic Attitude

This study aims to examine Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, subverting the concept of gender identity hitherto existed in human society for centuries. Patriarchal ideology is a standpoint from where the female race is viewed and defined. In other words, patriarchal attitude is a deliberate attempt of the male race to capture, control, usurp, exploit, and thereby govern and inferiorize the female race. The patriarchal ideology bullies female to be male's prey.

Originated and consistently practiced since the earliest phase of human civilization, patriarchal attitude has been legitimized by legal, political, social, religious, cultural and economic practice of the society which leads women to internalize the patriarchal ways of thinking, in their psychological, sociological, religious terms and behavioral acts. It is due to the deliberate attempt of the patriarchal attitude that the concept of gender hierarchy emerged, distinct gender identity was formulated and the particular characteristics were attributed to each sex.

Thus, patriarchal attitude has given a very distinct, fixed and the ultimate role and identity for each gender. And human society has strictly carried out the same role and identity as the final truth. Human society regarded the gender hierarchy as a natural phenomena and human consciousness in matter of gender is constituted in the same way. Patriarchal ideology has permanently shaped the concept of gender.

With the patriarchal modes of thinking there is the misogynic attitude. In patrilineal society, women are stereotypically presented in negative terms. They are attributed with qualities like inferiority, passivity, subordination beauty, tenderness,

irrationality, charmness, fleshyness and womanishness. These are supposed to be the feminine features.

The biological female is ensued to be female socially and culturally. The patrilineal, phallogocentric and logocentric human society compel a biological female since birth time to possess the qualities of a cultural and social female. The patriarchal ideology cannot even think that there can exist some different identity than they have presumed. Thus, the true identity of female is encroached by male chauvinism leading female to be just male's prey.

Female identity is considered to be no more than the identity of an irrational, soulless inanimate object created just to pacify or please somebody or something. Their existence is just defined as an irrational, soulless object made as help mate for male partner to please him, thereby getting him rid of his tiredness and solitariness. Besides pleasing the male, women are entitled to get busy with child bearing, child rearing, doing household chorus, and staying indoors beautifying themselves so that her male partner can easily become the prey of her bewitching beauty and tenderness. Hence her existence is just limited on her physicality and sexuality. Female is considered to be an object of possession. From the point of view of the role given to female by the patriarchal ideology, the history of entire womanhood can be easily substituted with a mere inanimate object endorsed with the female qualities mentioned above. They are regarded as the soulless object, a nonhuman being.

Misogynic attitude has been labeled on male from the earliest human civilization. Women have been stereotypically presented in all periods of civilization. Sukumari Bhattacharya depicts the historical, cultural, religious and social reality of women in ancient Indian civilization. The Vedic period is the span of the time of seventeen or eighteen centuries in the ancient Indian civilization. She argues that the

position of women in the Vedic society was too worst (48). Women were regarded as the most inferior, evil and the lowest creature of the earth in the Vedic period. The society denied the dignified and prestigious existence of women. They were taken as evil, false, monstrous and as a good which could easily be sold, bought, offered, exchanged and substituted. According to her, *Yajur Veda* asserted

Woman is false, she is a misfortune, she is nothing but a passion like wine or dice. . . A woman was regarded as not better than an object of enjoyment. Her body and her labor are there for her master's enjoyment. Hence she could be pawned, bought, sold, given as part of sacrificial fees, or dowry, or as gifts to guests. Scriptures clearly state that woman brings enjoyment. At the same time one should not over enjoy cattle the field and the wife. (48)

Hence, women were dehumanized and brutally presented in the ancient Indian civilization.

As the women's status was equal with a soulless object, male children were the basic requirement of the society and the family. The sole aim of marriage was to bear male children. The religious scriptures too have several prayers for the birth of the son. Bhattacharya states the prayer of *Athar Veda* that "a wife is a comrade, a daughter misery and a son a light in the highest heaven" (47). This shows the traumatic condition of women where they were degenerated, degraded, and denigrated into an inferior and worthless object.

Women were regarded as the most weak, powerless and defenseless creature. Women were supposed to be protected by others throughout her life. As it is defined "A woman is protected by her father in childhood, by her husband in youth and by her sons in old age; she is not entitled to any freedom" (47). Moreover, her place was

regarded to be only in the domestic affairs and she was over exploited in the family by all its members. Bhattacharya in this context writes, “Marriage is obligatory for most women; and in marriage a woman is given not only to an individual but to a family which gives the whole family a right over her” (45). She further writes “At home the wife’s place was clearly below her husband. The husband was enjoined to give the wife the left-over after he finishes his meal” (47). Hence, women were regarded as a domestic servant. Thus, women’s real potential was denigrated and underestimated, and their identities were just confined in a narrow, constrained and limited boundary, and were always regarded as secondary in the hierarchy.

Similarly, Chandrakala Padia traces the situation of women in the West being taken as nonproductive, nonpolitical, private and emotional. She discusses that women remained the silent population throughout the world. Moreover, She sees that “all socio- political structures and institutions . . . have been instrumental in reinforcing gender inequality” (1). Athenian society, Roman society, Christian society, Medieval Europe, etc. on which the entire philosophical thought of the present West is laid on, too regarded the issue of gender hierarchy as the ultimate truth. They never tolerated women have the supreme, higher and primary position. For them the distinct and fixed gender identity becomes a natural phenomenon and the ultimate truth.

Greek culture, on which the whole Western intellectual tradition rests, held biased attitude towards women and women’s position was low there. Padia in this context claims,

The Greek world view regarded women as inferior to men in every sphere - be it political, social, or legal. To illustrate, in Homeric saga, the male was the leitmotiv of Greek ethics, and a women’s contribution

was limited to just inspiring men to heroic deeds, abiding by marital faithfulness and beautifying her body for the sake of male.” (2)

Thus, the Greek people too formulated the idea of gender hierarchy as the ultimate truth. She further states, “a close look at history reveals that the women’s position in Athens was no better than that of chattel, that is, just a kind of moveable property...Athenian society never tolerated women at public places except at funerals and all-female festivals” (4). Hence, Athenian society too perceived the issue of gender hierarchy as the final truth.

Roman society too believed male supremacy and always kept women on the vicious narrow domestic circle of full restrictions and taboos. Women’s emancipation was a rare phenomenon there. Padia argues, “Roman society was a brutal, slave based society where a ruthless dominator model of male control over female ... regulated life at all level – be it personal, familial, national or international” (4). This is a portrayal of the attitude of the Roman men towards women.

Christianity too supports gender hierarchy. The mythological tradition of Christianity regards women merely as men’s rib and gives them the role to avoid the solitariness of man. According to biblical story, the first woman Eve was made out of Adam’s rib. Hence, according to the bible, women are possession of man whom the male can use, shape, define, and control according to their own wish, against whom the female cannot raise any question because they are just man’s property and one has a full authority over one’s property. So the bible too relegated women in secondary, subordinate, weak and passive being.

As the Hellenistic civilization collapsed by disintegration on itself and by the attack of barbarians in around 300, Christianity became the official religion throughout the then Roman Empire and then the view on women deteriorated much

more. Church and the Christian missionaries simply acquiesced in the traditional view of woman which imposed several restrictions on her. This was done essentially on the basis of the biblical interpretation which supported inferiority of women by placing all the blame squarely on Eve for the fall of humanity (4). She opines,

As for the late middle ages, they may well be regarded as one of the most brutal periods of history for women. This period not only tolerated, but promoted misogyny, and in cases of sexual impropriety it was always the woman who was blamed... In the feudal system of this period war was always a possibility... The lords were even allowed to test the virginity of the serf's new bride on the wedding night. Thus the young bride had to feel humiliated and dishonored on the very night of her married life. (5)

Thus, female identity was instrumentalized throughout Europe in the middle age.

Theologians too have given her inferior position. Padia summarizes Carmody's opinion of male superiority over female in this way:

Women is subordinate to man because she bears great responsibility for the curse that came with the original sin; women are simply to provide procreation and companionship to men; the natural orders assigns women only those function that correspond to her sexual and procreative organs; and adulterous women should be stoned to death, but unfaithful husbands are not to any punishment. (5)

Thus, Carmody stated her traumatic inferiority highly prevalent in the society. This too justifies female's vulnerable situation in human society.

The prominent philosophers from the time of the Socratic period too have shown the same phallogocentric and androcentric thinking in their writings. There are

almost no philosophers who have not advocated distinct identity and function of male and female to be performed in society. Hence, philosophers too sketched her in the image of weakness, fragility, triviality and defenselessness.

The enigmatic philosophers of all the time, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Weber, Freud, Monterlant, etc. too forwarded the same identity of female: subordinate and subservient. They have put man at the center being primary, powerful, rational, intellectual and valuable and in contrast woman in its periphery, being secondary, fragile, irrational, subordinate and weak being. The ontology and existence of male and female is constituted in this sort of binary opposition.

Aristotle has perceived woman as the most degenerated, denigrated, pernicious and sinful creature ever found. Perhaps, Aristotle is the only philosopher who has put the most blasphemous and sacrilegious comment upon her and it is surprising that he has shaped the intellectual tradition to a great extent. The following statement from Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* is worth noting in this regard:

Aristotle was more inclined to believe that women were incomplete in some ways. A woman was an 'unfinished man'. In reproduction, woman is passive and receptive whilst man is active and productive; for the child inherits only the male characteristics, claimed Aristotle. He believed that all child's characteristics lay complete in male sperm. The woman was the soil, receiving and bring forth the seed, whilst the man was the sower. Or, in Aristotelian language, the man provides the 'form' and the woman contributes the 'substance'. (98)

In this way, Aristotle relegated woman to be worthless creature and man most dominant, worthwhile and Supreme Being.

Similarly, in *Generation of Animal* Aristotle depicts the same picture of

woman. Biologically, Aristotle sees separate role of each sex in reproduction. He states:

The female always provides the material, the male provides that which fashions the material into shape; this, in our view, is the specific characteristic of each of the sexes: that is what it means to be male or to be female... thus the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male, since the Soul is the essence" of a particular body. (185)

Thus, Aristotle sees the essence in the man and physical, inanimate and worthless object in woman. He compares man with soul but woman with mere soil. Thus, Aristotle relegated women to worthless, contemptible, discreditable, petty and trifling being and assumed to be the earth's inferiorest object. He portrayed women's secondaryness, subordination and subservientness in position, contrast to men, and established the firm, solid and concrete hierarchy in gender. As Aristotle was one of the greatest scientists, philosophers and intellectual scholars, and was followed for centuries later, his belief of gender hierarchy shaped the consciousness of whole human being and the society remained firm on the issue of gender as laid by Aristotle. Hence, the West formulated his idea of gender hierarchy and regarded it as an ultimate truth.

Another scholar of the Renaissance period, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, too held the view of Aristotle about gender hierarchy. As to women's nature and mental ability, Hegel argues,

Women can, of course, be educated, but their minds are not adapted to the higher sciences, philosophy, or certain of the arts. These demand a universal faculty. Women may have happy inspirations, taste,



elegance, but they have not the idea. The difference between man and woman is the same as that between animal and plant. The animal corresponds more closely to the character of the man, the plant to that of the woman. . . . The education of woman goes on one hardly knows how, in the atmosphere of picture-thinking, as it were, more through life than through the acquisition of knowledge. Man attains his position only through stress of thought and much specialized effort. (172)

Hegel describes women as thoughtless, peaceful, and emotional being that is not fit for learning, knowledge, logic and thinking power. They can be tender, charming, elegant and rich in passion but lack in universal faculty and idea. Hegel also does not think that women too can be vigorous, masculine, rational and intellectual. Thus, the Western metaphysics supported phallocentrism. Hegel is one more step for this.

The trace of the misogyny justifies how the issue of gender hierarchy, based on patriarchal ideology, is deeply rooted in the Western intellectual background. The issue of gender hierarchy has dwelt in every culture, civilization, society, nation, religion, and intellectual thinkers, from the ancient to the present in their conscious level and behavioral habits. They have not thought the indeterminacy of gender hierarchy. Their notion of gender role and gender hierarchy is taken as natural phenomena. Thus, human society understood and internalized, the concept of gender role as natural, pristine, determinant, finite and the ultimate truth. It believed the superiority of male and inferiority of female.

However, there are many writers and thinkers who have subverted this age-old notion of gender. The two texts under the present study are such texts. This study attempts to expose it. The concern of this study is to reexamine the validity of gender hierarchy believed to be true for centuries. This study hypothesizes that, the concept

of gender hierarchy is just a construct, not the concrete reality and the final truth, which can easily be subverted, dismantled and redefined. Rather the position and identity of the male and female is always undetermined, fluctuate and uncertain.

Moreover the study tries to show that women are not to be considered always as the lowest, inferior and subservient being but they can be masculine and powerful who can drag the male race into the subservient position, crawling behind the female. Thus, it tries to subvert the blur the sharp distinction and hierarchy put between male and female.

As no earlier study has been made on the dramas *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Wesker and Albee respectively, foregrounding the issue of gender hierarchy, this study offers to be highly significant. Both the dramas of Albee and Wesker are analyzed and discussed from other perspectives but the issue of the subversion of gender identity has remained silent. The study therefore tries to expose this issue in light of Derridian theory of deconstruction. It will inaugurate a new paradigm upon these texts for the aspiring researchers.

### **Arnold Wesker and Edward Albee**

Born on May 24, 1932, in Stepney, London, Arnold Wesker, grew up in a poor Jewish family with hardships and trouble. He was brought up first in rented room in Fashion Street, Spitalfields and then in a new Council flat in Hackney. The educational background of his family too was very weak. In an interview with Robert Skloot, Wesker himself confesses that "I didn't come from a highly educated background" (41). Wesker was from such a poor and backward family which preferred work to reading and writing. Being failed to get a grant to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Wesker took several menial jobs like furniture-making,

carpentry, amateur acting, book-selling etc. ending up in pastry cook (Wesker and et al. 194). Politically, his mother was a member of a communist party and he was that of the young communist league for a short while. However, he was always involved in political activity (194).

At the literary career, Wesker developed an ambition to be a film writer and director and spent all his money to learn dramatic techniques at the London School of Film Techniques. Then he started writing drama. He wrote *The Kitchen* as his first attempt but it was not considered because it was not a full length play. Then he wrote *Look Back in Anger*, *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *Roots*. With the production of *Chicken Soup with Barley*, his first full length play from Belgrade Coventry in 1958, Wesker came to be regarded as an important British playwright of 1960s. Later he published several full length dramas.

Most of his dramas are laden up with his autobiographical traits. As Wesker came from a communist Jewish working class family, several of his works contain the theme of Jewishness, poverty, communism and lower class domestic realism. Such tendency of writing contributed a lot to the new wave in drama called Kitchen-Sink realism emerged in 1960s in the scenario of Modern Dramas in Britain. John Osborne and Arnold Wesker were the most significant figure to portray the lower class domestic realism in their writings (Carter and Mcrae 371).

Michael Kustow describes *Chicken Soup with Barley* “as a rallying-cry for the diverse but energetic forces of counter culture which characterized what was probably the most comprehensive mass political movement of that generation, which was mine, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament” (Kustow 46). According to Kustow, Wesker gives voice to the counter culture movement of his generation.

Born on March 12, 1928 and adopted by a wealthy owner of the famous Keith

Albee theatres, Edward Albee grew up in New York City, nearby Westchester and briefly attended the Trinity College. He was named after his grandfather, Edward Franklin Albee, who was a part of Keityh- Albee theatre, an extremely successful string of Vaudeville theatre. As he was adopted by the wealthy Albee family, Edward spent his childhood in excess of comfort and luxury, including private tutors, servants, automobiles, excursion to the theatre and so on, which shaped Albee's theme of his literary career.

During late 1950s he moved to Greenwich Village to begin writing plays. He did some trivial jobs there though he was called as the 'richest boy in Greenwich Village' by his friends. Albee's early works include *The Zoo Story*, *The Sandbox*, *The death of Bessie Smith* and *The Sandbox*, which were published on 1959. He wrote his first full length play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in 1962, which is considered as the most successful masterpiece. He subsequently published *Tiny Alice* (1964), *A Delicate Balance* (1966), *Seascape* (1975), *The Lady from Dubuque* (1979), *The Man Who had three Arms* (1982), *Marriage Play* (1987) etc. He adopted some other writer's works like *Lolita*, *Malcolm* etc. for stage.

As Albee grew up in the excess of luxury and comfort, he used his pen to criticize the moral and spiritual damages in the Americans by excess of material wealth. He is regarded as a harsh satirist of American values and Dream. He exposes emptiness, sterility, barrenness, infertility, incompetence, corruption, immorality caused on modern American man due to the false belief of American Dream. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is regarded as an "allegory for the historical experience" (Holtan 46). Albee is one of the advocator of the failure of the American Dream.

Charles Thomas Samuels does not categorize his works as absurdist theatre, like that of Samuel Becket but finds his works formally conventional and peculiar in

genre, which he terms as Social Gothic.

Albee's play hardly fits this genre. It is formally conventional; it says nothing more general about reality than that beatniks and executives have a hard time conversing; and it neither adheres to nor derides any philosophical assumptions. It is instead a prime example of a peculiarly American genre, which I should call "social gothic." Its confusions are accidental rather than, as in absurdist theatre, willed. Structurally, it confuses naturalism and sentimental melodrama. Ideologically, it confuses hostility to public complacency (which has traditionally been the great animating force of European naturalism) and adulation of private self-pity (which has been the great animating force of our contemporary theater). (188)

According to Samuels, Edward Albee does not follow any philosophical line, neither the theater of the absurd nor naturalism or melodrama, but it is a new American genre: social gothic.

### **Review of Literature**

Various critics have perceived Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in various ways and have offered several criticisms.

Following is the brief attempt to allocate some of the criticisms on these texts.

Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* concerns the Jewish family, which was fading away from the central part of London and communism, which was suppressed in the growing capitalistic mode of economy. The play is not highly acclaimed critically as it had to be. In this context, Malcom Page writes that Wesker is "undeservedly neglected" and that comments upon Wesker are usually "banal, wrong or misleading" (208). Due to its content of Jewish family and socialistic theme,

Wesker's play is deliberately made a failure.

Critics reviewed *Chicken Soup with Barley* focusing on the issues like communism, socialism, domesticity, family life, Jewishness, autobiographical traits, and so on. None of them have ever touched the issue of gender hierarchy, which this study attempts to.

Rachel Cooke relates this play with Wesker's family and the most autobiographical of his dramas. She opines that "of all Wesker's work, it is *Chicken Soup with Barley* that is most autobiographical (Para 9)". She argues:

Sarah and her wastrel husband Harry are thinly disguised portraits of Wesker's own parents, Leah and Joseph, who were the children of immigrants from Eastern Europe and who worked as tailoring machinists. They brought up Arnold and his sister Della, first in rented rooms in Fashion street, Spitalfields, and then in a new council flat in Hackney. Both were devout communists. (Para 9)

The frequent movement of Kahns family, for settlement is highly significant for Cooke. She relates the events of the play with Wesker's family life.

In an interview with Trussler and Morris, the playwright admits that the relationship between the characters refers to the obvious relationship with his own. He states "Sarah Kahn in *Chicken Soup with Barley* is a member of the communist party, and my mother is a member of the communist party Dave ...can obviously be compared to my own sister and brother in law ... what is not obvious is what I choose to select and juxtapose and extend" (194). Wesker's remarks justify that this is an autobiographical plays.

Robert Kleinberg finds the dramatic technique of serio-comedy as the most dominant aspect in the play. He states,

The ethnic qualities are presented sentimentally, and in this sense, serio-comically. That is, the Kahns and the Bryants are involved in serious situations, but their language and folk manners are endearingly comic. The comic elements tend simultaneously to lighten, intensify, and subvert the seriousness of the situation... Wesker's use of caricature response is very serious but the effect is also sentimentally comic (the Gertude Berg variety) and therefore a totally serious situation under goes and becomes a serio-comedy. (36-37)

Thus, Kleinberg values Wesker's artistic technique for making very serious events with the laughable comic instances which makes the play a serio-comedy.

Denis Donoghue finds the theme of communism embodied in the text. She opines, "In *Chicken Soup with Barley*... Wesker chronicles the struggle of the Kahn family to live the good communist life" (96). The drama seems to be exposing the theme of the failure of communism Donoghue argues that "What this trilogy says is not that communism is false but that even the truth of communism, if it were to obtain, would not automatically make a man free or whole" (97). Therefore, Donoghue takes this play as the exposure about the truth of communism.

Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is regarded as his most successful, famous, important and controversial drama of the year and is highly praised, applauded, reviewed and criticized throughout the world from various perspectives. Most of the critics have mainly foregrounded the elements which are similar to the American real historical experience. Besides, emphasizing on the patterns of the American history, critics have excavated the various themes of the drama such as the constant interpenetration of truth and illusion, theater of absurd, drama of love and romance, failure of American dream, drama of family life and so on. But the implicit

issue of the subversion of gender hierarchy in the drama is eclipsed in the hand of the critics. Without discussing this issue, the worth of the play remains incomplete.

Orley I Holtan finds it dealing with the American historical experiences. He illustrates, “I feel that one of the most profitable way of looking at *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is to see it as an allegory for the American historical experiences” (46). Though the American had dreamt to create a perfect society in the fresh, unspoiled continent, their dream was never materialized. America was increasingly caught up in the same corruptions, compromises and failure as the rest of the world, which Albee has artistically portrayed in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (49). The major characters George and Martha are deliberately named after the historical figure George and Martha Washington, which shows the obvious relationship of the drama with the American historical experiences. Holton in this context further elaborates,

Albee has created a rich and troubling allegory for the American historical experience, the story of a nation that began in boundless optimism and faith in its own power to control the future and that has had come to grips not only with external challenges but with its own corruption, compromises, and failure, that has reached the point where it must cast away its comforting dreams and look reality in the face.

(52)

Thus, Holton sees the drama telling the story of America, failing in its ideals and descending into corruption.

Summarizing the view of Richard Schechener, member of Pulitzer Prize advisory board about *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* C.W. Bigsby states,

He found it a filthy play and indicated it for its morbidity and sexual perversity which are there to titillate an impotent and homosexual



theater and audience. More perversely he saw in the play an ‘ineluctable to escape reality and its concomitant responsibilities by crawling back into the womb, or bathroom or both. (257)

Schechner perceives the drama in a high moralistic tone. He finds filthiness, sexuality, matting, copulation, etc. dominant in the drama.

Charles Thomas Samuels holds this drama to be “a ruthlessly faithful dramatization of a bad marriage” (195). He points out the disturbed, immoral and unfaithful relationship of George and Martha. He adds, “It is another of Albee’s satire on the modern world... about the decline of the West” (195). Thus, Charles comments that this play portrays the corrupted and immoral marital relationship of the modern world.

Ruth Meyer postulates that “the ambiguity between truth illusions is a major concern of the play” (62). He means to say that there is a constant interpenetration of truth and illusion that readers are pushed in an unbelievable chaotic situation, where they cannot clearly make a distinction between truth and a falsity. In his criticism, Meyer supplies Albee’s use of several ambiguous instances such as Honey’s false hysterical stroke, pregnancy, use of word ‘hurt’, sickness, their non-existent son, George’s murder of his father etc.

Both the dramas, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Chicken Soup with Barley*, are viewed by the critics from different perspectives. They have focused on the various issues but not issue of the subversion of gender identity in these dramas. Therefore, this study has analyzed these plays from this perspective.

### **Outline of the Study**

This study has been constructed under four major chapters and several sub-chapters. The first chapter comprises the background of the study and the thesis statement. It introduces patriarchal ideology and misogyny, and traces misogynic

attitudes, which is very important to create the basic argument of the study. Similarly, this chapter consists brief introduction of the authors: Arnold Wesker and Edward Albee whose texts, are taken under study. Furthermore, this chapter comprises review of literature, which summarizes the opinions of various critics upon these texts. It is significant in order to know that what critics have said about the two texts and what they have left. This study would not have been conducted if the issue of gender identity has already been studied in detail by the critics earlier. The study has been made possible as the issue of gender identity about these texts that has been remained silent.

The second chapter focuses on the theory of deconstruction based on Derrida. It defines the term 'deconstruction' and discusses Derrida's view on language and his concept of subversion of binary opposition. This chapter mainly aims to prove gender identity as an unstable phenomenon taking support of Derrida's deconstructive theory. Through Derrida's view of unstable meaning of language and his concept of binaries not opponent rather complement with each other. The rigid, stable and unalterable gender identity has been tried to prove as subvertive and indeterminate, which is the main objective of this study.

The third chapter is the textual analysis of the texts *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* This chapter provides the evidences of subvertive gender identity in the two dramas under study. The main concern of this chapter is finding the subvertive gender role played by the protagonists.

Finally, the last chapter defines the gender identity in a new paradigm. Erasing the gender hierarchy existed in human society since the primitive era to the modern time, gender identity is defined here in light of Derridian theory of deconstruction which is justified as unstable, indeterminate and fleeting.

## Chapter 2

### Deconstruction: Binary Oppositions in Literature

#### Zeroing Deconstruction

Deconstruction is one of the linguistic theories, among structuralism, formalism, new criticism, etc., which emerged with a prominent French scholar, Jacques Derrida, in late 1960s from the monumental essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Science”. The 1950s was the period in which the linguistic theories like structuralism of Saussure, formalism of Shklovsky and Mukarovsky, New Criticism of I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot had played the dominant role in the field of literary criticism. Structuralism perceived language as a system of sign, in which each signifier leads to a definite signified within a system thereby leading human language to have concrete, finite, fixed, and true meaning. Structuralists perceived language as a stable and reliable means of communication, because human language is nonreferential, but conceptual.

New Criticism showed that the text functions as a unified whole because the main theme of a text is established by the text’s formal or structural elements like imagery, symbolism, tone, rhyme, plot, characterization, setting, point of view, and so on. New Critics also believed to have a single and coherent meaning of the text because the particular elements in the text are working there to establish the theme of the text. This school of criticism was occupied with the linguistics theory that would suggest the fixed, finite, coherent and true meaning of the text, the universe and human identity.

Deconstruction is a vehement reaction against the hitherto belief of the stability, center, coherence, unity, truth, totality, and determinant and finite meaning of the human language, text, human identity, the world and the whole universe. It is

an adherence of instability, incoherence, indeterminacy, and referentiality in the meaning of human identity, the world, the universe and any sort of literary text.

Deconstructive criticism does not believe in the stable, true, coherent, fixed and determinant meaning of human language, literary text, the world and of the universe, rather it sees the meaning in the never-ending play of signifiers, which is always fleeting and sliding. There is no fixed and the ultimate meaning of anything for the deconstructive critics. It is as linguistics theory based on human language.

Deconstruction takes language as its starting point.

Deconstruction provides a new way of looking at the world, the literary texts, and all the hitherto beliefs, ideological, social, cultural, or religious. Denying the concrete and stable meaning, deconstructive criticism seeks to establish multiple possibilities of meaning because it sees language as an illusion, which mystifies one rather than providing a reliable ground.

Abrams too defines deconstruction as an act of reading in which readers can find multiple possibilities of meaning, challenging those who believe that a text contains a single, fixed and concrete meaning. He argues,

Deconstruction, as applied in the criticism of literature, designates a theory and practice of reading which questions and claims to subvert or undermine the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinant meaning of the text. Typically a deconstructive reading sets out to show that the conflicting forces within the text itself serve to dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meaning into an indefinite array of incompatible and undecidable possibilities. (56)

Abrams takes deconstruction as an attempt to subvert the notion of stability, coherence and determinacy.

### **Derrida and Human Language**

The key point of deconstruction depends on Derrida's view over language. The most important thing here is, if Derrida had not perceived language in such a distinct way, probably today's most domineering school of criticism, deconstructive criticism, would not have been born. Adams states, "Derrida's concern was with the problem of language of itself" (1116). In this context Tyson views, "Language is not the reliable means of communication we believe it to be, rather a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex of experience" (249). For Derrida, language is not a reliable and stable means of communication, rather it is much more vague, slippery and ambiguous.

Derrida is far more ahead than the structuralist's belief of language. For structuralists, a sign is a unit of language, a signifier, a group of letters written or pronounced, and the signified is the concept of the signifier that we picture in our mind. Though there is not a natural but arbitrary connection between signifier and signified, a structuralist believes that each linguistic sign gets a linguistic value on the signifying system of language in conceptual and material point of view. They believe that each sign gets a value within a language thereby leading each sign to have certain meaning. They assert that each signifier leads to a finite and determinant signified. Thus, for structuralists, language is a signifying system having fixed signifieds for each signifiers. Hence, they hold to have the finite and coherent meaning of the language.

But Derrida does not rest on the structuralists' view on language. He does not see each signifier leading to certain signified, rather a single signifier in a single

context produces very vague and ambiguous signifieds. Any signifier consists and produces a number of signifieds. Therefore, it is always impossible to communicate the desired theme between the interlocutors through language. Language does not provide an opportunity to have a communication in a very clear and simple way, rather it makes communication complicated, vague and ambiguous because the signs in the language do not have fixed and determinant signifieds. The signifieds of every signifier is always undecidable, unstable, fleeting, sliding and undetermined. Each signifiers produce signifieds in a never ending deferral and postponement. Hence, there comes to be a chain of signifiers instead of a final signified.

Adams argues, “adopting Saussure’s notion that the system of language is entirely differential, Derrida goes on to show that such a system cannot be a structure because by definition a structure must be structured and the constant deferral of meaning (signification) from one signifier to another allows for no stoppage, therefore no center, origin, or totality” (1117). Thus, Derrida shows no stoppage in the flow of the chain of signifiers instead of getting a signified. The formula of structuralists of the signifying system is reversed by Derrida:

For Structuralists: Sign = signifier + signified

For Derrida: Sign = signifier + signifier + ..... + signifier

According to Derrida, in each attempt of defining a linguistic sign, one has to jump from one signifier into another creating a long chain of signifiers. Instead of getting a signified one experiences an echolalia as in a chamber house. When Derrida notices that sort of feature of linguistics signs, he ultimately terms two important characteristics of language: “(1) its play of signifiers continually differs, or postpones, meaning, and (2) the meaning it seems to have is the result of the difference by which we distinguish one signifier from the another” (Tyson 253). Meaning for Derrida is

mere a play of the continual deferment and postponement of the signifier.

Therefore, indeterminacy is the major theme of the theory of deconstructive criticisms. Derrida coins a word 'difference' combining the words 'to defer' and 'to differ', which is the only possible meaning for him that language can have. So the only meaning language can have, for Derrida, is the difference. If there exists any meaning of the text, human identity, the universe, and the world, it is just the difference. So, it is impossible to exist the notion of closure, totality, determinacy, center, and the ultimate truth.

It is so because for Derrida human language is our "ground of being" (253). Unlike Plato, Descartes, or the structuralist, Derrida sees human language as the ground of being. To simplify the matter, all the knowledge, ideologies, experience that one has formulated regarding the human identity, the world, and the universe are merely based on the human language. In other words, language is the base of human knowledge. Truth, identity, center, margin, and ideologies that human being has created are constructed by means of language. All the ideologies or the understanding, perception, explanation, of the universe too are formulated by the same language.

Derrida takes the support of the structuralist to criticize themselves, that structuralists were among the first to argue that a person's view of the world is constructed by the language one speaks (257). Structuralists too hold that human knowledge is constructed by means of language. But the point Derrida differs from them is that they believe that language is generated by stable innate structure of human consciousness. Structuralists see language as a ground for being, but for them human language is highly structural, structured by stable and innate structure of human consciousness. They perceive language as orderly and stable means of communication. Thus, structuralist perceives the notion of totality, center, binaries,

closure and truth within language as the ultimate and stable truth.

Derrida attacks the notion of truth, stability, closure, totalities, binaries and the center that the structuralist and the whole Western metaphysics believed to be the ultimate truth. Derrida asserts that our ground the being is language but it is vague, instable, fleeting, slippery and meaningless. Then, Derrida raises the question to the whole Western metaphysics that how it is possible to exist the notion of center, closure, totality, truth, binaries and stability, if the language, the ground of our being, itself is dynamic, instable, fleeting and slippery. Therefore, as language is the ground of our being and the meaning that language produces is always fleeting, unstable and vague, there is no chance of existing stable truth, center, binaries and totalities. In this context, Tyson writes: “for deconstruction, then, language is the ground of being, but that ground is not out of play: it is itself as dynamic, evolving, problematic, and ideologically saturated as the world view it produces . For this reason, there is no center to our understanding of existence” (256). Thus, every concept is constructed by language, which itself is in the continuous play of absence and the presence. Therefore the ideologies, concept, knowledge people have generated are not true, stable and determinant, rather they are indeterminate and are always fleeting and sliding.

Therefore, according to the theory of deconstruction the concept of gender identity too, which has been believed to be true, finite, stable and determined since centuries back does not remain the same, rather the meaning of the gender male and female is no more than ‘difference’. To define and confine the genders, male and female, in a particular trace as it has been done, is to repress the play of the multiple meaning, denying the essential essence of the meaning of gender identity. So the Western philosophy has repressed the multiple meaning of the term male and female



confining it into a narrow sphere, leading itself into dictatorship. Now the firm concept of gender identity happens to be in the play of never ending deferral.

The firm and constant role and identity, universally attributed to each gender male and female gets problematized, deconcretized and decentralized, because it is a human concept, produced by human language, which itself is unstable and dynamic. Therefore, it is bizarre to go on thinking the stable gender identity, which is constructed by dynamic and unstable human language. If the language itself is unreliable, unstable, flexible, slippery and fleeting, how is it possible to have the concept of stable gender identity formulated by means of language? In this context, Tyson aptly writes,

Plato's forms, Descartes' cogito, structuralism's innate structure of human consciousness, and so on\_ is itself a human concept and therefore a product of human language, how can it be the outsidings of the ambiguity of the language? That is, how can any concept be outside the dynamics, evolving, ideologically saturated operations of the language that produced it? For Derrida, the answer is that no concept is beyond the dynamic instability of language, which disseminates (as a flower scatters its seeds on the wind) an infinite number of possible meanings with each written or spoken utterance.

(256)

Therefore, Derrida claims that, there exist no rigid, firm and stable concepts or meaning. Likewise, no concept of gender hierarchy and stable gender identity exists in human society, rather it has been blurred.

### **Indeterminacy of Binary Oppositions**

Structuralism defines each term in opposition to other. Good is defined in

opposition of evil, culture in opposition of nature and female in opposition of male. It has created several such oppositions in the language and has internalized them. "The essential point about this view of language is that underling our use of language is a system, a pattern of paired opposites, binary oppositions" (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 70). In structuralism and in Western philosophy male and female are defined in opposition to each other. Male and female are regarded as a pair of binary opposition like nature and culture, speech and writing, rational and emotional, black and white, good and evil, truth and error, civilized and primitive, heteroeroticism and autoeroticism, and so on, which are put in the set of binary opposition, and are defined in terms of superiority and inferiority with each other's in the logocentric Western philosophy. The two different items of each pair are considered to be similar as the two opposite poles of the magnet.

Binary opposition is conceptualized and legitimized as an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinction as an important aspect of language. Binary opposition in another word, is the dichotomy of absence and presence, in which the first item of the pair is regarded as presence whereas the second absence. So in each pair, the second item is regarded as the absence of the first pair, and that the second item of each pair is regarded as inferior, secondary, subordinate, and subservient. For instance, in the pair of male and female, female is regarded as the absence of the male. To simplify the matter, the Western metaphysics regards the absence of masculine characteristics in female. In other words, in male it is viewed the presence of phallus, while vagina of female is the absence of phallus. It does not believe to have masculine characteristics in female. It means the Western metaphysics makes female deserving the qualities of inferiority, like subordination, secondaryness and subservient being.

But Derrida blurs such polar oppositions, and shows each members of the pairs working as necessary complement of the other rather than opposing. He picks such oppositions particularly in the works of Rousseau's *Emile and Confession* and in general in the whole Western philosophy and shows these members of the pairs coordinating with each other rather than sharply contradicting. Derrida in this context argues "the history of that western metaphysics that entertains relationship of cohabitation with Rousseau's text . . . (165)", which means that the western metaphysics copulates with Rousseau's idea of sharp binary opposition. Derrida problematizes, destabilizes, deconcretizes and deheirearchizes the polar opposition between nature and culture, speech and writing, natural mother and surrogate mother, and heteroeroticism and autoeroticism.

Derrida argues that these types of pairs are not the dangerous supplements with each other as Rousseau in particular and the whole western metaphysics in general believe, but they are the essential supplement to each other. Without the supplimentrality between each other in the pairs, he opines, both remain incomplete. For instance, in the pair between nature and culture, if culture is needed to fashion or complete the nature, then how can nature be the primary, supreme, prime and presence and then culture secondary, subservient, and absence? Derrida asks. This is one of the much contradictory and the greatest fallacy of the whole Western metaphysics for Derrida.

Derrida shows that sort of contradiction and fallacy in the text of Rousseau and his comment on Rousseau's view of nature in the following way:

thus presence, always natural, which for Rousseau more than for other means maternal, ought to be self sufficient. Its essence, another name for presence, may be read through the grid of this ought to be

(Cecandionnel). Like nature's "love there is no substitute for a mother's love" says Emile. It is in no way supplemented, that is to say it does not have to be supplemented, it suffices and it is self-sufficient; but that also means that it is irreplaceable; what one would substitute for it would not equal it, would be only a mediocre make shift. Finally it means that nature does not supplement itself at all; nature's supplement does not proceed from nature, it is not only inferior to be other than Nature. (155)

Rousseau in particular and the whole Western metaphysics in general present nature's superiority over culture. They take nature as supreme, prime, superior in contrast to culture and put in first position in the polar opposition with culture. They do not see its supplementarity with anything, rather show it sharply contradicting with culture.

But Derrida goes one step ahead of them and shows nature bestowing to culture. He points out, nature, sometimes being defiled with culture. Sometimes breast feeding, the natural phenomenon, which is regarded as supreme, primary and pure, too comes to be deficient and is to be substituted and fulfilled by cultural phenomenon. Derrida argues:

Although there is no love for a mother's love, it is better that a child should suck the breast of a healthy nurse rather than of a petted mother, if he has any further evil to fear from her who has given him birth. It is indeed culture or civilization that must supplement a deficient nature, a deficiency that can't by definition be anything but an accident and a deviation from nature. (155)

Then Derrida asks, which one is sufficient, complete, supreme and primary in the pair, either nature, or culture? The answer was 'nature' for the Western metaphysics

but Derrida bluntly denies it, makes them ashamed and defines them in a new term. He does not see such hierarchies between them, rather let them be in condition of undecidability, in the never ending play of signifiers.

Similarly, Derrida dehierarchizes the schematization between the pairs of heteroeroticism and autoeroticism pointing out a great contradiction in the belief of Western metaphysics in regard to masturbation and natural sex. Though, western metaphysics regards natural sex as a natural phenomenon and the mere pleasure driving means, and masturbation as a crime and culpability, Derrida points out the great contradiction in them that they believe that masturbation can substitute the whole sex in absence of natural sex. He argues, if they believe in such replacement of natural sex from autoeroticism, what is the logic behind arguing the superiority of one over another? He therefore sees vainness in arguing the polar opposition between such terms.

Derrida explains that, western metaphysics regards autoeroticism as crime, shame, fault, and an inferior task. "The experience of autoeroticism is eroticism is lived in anguish. Masturbation reassures ("soon reassured") only through that culpability traditionally attached to the practice, obliging children to assume the fault and to interiorize the threat of castration that always accompanies it" (158). They never tolerate anyone involving in autoeroticism, as it is regarded as the inferior task and the greatest crime.

But Derrida sees Rousseau himself arguing that the same crime, shame, fault and the inferior task, autoeroticism, being able to deny, discard and dispose the whole sex. Derrida sees Rousseau arguing that one can drive pleasure sometimes from autoeroticism without being involved in women or the opposite sex or autoeroticism being able on disposing the whole sex. Derrida cites such contradiction in Rousseau in

this way: “the vice, which shame and timidity find so convenient, possesses, beside a great attraction for lively imaginations\_ that of being able to dispose of the whole sex as they desire, and to make the beauty which tempts them minister to their pleasure, without being obliged to obtain its consent” (158). Thus, Derrida raises questions to the adherent advocator of the polar hierarchies how such rigid dichotomy between autoeroticism and heteroeroticism exists, if one can be substituted by another. Derrida writes: “the dangerous supplement, which Rousseau also calls a fatal advantage is properly seductive” (158). Hence, Derrida subverted the schematization between autoeroticism and heteroeroticism.

Derrida elucidates that there is no chance of existing such contradiction or hierarchies or binaries but all these pairs are the essential supplement with each other. Derrida writes “the concept of the supplement is a sort of blind spot in Rousseau’s text” (167). Thus, Derrida reverses and problematizes the binary opposition. He does not only subvert the idea of binary opposition, but also puts them in condition of indeterminacy and in the never-ending play of absence and presence, blurring the hierarchies of superiority and inferiority. For instance, in the pair of nature and culture, Derrida firstly blurred the hierarchies between them, did not rest on this subversion, rather, let them their relation of superiority and inferiority in condition of undecidability. Therefore, one of the major concerns of the Derridan theory of deconstruction is to blur the hierarchies deeply rooted in the Western philosophy.

Several critics and authors too point out that the major concern of the literary school of Derridian deconstructive theory is to subvert and let the pairs of binaries be in condition of undecidability. Mary Poovey writes, “The project of deconstruction, then, is not to reverse binary opposition but to problematize the very idea of opposition and the notion of identity upon which it depends. Deconstruction therefore

undermines identity, truth, being as such; it substitutes endless deferral or play for these essences” (52). Poovey sees the main target of deconstruction being to problematize the idea of binary opposition and to destabilize and deconcretize the notion of identity.

Stephen Fuchs and Steven Ward note that deconstruction blurs the conceptual hierarchies, like subject and object, science and art etc.

Deconstruction collapses the internal conceptual hierarchies of a text and questions its latent assumptions, revealing the constructive and selective decisions that produced its central concepts. The traditional metaphysical distinctions between subject and object, signifier and referent, the word and the world, popular and serious culture, reason and rhetoric, science and art, and speech and writing are imploded and inverted. (483)

Fuchs and Ward point out deconstruction implodes inverts and collapses the traditional metaphysical distinctions: signifier and referent, and so on.

M. H. Abrams states the Derridian deconstruction and de-schematization of polar opposition in following ways:

Several of Derrida’s skeptical procedures have been especially influential in deconstructive literary criticism. A cardinal procedure is to subvert the innumerable binary oppositions such as speech/writing, nature/culture, truth/error, male/female which are essential structural elements in logocentric languages. Derrida shows that such opposition constitutes a tacit hierarchy, in which the first term functions as privileged and superior and the second term as derivative and inferior. Derrida’s procedure is to invert the hierarchy, by showing that the

primary term can be made out to be derivative form, or a special case of, the secondary term; but instead of stopping at this reversal, he goes on to destabilize both hierarchies, leaving them in condition of undecidability. (58)

Thus, Abrams sees, the destabilization of hierarchies into the condition of undecidability as the cardinal and dominant aspect of deconstruction. Derrida's major contribution is dehierarchize the tacit hierarchy dwelling as the essential structure of logocentric language.

Similarly, Lois Tyson also notes Derrida's theory of deconstruction in the following words:

Derrida borrowed and transformed structuralism's idea that we tend to conceptualize our experience in terms of polar opposites, called binary oppositions. For example, according to structuralism, we understand the term good by contrasting it with the word evil. Similarly, we understand reason as the opposite of emotion, masculine as the opposite of feminine, civilized as the opposite of primitive and so on... Derrida observed, one must examine the ways in which the two members of the opposition are not completely opposite, the ways in which they overlap or share some things in common". (254)

Here, Tyson too sees the concern of deconstruction is to let the members of the pairs of the binaries, be in condition of undecidability.

Thus the major concern of the school of the criticism of deconstruction is to blur the binaries that the whole Western philosophy had conceptualized from centuries.



### **Fallacy behind Gender Identity**

Patriarchal ideology, assumes to have stable, concrete and determined existence of gender identity and a sharp distinction and opposition between male and female. All the social, cultural, religious institutions and norms, values and beliefs of patriarchal society are formulated on this ground. But deconstruction denies and discards this notion. According to it, the word 'male' and 'female' are just the linguistic sign, which contains and produces multiple possibilities of meanings, and thus are not the constant terms. So the concept of stable gender identity is a mere shadow or illusion, which is elaborated in the following paragraphs.

For the structuralists, "signs which are made up of two parts (like two sides of a sheet of paper): a mark, either written or spoken, called a 'signifier' and a concept (what is 'thought' when the mark is made), called a signified," the linguistics signs 'male' and 'female' too have certain referent and signified for them (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 67). They believe to have certain referent and signified for the words male and female from both the conceptual and material view point.

But Derrida questions, what sort of man to understand from mere the linguistics signs 'man' in Saussure's signifying system of language? Men are of various types, and what sort of man does the word 'man' refer to? black, white, negro, tall, short, intellectual, pompous, arrogant, blind or of what other type? What sort of man to visualize in our mind from the word 'man'? Even while delimiting the context; the word man does not refer to a single and finite referent. For instance, if the man we are talking about, is a negro, still the context does not provide the definite ground to communicate exactly because again several questions arises about the negro man we are talking.

Firstly, it is not sure, either the Negro man is tall or short or average in height.

Interestingly again the question rises, what does tall mean? Secondly, the word, Negro man does not communicate, either he is reserved or frank or serious in nature.

Besides, we are in a complete bewilderment that either this Negro man is intellectual, studious, pompous, arrogant or negligible. Thus, the linguistic sign does not provide any fixed, finite or a certain signified, rather gets us entangled in the chain of signifiers. Out of the several possibilities, we delimitate the context and talk mere about the Negro man. But the delimited word 'negro man,' instead of supplying us with a finite referent or signified, supplies us with the chain of signifiers.

In this context, Tyson states: "as we have seen, any given signifier can refer to any number of signifieds at any given movement. And although context often helps us to limit the range of possible signifieds for some signifiers, it simultaneously increases the range of possible signifieds for other. That is why, communication is such a complicated and uncertain thing" (252). Here, Tyson too does not see a linguistic sign having a certain signified.

Therefore, in word level, there is no chance of existing finite and concrete signifieds for any linguistic signs for Derrida, rather instead of getting a fixed referent, a person merely falls on the play of signifiers which is in the play of never ending deferral. So, the words like male and female too have no fixed and stable definition, existence and meaning. The stable concept of gender is then is blurred and comes under the play of undecidability.

Besides the word level, the concept of stable gender identity comes under problem to Derrida. Logocentric language has constituted a rigid identity, shape and value. It is the very language to perceive, define, and shape the identity of male and female from the canon of patriarchal ideology, and have implemented that very rigidity in human society. Now a question arises, if the language itself is fleeting,

slippery, unreliable, fragile, and vulnerable, is it possible to exist the constant identity formulated by the same unstable language? What sort of logic is the logic to advocate the concept of stable gender identity through unstable language? The concept of rigid gender identity, therefore, is really a laughable instance.

Tyson argues, “for deconstruction, then, language is the ground of being, but that ground is not out of play: it is itself as dynamic, evolving, problematic, and ideologically saturated as the worldviews it produces. For this reason, there is no center to our understanding of the existence” (256). Hence, the concept of constant and rigid gender identity remains indeterminate. Patriarchal ideology gives male all social, cultural, religious, economic values and identity in opposition to female. They define male as non-female and female as non-male and hence put a tacit hierarchy and sharp distinction between them. As male has got the phallus, he is so presence and absence of the presence of female. Similarly, as female’s vagina is the absence of the presence of the phallus, she is always relegated to absence. They do not consider the play of absence and presence on each other.

But with the dehierarchization, deschematization and destabilization of all the hierarchies prevalent in the Western metaphysics, there is no question of remaining the tacit hierarchy between male and female to Derrida. Therefore the conception of stable gender identity and the concept of polar opposition between male and female is one of the greatest illusions.

Deconstruction does not see anything stable, finite, concrete and true rather sees things in the play of undecidability and in the process of never ending deferral. So instead of getting a fixed concept to any signifiers, one gets entangled in the chain of signifiers while defining words. One never feels presence of any signifieds in the signifying system of language. Therefore, there is no single, fixed, stable, and

concrete meaning of the words 'male' and 'female'. But rather than having the existence of stable gender identity, they come under the situation of complete undecidability.

### Chapter 3

#### Subversion of Gender Roles in Wesker's and Albee's Plays

Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* and Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are the literary texts that this study examines and exposes the subversion of the gender identity. As discussed in the previous chapters, human society has posed the primary role on male and the secondary role on female. Male has been considered as superior, supreme, masculine, objective, center, prime, natural, truth, logical, phallogentric, logo centric, presence, and brutal whereas female as inferior, submissive, fleshy, weak, sub-ordinate, tender, irrational, soulless, marginal, subjective, unnatural, peripheral, false, and elegant. The male is supposed to be the leader and the female as prey.

But this study, with support of the concept of deconstructionist theory, hypothesizes that the assumption of male supremacy always does not exist in the society and its subvertive role may exist in some corners of the human society. It exposes how the female supremacy also exists by making male the prey of female. The evidences of female supremacy are found in the texts of the two great artists, one from British and American society respectively.

#### **Sarah and Harry in *Chicken Soup with Barley***

Wesker's play demonstrates several instances of subvertive gender role, which has never been imagined in the patriarchal society. In contrast to the woman of a traditional society, Sarah Kahn, the heroine of the drama, appears to be masculine. The physical appearance of Sarah Kahn is masculine and she is fiery, powerful, energetic and older than her husband whereas her husband, Harry Kahn, is feminine and weak. Sarah plays the domineering role over her husband. Harry becomes the prey of his bullying wife. During twenty-five years of their married life, Harry can

neither oppose his wife, nor can he escape from her. He merely tolerates the bullying behavior of his wife and gets strokes two times due to the acts of his wife. He lives a very pathetic and paralyzed life at the very end of the drama.

She nags at her husband due to which he gets irritated, but cannot escape the situation. Sarah points out his weakness and accuses him and poses herself in the higher position of the family. He does not possess any qualities that the male dominant society expects him to possess. But, Sarah possesses unlimited qualities that patriarchal society never believes women can have.

The first act of *Chicken Soup with Barley* is set on the basement of the Kahn family in the East End of London in Oct. 1936. The day when the play opens is one of the most important days for the working class people of East London because the working class people are in preparation of their greatest demonstration against the Fascists. From the beginning of the play, Sarah plays domineering role. In order to escape from the situation, Harry reads books or takes his cigarettes or tea. He is so much occupied by the fear of his wife that he starts to forget things, happening around the surroundings, and tries to get asylum by pretending reading books, making tea or having cigarettes.

When the play opens, Sarah is working in the kitchen and Harry has just returned from Lottie's place, leaving their kids, Ada and Ronnie, at her, as the Kahns would not be at home in the day that day. Sarah starts nagging her husband about his negligence towards demonstration:

SARAH (from the kitchen). You took the children to Lottie's?

HARRY (taking up book to read). I took them.

SARAH. They didn't mind?

HARRY. No, they didn't mind.

SARAH. Is Hymie coming?

HARRY. I don't know.

SARAH (to herself). Nothing he knows! You didn't ask him? He didn't say? He knows about the demonstration, doesn't he?

HARRY. I don't know whether he knows or he doesn't know. I didn't discuss it with him— I took the kids, that's all. Hey, Sarah — you should read Upton Sinclair's book about the meat-canning industry — it's an eye-opener . . .

SARAH. Books! Nothing else interests him, only books. Did you see anything outside? What's happening? (1.1.15-29)

From the conversation between the couple, it is clear that Sarah plays dominant role over her husband bullying him. Harry starts reading a book. But, she disturbs him asking questions and arguing against him. He gives straightforward answers to her and does not like to talk more.

Again the subvertive gender identity of male and female can be seen in the following dialogue in which Sarah goes on nagging about his cigarettes and interest in the cinema:

SARAH. What time they marching?

HARRY. I don't know.

SARAH. Harry, you know where your cigarettes are, don't you? (This is her well-meaning but maddening attempt to point out to a weak man his weakness.)

HARRY. I know where they are.

SARAH. And you know what's on at the cinema?

HARRY. So?

SARAH. And also you know what time it opens? (He grins) So why  
don't you know what time they plan to march?(Touchel)

HARRY. Leave me alone, Sarah, will you? Two o'clock they plan to  
march — nah! (1.1. 37-49)

The dialogue depicts that instead of leading the family members with intellect, knowledge and logic, poor Harry forgets the special happening of the day, the demonstration. As an anti-hero, he concentrates on only few of matters of his personal happiness like the cigarette, movies and books. Though he is one of the members of the communist party and a leader of working class society, he forgets when the large mass of that day has decided to march the demonstration. This happens to him due to the dominant role played by his wife over him. His psychology has been terribly corrupted and occupied by the fear of his powerful wife. This is a very meaningful evidence for the subversion of gender identity.

For the patriarchal society, the rein of running the family, society, and nation is at the hand of male, but females are supposed to be far away from such affairs and to be involved in looking after the family and kids, cooking, cleaning and washing up. The revolutions, strikes, and wars are to be handled by male and the female are to be untouched for them. But, in the play Harry, one of the working class people, instead of making plan for the upcoming rally of the class, makes plan for stealing money from the purse of his wife, in her absence: “As she is out Harry looks for her handbag, and on finding it proceeds to take some money from it.”(1.1. 59-61). On the contrary, Sarah is very much moved by the concept of revolution and, on hearing the slogan of the working class people, her blood is fully charged and boils itself and she feels suffocated

(. . .The slogan ‘Madrid today- London tomorrow’ is being



repeated...)

SARAH (she is hot). Air ! I must have air –this basement will kill me.

God knows what I'll do without air when I'm dead.” (1.1. 58-

64)

Hence, Sarah has played the role, which is supposed to be played by some other male members in the society, which clearly justifies that the role attributed on each gender is alterable.

Sarah has termed Harry, as a perfect liar. Neither the audience nor Sarah herself knows whether Harry is speaking true or false, but Sarah forces him to confess that he speaking a lie. At first, Harry says that he is true, but later, in front of his powerful and fiery wife, he unwillingly admits that whatever his wife forces him to accept is true. The following conversation is worth noting in this context:

SARAH. Liar!

HARRY. I didn't have any tea by Lottie's, I tell you. (Injured tone)

Good God, woman, why don't you believe me when I tell you things?

SARAH. You tell me why. Why don't I believe him when he tells me

things! As if he's such an angel and never tells lies. What's the matter, you never told lies before I don't think?

HARRY. All right, so I had tea at Lottie's. There, you satisfied now? . .

HARRY. Oh, leave off, Sarah.

SARAH. No! This time I won't leave off...

HARRY. Sarah, will you please stop nagging me, will you? What

difference if I had tea there or I didn't have tea there ?

SARAH. That's just what I'm saying. All I want to know is whether

you're all of a liar or half a liar!

HARRY (together with her). . . all of a liar or half a liar! (1.1.76- 103)

Here the male identity has been brutally encroached by female chauvinism, leading the male to be its prey which is against the patriarchal ideology. She does not believe him, let alone respect and obey him.

The setting of the drama has been designed by Wesker to establish the weak character of Harry. The first act exposes a few hours before the great revolution of the working class begins. At this time, Harry is supposed to be planning for the revolution against the Fascists and leading the mass towards victory. But Harry is indifferent towards the situation. He merely has been presented as a lousy being. He is not involved in the discussion with the rest; rather he goes on preparing tea for the guests.

MONTY. I'd love another cup of tea.

HARRY (Jumps up and goes to kitchen). I'll make it. I'll make it. (1.1. 281- 82)

As the guests at the room make hot discussion over the past revolutions and the strikes, Harry is in the kitchen for making tea. When he comes back from the kitchen with teapot, there comes a frantic voice from outside: "Man your posts! Men and women of the East End, come out of your houses! The blackshirts are marching! Come out! Come out!" (1.1. 380- 83). As soon as this sound is heard, all the guests at Khan's apartment get extremely excited, take their position and flags in their hand and rush outside. But Harry is still indifferent towards the situation and is merely concentrated on his tea. He is surprised to see the guests rushing outside without having tea and pitifully says,

HARRY. But I've made your tea. (1.1. 392)

No role given to the Harry to be performed in such critical demonstration, which is a

great threat for male identity.

The male identity has been akin to heroism in all historical periods. Padia claims, “In the Homeric saga, the male was the leitmotiv of Greek ethics, and a woman’s contribution was limited to just inspiring men to heroic deeds, abiding by marital faithfulness and beautifying her body for the sake of male pleasure” (2). In contrary to this, Harry is presented as coward because instead of taking a vital position and defending the attackers, but his wife Sarah, being a female, takes a rolling pin and is in preparation of attacking the Fascists.

Harry gets extremely afraid and suggests his wife not to hit anyone with the rolling pin. The following dialogue is worth noting in this context:

HARRY (hacking away from rolling pin). Don’t hit anybody with that thing, Sarah, it hurts.

SARAH. Fool! (1.1. 411-13)

Moreover, Sarah guides Harry who innocently and unquestioningly follows his wife:

(Sarah dashes to the stairs but stops and, remembering something, returns to front room. From a corner of the room she finds a red flag with a hammer and sickle on it and thrusts it in Harry's hand.)

SARAH. Here, wave this! Do something useful!

(Exits upstairs.)

HARRY (grabbing his coat). Hey, Sarah, wait for me — Sarah! Hey, wait for me!

(He follows her, banner streaming. The voices outside grow to a crescendo: ‘They shall not pass, they shall not pass, they shall not pass!’) (1.1. 414- 19)

Here, Sarah functions as the heroine and guides her husband for the rally giving him

the flag of the party, beyond the exception of patriarchal society.

The scene two of the play opens the same day in the evening after the revolution gets over. Everyone returns back to the same apartment of Kahns, except Harry. They make a review of the revolution and the responsibilities they had carried out. It becomes evident that Harry has not taken any responsibility on the day. Monty had seen him once during the day time, waving the old flag at Cable Street, but he hadn't stayed long there, and he saw him running away on finding some sandwiches (1.2. 45-8). Again, this justifies the weak character of Harry.

Similarly, there is a discussion between Sarah and Harry's sister, Cissie about the character of Harry, which too shows the harassing role of Harry in their family.

The following conversation between Sarah and Cissie expose this:

SARAH. It's your mother who spoils him, you know that?

CISSIE. Spoils him! Do me a favor — the woman's been bedridden for the last ten years. Spoils him!

SARAH. He knows he can go to her — she'll feed him.

CISSIE. He's her son, for God's sake.

SARAH. Don't I know it. He's her son all right—and he wants to be looked after like everyone looks after her. Only it's such a pity — he can walk!

CISSIE. Yes, yes — so I know all this already. Good night, everyone.

(1.2. 156- 63)

Sarah compares Harry with his mother, an old woman who has been crippled for last ten years. It's not only Sarah, his wife, who criticizes Harry, but the whole family has the same attitude towards Harry.

Harry a male has been substituted by Sarah, a female, and the vice versa. This

instance is similar to Derrida's opinion of the constant interplay of absence and presence in each set of binaries. Hence, Harry and Sarah have been the perfect example of the play of absence and presence. It blurs the superiority and inferiority between male and female. The following conversation again explains the absence of masculine and the presence of feminine in Harry:

HARRY (proudly). I was nearly arrested. ...

HARRY. I was running through the streets waving a red banner Sarah gave me and a policeman told me to drop it.

PRINCE. So?

HARRY. I dropped it! And then I turned into Flower and Dean Street and raised it again.... I only just had time to hop into my mother's place.

MONTY. And you stayed there?

HARRY. I had a cup of tea and at about four o'clock I came out. I got to Gardiner's Corner and police were charging the barricades. I didn't see no Fascists. Any get there?

PRINCE. They stayed in the back streets. The police did all the attacking. So?

HARRY. ... I just ran back to my mother's and read a book. ...

HARRY. You're not staying for something to eat?...

(The boys assure him with pats and shakes of the head. Harry pours himself out a cup of tea and, taking it into the front room, he settles down to a book by the fire. . . .) (1. 2. 268- 99)

This conversation shows that Harry hides himself at his mother's during the rally when he is supposed to be there with his fellow demonstrates. But his wife stays with

others in the rally despite the police action. This depicts the reversal of gender identity formulated by patriarchal ideology.

Furthermore, the following description and dialogues shows the masculine presence in Sarah and absence in Harry; and absence of feminity in Sarah and its presence in Harry:

SARAH. You think I'm a fool, don't you?

( . . . Look at him! The man of the house! Nothing matters to him! (Pause.) Well, Harry, why don't you look at me? Why don't you talk to me? I'm your wife, aren't I? A man is supposed to discuss things with his wife.

HARRY (at last). What do you want me to say?

SARAH. Must I tell you what to say? Don't you know? Don't you just know! (Pause.) Artful! Oh, you're so artful!

HARRY. Yes, yes. I'm artful. (1.2. 301-21)

The above extract shows Sarah watches his attitudes and gazes at him but he tries to avoid her gaze upon him. Besides, she wants to talk to him but he shrinks and shifts uncomfortably. Thus, he looks timid and she brave.

The following dialogue depicts how Sarah likes to interfere Harry's activities whereas he wants to be free from her interference:

HARRY. Oh, leave me alone, Sarah.

SARAH. Oh, leave me alone, Sarah! I'll leave you alone all right.

There'll be blue murder, Harry, you hear me? There'll be blue murder if it carries on like tins. All our life is it going to be like this? I can't leave a handbag in the room. You remember what happened last time? You left me! Remember?

(Harry tries to turn away out of it all and Sarah shakes him back again)

Remember? And you wanted to come back? And you came back — full of promises. What's happened to them now?

HARRY. Nothing's happened! Now stop nagging! Good God, you don't let a man live in peace.

SARAH. You can still pretend? After you took ten shillings from my bag and you know that I know you took it and you can still be righteous ? Say you don't know anything about it, go on. Say you don't know what I'm talking about.

HARRY: No. I don't know what you're taking about. (1.2. 328- 40)

Sarah always nags and ridicules Harry so he wants to be away from her company and pretends to read. Hence, this dialogue explicitly justifies that the concept of binary opposition is a false belief the whole structuralist in particular and the western metaphysics in general, believed to be true. The concept of gender identity has been termed as two opposite sides of the magnet. But the activities of Sarah and Harry, in light of Derrida's concept of subversion of binaries, clearly show that the sharp distinction between male and female identity is a greater fallacy

The following conversation becomes one of the climatic points, of the extreme of supersession; a wife ever can have over a husband:

HARRY (rising and facing her in a rage). I'll throw this book at you — so help me I'll throw this book at you.

(At this point Ada rushes in.)

ADA. Harry, stop it. (She cries.) Oh, stop it!

HARRY (shouting). Tell your mother to stop it, she's the cause, it's her row. Don't you know your mother by now? (He has moved

away to the door.) (1.2. 353- 62)

This sort of relationship between a husband and a wife has not been even imagined in the patriarchal society, but it exists and it shows that the concept of gender identity is alterable.

Though, the second act of the play opens after a decade, the relationship between Sarah and Harry is constant. Still Sarah is superior to Harry. Sarah is still showing suppressive behavior to Harry.

In contrary to the idea forwarded in the *Yajur Veda*, instead of getting enjoyment from his wife, Harry has been a traumatic prey of his powerful wife. He has to tolerate the bullying and nagging behavior of his wife. He is so afraid of her that he never gets chance to do his works with his volition. His laziness, sleeplessness, headache, forgetfulness etc. have been caused due to his suppressive wife.

Similar suppressive voice of Sarah can be heard even after a decade in act II of the play. The following dialogue is meaningful to quote in this context.

SARAH. What! You here already? (Accepting the fact) You haven't been working! . . .

SARAH. It always happens where he works. You can't bring luck anywhere, can when the season starts again you're the last one to find work. Ah, Harry, you couldn't even make money during the war. The war! When everybody made money.

HARRY (laying pay packet on table). Nah!

SARAH (reading it). What's this? Seven pounds thirteen? Why only seven pounds thirteen ?

HARRY. Four days' work.

SARAH. You haven't worked all day today? So what you been doing?



HARRY. I felt tired. . . .

HARRY. I got a headache.

SARAH (going to kitchen and talking from there). Yes, yes —  
headache..... (2.1. 13-36)

Harry is henpecked anti-hero, who is not able to find proper work to support his family and prove his masculinity. But he is humiliated by his wife.

Traditionally, males are supposed to involve in the adventurous deeds whereas the females are supposed to bear children, look after them and do household tasks. But contrarily, Harry takes the opposite role doing household chores, like making tea, supper, arranging the household matters, etc.:

SARAH. Come and make some tea. Ada will be here soon.

HARRY. Leave me alone, Sarah.

SARAH (from the kitchen). Make some tea when I ask you!

(Harry rises, and Ada is seen coming along the balcony. She enters through the front door in the same manner as Sarah. She is 25 years of age, well-spoken, a beautiful Jewess and weary of spirit)

HARRY (kissing her). Hello, Ada.

SARAH. Ada? Ada? You here? Go inside, Daddy'll make some tea.

Supper will soon be ready. (Appears cheerfully from kitchen with all the signs of a cook about her. Kisses Ada.) Got a nice supper. (2.1. 41- 52)

As ordered by his wife, Harry adopts men's role, merely as household servant. Sarah works as the master.

Sarah causes stroke on Harry. He loses his consciousness, gets paralyzed and lives a pathetic, crippled, bed-ridden life. This is the most climatic point of the drama,

subverting the gender role of patriarchal society. This is an evidence to justify indeterminist gender identity. The following conversation depicts how Sarah takes Harry to task for being negligent about his daughter, shaving, changing shirt and smoking a lot:

SARAH (wearily to Harry). You see what you do? That's your daughter. Not a word from her father to ask her to stay. The family doesn't matter to you. All your life you've let the family fall around you, but it doesn't matter to you.

HARRY. I DIDN'T DRIVE HER AWAY.

SARAH (bitterly). No — you didn't drive her away. How could you? You were the good, considerate father. (Harry turns' away and hunches himself up miserably.) Look at you! Did you shave this morning? Look at the cigarette ash on the floor. Your shirt! When did you last change your shirt? . . .

HARRY (taking out a cigarette to light). Leave me alone, please leave me alone,

SARAH. You started the row, not me, you!

SARAH (taking cigarette from his hand). Why must you always smoke? — talk with me. Talk, talk, Harry.

HARRY. Sarah! (He stops, chokes, and then stares wildly around him.)  
Mamma. Mamma. (He is having his first stroke.) . . .

SARAH. Ronnie! Ronnie!

(Ronnie comes in from the kitchen) Doctor Woolfson — quick, quick, get him. . . . (Ronnie runs out) (2.1. 242- 67)

Suppressive wife, Sarah, causes Harry to faint but she is simply frightened and does

not react hysterically. She is calm, not emotional, unlike patriarchal ideology.

Harry's stroke has not been by any physical reasons. It is psychological, i.e. the over suppression laid on him by his suppressive wife. The various blood tests throughout the year in the hospital does not find any cause. The following dialogue shows this:

CISSIE. What do the doctors say is wrong with you?

HARRY. I had a stroke — that's all they know. They don't tell you anything in the hospitals these days. Sarah's gone to the doctor's now to find out if I can go back again for observation.

CISSIE. More observation?

HARRY. Ach! Don't talk to me about them, they make me sick.

CISSIE. All those blood tests they took and they still don't know — after a year. I'm surprised you had that much blood. Well, I'm going. Here, smoke yourself to death.

(Hands him forty cigarettes.) (2.2. 157-68)

The doctors not being able to know the cause of the stroke in a whole year suggests that over suppressive wife is the cause of his stroke.

The drama portrays almost twenty years' time span of the Kahn family. The third act opens in 1955, twenty years later the first act begins and ten years after the second act. Still the same impression of Sarah's supremacy over Harry is seen. By then, Harry has had second stroke and has been completely bedridden.

November 1955.

Harry has had his second stroke, and now paralysis has made him completely unfit for work. He can only just move around, has difficulty in talking, and is sometimes senile. Sarah retains much of her

energy but shows signs of age and her trouble —her tone of speaking is compassionate now. (3.1. 1-6)

The same bullying behavior of Sarah has caused the second stroke to Harry.

Though Sarah is taking care of Harry in such pathetic condition, she has done all this with disgust and hatred.

SARAH. You think he likes it? It's ach a nebish Harry now. It's not easy for him. But he won't do anything to help himself. . . . There were three men like this in the flats, all had strokes. And all three of them seemed to look the same. They walked the same, stooped the same, and all needing a shave. They used to sit outside together and talk for hours on end and smoke. Sit and talk and smoke. That was their life. Then one day one of them decided he wanted to live so he gets up and finds himself a job — running a small shoe-mender's — and he's earning money now. A miracle! Just like that. But the other one — he wanted to die. I used to see him standing outside in the rain, the pouring rain, getting all wet so that he could catch a cold and die. Well, it happened: last week he died. Influenza! He just didn't want to live. But Harry was not like either of them. He didn't want to die but he doesn't seem to care about living. So! . . . When that happens I go mad — I just don't know what I'm doing. (3.1. 114-35)

Sarah's evaluation of Harry highlights his weak character- he can neither take care of himself. He does not fight for life and has been a fishbone for her. Therefore, she is disrespectful towards him.

### **Martha and George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?***

Albee's full length drama *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is set in a living room of a house of New England College, on a Sunday early morning. It starts at 2 am. There are merely four characters in the drama, George, a 46 years old college Professor, Martha, George's wife, Nick, another newly recruited professor of the same college and Honey, Nick's wife. The reversed gender role between Martha and George is presented in the drama as she is domineering wife.

Martha is a fifty-two years large, boisterous woman, daughter of the president of the college, where George has been teaching for twenty-three years. George is a weak character. Martha is always seen in superior position to him. In the opening scene of the play, Martha enters to the room, followed by her husband, George. Martha is leading her husband against patriarchal ideology as a husband (male) is supposed to lead and guide the wife (female). Similarly, she begins the first dialogue of the drama. This shows that she is in superior position to her husband.

Patriarchal ideology attempts to capture, control, usurp, exploit, govern and inferiorize the female race. Moreover, males are supposed to lead and guide the female. But George does not possess such masculine characters and instead of governing and inferiorizing Martha, his wife, he is ruled and inferiorized by her. The beginning of the play is significant in another aspect too because she initiates the topics of discussion and George, unwillingly, follows her and ultimately gets assimilated into what Martha says.

George cannot force her to sleep, although it is already two am and he is willing to sleep. He cannot react against his wife's oppressive behavior and insults towards him. The following dialogues reveal the situation:

*(Set in the darkness. Crash against the front door. Martha's laughter*

*heard. Front door opens, lights are switched on. MARTHA enters, followed by GEORGE)*

Martha: Jesus. . . .

George: . . . Shhhhhhhh. . . .

MARTHA: . . . .H. Christ. . . .

GEORGE: Well I am *sorry*, but. . . .

MARTHA: What a cluck! What a cluck you are. . . .

GEORGE: I can't remember all the pictures. . . .

MARTHA: Nobody's asking you to remember every single goddamn

Warner Brother epic... just one! ... (1.1. 1-44)

The above dialogues show how Martha is taking control over George. Thus, this above conversation sufficiently justifies that she is very powerful and is in the supreme place than her husband.

As Wesker's heroine, Sarah, in *Chicken Soup with Barley*, Martha starts bullying and nagging her husband and poor George, unwillingly tolerates whatever she says. Though Martha is using humiliating expressions, George stands them without any protest.

MARTHA: (Pause) Well, what's the name of the picture?

GEORGE: I really don't know, Martha....

MARTHA: Well think!

GEORGE: I am tired, dear . . . it's late . . . and beside. . . .

MARTHA: I don't know what you are so tired about . . . you haven't

done anything all day; you didn't have any class, or anything... .

GEORGE: Well I'm tired. . . .

MARTHA (*Still softly*): I said make me a drink (1.1. 99-138)

George looks tired and wants to sleep but he cannot. Martha laughs at him for not knowing name of the picture and orders him to make a drink. This sort of relationship between George and Martha simply justifies the fallacy of patriarchal ideology as to rigid concept of gender identity.

Both of them have been complete drunk as the drama opens and its already too late and all of sudden Martha indicates that she has invited some more guests for party. The issue of coming guests for gathering in such early morning makes George shocked:

GEORGE (*Moving to the portable bar*): Well, I don't suppose a  
nightcap'd kill either one of us

MARTHA: A nightcap! Are you kidding? We've got guests.

GEORGE (*Disbelieving*): We've got what?

MARTHA: Guests, GUESTS

GEORGE: GUESTS

MARTHA: Yes. . . . guests . . . people. . . .We've got guests coming  
over.

GEORGE: When?

MARTHA: NOW!

GEORGE: Good Lord, Martha . . . do you know what time it . . .  
Who's coming over?

MARTHA: What's their name.

GEORGE: Who?

MARTHA: WHAT'S-THEIR-NAME? (1.1. 139-65)

Martha inviting a young man for drinks in her room at such late night without asking her husband is very crucial. Such step of Martha is not a simple issue for the

patriarchal society because a woman is defined in terms of obedience, loyalty, chastity, virginity and purity. But, Martha has done this.

The following dialogue demonstrates how a wife initiates for love or kiss, although patriarchal ideology perceives her to be passive.

MARTHA: I WANT A BIG SLOPPY KISS!

GEORGE (Preoccupied) I don't want to kiss you, Martha. Where are these people? Where are these people you invited over?

MARTHA: They stayed on to talk to Daddy. . . . They'll be here. . .  
Why don't you want to kiss me?

GEORGE (The matter-of-fact): Well, dear, If I kissed you I'd get all excited. . . I'd get beside myself, and I'd take you, by force, right here on the living room rug, and then our little guests would walk in, and . . . well, just think what your father would say about that.

MARTHA: You pig! (1.1. 334-50)

This extract shows that George loses male characteristics as he looks passive in matters of kissing his wife but Martha is Masculine as she is active to propose for a kiss. Moreover, he is afraid of being emotional, not his wife about sex. This shows the subvertive gender identity.

Martha orders George in harsh words, "Hey, Put some ice in my drinks, will you? You never put any ice in my drink, why is that, Huuh?" (1.1. 299-301). This is bullying way of ordering her husband to do things... Similarly, when the guests appear at the door, Martha uses even more harsh term to George,

MARTHA: (*Same*) Go answer the door.

GEORGE (*Not Moving*): You answer it.



MARTHA: Get to that door, you. "He does not move" I'll fix you,  
you...

MARTHA (*shouting...to the door*): C'MON IN! (To George, between  
her teeth) I said, get over there!

GEORGE (*Moves a little towards the door, smiling slightly*) all right  
love... whatever love wants. (*Stops*) Just don't start on the  
bit, that's all. (1.1. 390- 405)

George obeys his suppressive wife. He is not even aware of his gender identity and pathetically says, "all right, love . . . whatever loves wants." He is not chauvinist but submissive, which is evident of the effacement of his gender identity.

The sexual relationship between husband and wife is very important in the married life. The male have a dominant role in sexual matters. But it is not so in the play. When Honey reveals George and Nick that Martha has changed dress, George is highly suspicious and afraid thinking that Martha is going to attract Nick sexually. He pathetically admits that Martha always does so for strangers but not for him for years.

GEORGE (*Driving*): Oh no, now . . . you mustn't. Martha is changing.  
. . . and Martha is not changing for me. Martha hasn't changed  
for me in years. If Martha is changing, it means we'll be here  
for . . . days. You are being accorded an honor, and you must  
not forget that Martha is ...

NICK: You might not understand this . . . but I wish you wouldn't talk  
that way in front of my wife.

HONEY: Oh, now. . .

GEORGE (*Incredulous*): Really? Well, you're quite right. . . . We'll  
leave that sort of talk to Martha.

MARTHA (*Entering*): What sort of talk?

(*Martha has changed her clothes, and she looks now more comfortable and . . . and this is most important . . . most voluptuous*) (1.1. 1203-22)

It shows that Martha is going to seduce Nick, not George. This sort of relationship between them justifies that she is superior above him in sexual matters too.

Martha narrates the story of her physical victory over George in an exaggerated tone, which shows that George is defeated by her in every sphere of life. George was shamefully defeated in boxing by Martha, twenty years back, and Martha says, that defeat has shaped their married life. It indicates that throughout their married life of decades, there existed the victory of Martha over George. Martha narrates her physical victory over George in the following dialogues.

MARTHA: . . . it was twenty years ago, and it wasn't in a ring, or anything like that . . . It was war time, and Daddy was on physical fitness kick . . . Daddy's always admired physical fitness . . . says a man is only part brain . . . he has a body, too, and it's his responsibility to keep both of them up . . . you know? . . .

MARTHA: . . . and George, wheeled around real quick, and he caught it right in the jaw . . . paw! . . . I hadn't meant it . . . . and stumbled back of few steps, and then CRASH, he landed . . . flat . . . in a huckleberry bush! . . . I think it's colored our whole life. Really I do! It's an excuse anyway. (1.1. 1440-1501)

George has been living a miserable life for decades with Martha. His obedience to Martha's order shows the effacement of his male identity.

Martha makes fun of George in front of the guests. She neither obeys nor stops

nagging him, whereas he wearily tries to control her but in vain. She sucks identity of him as a vampire and makes him ineffectual. She discloses the matter of their forbidden son in front of the guests, despite the frequent objection of him. Then, she starts discussing the secret matter of their marriage and love affair to the guests which he wants to keep secret:

MARTHA (*Irritated*): Whadda you want?

GEORGE (*Too patiently*): I'd thought you were telling the story of our courtship, Martha. . . . I didn't know you were going to start in on the other business.

MARTHA (*So-thereish*): Well, I am!

GEORGE: I wouldn't, if I were you.

MARTHA: Oh . . . you wouldn't you're not!

GEORGE: Now, you've already sprung a leak about you-know-wha . . .

GEROGE (*Almost crying*) I said stop, Martha. . . .(1.1. 2215-78)

This way of Martha maddens George. One after another, disclosing secret matters to the guests Martha humiliates George.

The climatic point of the drama reaches in the second act. His helplessness and incompetence is explicitly seen there. George's indifference to Martha's flirtatious behavior with Nick and his consent on letting her to have sexual intercourse with him are really offensive for the audiences. The rigid stand point of viewing male and female race gets completely meaningless in this point. A male tolerating his wife flirting and having sexual intercourse with another male is the perversion of marital life. The male looks too weak and the female perverted. This brings anarchy and chaos in the society.

The way Martha flirts with Nick in front of George and George's easy

acceptance on the matter is very crucial:

MARTHA: Well, go. (*Mugging . . . to NICK*) we want to be alone.

GEORGE (*Moving to take the bucket*): I wouldn't be surprised, Martha  
. . . I wouldn't be surprised. . . .

MARTHA: Hey . . . hand me a cigarette . . .

*(As he does, she licks her hand between the knee and the crotch,  
bringing her hand around to the outside of his leg) . . .*

*(He seems uncertain, but does not move. She smiles, moves her  
hand a little)* Now, for being such a good boy, you can give me  
a kiss. C'mon.

NICK (*Nervously*): Look . . . I don't think we should . . .

MARTHA: C'mon, baby . . . a friendly kiss. . . .

NICK (*Weakening*): But what if he should come back in, and . . . or ... ?

MARTHA (*All the while her hand is moving up and down his leg*)

George? Don't worry about him. . . .faculty. (*They both laugh,  
quietly . . . NICK a little nervously*)...

MARTHA: You're a scientist, aren't you? C'mon . . . make an  
experiment . . . make a little experiment. Experiment on old  
Martha.

NICK (*Giving in*): . . . not so old . . .

MARTHA: That's right, not very old, but lots of good experience . . .  
lots of it.

MARTHA (*As they draw slowly closer*): It'll be a nice change for you,  
too. . . . (*NICK, who has already had his hand on MARTHA'S  
breast, now puts his hand inside her dress*) (2.1. 2004-2115)

George's remarks "I wouldn't be surprised, Martha . . . . I wouldn't be surprised" (2.1. 2009) shows that George is habituated with Martha's sexual intercourse and flirtation with several men in the past. Moreover it points to the fact that he is sexually impotent and a defenseless creature who cannot control her. Unlike patriarchal ideology, it illustrates that a woman can be sexually active, potent and aggressive and a man passive, impotent and submissive.

Even Nick, the young man, does not initiate for the illicit sexual relationship with Martha, but it is she who invites him to her room, encourages and arouses him for this. She has that much control over George that, he does not object her going to sleep with Nick, she frequently comes to George and teases him. George tries to get rid of this. There is one most interesting and crucial point George makes at this time. Besides, George asks permission for reading book:

GEORGE (*Chuckles, takes his drinks*): Well, you just hold that thought, Martha . . . hug it close . . . run your hand over it. Me, I'm going to sit down . . . if you will excuse me . . . I'm going to sit down over there and read a book. (*He moves to a chair facing away from the centre of the room, but not too far from the front door.*)

MARTHA: You're gonna do *what*?

GEORGE (*Quietly, distinctly*): I am going to read a book. Read. Read. Read? You've heard of it? (*Picks up a book*)

MARTHA (*Standing*): Whaddy mean you're gonna read? What's the matter with you?

GEORGE (*Too Calmly*): There's nothing the matter with me, Martha. . . . I'm going to read a book. That's all. . . .

MARTHA (*Incredulously*) He is going to read a book . . . . The son of  
bitch is going to read a book! (2.1. 2203- 38)

Patriarchal notion of male as heroic, courageous, brutal, masculine etc. have been  
erased from the identity of George.

Poor George's expression in the first act, "Martha is changing . . . and Martha  
is not changing for me. Martha hasn't changed for me in years" suggests that Martha  
did not change her clothes for providing sexual happiness to him (1.1. 1204-05). It  
shows George is a pathetic figure and Martha, a characterless woman:

NICK . . . (*Moves to Martha, puts his  
arm around her waist. George can't see this, of course*) . . .

MARTHA: We're going to amuse ourselves, George

GEORGE (*Not looking up*): Unh-hunh. That's nice.

MARTHA: You may not like it.

GEORGE (*Never Looking up*) No, no, now. . . you go right ahead. . .  
you entertain your guest.

MARTHA: I'm going to entertain myself, too.

GEORGE: Good . . . good. . .

MARTHA (*After*) You know what I'm doing, George?

GEORGE: No, Martha . . . what are you doing?

MARTHA: I'm entertaining one of the guests. I'm necking with one of  
the guests.

GEORGE: (*Seemingly relaxed and preoccupied, never looking*): Oh,  
that's nice. Which One? . . .

GEORGE: Someone at the door, Martha.

MARTHA: Never mind that. I said I was necking with one of the

guests.

GEORGE: Good . . . good. You go right on. (2.1.2239-90)

A husband, consenting his wife for sexual enjoyment with others is most humiliating to patriarchy.

Not only this, but also George hears the sound of Martha and Nick having sexual intercourse coming from the next room. Such a case is rarely heard and is the most intolerable event for the male. But George can do nothing. His demeanor is worth noting:

*He laughs, briefly, ruefully . . . rises, with the book in his hand. ... he looks at the book in his hand and, with a cry that is part growl, part howl, he howl, he hurls it at the chimes. They crush against one another, ringing wildly. (2.1.2373-80)*

The behavior of the couple is highly significant as it provides a strong raw material for defining gender identity in new paradigm.

### **Bullying Females and Bullied Males in Both the Dramas**

The texts *Chicken Soup with Barley* of Wesker and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* of Albee are important for dehierarchizing the issue of gender identity. In both of the dramas there are abundant similar evidences of subverted gender identity. In these texts, there has been the effacement of the rigid male identity which the patriarchal ideology believes to be true from the time immemorial. George and Harry represent two different societies: British and American. In both the texts, female are holding superior position to male, which is against the concept developed and practiced in patriarchal mode of society.

Similarly, one represents the poor working class family in England whereas the another represents the aristocratic family in America. Similarly, the education

level of the males too is different in these dramas. The educational level of Harry in Wesker's drama, *Chicken Soup with Barley* is not exposed but the audience guesses that Harry does not have any high academic background whereas George in Albee's drama *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a highly educated college Professor.

Despite this difference in social, financial and intellectual level, one sees the same subvertive gender role played by both males and female protagonists of the dramas.

Female are stereotypically presented in patriarchal ideology attributed with such qualities like inferiority, passivity, submissiveness, subordination, beauty, tenderness, irrationality, charmness and womanishness which are supposed to be the feminine force. Female identity is supposed to be the help mate of male for pleasing their male partner. Women's superiority is never imagined in patriarchy. Challenging these concepts attributed to female, both the female protagonists in these dramas, Martha and Sarah, present themselves in the superior position to their partners. Both of them have completely controlled and governed their husbands.

Both heroines never present themselves in inferior, passive and submissive way. But they have presented themselves as aggressive and bullying. Sarah nags Harry for being lazy and irresponsible, whereas Martha humiliates George by having sexual relation with other males. In both of these texts, the identity of Harry and George has been destroyed by the females, Sarah and Martha. The identity of the female as formulated by the patriarchal society has been substituted by Harry and George, the males. They are very weak. This reversed identity of these protagonists has subverted the gender identity that patriarchal society believed to be true, constant, and determinant for centuries.



## Chapter 4

### Shifting Gender Identity in New Paradigm

The concept of gender hierarchy and gender identity existed in human society since the primitive era of human civilization and has been consistently practiced assuming it to be natural and ultimate truth. Upon surveying the different mode of societies like the Vedic, the Greek, the Roman, the Christian, etc. and the opinions of the scholars like Aristotle, Carmody, Hegel, etc. this study traced gender hierarchy dwelling in patriarchal mind as innate and unalterable idea. Patriarchy believed the male to be superior, primary, supreme, masculine, central, rational, powerful, and productive; in contrast, the female is considered to be an inferior, secondary, weak, feminine, peripheral, irrational, soulless and unproductive being. Thus, the traditional society created the sharp hierarchy between male and female and legitimized and practiced that in moral, religious, political, social, and economic spheres.

With the perspective of Derridian theory of deconstruction, this study concluded that the concept of binaries, stabilities, ultimate truth, closure, totalities came under threat. With a critical view upon the rigid concept of gender identity, it re-examined its validity and authenticity. It showed that the concept of rigid gender identity is one of the greatest fallacies of human being. There are several bases upon this logic. According to Derrida, the meaning that the human language produces is ambiguous, fleeting, unstable, slippery, and always comes under the never-ending deferral, in signifying system of language by which the meaning of language is supposed to be produced. In other words, instead of getting a particular signified of any signifier (word), one jumps from one signifier into another signifier creating a long chain of signifiers and experiences an echolalia as in a chamber house. Hence, there is meaninglessness upon the words male and female and no constant and

determinant meaning of gender itself. Similarly, according to Derrida, the human language is the ground of being and the language itself is not constant on itself and hence all the knowledge, ideologies and truth formulated on the basis of language cannot be constant, stable and final truth. Therefore, the rigid and stable concept of gender identity cannot become stable and determinant.

Similarly, the hierarchy between male and female putting them in binary pairs too, cannot be stable and rigid and in position of superiority and inferiority because the terms of binaries do not sharply contradict, but essentially supplement each other. The stable gender hierarchy is easily reversed and problematized as the terms such as male and female are in constant interplay, erasing the hierarchy imposed by the patriarchal ideology. The textual analysis that this study does on the two dramas *Chicken Soup with Barley* by Wesker and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Albee shows abundant evidences of subvertive and reversed gender identity and hierarchy. It finds out that the two dramas challenge the concept of rigid and stable meaning attributed to male and female.

This study assimilates thus, with the new definition of gender identity as indeterminate, unstable and fleeting, and sliding propounded by Derrida and concludes that trying to confine the stable, determinant, and final meaning of gender is to repress the multiple possibilities of the identity, single gender may have. Therefore, the concept of distinct gender identity is to be erased and should be re-conceptualized gender identity as indeterminate. There is absence and presence of the qualities of each in each.

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