

**THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE NOVEL  
'THE BELL JAR'**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English Education  
In Partial Fulfillment for the Master's of Education in English**

**Submitted by  
Pooja Bhatt**

**Faculty of Education  
Tribhuvan University  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal  
2013**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is original; no any part of this thesis resembles to the other research degree. It is an original attempt to the existing collection of the knowledge.

Date: 2013-06-12

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**Pooja Bhatt**

## RECOMMENDATION FOR ACCEPTANCE

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# DEDICATION

**Dedicated to**

*This one is for My Parents*

*and*

*My brothers Dhruwa and Mukund*

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**Pooja Bhatt**



## ABSTRACT

The topic of my thesis is '**The Feminist Perspective in the novel The Bell Jar**'. It is an autobiographical novel by Sylvia Plath which was published in 1963. The purpose of this study was to find out the aspects of feminism from the novel. My research is qualitative research so it is completely based in secondary sources of data. To widen the knowledge and insights in the related area I have used many related books, articles, ELT journals, dictionaries, reference materials and theses. I read and re-read the original novel of Plath's 'The Bell Jar' and also the extract from 'New Paradigm' to obtain the required objectives of the research. I adopted the qualitative research design selecting some extracts related to the female character and analyzed them. The findings of the study showed that females are dominated in male dominated society even in so called developed countries, they are dominated even by the females themselves who advices to follow the norms and values of the patriarchic society. The society and social aspects like religion, laws and other social institutions favors the males where females are taken as secondary position.

This thesis consists of four chapters along with references and appendix at the end. Each chapter is divided into necessary heading, and sub-headings. Chapter one deals with general background, review of related literature, objectives and significance of the study. Chapter two includes methodology of the study, sources of data, sampling procedure, and tools for data collection, process of data collection and limitations of the study. The third chapter consists of analysis and interpretation of the collected data and the final chapter lists the major findings and recommendations, educational implications based on the analysis and interpretation of this study.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

B.Ed	: Bachelors of Education
M.Ed	: Masters of Education
Viz	: Namely
No.	: Number
etc.	: Et cetera
p.	: Page
T.U	: Tribhuvan University
CUP	: Cambridge University press
OUP	: Oxford University Press
Dr.	: Doctor
NGO	: Non Government Organization
INGO	: International Non Government Organization
ELT	: English Language Teaching
Regd. No.	: Registration Number

# CHAPTER - ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General Background

Literature simply refers to any piece of writing, which expresses internal and external feeling, thought, view, perspective and experience that is valued as a work of art. Literature is the use of language to evoke a personal response in the reader or listener. The word literature literally means “acquaintance with letters” and the term letters is sometimes used to signify literature. Thus, we can say that the art of jotting down our internal feelings, emotions, thoughts etc. is known as literature. Literature is the term used to describe written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, ‘literature’ is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction.

Literature has its roots in one of the most basic human desires, the desire of pleasure. It attempts to provide immense pleasure to the readers through different kinds of events such as love, power, violence, war, conflict, and other different issues related to human life and nature. Through the use of ornamental language literature provides a great impact on its readers and sets them free from any sort of trouble or tensions. Not only have the readers, even the writers found one source of pleasure in mastering the difficult demands of their craft. Thus, literature is such a powerful art which easily wins the heart of people and make them more and more lovers of literature. According to Lazar (1993, p.1), "Literature is a world of fantasy, horror, feeling, visions ... but into the words".

Literature is a world of fantasy, horror, feelings, visions which are jotted down into words. Literature can speak of imaginary people so vividly that they seem more alive and natural than the people we meet on the way and can make us care about its characters as if they were our close friends. Thus, literature has such a power to melt the heart of the readers and make them dive into its artistic creation. Lazar (1993, p1.) states, “Literature means to meet a lot of people, to know other different points of view, ideas, thoughts, minds to know ourselves better”. Literature is a sort of disciplined technique which arouses certain desires, pleasures, hopes, thoughts, wants in human mind. To quote Lohani, et al. (1996) quotes:

.....Literature exists because it pleases us and it pleases us by imitating life, more precisely, by displaying its writers’ visions of life as it is or as the writer thinks it should be. We are always curious about ourselves as well, and literature offer hints, suggestions and flashes of insights in such a way as to refresh and encourage our own thinking, and so leads us to insights of our own (p.1)

### **1.1.1 Literature in Language Classroom**

Literature plays a dominant role in the language classroom. It makes the classroom more interesting and facilitating. Literature provides sufficient motivation to the language learners. It provides enjoyment as well as refreshment to the students while teaching language. It helps to develop an awareness of language use and helps to conduct different communicative activities. Literature exposes students to complex themes

and fresh unexpected uses of language. It encourages students to reflect on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions. Literature makes students more active both intellectually and emotionally. A good novel or short story can take the students to foreign countries and fantastic worlds. Similarly a play or poem can bring up certain dilemmas and powerful emotional responses. Literature can provide students with access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying. Main aims of teaching literature in the classroom, according to Lazar (1993, p. 3), are:

- a) *One of our main aims in the classroom should be to teach our students to read literature using the appropriate literary strategies. This involves them not in reading for some practical purpose, for example to obtain information, but rather in analyzing a text in terms of what it might mean symbolically or philosophically.*
- b) *Our main task in the classroom is to pinpoint how far literary language deviates from ordinary language.*
- c) *Literary texts have a powerful function in raising moral ethical concerns in the classroom. The tasks and activities we devise to exploit the texts should encourage our students to explore these concerns and connect them with the struggle for a better society.*
- d) *The text traditionally prescribed for classroom use may generally be accorded high status, but often seem remote from, and irrelevant to, the interests and concerns of our students.*
- e) *Our aim when using literature with our students is to help them unravel the many meanings in a text. Students often need guidance*

*when exploring these multiple levels of meaning in a literary text- we need to devise materials and tasks which help them to do this.*

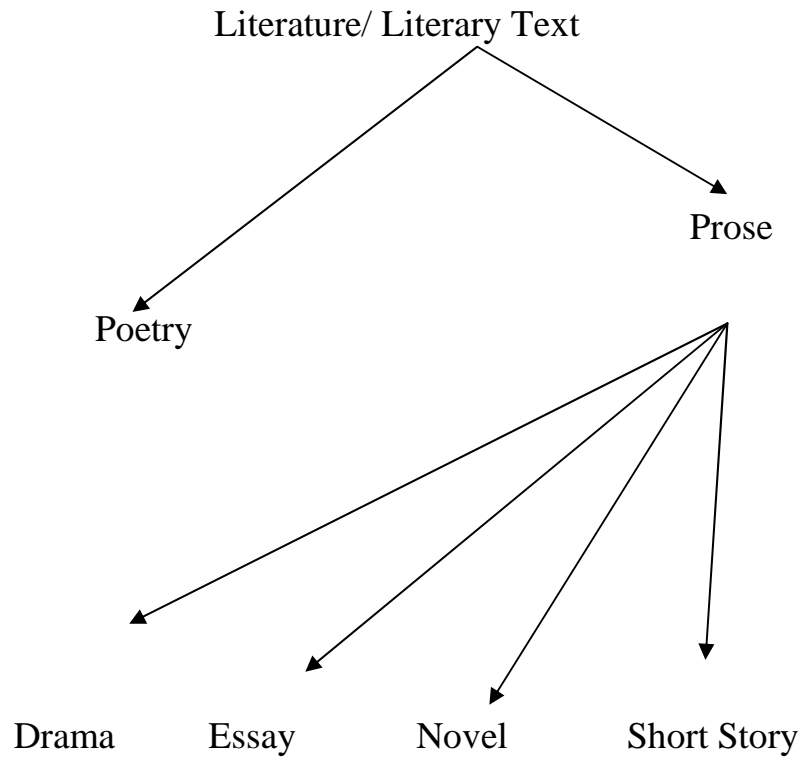
- f) Literature provides wonderful source materials for eliciting strong emotional responses from students. Using literature in the classroom is a fruitful way of involving the learners as a whole person and provides excellent opportunities for the learners to express their personal opinions, reactions and feelings.*
- g) We should not expect to reach any definitive interpretation of a literary text with our students. Rather we should use the text as the basis for generating discussion, controversy and critical thinking in the classroom.*

Thus, literature plays a crucial role in language learning process. It makes the language class motivating and interesting. It enhances the critical faculty of students and empowers them with ability to grapple with the text and its language.

### **1.1.2 Genre of Literature**

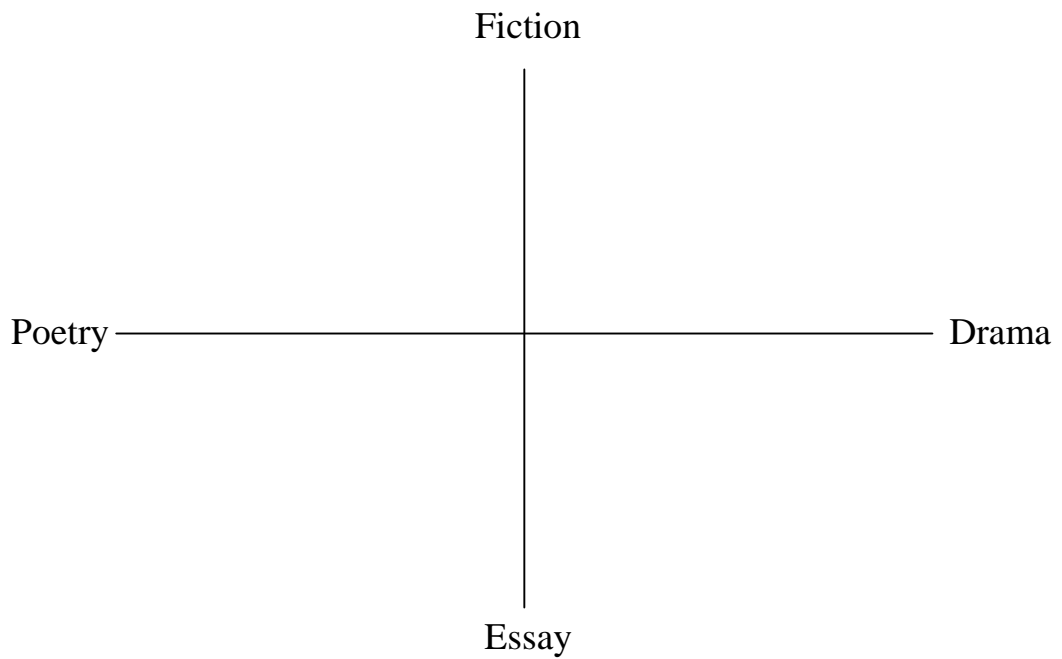
Genre of literature denotes types or classes of literature. Literature is divided into different genres; especially literature can be divided into two forms: Poetry and Prose. These two forms are different in structure and subject matter. They can be further classified into different genres tentatively





(Adapted from: Regmi, 2003)

Literature can be further broadly divided into four genres:



(Adapted from: Regmi, 2003)

## ) **Poetry**

Poetry is a creative art of languages. In poetry poet expresses his/her thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, in a beautiful way. Poem expresses different aspects of thoughts, mood, feelings etc. to the readers. Generally poem is in written form but it can also be in oral form, which is transmitted orally from one person to another. In the history of English literature poetry is written in several forms. The most dominant forms of poetry are - Sonnet, Elegy, Ode, ballad, Epic, Lyrics, Pastoral, Narrative, and Romance.

## ) **Drama**

Drama is a narrative art composed not for a reader as fiction and poetry, but for spectators. The amount of story presented is foreshortened in a play and incidents are often of high tension. The place and intensity of drama give it its characteristic “dramatic effect”. According to Aristotle, the playwright combines six elements in a play: action, character, thought, language, music and spectacle. According to Abrams (2005, p.69) drama is “the forms of the composition designed for the performance in the theatre, in which actors take the role character, performs the indicated actions, and utters the written dialogue”. In other words, drama is generally a literary work written in dialogue to be performed before an audience by actors on the stage.

## ) **Essay**

Essay is a form of literature. Among poetry, drama and fiction essay has its unique qualities. The basic quality of essay is to be persuasive.

However, there can be descriptive, meditative, and dramatic essay as well. Essays are written in prose form. Everything written like business report, news writing may not be essay. To be an essay the prose writing must have some literariness. Literary quality only can make essays as the form of literature. So, aesthetic quality along with information is necessary to be an essay. For example, Nigeria Fall is an essay by Robert Brook, with information as well as aesthetic pleasure.

Essay was originated with the sixteenth century by French writer Montaigne. The length of the essay is not fixed. It can be long or short, factual or fictional, practical or playful. The form may depend on the choice of the writer to meet his needs.

## ) **Novel**

Novel is also one of the genres of literature. It is an extended form of literature. The term novel is now applied to a great variety of writings that have been in common only the attribute of being extended works of fiction written in prose. However, its length is not determined and critics have not made a consensus on how long it should be. According to Cud don “the length of novels varies greatly and there has been much debate on how long a novel should be”. In novel there are various and multiple characters with a complex plot. It allows for the greater development of the environment or setting.

Novel is regarded as the form of fiction which is based on the imagination or the facts. It is a long narrative story dealing with characters, incidents, and settings that imitate those found in real life. The novel deals with the events and actions which constitute its plot. Plots of the novel may be tragic, comic, satiric, or romantic. Thus reading and

writing a novel is a part of life. In novel there is a large number of characters, numerous flashbacks to the past events with highly complicated plots. Generally, there the different types of novel:

### **i. Picaresque novel**

This novel emerged in 16<sup>th</sup> century in Spain. It is realistic in manner, episodic in structure and often satiric in aim. The first, and very lively English example of this novel was Thomas Nashe's "The unfortunat Traveller" (1594). Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" (1876) etc.

### **ii. Psychological novel**

It was written by Samuel Richardson. The first psychological novel was 'Pamela'. It is the story of a sentimental but shrewd young woman who got success in becoming the wife of a wild young gentleman instead of his debauched servant girl.

### **iii. Epistolary novel**

It was written in the form of letters but later novelists have preferred alternative devices for limiting the narrative point of view to one or another single character. The Epistolary technique is still occasionally revived in writing novel

### **iv. Realistic novel**

It is characterized as the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives. It focuses on the customs, conversation and ways of thinking and valuing of a particular social class, it is often called a novel of manners.

#### **v. Social novel**

It emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events; often it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform. Example of social novels are Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' (1852) etc.

#### **vi. Historical novel**

It begins in 19<sup>th</sup> century by Sir Walter Scott. It is also known as documentary fiction, which incorporates not only historical characters and events, but also reports of everyday events in contemporary newspapers.

#### **vii. Non-fictional novel**

This novel uses varieties of novelistic techniques, such as deviations from the temporal sequence of events and description of participants' state of mind to give a graphic rendering of recent people and happening.

#### **viii. Regional novel**

It emphasizes the setting, speech, social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local color, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and interacting.

(Abrams, 2000, p. 190-194)

Hence, the novel is an extended work of fiction. Its length varies according to the writers. However its length is not determined and critics

have not made a consensus on how long the novel should be. It contains multiple characters with long and complex plot.

## **) Short Story**

A short story is a brief work of prose fiction. It is a work of fiction in which there is a concentration on a single event. Its plot and characters are somehow connected to each other. Abrams (2005) defines short stories as “a brief work of prose fiction and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types and the narrative technique of the novel are applicable to a short story as well”(p.295). From this definition we can say that short stories are same like the novel in reduced scale. It is a story that can be easily read in single setting. The plot of the short stories may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric as well. It may be written in the mode of realism, naturalism or fantasy. A Russian writer, Anton Chekhov is considered as chief founder of modern short story. The essential quality of short story is narration. Plot, character, setting, language style and theme are the major elements of the short story.

### **1.1.3 Literary Theory**

Literary theory refers to the different theories of different scholars for criticism from Aristotle through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some different types of literary theories/criticisms are:-

#### **i. Psychoanalytical Criticism**

Psychoanalytical criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of the personality of the individual author. This approach emerged in the early

decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Psychoanalytical criticism is the study of relation of conscious and unconscious state of mind.

Psychological approach has been one of the most controversial, the most abused, and for many readers the least appreciated. Sapkota(2005) states:

..... The symbols are divided into three kinds: phallic, yonic and flying symbols Phallic symbol is associated with phallus: vertical things, convex images like tower, mountain peak, snake, knife, stick etc. Yonic symbol refers to all concave images like- pound, cup, flower, hollow, cave and ring etc. Flying symbol remains associated with action or movement. Like the symbols of riding, flying, dancing, running, fighting that all refers to sexual desires, sexual activities and the pleasure out of it (p.219).

## **ii. Marxist Criticism**

Analysis of human behavior in relation to struggle for economic power is known as Marxist criticism. This theory was propounded by Karl Marx. This theory is related to social realism. Marx is a through going materialist and his works marks a turning against the epistemological positions popular among early 19<sup>th</sup> century German idealists.

According to Marxism, society has been divided into two classes- the bourgeois and proletariat. Bourgeois have property, they are called haves and proletariat are called have- not's. Marxist analysis ideologies are of two types: repressive and liberating. Capitalistic ideologies are negative;

they are used by bourgeois to exploit the working class people. Marxism is liberating ideology it gives consciousness to the oppressed people to unite and fight for their right. Marxism gives awareness about exploitation; therefore it is called a liberating ideology.

### **iii. Modernism and Post-modernism**

The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and other arts in the early decades of the present century. As Abrams(2000) states:

..... Modernism involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases, not only of western arts, but of western culture in general. Important intellectual precursors of modernism, in this sense are thinkers who had questioned the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality (p.167).

The term post- modernism is applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45). Abram (2000) states:

..... Post- modernism does not only involves a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the counter traditional experiments of modernism but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by resource to the models of " mass



culture" in film, television, newspaper cartoons and popular music(p.168).

#### **iv. Structuralism and Post- structuralism criticism**

Almost all literary theorists since Aristotle have emphasized the importance of structure, conceived in diverse ways, in analyzing a work of literature. Structuralism is the interpretation of the text based on the underlying structure of the text. The critics of structuralism concentrate on the relation of the surface and the underlying structure of the text. Structuralism owes its origin to Saussure's linguistics. Saussure's ideas of linguistic meanings depend upon the concept of 'sign', which is composed of 'signifier' and 'signified'. 'Signifier' is the actual sound or the written marks on the paper, it is materialistic. 'Signified' is actually a concept, an idea; it is non- materialistic, psychological or mental.

The post- structuralism challenges the Saussure's anthropological concept of sign. Which Saussure unconsciously holds and shows how the signifier and the signified are post- structuralism challenges the Saussure's anthropological concept of sign. Which Saussure unconsciously holds and shows how the signifier and the signified are far from being united and opposite to each other.

But, in my research above theories are not applied. In my research I have applied the theory of feminism because my research is related to the analysis of the novel "The Bell Jar" from feminist perspective. So, the detailed description about the feminism is below:-

## **v. Feminism**

Feminism is generally said to have begun in 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the feminist movement is rooted in the west and especially in the reform movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining equal political, economical and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. The organized movement is dated from the first Women's Right Convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and till date. Feminist literary theory is often a political attack upon other modes of theory. Feminism raises voices of the equal rights of the women. It mainly focuses on the domination and the exploitation of the female by males in the society. The major problem that feminist see in society is patriarchal system. Due to the patriarchal society women have second position in their society. So feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women. Feminist theory aims to understand gender equality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. The critics of feminism show all kinds of exploitation in the name of gender and say that man and woman are equal and should get equal status in political, social, educational and all aspects of society. They question the traditional role of gender of male and female. Sex may be biological but gender is social construct. So, biological essential should not guide the gender role.

Feminism is social theory and political movement primarily informed and motivated by the experience of the women. "Feminism is the theory of the social, economical and political equality of sexes. It is also an

organized activity on behalf of women's right and interest" (Majapuria, 2007, p.6).

Feminist campaign have changed societies, particularly in the west by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women( including access to contraceptives and abortions), and the rights to enter in the contracts and own property. Feminist have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. They have also advocated work place rights including maternity leave.

Nepal is also male dominated society where females are oppressed politically, economically, educationally, psychologically and socially. The gender issues raised in the West are the real issues related to our Nepal. In our context also women are discriminated and taken as the second citizens, they are treated as if they are from the other planet. We also have some movement to promote women's equality in real sense but they are not sufficient. Different NGOs, INGOs, along with government have tried their best to eliminate this discrimination, but yet the women are not free from this.

Some characteristics of feminism according to Poudel, et al. (2002, p.293) are:

- a) Voices against canon's sexual exclusiveness.
- b) Rejection of the marginalization of all women.
- c) Disregard to culture as patriarchal culture.
- d) Examine the experiences of women from all areas and classes.
- e) Study sexual, social and political issues once thought to be outside the study of literature.

#### 1.1.4 “The Bell Jar” in M.Ed 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Course

The novel “The Bell Jar” is written by Sylvia Plath. It is prescribed for M.Ed 2nd year students as a compulsory subject for the students of English Education. The book ‘New Paradigm’ is a collection of genre of literature. Actually, literature teaches English language to the students through literature. It familiarizes the students with different forms of literature and helps to provide motivation and sufficient teaching learning activities in interesting way. So, novel is also one of the genres of literature. It familiarizes the students about different theory of literature.

This novel is contextual in the case of Nepalese society. Our country has also patriarchal rules and regulations where women are taken as second citizens. Males are regarded as the superior and the female as inferior which is not fair at all. If women go out and behave like men or if they express their sexual desires they are called bad girls. To be a good girl they have to follow all the rules and regulations of the patriarchal society. Her feelings, emotions, desires and needs are not given priority. The females in Nepal are also suppressed by the patriarchal bounds like the character in the novel, “The Bell Jar”. The world is wide, country is great but still the problems and the necessities of the women are too small and hidden. She is unable to express her desires and willing in front of the society. Her talent, desires, feelings, needs and emotions are suppressed in this wide world like in the instrument ‘bell jar ‘ which has a wide belly with a narrow mouth and neck.

So, the context in this novel and the context of our country in the case of women are quite same. Many problems are interrelated which help to make the students conscious and aware after reading the novel. But In the prescribed book ‘New paradigm’ this novel is just an abstract, whole

novel is not given due to which students may not get the sufficient material about the novel from the text. Therefore, the research in this novel is chosen which will be very helpful tool for the students of M.Ed 2<sup>nd</sup> year and also to the teachers and readers who are interested in the various genres of literature.

### **1.1.5 An Overview of the novel ‘The Bell Jar’**

“The Bell Jar” is an autobiographical novel written by the female writer Sylvia Plath. Being an autobiographical novel, it conforms closely to the events of author’s life. Sylvia Plath was born to Otto and Aurelia Plath in 1932. She was an excellent poet but is known to many for her autobiographical novel which was published in 1963, a month later, Plath committed suicide. But, the book which I studied for my research is published in (2005).

The main character in the novel is Esther, a young woman from the Boston, Massachusetts. The story relates a year in the life of Esther Greenwood, who seems to have a rosy future in front of her. She won a competition to guest edit a magazine and travels to New York under Editor Jay Cee. Esther was neither stimulated nor excited by the big city and glamorous culture and life style that girls of her age are expected to idolize. Instead her experiences frighten and disorient her. She appreciates the witty sarcasm and adventures of her friend Doreen. But Esther worries about the fact that she is still a virgin; her encounters with men in New York go badly distorted. Esther’s time in New York heralds the start of a slow mental break down; she slowly loses interest in all the hopes and dreams.

Dropping out of college and staying listlessly at home, her parents decide that something is wrong and take her to a psychiatrist, who refers her to have a shock therapy. Esther's condition got worse due to this inhuman treatment, and she finally due to depression decides to commit suicide. But, her attempt fails and a rich old lady whose support Esther had gained through her writing agrees to pay for treatment in a centre that does not believe in shock therapy as a method for treating the ill.

Esther slowly starts her movement to recovery, but a friend she has made at the hospital named Joan, appeared to be cured of her illness commits suicide when she leaves the hospital. Esther decides to take control of her life and is once more determined to go to college.

#### **1.1.6 Feminist Movement**

The feminist movement also known as women's movement refers to a series of campaigns for reforms on issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights, women's suffrage(right to vote), sexual harassment, sexual violence etc. Feminist movement began in the western world in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has gone through three different waves:-

- i. First-wave Feminism: - First- wave feminism refers to the movement of early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was oriented around the condition of middle or upper class white women and involved suffrage and equal rights in politics. Writers such as Virginia Woolf are associated with the ideas of the first wave of feminism. Wolf describes how men socially and psychologically dominate women in her book 'A room of One's Own'. This book argues that women are simultaneously victims of themselves as well as victims of men.

- ii. Second- wave Feminism: - The second wave of feminist activity began in early 1960s and lasted till the late 1980s. This wave was concerned with gender inequality in laws and culture. 'Simone de Beauvoir' is associated with this wave because of her ideas of women as "the other". During this time, feminist campaigned against political and cultural inequalities. This movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of sexist structure of power.
- iii. Third-wave Feminism: - The third wave of feminism began in the early 1990s. It arose in the response to the perceived failures of the second wave feminism. The third wave feminism had a greater focus on developing the different achievements of women. It includes renewed campaigning for women's greater influence in politics.
- iv. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave, such as Gloria, Bell Hooks, Chela Sandoval and many other feminist called for a new subjectivity in feminist voice. In the years of the movement women accomplished many of the goals they set out to do. They won protection from employment discrimination, abortion law reform, greater representation in media, and equal access to school, equal rights movement and many more.

### **1.1.7 Feminist Literature**

Feminist literature, as the name suggests, is based on the features of feminism, and refers to any literary work that centers on the struggle of a woman for equality, and to be accepted as a human being, before being cast into a gender stereotype. Not all these works follow a direct approach towards this goal of equality. It is only through such media that women

believed a change was possible in the way they were perceived in society. Not all feminist literature has been written by women, but also by men who understood women beyond the roles they were expected to fit into, and delved into their psyche to understand their needs and desires. Some works may be fictional, while others may be non fictional.

## J **Features of Feminist Literature**

- Feminist literature is based on the principles of feminism, and refers to any literary work that centers on the struggle of a woman for equality, and to be expected by the human being cast into a gender stereotype.
- Feminist literature may be fictional as well as non fictional.
- Feminist literature is known to understand and explain the difference between sex and gender.
- Women in literature of the feminist nature are always featured as the protagonist, who more often than not, does not readily accept the traditional role of women as decided by the society.

## **1.2 Review of Related Literature**

A literature review discusses published information in a particular subject area, and sometime information in a particular subject area within a certain time period. A literature review can be just a simple summary of the sources, but it usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. Or it might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates. And



depending on the situation, the literature review may evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant. Many researches in this area have been carried out by various scholars in different universities all over the world. In the Department of English Education, Faculty of Education, T.U. a few research works have been carried out in literature. I have reviewed some books and research notes which are significant to my studies. Reviews of some books:-

According to Lazar (1993), literature should be used with language students because “it is very motivating and has general educational value and it stimulates for language acquisition” (p.14). Giving the importance of teaching novel, he further says “A good novel or a short story may be particularly gripping in that it involves students in the suspense of unraveling the plot” (p.15).

Collie and Slater(2009) says, "one of the main reasons might be that literature offers a beautiful and extremely varied body of written material which is important in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues which is enduring rather than ephemeral"(p.3). They further state that "Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspect of foreign language system"(p.5).

Similarly, reviews of some thesis are:-

Joshi (2008) carried out research on "Teaching English Short Stories Interactively". He attempted to carry out the effectiveness of teaching English Short Stories Interactively at the primary level. The research was carried out in a private school. As a sample of the study twenty seven students of Grade III were taken. To find out the effectiveness of

interactive teaching same pictures were taken for pre-test and post-test activities. A table of check list was developed to record the students' interactive activities in each text. At the beginning students were not able to handle the activities but gradually they developed the capacities to handle themselves.

Similarly, Pokhrel (2008) also carried out research on “strategies used in teaching fiction”. His main purpose of the study was to find out the strategies used in teaching fiction in Master's level. He discovered that there were not any fixed strategies adopted in teaching fiction in Master’s level. They were varied teacher to teacher.

In the same way Gautam (2011) carried out research on “Gender Issues in written discourse”. His main attempt was to analyze the written discourse and to determine how language becomes sexist. He conducted this research on the basis of Manjushree Thapa’s novel ‘Season of Flights’. The main objectives of the study were to analyze the written discourse, to determine how language becomes sexist and to suggest some pedagogical implications. He concluded that subordination of women is all around, i.e. religious, cultural, social, economical, political and ideological. Each of them supports the other. Therefore, efforts to liberate women from oppressive gender relations must be all around through the use of language in writing.

Although, some research activities are conducted on the area of literature, regarding the context of Faculty of Education T.U. Nepal, no research has been carried out on the novel "The Bell Jar". Thus it is a new research in itself.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To identify the aspect of feminism in 'The Bell Jar'.
- 2) To provide some pedagogical implications.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for all the people who are engaged in studying or teaching literature, especially students, teachers, text book writers, and other people who are interested in the field of literature and language teaching. In the course book of M.Ed 2<sup>nd</sup> year the abstract of this novel is only given. So this research is very helpful reference material for them. Also, it is beneficial for the literary criticism; in the case of “The Bell Jar”.

## **CHAPTER - TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

To conduct this research I have adopted qualitative research. Qualitative research makes use of different varieties of interpretative research methodologies. Here, I have tried to interpret different issues related to feminism such as; gender issues, social issues which are found in the novel “The Bell Jar”.

My research is totally ‘library based research’ where I have identified theoretical aspect of feminism in “The Bell Jar”. This is also supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985) where they say, “this type of research as naturalistic inquiry which implies that participant observational techniques result in a more natural approach than the test surveys and the like used more traditional approaches”(as cited in Best and Khan,1993,p.180).Qualitative research is different than the traditional research method. This research uses different forms of data than those used in traditional research method. According to Patton (1990, cited in Best and Khan, 1993, p. 19o), “qualitative research consists of three kinds of data collection: I) in-depth open ended interviews, ii) direct observation, and iii) written documents”. He further says document analysis in qualitative inquiry yields experts quotations or entire passage from organizational clinical or program record, memoranda and correspondence, official publication and reports, personal diaries and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys.

#### **2.1 Sources of Data**

To conduct my research I have used only secondary sources of data.

### **2.1.1 Secondary Sources of Data**

To widen the Knowledge and insight in the related area I have used many related books, articles, ELT journals, dictionary, reference materials and theses, web sites etc. such as:

Plath's "the Bell Jar", Tyson's Critical Theory Today, different books on research methodology and literature like: Best and Kahn (2009), Nunan (1993), Lazar (1993) Majapuriya (2007) etc. Different thesis approved in the Department of English Education, other researches etc.

### **2.2 Sampling Procedure**

I have selected only those extracts for analysis which are related to my objectives related to female issues. For this I have selected language and dialogues used by the female lead character of the novel.

### **2.3 Tools for Data Collection**

I have analyzed text as tools for data collection. I read and re-read the novel "The Bell Jar" by Sylvia Plath in addition to the extract from 'New Paradigm'. I have used different books based on Lazar, Collie and Slater, Brumfit to generate facts for educational implication. I have used these books for data collection to obtain the required objectives of the research. My research questions are:

- 1) Is there male domination in the novel?
- 2) Gender biasness is seen in the novel or not?
- 3) Does the novel show the social depression of the female?

## **2.4 Process of Data Collection**

I have analyzed the novel “The Bell Jar”, materials related to internet, book review and other novels, and compared the cases with women in Nepalese society. This library research is based on reading, quoting and analyzing the quotes from literary and critical aspects. In the process of data collection I have adopted the following methods-

- I read and re-read the original novel “The Bell Jar” and the novel extract as in 'New Paradigm'.
- I listed out some sentences used by the female characters.
- I analyzed some extracts from the novel.
- I related this novel in the context of Nepalese society.
- I have suggested some pedagogical measures.

## **2.5 Limitations of the Study**

- i. The study is limited to the feminist criticism of the novel ' The Bell Jar'.
- ii. The study has secondary sources of data only.

## CHAPTER - THREE

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE NOVEL

In Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel "The Bell Jar", there are adventures of a young woman, the protagonist Esther Green Wood is an ambitious and promising writer in a male dominated society which does not let her achieve her true potential. Plath's alter ego, Esther is thus driven to a nervous breakdown and attempts suicide several times. The novel 'The Bell Jar' is a feminist text in many ways which is centered on the struggle of a young woman who cannot achieve her goal in male dominated society.

People close to Esther do not accept her talent as a poet and the writer; they rather try to push her into the traditional norms and values. Not only the males or the society even her own mother does not support her on her career. For example, Esther's mother repeatedly tries to convince her to learn shorthand but Esther always refuses her saying " , when I tried to picture myself in some job, briskly jotting down line after line of shorthand, my mind went blank" (p.117) Esther unlike many other women of that time refuses to be controlled by the societies traditional rules and values.

.....The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a fourth of July rocket (p.79).

The protagonist of the novel, Esther wants to live her life in a fashionable world, after winning a fashion magazine contest by writing essays,

stories, poems, and fashion blurbs. She gets a job in New York for a month. Like Esther, other girls were also not free from the rules and regulations, and the traditional concepts of the society. She works with “other girl with wealthy parents who wanted to be sure their daughters would be living where men could not get at them and deceive them” (p.4). Esther would like to live differently as her friends in the fashion magazine. On the one hand Esther wants to live differently as her friends in the fashion magazine, she wants to live a glamorous city life as her friend “Doreen”, who is cynical and bemused and represents a mature and unhindered female sexuality. On the other hand, she seems quite indecisive in her career. The intellectual life of the university where Esther ponders writing a thesis on Finnegans Wake, contrasts with the shallow fashion pieces which Esther is writing for the magazine. Esther is painfully incapable to reconcile conflicting desires, ambitions and self-concepts. These pains eventually became so unbearable that she in the final chapter of the novel chooses the absolute way of committing suicide.

Esther seems to be rebellious; she does not like to be confined within conventional social norms and values of the society. She shows her rebellious nature when even her mother does not try to understand her interest. Her mother advises her to learn sewing, shorthand, and cooking and dancing. But Esther does not have that type of vision; she does not want to do what the traditional women have been doing. She thinks that her life is not destined to be like that of typical women. She says,

..... I hated the idea of serving men in any way I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters. Besides, those little shorthand symbols in the book my mother showed me



seemed just as bad as lets equal time and lets equal the total distance (p.72).

Esther wanted to live an independent and professional life. But, despite her energetic enthusiasm towards the adaptation of professional career, she was on the state of dilemma. She could not decide what to choose for her career. She says;

..... I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig. tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig. a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig. was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig. was a famous poet and another fig. was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig. was Europe and Africa and South America [...] above these figs were many more figs I could not quite make out (p.73).

The main theme of the novel “The Bell Jar” appears in the above lines that the protagonist faces anxiety over her future and problem dealing with her own and other’s sexuality. Plath relates Esther’s anxieties over her future to more general problem with gender roles in which society Esther lives. Her problem is not that she believes she will be unsuccessful in her career she chooses but the part of the problem seems to be that she cannot settle a successful career that she may choose with the traditional gender roles of her society. Esther worries about not being able to fulfill her everyday duties rather than worrying about larger questions of what she does as a successful career woman. Actually her problem is that she

has too many options, but she is not satisfied with them. She has always fear and confusion of what path to accept for her future. This fear of unknown and confused future leads her to dark depression. She sits paralyzed with her indecision and this turns her to madness at last. Inhuman and shocking treatment at hospital is also responsible for her depression, madness and suicide respectively. Esther is given shock treatment, which she does not see as a therapy but as a punishment for some terrible crime which she has not committed.

.....Then something bent down and took hold of me and shook me like the end of the world. Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a dropped me till I thought my bones would break and the saps fly out of me a split plant. I wondered what terrible it was that I had done (p.138).

On the way of her treatment she meets her friend Joan, a former girl friend of Buddy Willard. Both of them suffer with psychic problems and attempt to commit suicide earlier. A few days later, Joan commits suicide by hanging. This event shocks Esther. She attends Joan's funeral and foresees her death is coming. She says " during the simple funeral service I wondered what I thought I was burying"(p.232). In this way one, energetic, versatile and talented lady turns her life gloomy due to depression caused by her unsuccessfulness in her career caused by the male domination and traditional rules and regulations of the society. She is always discouraged by the males and even by her own Mother who wants her to follow the tradition which other females has been following.

### **3.1 Characters as Represented in the Novel from Feminist Perspective**

Characters are most important aspect of a novel. Whatever happens or occurs in the novel is due to the role of the characters involved. So, characters are very essential or important to understand the theme of the story, because without having good generalization of characters it's very difficult to understand what message the writer wish to convey to the readers. There are many male and female characters represented in the novel, some of them have major and some have minor roles.

Some of the major characters are-

- i. Esther Greenwood:** - Esther Greenwood is the heroine of the novel. She is an autobiographical portrait of Sylvia Plath. The novel is chronically about her descent into madness and about her struggle to escape from it. The title "The Bell Jar" is a metaphorical explanation for what her insanity felt like. Esther has problem relating to men and becomes very sexually frusted and confused. Her friendship with women disappointed her. She cannot decide what to do with her life; she is not able to decide about her career and future.
- ii. Doreen:** - Doreen is Esther's female friend. She is a beautiful lady and she does not want to do the boring activities with the others. She is interested in making her own route for a journey but she is interested in men rather than her own career. It is through Doreen, that Esther meets Macro, a man with whom she has the most violent and harrowing experience in the novel.
- iii. Buddy Willard:** - A contemporary reviewer of 'The Bell Jar' once observed that Buddy Willard is a perfect specimen of the ideal 1950s American male. He is handsome and athletic, he attends church, loves

his parents, thrives in school and studies to become a doctor. Buddy is Esther's boy friend, to a certain extent, for the greater part of the novel. Buddy appeared as a god for the Esther but this relation was broken after he told Esther that he slept with a waitress on many occasions during the summer. Esther had decided to break up with him soon after knowing this but he contracted TB and was sent away to sanatorium. Buddy represents both Esther's struggle with men and their weakness, and her accomplishment in overcoming his influence.

- iv. **Mother:** - Esther's mother remains in the background of the novel. She is both a symptom and cause of her problem. She seems constantly abstracting Esther about what she is going to do with her life. She also avoids Esther's problem, she does not want to admit that Esther needs to be in asylum and wants to pretend that nothing has happened. She even did not cry when her husband died, and lives in the world of fantasy.
- v. **Joan:** - Joan is Esther's second female associated in the novel. She is not like Doreen; she is a follower than a leader. Joan is easily influenced and fragile. She comes to the asylum after pretending suicide. Through Joan Esther learns to help herself. She goes to Joan when she had her first sexual experience. Joan at last committed a suicide which is an example to Esther of a life wasted.

(For the description of minor characters see appendix I)

### **3.2 Analysis of Some Extracts used by the Female Characters in the Novel 'The Bell Jar'**

There are different male and female characters in the novel. Characters have important role in the story, they convey the message what the writer wants to say. In this novel characters have used different dialogues

according to the situation or the circumstances. But, here my concern is only upon the language or dialogues used by the female character. Some of them are:

1) *“I buried my face in the pink velvet façade of Jay Cees love-seat and with immense relief the salt tears and miserable noises that had been prowling around in me all morning burst out into the room.” (p.98).*

In the above extract Esther describes her first of many breakdowns which occurs when she and the other girls are in the middle of a photo shoot. During the photo shoot Photographer asks her about her career but she is unable to make a firm decision. Actually she aims to be poet and the writer but people close to Esther do not accept her talent rather they try to push her into the traditional bounds. Therefore, she is hopeless about her future. She cries because every other girls in her group seems to have their career set, but she feels so lost and unable to make firm decision and as a result, she breaks down in the public.

2) *“I fisted my fingers together and smashed them [...]. Macro pulled out a white handkerchief and dabbed his nose. Blackness like ink, spread over the pale cloth” (p.105).*

Macro tries to rape Esther, but she defends herself by giving a punch – making him bleed. This is the first time Esther feels threatened by a man, but she is able to stand up for herself against his cruel behavior by hurting and making him bleed. She seems quite strong in this situation by defending against Macro who tries to rape and destroy her virginity by the power of so called man, but he fails and gets hurt by the female. This extract shows how some males of patriarchal society treat females. They

think themselves superior and powerful and try to dominate or seduce the innocent females.

3) *“The water pressed in on my eardrums and on my heart. I fanned myself down, but before I knew where I was the water had spat me up into the sun” (p.154).*

Esther faces anxieties over her future and problem due to the gender roles of her society. She has always fear and confusion about her future. She is not able to take a right decision to choose her career. There seems nobody to support her even her own mother does not try to understand about her choices. She feels herself alone in the traditional society which always tries to trap her. She is so unhappy with her life .in this scene Esther describes one of her many attempts to commit suicide. She tries to drown herself and wants to take rest from this world which made her very tired in the short period of her life but is unsuccessful.

4) *“I would bleed and lay down, nursing the towel. It occurred to me that the blood was my answer. I could not possibly be a virgin any more. I smiled into the dark. I felt part of a great tradition” (p.219).*

Esther had sex with Irwin. She loses her virginity with a man she just meets. Virginity had become a much burden to her. She wanted to destroy her virginity to which this traditional society does not easily accept. If the man keeps a sexual relation, nobody bothers; male dominated society does not raise any questions. But, if the female had a relation, society says her bad girl. Esther’s boy friend Buddy says her to be a virgin until she gets married but he himself had a relation with a waitress many times. So, Esther was against this type of discrimination not because she was interested to have a sex with a boy but because to break the

discrimination what the patriarchal society has. After losing her virginity she bleeds badly, but instead of being concerned about her wound, she feels glad of losing her virginity, a part of a great tradition.

5) *“I’ll go I said, and I did go, and all during the simple funeral service I wondered what I thought I was burying”(p.232).*

While Esther was in the hospital, she meets a friend Joan, who eventually hangs herself. Esther goes to her funeral and thinks that she is getting buried.

6) *“The eyes and the faces all turned themselves towards me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room” (p.234).*

At the end of the novel Esther is released from the hospital. She feels happy for accomplishing her so much in the hospital when she was gone mad due to depression. She has gone through a difficult journey in the beginning, but the climax of the novel changes her life.

### **3.3 The Restricted Role of the Women in the Novel 'The Bell Jar'**

In this novel females are dominated by the males and even the females themselves. The role of the women is very much restricted. The main character in this novel is Esther, who does not want to follow the traditional rules made by the male dominated society which always thinks the male superior and females inferior. Esther wants to be like man, she wants freedom and independence. She wants to go beyond these traditional rules of the society but society does not let her do so.

Esther feels pulled between her desire to write or to be a poet and the pressure she feels to settle down and start a family. Esther is a talented

girl, when her intellectual talents earn prizes, scholarship and respect; many people assume that she must want to become a wife and mother. Even her mother herself does not support her talent. She does not support her to be a writer. She says it is all wastage of time. Her mother advises her to learn sewing, shorthand and cooking and dancing. "By the end of the supper my mother had convinced me "(see appendix II). She imposes her to do traditional works without breaking the rules and regulations of the society. Her talent had no value and respect. The girls at her college shows their respect only when Esther starts dating a handsome and well-liked boy, Buddy. Esther's mother approved her relationship with Buddy who was her friend's son. Buddy was an educated man, who loved Esther but then also he restricts her. He assumes that Esther should drop her poetic ambitions as soon as she becomes a mother and Esther feels that she cannot be a mother and poet at the same time. Esther has obsessive fear to maternal life; she considers that women who hold maternity cannot make them self creative. She is despaired of becoming some one's wife and the mother who can destroy her carrier. Esther says,

....I tried to imagine what it would be like if Constantin were my husband. It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my night-gown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd expect a big dinner, [...]This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage



was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a University professor and had been a private school teacher herself (p.80).

Esther seems to be rebellious, as she does not like to be confined within the conventional rules and values of the society. "My mother had always told me never under any circumstances to go with a man to a man's room after an evening out, it could mean only the one thing" (p.76). Esther longs to have adventures that society denies her, particularly sexual adventures. She decides to reject Buddy because he had a relationship with a waitress while dating Esther, but expects Esther to remain a virgin until she marries him. Esther understands her first sexual experience as a crucial step towards independence and adulthood, but she seeks this experience not for her own pleasure but rather to relieve herself of her burdensome virginity. She says,

.....I wondered how much I would bleed, and lay down, nursing the towel. It occurred to me that the blood was my answer. I couldn't possibly be a virgin any more. I smiled into the dark. I felt part of a great tradition (p.219).

Esther feels anxiety about her future because she can see only mutually exclusive choices: virgin or whore, submissive married woman or successful but lonely career woman. She dreams of a large life, but the stress worsens her life to madness.

## **CHAPTER - FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of my study was to identify the theoretical aspect of feminism in the novel 'The Bell Jar'. I have drawn some findings and recommendations on the way of my analysis which can be put forward as follows:

#### **4.1 Findings**

The following findings have been deduced from the study-

- ) Females are dominated in the male dominated society, even in so called developed countries.
- ) Females are dominated by the females themselves who advice to follow the norms and values of the patriarchal society.
- ) In patriarchal society women have internalized their stereotypical roles that make their own marginalization. They are satisfied with their submissive roles, motherliness and domesticated, having dull as well as nullified existence. They are compelled to do what patriarchy wishes them to do.
- ) Female are subject to patriarchal domination in many societies. They are dominated sexually, politically, economically etc. for example if woman goes out and behave like man or if she expresses her sexual desires society calls her a bad girl.
- ) The society and social aspects like religion, laws and other social institutions favors the males where females are taken as secondary position in the society. For example males are regarded as a strong, brave, rational and outgoing and females are regarded as a soft, emotional, weak, home sitting etc.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

On The basis of the deduced findings, I have attempted to forward some recommendations which are as follows:

- ) Oppression of the women should be abandoned socially, politically, culturally, and religiously.
- ) Women should not be treated as a subject they should also be viewed as a full human being capable of doing everything not subordinate to men in social status.
- ) The problems of the women character, domination, exploitation, marginalization of empowerment of women should be exposed in literary writing.

## **4.3 Pedagogical Implications of the Study**

- ) Teacher in the classroom should behave equally to both female and male students, there should not be biasness.
- ) Both male and female students should participate equally in the classroom activities such as speech, role play, drama etc. so that they can be friendlier and know each other's importance.
- ) Literary text representing the women's world should be included in teaching materials as reading materials.

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## APPENDIX-I

### Description of minor characters:-

- ) Jay Cee: - She is Esther's boss at her editorial internship. She is harsh to Esther when she does not know what she is going to do with her life and also advises her. Esther likes Jay Cee and also badly hurt by her.
- ) Betsy: - One of the other girls. Betsy is a normal girl that Esther does not really like.
- ) Frankie: - The shorter friend of Lenny Shepherd. He comes along with Lenny, Doreen, and Esther as Esther's date. When she refused to dance with him, he leaves. Esther is left with the new couple.
- ) Lenny Shepherd: - A recording engineer with whom Doreen falls in love.
- ) Mrs. Willard: - Buddy Willard's mother. She is a friend of Esther's mother. She wants Esther and Buddy to be together.
- ) Hilda: - One of the other girl. Doreen and Esther frequently make fun of her.
- ) Philomena Guinea: - The financial backer of Esther's scholarship.
- ) Constantin: - Person with whom Esther decided to have sex but he does not seem to be interested.
- ) Eric: - The law student with whom Esther has a conversation about sex.
- ) Mr. Willard: - Buddy's father, he wants Esther to be his daughter.
- ) Macro: - The woman-hater introduced to Esther by Lenny Shepherd. Macro pushes Esther on the ground and tries to force himself on her, and Esther punches him in the nose.

- ) Dodo Conway: - The catholic woman who drives Esther and her mother to the hospital when Esther needs her first shock treatment.
- ) Teresa: - The family doctor who refuses to give Esther stronger sleeping pills and advises her to go to the psychiatrist.
- ) Dr. Gordon: - The first psychiatrist Esther sees.
- ) Cal: - The boy introduced to Esther by Jody.
- ) George Blackwell: - The roommate of a guy Esther once dated at Amherst.
- ) Dr. Nolan: - The doctor at the private hospital.
- ) Valerie: - Seems normal but is actual a lobotomy patient.
- ) Mrs. Norris: - The silent woman to whom Esther attaches herself in her first few weeks at the asylum.
- ) Dee Dee: - The woman who has a romantic relationship with Joan.
- ) Irwin: - The young professor who Esther meets and with whom she loses her virginity.

## APPENDIX II

### **Restricted role of the women in the novel 'The Bell Jar'**

By the end of the supper my mother had convinced me I should study shorthand in the evenings. Then I would be killing two birds with one stone, writing a novel and learning something practical as well. I would also be saving a whole lot of money. That same evening my mother unearthed an old black-board from the cellar and set it up on the breezeway. Then she stood at the blackboard and scribbled little curlicues in white chalk while I sat in a chair and watched. At first I felt hopeful. I thought I might learn shorthand in no time, and when the freckled lady in the scholarships office asked me why I hadn't worked to earn money in July and August the way you were supposed to if you were a scholarship girl, I could tell her I had taken a free shorthand course instead, so I could support myself right after college.

The only thing was, when I tried to picture myself in some job, briskly jotting down line after line of shorthand, my mind went blank. There was not one job I felt like doing where u used shorthand. And, as I sat there and watched, the white chalk curlicues blurred into senselessness.