

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Voice from the Margin: Feminist Identity in Plath's *Collected Poems*

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LETTER OF APPROVAL

This thesis entitled “Voice from the Margin: Feminist Identity in Plath’s *Collected Poems*,” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Purna Bahadur Basnet has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

Sylvia Plath harshly attacks repressive patriarchal society which has not only rendered women as sub-human, inferior, mysterious, and uncertain but also has rendered the female insignificant . In the *Collected Poems*, Plath exposes the discrimination and violence meted out to females and their bodies. While exposing this, Plath raises her voice vehemently against patriarchy, which reflects her attempt to claim female identity and subjectivity as separate niche.

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I. Voice from the Margin

Females are marginalized and their voice is dominated by patriarchy in Sylvia Plath's poetry. Not only the voices of females are marginalized but also their will, desire as well as body are ignored and "othered," and their power is aborted by males. Plath associates female's sufferings and death with males. She is made to suffer at the hands of her father and husband. So, she shows an expression of rage against males because they obstruct females from creating separate niche. Plath not only denounces the ignorance of the female body and the process of "othering" them but also voices for the search for female subjectivity.

Sylvia Plath, who was born in 1932, was writing at a time when feminist literary criticism had just been formally inaugurated. She can be taken as a heroine of the feminist movement as she attacked the males in a direct and rebellious manner. Women writers and critics at the time were in minority and marginalized. So, Plath's courage to raise her voice against the male is the voice raised from the margin at her time.

Sylvia Plath's father, a professor of biology at Boston University, has been characterized as authoritarian and died of diabetes in 1940 when Plath was eight years old. She studied at Gamaliel Bradford Senior High School and at the Smith College from 1950 to 1955. In *Letters Home* (1975), edited by Plath's mother, she revealed a portrait of a young woman driven by hopes for the highest success alternating with moods of deep depression.

After winning a Fulbright scholarship, Plath attended Newnham College, Cambridge. She met there in 1956 the poet Ted Hughes, whom she married next year. They first met at a student party, where she bit Hughes on the cheek, really hard. It set the tone to their tumultuous relationship. Plath decided to be a good wife, but Hughes

was not the ideal husband as she imagined: he was moody, penchant for nose-picking, and dressed slovenly. Also Plath's suspicions of Hughes's infidelity burdened her.

Plath's early poetry was based on then current styles of refined and ironic verse. Under the influence of her husband and the work of Dylan Thomas and Gerald Manley Hopkins, she developed with great force her talents. In 1957, Plath returned to U.S., where she worked as a teacher of literature at the Smith College. From 1958 to 1959 she worked as a clerk in Boston and studied poetry at Robert Lowell's course. Plath moved again to England in 1959. Her first child, Frieda Rebecca, was born in 1960 and second, Nicholas Farrar, in 1962. Next year appeared her well-known poems, the aggressive 'Lady Lazarus' and the notorious 'Daddy', in which Plath expanded the boundaries of intimate expression:

Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

(from "Daddy," 1966)

When Ted Hughes abandoned her for another woman, Assia Gutmann Wevill, the wife of the Canadian poet David Wevill, fantasies of self-destruction took over of Plath's resolution. Wevill was German-born, sophisticated woman, with film-star looks. Near the end of her life, Plath burned hundreds of pages of a work in progress. In one of her final poems she wrote: "Dying / is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well." (from "Lady Lazarus") In a letter to her mother, Plath complained that Hughes had left her in poverty. She has expressed her frustration:

It is as if my life were magically run by two electric currents: joyous
positive and despairing negative – which ever is running at the moment
dominates my life, floods it. I am now flooded with despair, almost

hysteria, as if I were smothering. As if a great muscular owl were sitting on my chest, its talons clenching and constricting my heart.

(Wakeman 1144)

Her literary reputation rests mainly on her carefully crafted pieces of poetry, particularly the verse that she composed in the months leading up to her death. Plath has been considered a deeply honest writer, whose ceaseless self-scrutiny has given a unique point of view to psychological disorder and to the theme of the feminist-martyr in a patriarchal society.

Sylvia Plath's early poems--already drenched in typical imagery of glass, moon, blood, hospitals, foetuses, and skulls--were mainly 'exercises' or pastiches of work by poets she admired: Dylan Thomas, W. B. Yeats, Marianne Moore. Late in 1959, when she and her husband were at Yaddo, the writers' colony in New York State, she produced the seven-part 'Poem for a Birthday', which owes its form to Theodore Roethke's 'Lost Son' sequence, though its theme is her own traumatic breakdown and suicide attempt at 21. After 1960, her poems increasingly explored the surreal landscape of her imprisoned psyche under the looming shadow of a dead father and a mother on whom she was resentfully dependent.

A fanatical preoccupation with death and rebirth informs her sad, cynical novel, *The Bell Jar*, compared with Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* for its classic of adolescent angst, as it does her first book of poems, "The Colossus," published in 1960. Plath's mature poetry, too exalted to be merely "confessional," frequently treats of this resurrection theme, together with a related one which attempts to redeem meaningless life through art. Lines like 'I am lost, I am lost, in the robes of all this light ("Witch Burning"), and "On Fridays the little children come / To trade their hooks for hands" ("The Stones") foreshadow the powerful, wholly convincing voice

of poems like 'The Hanging Man', published posthumously in "Ariel": 'By the roots of my hair some god got hold of me. / I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet.'

Ted Hughes has described how Sylvia Plath underwent a searing, "curiously independent process of gestation" during the spring of 1962, when, two months after giving birth to a son, she produced a powerful radio drama, "Three Women." The first deathly "Ariel" poems appeared soon afterwards with "The Moon and Yew Tree," "Little Fugue," "Elm," "Event," "Berck-Plage," and others. During the summer of 1962, her marriage to Hughes began to buckle; she was devastated when she learned that he had been unfaithful to her. Although she and Hughes travelled to Ireland together in September, the marriage was by then in ruins, and in October she asked her husband to leave for good.

It was after Hughes's departure that Plath produced, in less than two months, the forty poems of rage, despair, love, and vengeance that have chiefly been responsible for her immense posthumous fame. Throughout October and November of 1962, she rose every day at dawn to take down, as from dictation, line after miraculous line of poems like 'The Bee Meeting', 'Stings', 'Daddy', 'Lady Lazarus', 'Ariel', and 'Death & Company', as well as those heartbreaking poems to her baby son: 'Nick and the Candlestick' and 'The Night Dances'.

In December 1962, she moved with her children from Devon to London. What she recognized as the 'genius' of her poetry temporarily restored her self-confidence, but in January 1963, after the publication of *The Bell Jar*, and during the coldest winter of the century, she descended into a deep, clinical depression, and in the early morning of 11 February, she gassed herself.

In the quarter-century following her suicide, Sylvia Plath has become a heroine and martyr of the feminist movement. In fact, she was a martyr mainly to the

recurrent psychodrama that staged itself within the bell jar of her tragically wounded personality. Twelve final poems, written shortly before her death, define a nihilistic metaphysic from which death provided the only dignified escape.

Theme and Style of Plath

The common element found in Sylvia Plath's poetry is her thematic content. Several of the reoccurring themes in her poems are suicide as a way to relieve pain, abandonment, and passivity. Relief through suicide is one of the most common themes used in Sylvia Plath's poetry. In one of her most famous pieces, "Lady Lazarus", Plath writes of her attempts at suicide. "And like the cat I have nine times to die./ This is Number Three." She describes the two previous attempts at killing herself when she says "The first time it happened I was ten. . . . The second time I meant /To last it out and not come back at all." She describes death as "an art" that she does "exceptionally well (Plath 244)." "Daddy" is another of Plath's poems that demonstrates her common death by suicide theme. Plath writes that "At twenty I tried to die/And get back...to you/ I thought even the bones would do." Plath's reoccurring theme of suicide adds to the reader's image of the author herself.

A second common in Plath's poetry is abandonment. In her 1962 poem entitled "The Bee Meeting", Plath writes "...they are all gloved and covered, why did nobody tell me?" and "I am nude as a chicken neck, does nobody love me?", demonstrating her fear of abandonment (Plath 211). Her poem "Daddy" also contains the theme of abandonment. Plath writes about how she "used to pray to recover" her father, and how he had "died before [she] had time" to tell him how she felt. These poems display the theme of abandonment, a common subject in Plath's poetry.

Plath employs imagery throughout most of her poems. She incorporates many images of nature, color and symbols within her works. The specific details Plath

chooses to place in her poems allow her to give her audience visual pictures of the story at hand. Nature images fill many of her most famous pieces. “Black Rook in Rainy Weather”, written in 1956, is one of her works that contains several instances of nature imagery. Plath describes the “stiff twig” where a “wet black rook” rested, with the “mute sky” overhead (Plath 56). Another of her poems, “Winter Landscape, with Rooks” also written in 1956, contains nature images. She tells of a “single swan” that makes its way around the pond, and the “dry frost” that covers her pain (Plath 21).

Another type of imagery Plath employs in her poetry is that of colors. Her 1956 poem, “Ode for Ted”, contains many instances of color imagery. The “green out-sprouts” that push through the ground, the “red fox” that stalks the rabbit, and “blue fur” that adorns the moles are all examples of this (Plath 29). Plath’s “The Sleepers”, written in 1959, also contains many references to color. She describes the “blue light” escaping from the window that is surrounded by “yellow lace”, and the “silver track” left by a small snail.

Sylvia Plath also includes hostile, violent imagery in many of her poems. In her 1962 poem, “The Cut”, Plath describes the “dead white” skin cut off a thumb, leaving only a “red plush” behind on the “thumb stump” (Plath 235). Another of her poems, “Daddy”, written in 1962, also contains hostile imagery. She describes her father, who died when she was young, and his “brute heart”, as well as the “obscene language” of his relatives, the Germans. These pieces, along with many of her others, demonstrate Sylvia Plath’s continuous use of imagery within her poems.

Another common element found in Plath’s works is figurative language. She uses various elements of literature, the most common of which are allusions, metaphors, and personification. Several allusions can be found in Sylvia Plath’s

works. Within her “The Colossus” poem, Moonrise, there is an allusion to Christ’s death. “A body of whiteness/ Rots, and smells of rot under its headstone/ though the body walk out in clean linen.” Allusions are also put to use in her poem “Daddy”. She refers to the popular nursery rhyme “The Old Woman in a Shoe” when she writes “. . . black shoe in which I have lived like a foot for thirty years...” Plath also alludes to historical incidents when she talks of her father’s “Luftwaffe” and his “Aryan eye”, and when she calls him “Panzer- man”. The specific allusions Plath chooses to include in her works help us to relate the plot to well known occurrences.

Plath also employs similes within her poetry. In her poem “The Queen’s Complaint”, which she wrote in 1956, Plath uses similes to demonstrate the queen’s attacker. She writes that he has “hands like derricks” and looks “fierce and black as rooks (Plath 28).” Similes also play an important role in her 1962 poem, “The Other”. The phrases “like a meathook”, “breath like mileage” and “scratch like a cat” all add understanding to the poem (Plath 201).

Although she died at the mere age of thirty, Sylvia Plath gained fame from her large amount of poetry, much of which was published after her death. Her works have impacted the lives of many of her readers, leaving them with a new understanding of those on the brink of suicide, and helping them gain an insight on a contemporary form of writing. Even though Plath is gone to her poetry continues to thrive, unveiling the legacy of a tortured artist.

Sylvia Plath's unique literary style has been appreciated. She has been hailed as a kind of "archangel of confessional poetry" (Drennan 1184), and her poetry has been described as being "at once confessional, lyrical, and symbolic" (Hinkle 920). The styling that has led to the continuity of her art and its relevance to society can be attributed to many factors and techniques common among her poetry and prose,

namely her unique uses of rhythm and meter, her prevailing themes of feminist criticism, her use of the technique of "doubling," and her unique approach to characterization. Plath's poem "Mirror" is a work typical of her writing style in these regards. As most authors whose work stands the test of time, Sylvia Plath has a unique literary style that is a common thread throughout the majority of her lasting work.

Plath's work has a mixture of comic and serious elements; it combines various types of rhymes and half rhymes in structured and free verse. At times Plath's persona is curt. Her poems are graphically morbid, hallucinatory in their imagery, but full of ironic wit, technical brilliance, and tremendous emotional power. She is known for her controlled stanzas, heavy with assonance and consonance, her elaborate syntax with its inversions and subordinate clauses, her ingenious metaphors.

Though several critics have interpreted Plath's poems from traditional feminist perspectives, no critic has yet studied her poems from the position of margin in which female body has been ignored and "othered". So, this study examines feminine body, which is site for feminine resistance.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short introduction to Sylvia Plath and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It discusses feminism, sexuality and the politics of the body.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how the female body has been neglected, "othered" and discriminated against in

the male-dominated society. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

II. Feminism and Politics of the Body

Sexuality and Femininity

Human sexuality is as much the socio-cultural construct as it is biological. It plays a major role in everyone's life. It is the way in which people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. There are many factors that help to develop sexuality, arguably one of the most important, is our actual gender. Whether one male or female, is likely to have a major influence on the development of individual sexuality. Thus, sexuality is an integral part of our personalities whether we are aware of it or not.

In the western cultures, man/woman dichotomy has been a significant issue since the time of Plato and Aristotle. They have associated man with soul and women with body, which is inferior to soul. They regarded man as perfect being and women as an incomplete man. This philosophical construction of human sexuality has helped to place females in inferior position. Even the natural historians since Aristotle gave preference to the study of male bodies. They considered women to be a "monstrous error of nature and a deviation from the male norm" (Schiebinger 24). So, David Morgan writes: "clearly, bodily differences are taken as major signifiers of differences between men and women, and these physical differences are often read, in complex ways, as being the very source of essential differences between the masculine and the feminine" (70).

Male assumes the dominant position in sexuality. They shaped sexual behaviour to suit their own interests. Women are not respected as autonomous individuals but are treated as dehumanized sex objects, the mere sexual playthings of men:

Female sexuality is supposed to lie in her perceptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent and submissive. Female sexuality has been held to involve long arousal and slow satisfaction, inferior sex drive, susceptibility to field dependence and romantic idealism rather than lustful reality. Women are psychologically no less than anatomically incapable of rape. (qtd.in Oakley 35)

Sexuality has become a central political issue for feminists and also a source of division amongst them. Sexuality has been contested terrain amongst feminists since the nineteenth century. It has become the major issue within and many academic disciplines. The growth of interest in this area can be traced back to the beginning of 'second wave' feminism, and has its origin in the political aims of women's liberation for freedom. In recent years feminists and gay scholars have taken the lead in putting sexuality on the academic agenda and in developing research, theory and teaching in the field. The new scholarship on sexuality differs radically from the older, sexological tradition.

Sexology treated sexuality as a biological and psychological phenomenon, often drawing the medical model, which regarded differences from the narrowly defined heterosexual norms as pathological. More recent approaches have given far higher priority to the social and cultural shaping of human sexuality.

This new approach to sexuality lies at the heart of the historian Michel Foucault's work. He views sexuality as social construction. He tries to change the historical concept on sexuality, which has been defined in terms of repression and prohibition and he offers a way of thinking about sexuality in terms of mechanisms of power. He says, "Sexuality must not be seen as drive but as especially dense transfer

point for relation of power” (qtd. in Jones and Coates 143). In the same way, he takes a “constructivist” position towards sexuality, as opposed to an “essentialist” position, which sees sexuality as something fixed that, exists in us.

The essentialist view of sexuality as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have observed that the “Sexuality is coextensive with existence” (qtd. in Beauvoir 43). It can mean that every experience of existence has sexual significance or that sexual phenomenon has existential import. It is taken as a natural phenomenon that is universal and unchanging. Something, that is a part of the biological, makes up of each individual. From this perspective, ‘sexuality’ is described basically as a fulfillment of heterosexual biological desire that is conceived as normal and natural.

Sexuality and sexual orientation are tremendously important considerations in analyzing the status of women in culture because almost all societies have defined women in terms of sex. Women are, too, often defined as sex objects, useful for their ability to satisfy male sexual desire ignoring their own desire and subjectivity. Women’s sexuality has been defined in very narrow ways. Such definition ignores or rejects women who are not interested in pursuing exclusively heterosexual relationships, including women who are lesbian, bisexual, or celibate. Women who do not conform to the normative script for female sexuality are frequently stereotyped and labeled as deviant. And in the same way, if they are disabled, overweight, or otherwise “abnormal” they are not thought of as sexual at all. In this context, Lucinda Joy Peach points out: “Women who do not conform to the normative cultural standards of being “males identified” with respect to their sexual orientation are frequently called lesbians, regardless of the accuracy of the label” (61).

Sexuality has become the major feminist issue. Historically enormous efforts, from chastity belts to property laws, have been made to control female sexuality and

to tie women to individual men through monogamous heterosexual relationship. The double standard of morality has entitled men to sexual freedom denied to women. It has also divided women themselves into two categories: the respectable Madonna and the reparative whore. Women's sexuality has been policed and regulated whereas men's has not been subjugated to repression in the same way. It is the woman prostitute who is stigmatized and punished, not her male clients.

Psychoanalyst like Sigmund Freud has viewed female sexuality in terms of 'penis-envy'. He further brought to light a point of the importance which had not been fully appreciated namely that masculine eroticism is definitely located in the penis, whereas women have two kinds of orgasm-clitoral and vaginal. Clitoral orgasm in Freud's view is less matured. He maintains that adult women should transfer their center of orgasm to the vagina, where male penetration makes their sexual response complete. Freud's theory of double orgasm has no basis in fact. The center of female sexuality is the clitoris; female orgasm is achieved through the stimulation of the clitoris whether or not accompanied by vaginal penetration. The myth of double orgasm led women to believe that they were frigid and unable to produce a matured sexual response.

Freud never showed much concern with the destiny of woman but always concerns for male destiny. He admits that woman sexuality is evolved as fully as man's. So he writes, "The libido is constantly and regularly male in essence, whether it appears in man or in woman" (qtd. in Beauvoir 44).

The concept that woman need men to achieve a mature sexual response is related to the larger issue that women are dependent on men on their sexual, emotional, social and economic well being. This assumption, not only legitimates

“compulsory heterosexuality” as an institution but subjects women to continued domination by men.

The Social Construction of Sexuality

This section projects the idea that individual matters like sexual behavior and desires are shaped by the social and cultural context. Sexuality is so much a part of the social order that it is no longer conceived as individual or personal at all. It is the social process that creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire, creating the social beings we know as women and men as their relations in the created society. Sexuality cannot be treated in isolation. We cannot define anything as sexual in an absolute sense but it becomes sexual by the application of socially learned meanings. The social-construction perspective focuses on the cultural and historical context in which sexuality is learned and enacted, or “scripted”. Cultures and societies organize sexual practices into approved, permitted and tabooed patterns and individuals internalize them. In this sense, sexual behaviour is ‘socially scripted’ in that it is a ‘part’ that is learned and acted out within a social context. In this context Andrea Dworkin says:

Men control the sexual and the reproductive uses of women’s bodies. The institutions of control include law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care, the economy, organized religion, and systematized physical aggression against women (for instance in rape and battery) [...] he, ideology of male sexual domination, posits that men are superior to women by virtue of their penises; that physical possession of the female is the natural right of the male; [...] The metaphysics of male sexual domination is that women are whores [...] One does not violate something by using it: neither rape nor

prostitution is an abuse of the female because in both the female is fulfilling her natural function. (203)

So, the term 'sexuality' does not refer just to genital sexual activity but to all attitude, values, beliefs and behavior that might be seen to have some sexual significance in our society. Stevi Jackson says:

Biological factors do not determine the forms which sexuality takes, but merely set parameters within other influences operate. Although women and men may differ genetically, hormonally and physiologically, it is not possible to leap to the conclusion that they therefore also differ in terms of personality as behavior. Biology is not destiny in any absolute sense; it only comes to be so through the qualities, which are assigned to members of each gender within society. (qtd. in Jackson 63)

In this way, biological events as physiological process - - such as aging, illness, and reproduction are heavily influenced by the social-cultural systems in which they occur. For women aging process has its own strains in the society that values women for their youth and beauty and aging becomes a difficult social and psychological experience. Even though the reproduction is physical one, its significance lies as much in its social meanings.

Human sexuality has always been a social product and will continue to be so, no matter whatever form of society comes into being in the future. Sexualities are multiple, no unitary, and not physiologically or psychologically fixed for life but are socially shaped. As sexuality is social matter, it is essential to learn and discuss the actual meanings of society and its nature.

Politics of the Body

Women have often been regarded as inferior beings from the very beginning of the history of civilization. The practice is that men have always occupied superior position in every field of human activities. They have always kept women under their control. The whole world is on the side of men and women are projected as the “other” in social, cultural, political and educational field. Their desire for freedom and equality and their ambition have been subjugated by males.

Women have been portrayed in different ways in the works of art written by male writers. A work of art in the classical age was greatly influenced by the socio-cultural surroundings. Mythology and philosophy took more space in the creation of literature. They took it for granted that god is the generator of worldly truth. For them, women were defective men. Whether classical philosophers made the maxims to guide artists or they observed that they certainly accepted that creation begins from a super soul or a superman, women, therefore, were incomplete. The literary works of the classical period amply exemplify the artist's conformation with the norms of the patriarchal society and their presentation of women as subjects of entertainment or of wish fulfillment.

As women were regarded as inferior, it was said that the male was always superior to the female. Males have always tried to put women under their control. All the world is on the side of the male and the female is projected as "other" in their works as, "Frailty thy name is woman" said Shakespeare (Hamlet II, III). Similarly Aristotle was more inclined to believe that women were incomplete in some way. He says, “A woman was an unfinished man” (qtd. in Gaarder 116). Legislators, priests,

philosophers and scientists have striven to show that the sub-ordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth.

Classical feminists and Renaissance feminists view that tragedies victimize feminine representation. Sophocles, a ruler and priest, states that "Silence is the adornment of women" (242). Therefore, it aims at decrying that whatever Sophocles wrote, he wrote under patriarchal dominance. Athenian society was patriarchal society where there were patriarchal ideologies such as, if there is conflict between man and woman, man is the winner, woman should be silent, they should not go outside, should please male, whereas the male was thought to be domineering, ruler, protector of women, fighter, courageous, "Lack of tenderness towards women was the rule at Athens " (136). These beliefs are not exceptions in Sophoclean tragedies.

Bible itself marginalizes women as the "other". The book of Genesis says that Adam was created by god and Eve was created out of Adam's rib. He dreamt and found her. Eve was good as long as she obeyed God and Adam. She changed into a demon as soon as she disobeyed.

In a similar way Homer's *Iliad* also projects women as the other. The plot of *Iliad* begins from the claim of possession of a maid. Achilles first possessed her but Agamemnon wanted her. As a result Achilles withdrew from the battle. In the next event Paris proposed to be the husband of Helen, Menelaus, her husband fought to possess her. The war was merely for Helen and for her possession. Helen regarded to be the most beautiful woman of the period became an object to be desired, fought for, and possessed by men. *Odyssey* is the next great work by Homer. This work is influenced by the same patriarchal society of Homer's time. In this characterization of male and female, man has always been active and domineering. He determines his

own destiny with his efficiency and remains independent. On the other hand, women are submissive, their desire depends on man's ability.

In early nineteenth century England, wives were taken as slaves and sold by their male counterparts. Women were taken as the weaker sex to the superior physical and economic power of a free and independent male. Women were paid less attention than males and were not allowed to study or go to school as the males. They were not given systematic training. So, Mary Wollstonecraft first raised her voice in support of education and emancipation of women. She was the first feminist theorist and with her publication of *A Vindication of Rights of Women* feminism gained momentum. The lack of sufficient training was felt to be one of the major disabilities in women's struggle for independence. The Industrial revolution brought a radical change in the life of western society in the second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The increasing development of industries resulted in the decline of domestic industries which had an impact in the income generation of women. They were underpaid and given poor education. Thus, the women of middle class raised their voice for equal opportunities and higher education. So, the several acts were passed for the benefit of women and children.

Francis Wright, who was one of the first women orators, raised her voice for the better education to be offered to women. American Women Suffrage Association was established for the betterment of women. Nevertheless, for the nineteenth and twentieth century, the American Women Suffrage Association fought for the emancipation and betterment of women. This culminated in the winning of the vote in 1920. And then feminist movement remained dormant for forty years.

Some educated women have used literature as a means to raise their voice against male-domination for female identity, albeit through images, symbols and

metaphors. However, it was only after 1960 when feminist literary criticism came into existence that abundant feminist writing appeared.

As, has been observed, feminism, in its diversity, is concerned with the marginalization of women. In modern times it is concerned with the practice of ignoring the female body, which the modern feminists regard as the source of power, creation and resistance. In fact, there is no denying the fact that without the female body there would be no feminist theory. So, feminism has long seen its own project as intimately connected to the body, and has responded to the masculinist convention by producing a variety of incompatible theories which attempt to take the body into account. In this regard, Margrit Shildrick observes, "In consequence, feminism has, from the very start, been deeply concerned with the body-either as something to be rejected in the pursuit of intellectual equality according to a masculinist standard, or as something to be reclaimed as the very essence of the female" (3). This shows that body has been the site from which feminist theory has emerged.

Due to the emergence of feminist theory, it is no now possible directly exploit and dominate females in social and political activities. However, the male-domination is there in different forms in the name of perfecting women's beauty in our culture, not the part of a women's body is left untouched and unaltered. Susan Bordo quotes Andrea Dworkin:

No feature of extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement

From the head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alternation. This alternation is an ongoing, repetitive process. It is vital to the economy, the major substance of male-female differentiate, the most immediate physical and psychological reality of being a woman. From the age of 11 or 12

until she dies, a woman will spend a large part of her time, money, and energy on binding, plucking, painting and deodorizing herself. (247)

This shows that man takes advantage of women's body which is used for male consumption and promoting economy. Modern feminists, who expose such oppression against women, aim at effecting change in readers' lives.

Feminism has discovered the fact that "definition and shaping" of the body is the focal point for struggles over the shape of power. In this connection, Susan Bordo recalls Wollstonecraft's 1992 description of the production of the 'docile body' of the domesticated woman of privilege:

To preserve personal beauty, woman's glory! the limbs and faculties cramped with worse than Chinese bands, and the sedentary life which they are condemned to live, whilst boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles and relays the nerves. As for Rousseau's remarks, which have since been echoed by several writers, that they have naturally, that is since birth, independent of education, a fondness for dolls, dressing, and talking – they are so puerile as not to merit a serious refutation. That a girl, condemned to sit for hours together listening to the idle chat of weak nurses, or to attend to her mothers' toilet, will endeavour to join the conversation is, indeed, very natural; and that she will imitate her mother and Aunts, and amuse herself by adorning her lifeless as doll as they do in dressing her. (249)

This shows how women, whether they are high class or low, are slaves to their bodies, and take glory in their subjection. All women in this male-dominated world, are in deplorable state because right from their in fancy they are taught the "beauty is

woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (Wollstonecraft 55).

Women have internalized this ideology and they consider it their obligation to remain beautiful for the consumption of males. In recent times, a more activist generation has been stressing on the need to break away from this ideology which Wollstonecraft calls "gilt prison" because they argue that the most physical and trivial aspect of women's bodily existence have been, in fact, significant elements in the social construction of an oppressive feminine norm. This activist generation first organized the first feminist mass meeting in America to protest against the ideology which has always rendered women an object. The subject of the meeting was "Braking into the Human Race", and they demanded "The right to ignore fashion", among the various social and political rights of women (Cott 249), because they well understood how the body politics has been central for feminine oppression. They brought into light the material everyday household practices such as what one wears, who looks and cleans and more recently what one eats or does not eat. They took these things out of the realm of the purely personal and brought into the domain of the political. In this regard, Bordo cites an example prepared by Willamette Bridge Liberation News Service 1971. This shows how female subjectivity is normalized and subordinated by the everyday bodily requirements and vulnerabilities of femininity:

Sit down in a straight chair. Cross your legs at the ankles and keep your knees pressed together. Try to do this while you're having a conversation, but pay attention at all times to keeping your knees pressed tightly together. Run a short distance, keeping your knees together. You'll find you how to take short, high steps if you run this way. It is unfeminine to run like man with long, free strides. See how

far you get running this way for 30 seconds. Walk down a city street. Pay a lot of attention to your clothing; make sure your pants are zipped, shirt tucked in, buttons done. Look straight ahead. Every time a man walks past you, avert your eyes and make your face expressionless. It's a way to avoid at least some of the encounters we've all had with strange men who decided we looked available. (249)

This passage shows how women's bodily activities have a great role in their relationship to men, who expect certain behaviour from women. That is why recent feminists have begun to focus on women's body which has been "othered" by men because it has become the medium for male domination. These feminist protesters have recently attacked Miss America not on the ground of theoretically crude, essentializing programme, but on the ground of "non-reductionist analysis of the intersection of sexism, conformism, competition, ageism, racism, militarism and consumer culture as they are constellated and crystallized" (Bordo 250). So, these protesters held "No more Miss America" demonstration which earned well-wishers of women the reputation of or being "bra-burners", because it was reported that the demonstrators burned their bras as a protest to discipline their breast, which is culturally required for the other – as a symbol of maternal lone, as a wet-nurse for master's children or erotic fetish. Clearly, they sent a story political message that they refused to keep their bodying parts in good and attractive shape for males and others- Any Collins who writes for Lear's magazine – in which she writes how different manufactory companies produce different designed bras for women who enjoy using them. Bordo quotes:

Women are again playing up their bust lines with a little artifice. To give the solid, rounded shape that is currently desirable, La Perla is

offering a Lycra bra with pre-formed, pressed cotton cups. To provide a deeper cleavage, a number of lingerie companies are selling side-panel bras that gently nudge the breast together. Perhaps exercising has made the idea of altering body contours acceptable once more. In any case, if anatomy is testing, women are discovering new ways to reshape body. (250)

Women are compelled to shape their body parts the way the male desire. And the manufacturers, most possible males, prepare the goods which help to shape women their bodies for male consumption women are even ready to bear personal sufferings when they go for implants, purely to enlarge or reshape their breasts. Bordo considers this cultural spectacle as these women consider any health risk worth the resulting "boon to their self-esteem and market value" (250). These women are all too conscious of "the system of values and rewards that they are responding to and perpetuating" (250). These women are taken in by different fitness center's statement that these centers are telling the truth about their culture, when they say, "you don't just shape your body. You shape your life" by being commodity for men (Ibid, 250). Such centers create ideology and the women get influenced by it because these women insist on their right to be happy on its terms. Bordo elucidate how women try to seek freedom within this ideology: "In the dominant ethos, their right is the bottom line; proposals to bear or even regulate silicone breast implants are thus often viewed as totalitarian interference with self-determination and choice" (251). But Bordo attacks those feminists who try to search freedom within this ideology.

In the late sixties and seventies, the discourse on the female body was of a "Socially shaped and historically colonized" territory, not a site of individual self-determination (Bordo 251). Now feminism has inverted and converted the old

metaphor of the body politics, found in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Machiavelli, Hobbs and others, to a new metaphor: 'Politics of the body'. In the old metaphor of the body politics, the state or society was imagined as a human body. Now, feminism imagines human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control over women from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battery, to compulsorily hetero-sexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy and explicit commodification of female body. In this regard here, Bordo quotes Omolade who has described how African-Americans woman is exploited and tortured:

Her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and virgin. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labour where she was forced to work with men and work like men. Her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family as domestic servant whether she was technically enslaved or legally free. Her vagina, used for his sexual pleasure, was the gateway to the womb, which was his place of capital investment – the capital investment being the sex act and the resulting child the accumulated surplus, worth money on the slave market. (251)

It is objectionable that the body's actual bondage in slavery cannot be compared to the metaphorical bondage of privileged nineteenth century women to the corset, much less to then fifth century women's 'bondage' to the obsession with slenderness and youth. However, it has held women responsible for whatever "enslavement they suffer from the whims and bodily tyrannies of fashion" because women have fetish for beauty (Bordo 251). The patriarchy itself creates this ideology and holds the women responsible, that is what new feminist model protests. According to this

ideology, men's desire neither has responsibility to bear, nor does the culture which subordinates women's desire to those of men, sexualizes and commodifies women's bodies, and offers them limited opportunity for social or personal power. And feminine nature easily helps to be drawn towards such trivialities, and to be willing to endure whatever physical inconvenience is required, because women become ready to give pain and torture to their own bodies for male satisfaction. In this sense, according to Susan Bordo women always become “done to” and never “doers” (252). Women's obedience to the dictates of fashion to entertain male desire is a bondage rather than choice. This has now become a crucial historical moment in the developing articulations of a new understanding of the sexuality and politics of the body.

In contrast to the western notion of the body politics, the links between bodies and the nations are made in quite different ways in some colonial and postcolonial discourses where it is the feminine form that is at stake. Price and Shildrick look at the authorized discourses of western missionaries to theories how the mapping of both the bodies of Indian women, and of the state, worked symbiotically to establish the grounds for the instigation and extension of colonial rule. The missionaries, in the name of rescuing Indian women from social evils consolidated the colonial power. Price and Shildrick write:

They focused explicitly on the female body as the central point of the power/knowledge regime that served both god and the state. The insistent discourse of female degradation behind the veil of *Purdah* – 'our suffering sisters' – lent weight to state moves to extend colonial power through the regulation of the sexed body. The existence of the customs of infanticide and *sati*, for example, in areas formally outside

the control of the British government service was given as one of the major reasons to take over those independent and quasi-independent states. (392)

This shows how the mechanisms directed at a local level against the bodies of Indian women, and raise the questions about the role of a female bodies in what has traditionally been seen as a process dependent upon the conquest of one group of male bodies by another. The colonizers created a discourse in which women were cast as victims of social evils and needed rescue.

Body as a Site of Resistance

Feminism, from the start has been deeply and closely connected to the body, so it is possible to say that without the body there would be no feminist theory. The body has long been a contested site in feminist circles. From debates about motherhood, pregnancy, and abortion, discussions of pleasure and sex, to more philosophical discussion of embodiment and the gendering of bodies, the major thinkers of feminist theory have reshaped our ideas of how women and men understand what the body is.

As from philosophers to common men have regarded women's body as inferior and weak, modern feminists have attempted to counter this claim. So, in the emergent feminist theory, the body becomes a central focus of more practical concerns, which led to a more positive theorization. Despite an initially widespread emphasis in the need for women to escape the relations of reproduction, the reproductive body of female becomes a site for the reconceptualization of the feminine. First the female quality to give birth is their power which men lack Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price write:

The uniquely female capacity to give birth 'naturally' has been taken up as the center of women's power, simultaneously to be jealously guarded against the incursions of biotechnology, and celebrated in its own right. In the case of both sexuality and reproduction, the body retains something of its uncomfortable status as a place of ambush, of its vulnerability male power, and gets its grounds an affirmation of the feminine [...]. (4)

In addition, from many feminists, the maternal body has come to figure the claim that woman have a “unique ethical sense that lays stress on caring, relationality and responsibility – an ethical sense that is more adequate not simply to women themselves but to all humanity” (4). This proves that women’s ability in general to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest an unusual and unique power through which women can resist male power.

If we study Foucault's power relationship, we get enough insight in order to understand and interpret feminism as the body politics. As Foucault holds that power operators through multiple networks, prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity are maintained, not through physical restraint and coercion, but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to the norm. Bordo quotes Foucault:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself. (253)

Though power is not seemingly held by anyone, it is, in fact, held by some in disguise. This is helped to promote male dominance and female subordination, so much of which, in a modern western context, is reproduced voluntarily, through self-normalization to everyday habits of masculinity and femininity. Here Foucault's ideas are central in self-normalization of daily habits for women. Bordo gives examples of eating disorders as arising out of and reproducing non-native feminine practices of our culture. She further writes: "These are practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of 'power' and control" (253). Bordo is for subverting all this and for self-correcting to norms.

Foucault emphasized the fact that power relations are never seamless, but always generating new forms of culture and subjectivity, and new ways for potential resistance to emerge. He came to sex that where there is power, there is always resistance. So, if I take Foucault's insight, prevailing norms have transformative potential. Bordo sees resistant power liberating power in women's docile bodies. She writes:

While it is true that we may experience the illusion of 'power' while actually performing as 'docile bodies' ... it is also true that our very 'docility' can have consequences that are personally liberating and/or culturally transforming. So, for example, the woman who goes on a rigorous weight-training programme in order to achieve a currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles also enable her to assert herself more forcefully at work ... 'feminine' decorativeness may function 'subversively' in professional contexts which are dominated

by highly masculinist norms. Modern power relations are thus unstable; resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious. (254)

Deconstruction has been helpful in pointing to the many-sided nature of meaning; for every interpretation, there is always a reading 'against the grain'. Foucault has been attractive to feminists for his later insistence that cultural resistance is ubiquitous and perpetual. An initial wave of Foucauldian-influenced feminism had seized on concepts such as 'discipline', 'docility', 'normalization' and 'bio-power' whereas a second postmodern wave has emphasized 'intervention' 'contestation', 'subversion', Bordo elaborates:

The first wave, while retaining the 'old' feminist conception of the 'colonized' female body, sought to complicate that discourses insufficiently textured, good guys/bad guys conception of social control. Postmodern feminism, on the other hand, criticizes both the old and discourse and its reconstruction for over-emphasizing such control, for failing to acknowledge adequately the creative and resistant responses that continually challenge and disrupt it. (254)

From this postmodern perspective, both the earlier emphasis on women's bodies as subject to 'social conditioning' and the later move to 'normalization', underestimate the unstable nature of subjectivity and the creative agency of individuals. In this sense, the dominant discourses, which define femininity, are continually allowing for the eruption of 'difference', and even the most subordinated subjects are therefore continually confronted with opportunities for resistance, for making meanings that oppose or evade the dominant ideology. So, postmodern feminism appreciates for the creative 'powers' of female bodies to resist the grip which male systemically tighter on the female bodies.

III. Feminist Intervention and Body Politics in Plath's Poems

One of the most controversial of twentieth century American poets, Sylvia Plath is mostly interpreted as a confessional poet whose poems are the expression of her personal anguish and fragmentation. But this research attempts to prove that with her expression, there is the interplay of dominant discourses of her time and her own personal confessional incorporates the age long excruciating pain endless sufferings of all women of her time. So, her poems are the platform where she stands to raise the voice of resistance against the oppressive patriarchy.

Plath's poems are the voice of marginalized and suppressed women. These are the voice of oppressed, marginalized, and sidelined group during the 1950s in America. The age-old male domination is responsible for all this. Male wanted to prove their suppression and subordination over women and their own superiority in the binary opposition: male\female, center\margin, strong\feeble, and so on. In the social hierarchy the males were superior position and it was to be continued to exercise power over women. So, to fulfill all of these needs male had circulated the patriarchal ideology through various medium. According to this ideology, women are always defined as passive, submissive, doll, docile, weak and so on. The revolutionary spirit like Plath could not bear any type of domination and oppression from males. Therefore, as a medium to circulate the anti-patriarchal ideology, Plath chose poetry. The poetic devices themselves are loaded with political power. As a result, Plath's thirst for controlling over socio-political forces can be vividly seen in her poems.

In such a situation, the purpose of resistance the patriarchal ideology is to assert her feminine identity. By staging rebellion against patriarchal norms and values, Plath is in quest of socio-economic power. Her poems speak not only for her

own freedom but also they are the voice of all women to acquire equal social, economic and political power as men have. This quest clearly shows her politics of writing poetry. In a sense, these poems are the voice of neglected, marginalize, oppressed, dissatisfied group – women-rising to have equal sharing over all of the socio-economic and politico-cultural forces. Here lies the body politics of Plath beyond her personal confession. Hence, her poems are both influenced by and influence the social circumstances of the period where she was living in.

For this purpose of examining her concern for feminist identity, the study delimits itself to the study of Plath's nine selected poems i) "Ariel", ii) "Tulips", iii) "I Want, I Want", iv) "Metaphors", v) "For a Fatherless son", vi) "Daddy", vii) "Lady Lazarus", viii) "Fever 103°", ix) "The Applicant".

"Ariel"

The poem "Ariel", at its basic level of plot, tells the story of a runaway horse which is ridden by the speaker, conveying to the reader a sense of thrilling self-imperilment from the speaker's side. The metaphor of flying and motion throughout the poem gives the reader a feeling of rage or even violent action on the side of the speaker. It conveys the feeling of lack of control, the speaker is not able to control the horse and tries unsuccessfully to hold on to his "brown arc neck" (Line 9), of getting away or escaping, of leaving everything behind and perhaps even creating a new identity. This can be seen as the poet's desire to break free from the duties, traditions and expectations of society. It seems like the "child's cry" (Line 24) reminds the speaker of her motherly duties; childbirth or taking care of children from which she is released for the time being. On the other hand, there is a notion of power; the speaker is invested with power – she is able to escape reality and perhaps create a new one in which she will be dominant and will invest complete power. The change of

images following one another in quick succession and the quick pace of change gives to the readers again the impression that the speaker is flying on the horse and wants to get away. The question which crossed my mind is whether this escape is a metaphorical one- from her reality and duties, or is it an actual desire to get away from this world- a desire for death. Sylvia Plath committed suicide a few months after this poem was written. This idea of leaving the world and its duties, traditions and customs can also be seen in the image of Godiva unpeeling "Dead hands, dead stringencies" (Line 21). Yet, when the speaker flies into the red eye (which I observe as the rising sun), this can be seen both as having her wish granted- dying by burning from the sun's heat or a rebirth- dying only to be born again out of the ashes. It is merely a metaphorical death in which the speaker to peel off all social constraints, duties and limitations. This notion of rebirth seems to be expressed in her hopeful ending- " the cauldron of morning" (Line 31) in which the sun rising in the morning reflects the hopeful rebirth and re-illumination of another day. The poem, which is written in a dual or double voice, contains both a female voice and language full of feminine and sexual images.

"God's lioness", "Thighs, hair, flakes from my heels" (Line 18) arouses a sexual connotation, Godiva," and "the child's cry" – feminine duties. Additionally the poem proposes on, the one hand to convey a feeling of powerlessness and fragility of the woman rider who has to struggle for control over her horse. On the other hand, there is the notion of power, force and control which are conventionally male traits. She wants not only to escape but also to be like an arrow which is endowed with that force and even manages to become one for a while. Yet, soon after she returns to the female fragility of the dew – which will surely be consumed by the sun. There is a constant battle of forces between the fragile woman speaker and the male stronger

forces such as the horse and the sun. In relation to Elaine Showalter's article, what comes into focus in this poem is the cultural and feminine chores which Sylvia Plath abandons and wishes to escape, and the use of the body as a source of imagery as suggested by Showalter. As Showalter suggested that women writers have their own unique language which is based on feminine experience, Sylvia Plath speaks a language endowed with feminine notions. Moreover, she makes a vast use of the wild zone mentioned by Showalter and within this zone tries to break free from convention. Only by making this journey with Ariel and reaching its final destination, can she find her way out of this confined world (literally or metaphorically), uninterrupted by the dominant male group. In this poem Plath actually takes control over the situation and causes change. As Susan Bordo asserts, the power relations between the dominant group and women do not always imply that women are always dominated by the dominant group – although it is conventionally so. Thus, in Ariel the speaker does not allow the dominant group to overcome her and takes control by escape. Sylvia Plath's obsession with control, as seen in this poem, ended in a state of gaining control – death or abandonment of conventional life. This may seem parallel to the anorectic woman who seeks for control over her physical hunger and her body. As soon as the goal is attained, the anorectic woman gains a feeling of accomplishment and control just as Sylvia Plath has a feeling of hope and accomplishment at the end of Ariel. When Bordo defines anorexia as a rebellious act against social conventions of the full figured, domestic female figure, this is highly echoed in Ariel in which we observe the speaker as a rebellious figure, denying conventional social roles and seeking to escape.

“Tulips”

Many of these notions appear in another poem of Sylvia Plath, "Tulips". In this poem the speaker who is lying in hospital, feeling immense peacefulness, having given up all her responsibilities, identity and connection to the world "I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses . . ." However, this peacefulness is disrupted by the red tulips which were sent by her husband, invading her privacy and feeling of detachment from the world, reminding her of the outside world which she is currently separated from. The idea of lying in bed being ill is parallel to Susan Bordo's notion of the nature of anorexia as a rebellious reaction to social norms. By lying in bed the woman denies her identity and social duties and is able to reach an escape from duties without being expected to perform these duties – being ill. At the beginning of the poem, Plath illustrates her total tranquility and passivity, allowing herself to be completely taken care of by others "my body is a pebble to them. . . ". This escape from her life and duties also relates to what Showalter mentions in relation to the cultural realm of difference in female literature, which is influenced by the cultural roles of women. Here, Plath has found a way to escape her domestic chores. This situation is her wild zone in which she is able to fulfill her desires. This is why she is so angry at the invasion of the tulips of the new world she has temporarily created for herself. The red tulips, disrupting the whiteness and purity of the hospital room, are a symbol of the outside room, her family and reminders of the social duties she will have to return to. By attacking even the pictures of her husband and child " their smile catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks", she makes this idea very clear .As the poem proceeds, she personifies the tulips ". . . hear them breathe...redness talks to my wound...now I am watched . . ." and blames them for consuming her oxygen and choking her. Like in

"Ariel", this escape from domestic and social traditional roles can be seen also in the light of Elaine Showalter's article who cites Shirley and Edwin Ardener who perceived the female "wild zone" as a situation created by women where they do not wish to be interrupted by the male. The tulips, sent by the male – her husband are in fact trespassing into her wild zone where men have no place. This "wild zone", besides being an escape can also be regarded as a yield for death. She is situated in state of not living, being underwater "the water went over my head", feeling numb seems close to being dead. Death is symbolized by the whiteness and purity of the hospital – opposed to the living red tulips. The idea of quietness and purity of death as a goal may be echoed in Bordo's perception of the anorectic's feeling of control over physical limitations which death is apparently one of them and may be seen as the highest form of control.

“I Want, I Want”

In the poem titled “I Want, I Want”, Plath glorifies the act of giving birth to the new-born baby calling it God. Here, Plath celebrates her own power of being able to create new life, which men lack. And she calls the baby god, as she writes, “the baby god / immense, bald” (line 2). This is the celebration and glorification of women’s bodily power. In terms of the glory, men are by nature deprived. This certainly helps women to assert themselves in male-dominated society. The third line which reads the baby “cried out for the mother’s dug” (line 3) emphasizes the fact that it is the mother and her bodily power which gives the baby life. The mother’s role is vital in making a baby’s life sustainable. The mother’s breasts are compared with “the dry volcanoes”, which possess an unimaginable feminine power, as Plath says, “the dry volcanoes cracked and spit” (line 4).

Plath, in the second and the third stanzas, shows the role of father unimportant. Plath writes that when the baby “cries for the father’s blood”, he engaged in, otherwise other activities such as in “setting wasp, wolf, and Shark to work, and in “engineering the gannet’s beak” (line 7-8). In the final stanza, Plath describes the father as “the inveterate patriarch”, who out of jealousy of the mother shows his male power as he “raises his men of skin and bone” (line 9-10). Plath describes the jealous father who does not want to see the creation and involves himself in other activities, flexing his muscles Plath writes:

Dry-eyed, the inveterate patriarch
Raised his men of skin and bone,
Barbs on the crown of gilded wire,
Thorns on the bloody rose-stem. (106)

“Metaphors”

Similarly, in the poem “Metaphors”, Plath glorifies women’s power to conceive and bear children. In the poem she especially appreciates the pregnant woman’s body. As women have been regarded as mysterious and unknowable because of their power to menstruate and give births, Plath emphasizes on this women’s mystery as a female power. She describes women’s nine month’s pregnancy as “a riddle in nine syllables” (line 1). During pregnancy, woman’s body becomes big like “an elephant” and “a ponderous house” (line 2). Here, Plath focuses on the body. She recalls a series of metaphors which celebrate the female body. She describes the body as a “melon”, “red fruit”, “ivory”, “fine timber”, “a cow in calf”. Here, what Plath all does is the celebration of the pregnant female body.

“For a Fatherless Son”

In “For a Fatherless Son”, which has been collected under “*Collected Poems*”, depicts first a woman at times almost desperate to have a child, and then a dotting reverent mother. Although certainly the power to create a brand-new human being is far and away the highest earth-bound potential a woman has, housewifedom and the forgoing of all work except for the loving raising of one’s children go against the feminist-establishment credo that not only should women not have to stay at home, but in fact they should not ever do so at all, for their own good. But Plath wants to subvert this ideology by creating babies and writing poetry.

In the first stanza of the poem, “For a Fatherless Son”, Plath talks about the fatherless child whom male-dominated society looks down upon. She shows how the child feels the “absence” of the father (line 1). This society takes this absence as a serious and big issue like a “death tree” (line 3). Plath takes all this as “illusion” (line 4). Plath further in the second stanza says that because of neglect of the female – the child is helpless, but in the eyes of males only. Here, Plath asserts herself through her bodily gaze and organs:

The blind mirror of it. I look in
And find no face but my own, and you think that’s funny.

It’s good for me

To have you grab my nose, a ladder rung.

One day you may touch what’s wrong

The small skulls, the smashed blue hills, the god-awful hush

Till then your smiles are found many. (205-6)

Plath imagines the time when the baby will not feel the absence of the father, as he would find the mother around and touch the mother's bodily parts, which had been otherwise ignored by patriarchy.

“Daddy”

Plath's one of the most criticized poem “Daddy” seems to be a good selection for the purpose of showing ideological circulation in her poetry. To justify Plath's politics in writing poetry, this poem vividly shows how her poems function as the discourse which whole-heartedly supports the feminist ideology. Even the literary devices used here like symbols, images, metaphors, etc. are linked with this ideology and show the speaker's spitting contempt against males and her urge for power in the society. The poem includes some personal subject matters of the writer but through it Plath has reframed the private in terms of a public discourse, framing personal, family conflicts within larger cultural process.

One of the most important elements in the poem regarding the issue raised in this research is the Nazi-Jew allegory. By bringing the reference of the Holocaust imagery, Plath identifies her father with the Nazis and herself with the Jews. In this regard, Lisa Nabeshumber in her essay “The Poetics of Torture: Spectacle of Sylvia Plath's Poetry” writes “She identifies herself with persecuted Jews, the marginalized and hidden” (1933). Similarly, Irving Howe also says In “Daddy”, “Plath identifies the father with the Nazis” (1211). This identification is not only the personal identification but it implies a general one. This means to say that Plath's identification of herself with the Nazis is the identification of female with the Nazis and the males with Germans. This parallel identification clearly exposes the domination and subordination. This Holocaust and Jewish victims here become metaphor for suffering. Thus, in this poem, Plath's landscape is moved from the mythic an natural

one with political boundaries. Indeed, her personal hatred to her father remarks her hatred towards the authoritative masculinist forces. This overt Nazi-Jew allegory can be studied throughout the poem. For Plath, the Holocaust and the patriarchy's silencing of women was linked and outcomes of the masculinist interpretation of the world. In this poem, the speaker finds her voice and motive by identifying herself as antithetical to her fascist father. It is more clearly stated when she says "I thought every German was you. / I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew" (223). This parallelism also hints at the identification between Nazis suffering to that of women. Indeed "Daddy" uses Nazi imagery to make the same accusation about objectification brought against men as oppressors. By showing this oppressive patriarchal behavior, Plath has invited the readers to resist such behavior. And her wish is to provide politico-cultural power to women as a whole is embodied in her urge for anger and protest against patriarchy. So, the then existing anti-patriarchal ideology has worked in shaping her poems and on the other hand, her poems have equally influenced the feminist movement till now.

From the very beginning, the poem has successfully analyzed the then existing patriarchal culture. The first stanza visibly mirrors the abovementioned authoritative masculine forces. Plath writes:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor white,
Rarely daring to breathe or Achoo. (222)

The suffocative environment within the shoe where the speaker spent thirty years is symbolic to the suffocative situation of women in patriarchal society. In the society

dominated by male-constructed rules and laws, women are first defined as inferior sub-human and then they are treated badly. They are deprived of their rights of life, liberty and equality. This is clarified by the lines “I never could talk to you. / The tongue stuck in my jaw. / [...] I have always been scared of you” (223). Here, the speaker ‘I’ represents females and ‘you’ represents males. Women are always scared of patriarchal exploitation. So, the situation of the speaker in the shoe represents women’s situation in the society. Nabeshumber rightly criticized that the poem like “Daddy”, “practically explodes from the stress imposed on the female selves. This strangling objectification makes their silence that much more painful” (194). By speaking not only “the language obscene” but also the actual German language (Itch, itch, itch) the persona demonstrates that even as she attempts to escape her oppressor’s (male) language it makes heavy claims on her. This fixed “itch” can also be seen to mirror the shuttering repetition of the oppressor’s language. As Plath herself describes, certain styles of discourse violate body and soul more than others. This idea applies in her poems, too. In fact, it is the patriarchal discourse that has violated and shattered not only the soul and body but also the independent identity of females. On the one hand, anti-patriarchal discourse appears against patriarchy to ascertain power for female. This socio-political tension of ideologies is vividly exposed through “Daddy”.

“Lady Lazarus”

“Lady Lazarus” is one of Plath’s poems which bears a poignant expression of her resentment, even a vengeance, against the male-dominated society. The oppressed woman of the poem, who is herself the speaker, embodies all the oppression upon women and also many kinds of violence for which man is responsible. By reversing the traditionally appointed roles of women and men, Plath has invited the readers to

criticize the age-old oppressive patriarchal society. Hence, in this poem, by analyzing the literary devices like allusion and image and by studying their implications we can see how Plath was influenced by the anti-patriarchal ideology and how this ideology is circulated through the poem.

First of all, the title itself is suggestive of the fact how Plath has reversed the traditional roles of male and female and how she empowers women to fight against female victimization in patriarchal society whether it is done by Daddy or Doctor or even by God. In this regard, Plath has presented the female speaker as a strong and rebellious-spirited woman who dares to “eat men like air” (247). By asking a rhetorical question as “Do I terrify?” the speaker shows how brave she is. Similarly, she has directly addressed the male as “Her Doktor”, “Her Lucifer”, and “my enemy”. Here, the female speaker is quite reversed to the traditional passive and weak woman. When she says “Out of the ashes / I rise with my red hair”, it shows that a new and vibrantly brave woman is being born to fight against all traditions including social, political, cultural and literary which have not only tortured but destroyed the female identity. She is born as a capable enemy of male traditions after the oppression and destructive physical, political, cultural, artistic, psychological and all sorts of tortures. As Narneshumber writes, “in poems like “Lady Lazarus”, Plath presents selves in revolt, resisting assimilation to patriarchal ideals” (185). In this way, the poem bears the theme of universal females protest in the modern world. This feminist discourse is clearly circulated through the poem.

Likewise, the title itself refers to the female power. Lazarus refers to the biblical story in which Jesus Christ brought Lazarus back from the dead. However, here it is a woman who comes back from the dead without the help of a male/God figure. A woman is herself capable in doing the things which were done by the males

in the past. Indeed there is the connection between Lady Lazarus and the Bible's Lazarus. In the Bible Christ miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead possibly out of his desire to advertise his own power – representative of male ego. Here, this desire parallels Herr Doktor's talent for bringing Lady Lazarus back from the dead. He represents her in front of a crowd, so that his "opus" can be admired and his power acknowledged. By showing this utter futility of male domination and objectification of women, Plath has criticized the patriarchal ideology through poetry. At last, she threatens the male to eat them even rising out of ash. Here, her reincarnation as Lady Lazarus is the direct threat and challenge to the speaker's audience which is made up entirely of men (Herr God, Herr Lucifer, and Herr Doktor)

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And eat men like air. (246-47)

This threatening seems to be the foreshadowing of victory, in the restoration of the true self and the annihilation of its detractors. Here lies Plath's feminist agenda of protesting against oppressive patriarchal domination.

Another important issue is the Nazi analogy / Holocaust imagery. As in "Daddy", Plath has identified the male with the objects of saleable commodity. She says that her "skin" is for bright "lampshade", "My right foot" "a paperweight" etc. So, this imagery serves to magnify the controller / controlled and male / female relationship and ultimately shows female victimization in patriarchal society. By

doing so she has been able to expose hollowness and meaninglessness of patriarchal discourse. Thus Plath's poems are full of rebellious feminist voice which directly challenges the male authority in patriarchal society.

“Fever 103⁰”

One of Plath's most aggressive poems “Fever 103⁰” is a bitter criticism of patriarchal ideology. Attacking the whole patriarchal language, culture and custom, Plath imagines to establish such a society where male/female dichotomy will not exist and it will be like “Paradise” (Plath, 232). In the very beginning of the poem Plath is so furious against patriarchal ideology that she sarcastically asks whether the masculinist languages are pure or not:

Pure? What does it mean?

The tongues of hell

Are dull, dull as the triple

Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus

Who wheezes at the gate. (231)

This rhetorical question clearly criticizes the then prevailing patriarchal ideology which always undermined capacities in women. Moreover, it tries to define women as weak, passive and dependent creatures. Nor can masculinist language capture female essence. Therefore, she asks how such language can be pure. This language is “dull” in itself (231). So, such handicapped language can't do justice to women. In such society women are always guided by patriarchal ideology. So, she criticizes this ideology and wishes to establish domination-free society like paradise.

Plath's aggressive nature reaches its zenith when she says “Devilish leopard!” to the patriarchal ideology. For her, patriarchy itself is devilish in nature. It devours

women's potentiality and capacity of creating something new. Above all, it devours their identity. Women's independent identity is always enshadowed by male's domination in all fields. Like the victims in "Hiroshima", women's existence is threatened by the masculinist behaviour. She also calls it "The sin. The sin" (231). The body of patriarchal ideology severely hurts females and to justify this ideology the males use various discourses like art and literature. Through this poem Plath is circulating the anti-patriarchal ideology which strengthens feminist ideology. In this regard, she imagines herself as "a pure acetylene" who wants to cut through the patriarchal discourses and dismiss it so as to establish dichotomy-free state (232). She is hopeful of the fact that one day there will be established a society where male will not be able to subordinate women. She says:

All by myself I am a huge camellia
Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush
I think I am going up
I think I may rise –
[...]
To Paradise. (223)

In this paradise males will have no power to dominate and subordinate females. "Not you, nor him / Not him, nor him" will be superior to women because in such a state males won't have dull language (232). There will be the subversion of male / female dichotomy. As a result, it will be a society with no domination and suppression.

In this way, "Fever 103⁰" is a politically loaded poem that expresses the females' outcry of redefinition of traditional masculine power. It castigates the mentality of those who accept the ideology of patriarchy. The sole cause of all types of dominations in the society is the patriarchy with "Devilish leopard" criticizes this

ideology whereas her comparison of “acetylene” with herself circulates feminist ideology (232). Females are emotionally excited to fight for their freedom and liberty. In a sense, these poems are Plath’s appeal to all women for their participation in the pretest against patriarchy. Thus, it can be concluded that Plath’s poems are full of political issues and her feminist ideas.

“The Applicant”

“The Applicant” is Plath’s another powerful poem which vehemently criticizes the patriarchal ideology which entirely reduces women to nothing more than commodities robbed of their humanity. By exposing the very suppressive nature of males, she has invited the readers to criticize it. The speaker of the poem calls a woman addressing “it”. In patriarchal society women treated as if they are the objects that we can use for our own purpose. Plath says, “How can we give you a thing?” Paralleling women to objects or things shows the cruel treatment of women in male dominated society. Here, women are regarded as if they have no feelings and emotions. Like machines, they “do whatever you tell it” (Plath 221). In the poem the potential wife is characterized fully as a manufactured commodity. She is presented as so passive that she can do nothing more than satisfying male thirst and hunger. Even she doesn’t have control over her own body and mind. She is “a living doll” which “can sew” and “cook” “talk and talk” (221-2). This shows how patriarchy undermines females and their roles in the society. So, through this poem Plath has exposed the emptiness in the current role of wife who is reduced to an inanimate “it”:

A living doll, everywhere you look.

It can sew, it can cook.

It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.

You have a hole, it's a poultice.

You have an eye, it's an image.

My boy it's your last resort.

Will you marry it, marry it marry it. (221-2)

A wife, in the poem, is literally a piece of property (a living doll) “that” or “it”, a guaranteed, completely obedient slave. It awaits purchase by the male costumers. Such commodification of women is the basic feature of patriarchal society. Males think that women should be silent, passive and dependent upon them. Males' wishes are to use women as they use goods bought from the market. They must be “guaranteed” and “obedient” so that no threat would come against patriarchal ideology. By understanding this biased ideology of patriarchal discourse, Plath has attempted to go against such practices and empower women to their fullest. In this process she is taking help from feminist discourse.

Similarly, by exposing the emptiness in the current role of wife and their being objectified in patriarchal society, she is indirectly showing the hollowness of age-old patriarchy. Since the society we are living in is guided by such handicapped rules and regulations, women are deprived of their basic human instincts like expression of emotions and feelings. Such ideas add impetus to feminist discourse which aspires to enable women to do things on their own. In this sense “The Applicant” is Plath's urge for empowerment of women. This purpose has been supported fully by the literary devices like symbols and metaphors. The most striking metaphors are “doll” and “thing”. These metaphors are used to be compared with women and thereby to show hypocrisy of males and patriarchal system above all. Comparison between the activities of women and those of dolls is a striking point in the poem. This shows how females are deprived of any kind of response, emotion and feeling in their life. So,

this poem, by exposing the conflict of ideologies of the time she lived in, circulates the voice of women which has been sidelined and marginalized for ages. To unearth the age-long suppressed voice of women and make it heard to the public is Plath's main purpose in the poem.

IV. Conclusion

Sylvia Plath's poems are the outcome to the 1950s repressive patriarchal society which has not only rendered women as sub-human, inferior, mysterious and uncertain but also it has ignored the female body and "othered" as well as their power is aborted. In the "*collected poems*", Plath exposes the discrimination and violence meted out to females and their bodies. While exposing this, Plath raises her vehemently voice against patriarchy, which reflects her attempt to claim female identity and subjectivity as separate niche.

In "Ariel", Plath uses female voice and language which is full of feminine and sexual images, and there she presents a rebellious figure, who denies the conventional social roles and seeks to escape to create her own identity. In "Tulips", she attacks patriarchy and tries to escape from feminine roles. In "I Want, I Want" and "Metaphors", she glorifies feminine bodily power of giving birth to males themselves. In "For a Fatherless Son", Plath undermines the role of father and asserts the presence of mother for children. In "Daddy", "Lady Lazarus", "Fever 103⁰" and "The Applicant", too, Plath severely attacks to the males who always ignore the role of females in the society. In this way, these poems sometimes she becomes too much harsh.

In this way, Plath's poems have very implicitly circulated the feminist ideology by criticizing the patriarchal ideology. Plath's *collected poems*, thus, are linked with female's the body politics and sexuality directly. These poems fully support the purpose of modern feminists' movement, providing females with socio-economic and politico-cultural rights in the society. These poems raise the issues such as the need of independent identity of women, enough space for women to exercise in the society. The purpose of all these issues is to empower women and subvert the

reigning ideology that female body is weak, alien and inferior. Finally, Plath's anti-patriarchal theme is buttressed by the use of various literary devices like images, metaphors, allusions, symbols and so on.

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