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Women's Struggle for Freedom in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Nem Bahadur Shahi has completed his thesis entitled "Women's Struggle for Freedom in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* under my supervision. He carried out his research from December 2011 to December 2012 A.D. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled Women's Struggle for Freedom in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Nem Bahadur Shahi has been approved by the undersigned members of research committee.

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Abstract

Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* explores women's struggle for freedom from patriarchal violence. Sophie, the major character of the novel tries her best to oppose her forceful virginity test, thereby resisting her exploitation by patriarchal culture and its hegemony. Patriarchy creates the ideology of virginity to keep women under its domination. If the girl loses their virginity, they are not easily accepted for marriage. Mothers are responsible for their girl's purity. Martine forcefully tests Sophie's virginity to be sure about her purity. Sophie becomes victim of Virginity test by her mother and sexually exploited by her own husband because her husband forcefully have sexual contact with her though, she is unable to have sex because she is wounded by spice pestle to break her virginity. It gives her mental and physical pain. So, she wants to struggle against these acts. She takes action to break patriarchal bondage. She deliberately breaks her own virginity with the help of spice pestle to escape from virginity test. It shows her act of struggle against patriarchal domination. She elopes with Joseph. While Joseph tries to have sexual intercourse in her first wedding night without her interest, she hates him because she does not like undesired sexual contact. In Haitian patriarchal society, there is belief that if the married girl bleeds in the first wedding night she is considered virgin girl, if not, she is a bad girl. For the reputation of male in the patriarchal society, they accept virgin girl for marriage and neglect bad girl. So, Sophie violates the traditional belief, cultural custom and patriarchal ideology because she doesn't live under the shadow of patriarchal hegemony; rather, she struggles against it. She fights for identity, right and freedom in patriarchal society.

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I. Edwidge Danticate and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Introduction

This research entitled “Women’s Struggle for Freedom in Edwidge Danticate’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*” probes into the problem of identity; self-dignity and freedom of women in the patriarchal and male-dominated society where women become victim of cultural tradition. There is no place to do something freely in the society and the culture is also biased for them. Women are oppressed, dominated and exploited. Patriarchy labeled women as a third-grade citizen in the society and created the wall of boundary for women to suppress and impose its hegemony. Women are living their pitiful life under the shadow of patriarchy till nowadays in the many country of the world. There is freedom to men not women in the patriarchal society and there men are superior and women are inferior.

The major concern of this research is to probe into the problem of Sophie and other women characters being victim of cultural custom and sexual exploitation in patriarchal and traditional Haitian society and their revolt against this patriarchal society and cultural tradition for freedom. This research justifies that there is not only the domination and exploitation of women rather there is also revolt of women against domination and they are struggling for social justice, equality and independence.

Feminism is a school of thought, which questions the traditional canon formation and attack patriarchal society for being biased. It rescues to the women who have under the domination and exploitation of canon to raise the issue of domination, exploitation patriarchy and gives enforce to struggle for freedom. Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski in their book *Feminist Theory: A Reader* about feminism write that, “Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all woman; women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbian, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women”

(8). Feminism is the battle field of struggle of women for independence who are living under the exploitation and domination of patriarchal hegemony. It is a method of approaching life and politics a way of asking questions and searching for answers about the oppression of women. There is no identity of women in patriarchal society.

Feminist criticism studies and analyzes the text from the perspective of women. It analyzes texts to emphasize issue of domination, oppression, exploitation of patriarchal tradition and the struggle of women for freedom. Shari Benstock, Suzanne Ferris and Susanne Woods in their book *A Handbook of Literary Feminisms* write that, “Feminist literary criticism offers strategies for analyzing texts to emphasize issues related to gender and sexuality in works written by both men and women, but is particularly concerned with women’s writing” (153).

In Danticat’s novel, the protagonist, Sophie suffers sometime physical exploitation and some other times mental exploitation. She is a rape born child from unknown father. She lives with her aunt in Croix-des-Resets, Haiti after her mother left. Martine raped at the age of sixteen by an unknown man in a cane field on her way returning from school. The rape left Martine with a child, Sophie and a lifetime of vivid nightmare. She spends her childhood with her aunt, Atie in Haiti and later she goes to New York to live with her mother. There she starts to read because her mother wants to make her a great person in future. Gradually, she becomes close with Joseph, an old musician in her adult. Her mother does not like her intimacy with opposite sex. She wants to keep her daughter virgin until marriage because if Sophie has destroyed her hymen before marriage, she cannot get marriage as well as she cannot save the familial honor and prestige.

Martine cannot tolerate the closeness between Sophie and Joseph. She becomes more suspicious about Sophie’s virginity. One night, she takes Sophie on her bed and tests her virginity inserting her finger into Sophie’s vagina. Sophie is still

pure. Martine tests her because it is her responsibility about her daughter to keep pure. From the humiliate act of Martine's virginity test. Sophie becomes mentally weak. She cannot face her mother's act and breaks her own hymen with the help of spice pestle. At last, Sophie elopes with Joseph to get escape from her mother's violence.

Sophie is sexually exploited from her own husband. She is mentally distracted and physically wounded from the virginity test but Joseph does not understand Sophie's pain and becomes forcefully ready to sex in their wedding night. Sophie ignores it but he does not interest about her condition. At last, in the miserable condition she becomes ready to have sex with Joseph undesirably rather she thinks that it is her duty to fulfill his sexual passion. She hates her own body and Joseph too. She doesn't like the sexual violence and body politics. Later, she returns to Haiti to get peace from sexual violence.

Martine and her aunt Atie become victim of virginity test by their mother in their adulthood like Sophie. Martine is exploited from sexual violence and Atie is mentally exploited in love. She is deceived by Augustin because of her poor economic condition. They are suffering from patriarchy but they lack courage to protest. But, Sophie is a revolutionary woman who always fights against the patriarchal domination. Sophie rejects the cultural custom and patriarchal religious system. In order to assert autonomy, self-hood, individual identity and freedom from violence, she revolts against cultural tradition, patriarchal society and rejects the norms and values which represents and tries to come out from the bondage to demonstrate her search for freedom.

Haiti is under the rule of French colonialism and there is the tyranny of colonialist upon females. There is double oppression of colonialism and patriarchy upon women. They are not saving from violence. In this novel, the female characters Sophie, Martine and Atie are sexually and mentally exploited from the patriarchal

violence. Patriarchal society makes Sophie to have sexual intercourse forcefully at the wedding night with her husband, Joseph. He does not understand Sophie's pain and becomes ready to fulfill his sexual desire. Sophie is not happy in this act but she becomes ready without her interest because she thinks that it is her duty to fulfill his sexual passion. On the other hand, Sophie is suffering from her mother's practice of virginity test. She attempts to insert her little finger in Sophie's vagina in order to make sure that her hymen is still intact. She begins to feel isolated and depressed then she deliberately breaks her hymen with an inanimate object. She elopes with Joseph against her mother's action. At that time, she has wounded from the spice pestle and there is a problem in her vagina but Joseph does not know her pain. Joseph is agent of patriarchal society who becomes ready to fulfill his passion forcefully without Sophie's interest. It is sexual exploitation of men upon female.

An unknown man rapes Martine in the cane field in her way from school. The rape leaves Martine with child, Sophie and nightmare. This act of rape presents the male's tyranny and exploitation upon female and the violence of patriarchal society which gives agony and nightmare to women and they become mentally weak. Atie has worse memories about her adulthood. She loves Monsieur Augustin, but at last, he leaves her and marries a rich woman. Atie is sexually and mentally exploited by him. So, she becomes spinster in her life.

Similarly, a rich man marries a very poor girl who is completely untouched. When the bride does not bleed on the wedding night, the groom cuts her between the legs to save his honor. Instead, the girl bleeds and death, leaving her husband to parade the bloody sheets at her funeral procession. Chicana is another girl, raped by her grandfather for ten years. So, in this novel, all the women characters are exploited from sexual violence and patriarchal culture. They are being victim of domination and

exploitation. They have worse memory and trauma forever in their life which is cause of patriarchal violence.

This research not only assumes the domination of patriarchal society as well as cultural to the female characters and protagonist Sophie but it also presumes the women's struggle against patriarchal domination and cultural exploitation for their right and freedom in society.

Sophie cannot tolerate the act of virginity test and deliberately breaks her own hymen with an inanimate object. This act of Sophie does not show her will rather it is also an act of liberation, freeing her once and for all dreaded practice of testing. She elopes with Joseph to take the revenge with her mother and cultural tradition breaking her hymen and destroy her virginity because her mother wants to continuity of virginity test to save cultural belief. But Sophie doesn't like this humiliate act. She wants to violate the traditional cultural system and give challenge to patriarchy to live freely and happily.

This study demonstrates the suppression of patriarchy as indicated in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in terms of feminist claims about the sexual exploitation in the novella. It follows general feminist critics like Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Mary Woolstonecraft etc.

Feminism is the school of thought dealing with the women's issue. It questions the status of women given by patriarchy. It deals with their claim of inclusive social structure. Feminist criticism summarizes the struggle for the recognition of women's, cultural roles and achievement and for women's social and political rights. Marry Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Right of Women*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and many others have contributed to the development of feminist criticism. Feminist criticism deals with the issue of patriarchy that is male-centered and controlled, and is

organized in such a way as to subordinate women. Now women have to questions that subordinate position and struggling for their right.

Feminism is the theory which deals with the issues related to woman. About feminism Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski in their book *Feminist Theory: A Reader* write that “Feminism is a mode of a analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of woman” (8). Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women who are dominated from color, labor, economic status and gender. Paula Treichler in her article “Feminism” says that, “there is feminism where all the problems of women in society are seen as caused by men” (8).

Feminism is the women’s movement that only developed after 1960s and became dominant force in western literary studies. It is a critical and theoretical practice which struggle against patriarchy and sexism. Feminist critics disagree with the inferior role to women given by the patriarchal society. They seek the existence of women in the patriarchal society and struggle for the end of its autocracy. bell hooks in her essay “Feminism: A Transformational Politics” says that, “Feminist effort to end patriarchal domination should be of primary concern precisely because it insist on the eradication of exploitation and oppression in the family context and in all other intimate relationship (434).

Patriarchy is a social structure in which a man is the head of the family who has the supreme authority of decision making and the control over the family. Raman Seldon in his book *Feminist criticism* says that, “Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male” (137). Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, socially, politically and psychologically. It creates the different stereotypes to failure women in the society. About the biasness nature of patriarchy towards women, Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today* states:

Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal roles she is a good girl and if she does not she is a bad girl. These two rules also referred to as Madonna and whore or angle and bitch. It is patriarchy that defines because both roles are projections of patriarchal male desire. (89)

Lois Tyson talks about the biasness nature of patriarchal ideology that is not fever in women. It creates the different stereotypes about female like Madonna and whore or angle and bitch to make weak in society.

Similarly, Heidi Hartman charges that patriarchy is a set of social relation based on material. In her essay “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union” talks about patriarchy while talking about feminism. She gives the definition of patriarchy as a set of social rules and customs. As she states:

We can usually define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men which have a material base and which, though hierarchal, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different places in the patriarchy, they also are united in their shared relationship to dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. (322)

From the above quoted line we know that patriarchy is a set of social relation based on material. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and different classes, races, they also united to dominate over women.

In the past, women were supposed to be weak physically as well as mentally than men. They feel they are in fact made inferior not by nature but by social

mechanism. They assumed to be fit for child bearing and breast feeding. Females were given less opportunities to express their ideas in the past but now they are trying to break up the tradition. From time to time women have to suffer from patriarchy. They are depicted as inferior and immature than men. They have been made inferior or treated as inferior from the historical time. As Genevieve Lloyd states:

The male is more complete, more dominate than the female, closer akin to causal activity, for the female is incomplete and in subjection and belongs to the category of the passive than active. So too with the two ingredients which constitute our life principle, the rational and irrational: the rational that belongs to mind and reason is of the masculine gender, the irrational, the province of sense, is of the Feminine. Mind belongs to a genus wholly superior to sense as man is to woman. (19)

In man-made culture women treated badly on the basis of sex, race, class and religion. Women are subordinate to men and are responsible for domestic life. The attitude of traditional societies towards women is conditioned by her various relationships with men. As a wife, a mother, a sister and a daughter, she has loved and respected. Assumed as a weak creature, she has subjected to certain controls, restrictions and prohibitions. She is an object of infatuation and admiration.

With the change in time, women became educated and aware about their right and position in society. They became conscious about the patriarchal hegemony and boosted their voice against it. They became revolutionary and started working for the freedom of women. They started to question the phallogentric and patriarchal ideologies in literature. They developed their voice against man-made society, religion, cultural system and support of women's emancipation and education through their writings. Women are limited in the household from the past until nowadays.

They are being servant in house. Mary Wollstonecraft was the first feminist who raised the issue of women in patriarchal society. She advocated that women are limited in the household and deprived from their right. In her essay “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” Wollstonecraft states:

I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, discharging the duties of her station with perhaps merely a servant-maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business. I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who, returning weary home in the evening, found smiling babes and a clean hearth. (57)

In this extracts Mary Wollstonecraft shows that the position of women is limited only in the household activities. They are nurse of their baby and servant of their husband. They are centered in the house and totally unknown about outer world. They are unknown about their right so, they are dominated and exploited in the family and society.

In 19th century education brought awareness among women. They had to follow the rules, values and institutions that were established to favor men. Female's mind was totally neglected; knowledge was only to be gained from reading the novels. Many critical trends had developed and analyzed women’s issue from different perspectives. The feminist voices started to come from different parts of the world.

Marxist feminist was developed in 1960s and 70s. They defined the position of women in terms of socio-economic basis. For them the main cause of gender inequality was underpayment. By the time of industrial revolution they claimed political right to equality and freedom. The position of women today is the interpretation of female labor as inferior version of male labor. Female labor was

characterized as an unproductive, marginal, trivial, temporary, less valuable, and less skilled. This was applied in both household and paid occupation. Though the various feminisms had the diversities in its nature and aspect they had common characteristics too. M.H. Abrahams presents the three points which can be mentioned briefly below:

The basic view is that western civilization is pervasively patriarchal male-centered and controlled organized and conducted to subordinate women to men in cultural domains: families, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic [. . .]. The most highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonist-Oedipus, Hamlet, Ulysses, Tom Jones etc. and female character's roles are marginal and subordinate, represented either as complimentary in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. (89-90)

Because of those diversities feminist criticism diversifies in many feminisms. It comes in many forms and having a variety of goals. Some critics want to revisit the books by the male writers and review them from women's perspective and some other wants to rediscovers the works of women writers overlooked by a male dominated culture. In addition to those diversities they agree in some points. All of them are exposing patriarchy, examining socio-cultural, psycho-sexual context of literature and reevaluating literature of women writers.

One of the most important figures of the feminist criticism is Virginia Woolf. In her essay "A Room of One's Own" she talks about the conditions and situations of the women authors. Their subject matter is kitchen, family and domestics issues. In the past the women's concern was only the household works and the house. They did not go outside of the house. If they did not go outside how they can write about the external issues. She explores deeper concerns like man's anger at women,

misunderstanding between the sexes and psychological conditions of women in this book. She portrays very pitiful condition of the past women. She remarks:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel: they need exercise for their faculties and afield for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stockings, to playing piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (822)

Women writers of the past had faced many problems. They faced those problems because of the femaleness. They wrote under the male pseudonyms. They had the compulsion to hide their real identity. If they used their real names nobody would read their separate room for writing in the past. She was compelled to write common sitting room, where visitors and family members used to come and go. It became tough work for them. Her voice symbolically presents the women's position in patriarchal society. There is no room for write means there is no place for women to do something freely. They are always in the control of men.

Simon de Beauvoir, a French novelist, essayist, and existentialist who later became radical feminist. She is well-known as existentialist feminist. She talks about the position of women in the literature in her essay. Male present women in whatever way they like women because women never argue over it. Women have not permission of revolting against male construction in order to finds her rank in male dominated society. Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* seeks the identity of women. She states:

Women is losing herself, women is lost; It is hard to know any longer if women still exist, If they will always exist, if there should be women at all, what place they hold in this world, what place they should hold. “Where are the women? [. . .]. They are not women even though they have a uterus like the others. Everyman agrees there are females in the human species; today, as in the past, they make up about half of humanity; and yet we are told that femininity is in Jeopardy; we are argued. ‘Be woman, stay women, and become women.’ (3)

In the above mentioned line Beauvoir says women are losing. It is difficult to know whether women still exist or not. If they exist, they should be women at all. Some says woman is womb and some says they are not women at all though, they have the uterus. Patriarchy told woman that be women, stay women and become women.

Beauvoir discloses the ambivalence of man’s nature towards women. Some male presents woman as a goddess, mother, muse, and some other presents female as a devil, witch, cruel, and negative attitude of stepmother in literature. So, Beauvoir in her essay "Myth and Reality "states: “ The saintly mother has for co-relative the cruel stepmother, angelic young girl has perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that mother equals life, sometimes that mother equals Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil” (996).

Elaine Showalter, another very prominent American feminist historicizes the woman and analyzed what women did in the past and do in the present. Elaine Showalter in her essay “Gynocriticism and Female Culture” introduces gynocriticism as the study of women’s writing and reading. Including Showalter the other gynocriticslike Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Patricia Mayor Spacks want to develop new models based on the study of female experiences rather than adoption of male models and theories. She remarks:

The programme of gynocritics is to a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new model based on the study of female experience rather than to adopt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolute of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of culture. (1227)

The main purpose of gynocritics is to study well-known authors, rediscover women's history and to discover neglected women writers. For that they want to create new structure for the female literature. Before this there was only male framework, for them female texts cannot fit on it because of the experience. Female has different kinds of experiences such as the experience of manustration and child bearing. The main aim of programme is to develop a female sub-culture, including not only the ascribed status and the internalized constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions and the consciousness of women. Without understanding the female sub-culture, the text would miss its real meaning. It would be misread or misinterpreted.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar start an extensive study of women writers and set up a feminist literary theory. Their essay "From Infection in The Sentence" concerned with woman and literary tradition. It starts with the consideration of Harold Bloom's patriarchal model. Gilbert and Gubar criticize him and say that males have the anxiety of influence for their fore-fathers but women are suffering from 'the anxiety of authorship'. Women do not fit into the patriarchal model so; they have to create a new sub-culture unaffected by males. Males have the problem of subject matter whereas the females are suffering from the authorship because everything has already controlled by males. Women writer have anxiety that they have no predecessor and their works used to be judged on male parameters. Males fight for

matter where as females for space. To create their own issue of subject matter, man has taken literature as their own property. Female artist struggle not against her male counterpart but his reading of her, it is herself-creation. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their essay "From Infection in the Sentence" write:

Unlike her male counterpart, then, the female artist must first struggle against the effect of a socialization [. . .] and just as the male artist's struggle against his precursor takes the form of what Bloom calls revisionary swerves, fights, misreading, so the female writers battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process. Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her. In order to define herself as an author, she must redefine the terms of her socialization. (1237)

There is the psychological complexity in a woman because of her cultural environment. Human psyche is determined in terms of class, race, nationality and history. Female psyche can be studied as a product of such a society. A woman writer experiences her gender as a painful obstacle. Gilbert and Gubar's main purpose is to create space for women in literature or to create a sub-culture unaffected by males to eliminate their passivity. Women have been neurotic because of their psychological problem; i.e. the problem of suppression of desire. They are facing disruption and subversion. Males create images for them.

The above discussed feminist discourse has helped us to generate the arguments and justify the protagonist of Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, particularly the behaviors and the psyche of Sophie in the male dominated society. This discourse has given a perspective to observe and analyze the novel. The discourse enables us to understand the feelings and necessities of a female character in order to lives as an independent human being.

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on January 19, 1969. Her father and mother immigrated to the states while Danticat was a child, leaving her in Haiti to be raised by an aunt and uncle. At the age of twelve Danticat, like protagonist Sophie, was sent to New York to live with her parents. She went to receive a degree in French literature from Barnard College and a Master of Fine Arts degree at Brown. Danticat began writing *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, her first novel, while an undergraduate at Barnard. Finished her MFA thesis, it was published in 1998, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* entered a large public consciousness when it was featured an Oprah's Reading Club selection. In addition to various shorter pieces, Danticat has since published *Kirk? Kirk!* (1996), a collection of short stories which became a National Book Award finalist, and *The Farming of Bones* (1998), about the 1937 massacre of Haitian workers ordered by the Dominican Republic dictator Molina. Most recently, she has edited *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora* (2001). She has taught creative writing and New York University, and lives in Brooklyn.

Breath, Eye, Memory (1994) is the first novel of Edwidge Danticat about Haitian women. Danticat makes a portrayal of traditional society and ritual custom in Haiti. She has created a picture of the contemporary society which is based on the patriarchal tradition, norms and values. In this novel she protests to the cultural exploitation, patriarchal domination and matriarchal tradition. Sophie is her representative characters of Haitian women who struggle against the domination and exploitation for freedom.

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* has been criticized and interpreted from different perspective by many critics. Bonnie Lyons in her article "An Interview with Edwidge Danticat" writes that it is an autobiography of Danticat herself. It is clear while Danticat says with Lyons about her book, "Absolutely, in term of emotional autobiography, I think of the separation from the mother and the reunion. That and

arriving some place completely new. What's most true in that book is not the events but the feelings" (196). Similarly, Ethan Casey criticized that *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is the autobiography of Edwidge Danticat in her article, "Remembering Haiti" she says, "It is the very personal story of Sophie, first girl in a Haitian village, later a young woman living with her mother in Brooklyn" (525). Here, Ethan Casey compares Danticat with Sophie to justify her claim that it is a memoir of Danticat's and she is remembering Haiti in her work.

Though, the female in *Breath, Eyes Memory* are often relegated to the margins of the text, they are vitally important as they illustrate the body politics and patriarchal discrimination. Jelena Sesnic highlights the history of wounded women in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, and Memory*. In her article, "Wounded History: A Reading of Edwidge Danticat's Fiction", she states:

Her historical insight is reaffirmed by her grandmother's admonition that echoes mythic empowering but also debilitating, links between mother and daughter, which tie the ritualistic scene of identity formation in African based religions [. . .] it is only in the wake of her mother's burial that Sophie finds strength to revisit the site of her mother's violation, also of her "primal scene" and thus to stand witness for her mother and herself, apparently attaining liberation from her traumatic history. (257)

The above quotation examines the Sophie's rebellion to patriarchal violence for freedom. It also empowers Sophie in her mother, Martine and her Grandmother's act of violation through the scene of rape.

W. Todd Martin discusses the subversion by Ezili which is also the tool of resistance in Danticat's novel. In Martin's article "Ezili and Subversion of the Holy Virgin in Edwidge Danticat", who, remarks:

Sophie accomplishes this in part by her literal return to Haiti and her appropriation of Ezili; still full reconciliation cannot be achieved until she reestablishes her maternal line which links her to a long legacy of strong women [. . .] she must reclaim her sexual independence from the misogynist virginity cult. (9)

The above extract demonstrates that Sophie is revolt by the help of Ezili to claim her sexual independence from the virginity cult. Another critic Nancy F. Gerber treats about the relationship between daughter and mother, and the impact of unspeakable violence. In Gerber's article, "Binding the Narrative Thread Storytelling and the Mother-Daughter Relationship in EdwidgeDanticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*", she says, "Sophie's liberation is negotiated through narrative, through the first person telling of her journey, and though her understanding of the ways in which it frames the interpolated tales. She is not alone in her quest for healing and freedom" (196). Here, Nancy F. Gerber focuses on the gender struggle through the method of narrator which gives voice or liberates Sophie. Similarly, in Susan Stand Friedman's article "Borders, Bodies and Migration: Narrating Violation in Shauna Singh Baldwin and EdwidgeDanticat", he explains:

Sophie's migration to America results in less freedom, not more especially in the realm of the body - a state rendered all the more difficult because Sophie must piece together the fragments of her mother's story, nightmares and strange behavior to understand what is happening and to assert her own freedom from the past. (7)

In this article, Friedman shows that when Sophie migrants to America she fragments with her mother's story, nightmare and her testing virginity. These different stories make her strength and powerful to struggle against the patriarchal dominated society for identity and freedom.

This research explores the struggles of the protagonist Sophie to get freedom from violence and respectable status in the society. Many critics have analyzed this novel through various perspectives but this research is different from the issue of other critics. It also explores the social and cultural aspects of the novel. Actually, it explores the physical and mental freedom of Sophie from violence.

This research is a library based research. It uses a close, discursive analytical style of the feminist concept. As the focus of the research is a feminist critique which, establishes Sophie as important characters through the resistance against the violation of the patriarchal discourse. It mainly falls back upon feminist criticism. Feminist criticism explores the clear picture of women in the patriarchal and male biased society and raise question against the domination, exploitation and body-politics.

This research has three chapters i.e. introduction, textual analysis and conclusion. First chapter of the research introduces the central idea. It includes some critics in order to support the research and attempts to introduce feminist criticism. Second chapter of the research provides the textual analysis in terms of theoretical tools to justify the issue. Some extracts from the text has been taken to prove the issue. Third chapter concludes the ideas from all the sections and gives the summary of the research.

II. Women's Struggle for Freedom in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Breath, Eyes, Memory depicts the clear picture of Haitian women and their painful condition in the male dominated society and matrilineal tradition where women are being victim of patriarchal violence. The patriarchal ideology always dominates women in their life. Most of all, female characters are being victim of patriarchy. They are economically, physically and mentally weak and suffering from sexual exploitation and vivid nightmare that is result of patriarchal terror. The protagonist and narrator Sophie, her mother, Martine and aunt Atie all are suffering from patriarchal ideology and living their life in miserable condition. They have treated badly from the cultural custom and their male partner. They have been target of virginity test in their adult that is traditional system, which main concern is to keep women under the domination of family to save familial prestige and honor in the society. There is a luminous picture of domination as well as there is also struggle of women against patriarchal violence and body politics for freedom.

The main concern of this research is that, how Sophie and other women characters are treated badly and victimized by patriarchal society. They also revolt against this patriarchal society and cultural tradition. This research explores that, there is a silence revolt of women within domination and they are struggling against exploitation by performing physical and mental activities. This research explores the domination of patriarchy and struggle of women for freedom from violence.

Feminist critics claim that women are oppressed from the view point of patriarchy economically, politically, socially and psychologically. Patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept under its domination so, patriarchal ideology creates different types of traditional belief to suppress women. In this novel, female characters are especially suffering from the so-called virginity test. It is the cultural tradition that suppresses women. All the women characters are

suffering from this tradition where their mother tests their virginity for purity and to be sure that she is virgin or not. In the beginning of this novel, Sophie's grandmother tests her mother and aunt's virginity. When Sophie is in New York her mother Martine tells her about this secrete. She says:

When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside. Your TanteAtie hated it. She used to scream like a pig in a slaughterhouse. The way my mother was raised, a mother is supposed to that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure. (60-61)

In these lines, Martine reveals the event of her virginity test where her mother tested her. It is the cultural ideology to suppress women in their way. Patriarchal society creates vivid boundary to keep women under the tradition. The Haitian society is traditional society where these girls are disgraced and scarlet for social and familial prestige, who destroy their virginity before marriage they are not accepted for marriage. The girls who are not pure and intact their hymen they cannot save their familial honor and prestige. It is the man-made cultural doctrine to dominate female. Women just follow this tradition for their responsibility not for their willing. They are forcefully accepted it for their familial honor and prestige.

Sophie does not like this humiliating and cruel act. "I hated the tests" (156). She hates this act and raises a question to her grandmother that, "The testing? Why do the mothers do that?" (156). Her grandmother gives her answer. She remarks:

"If a child dies, you do not die. But if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced, and people, they think daughters will be raised trash with no man in the house."

"Did your mother do this to you?"

“From the time of girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, and even bring her back to me.”

[. . .] “The burden was not mine alone.” (156)

In these lines, Sophie’s grandmother considers the legitimacy of her daughter and maintains the old Haitian custom of preserving a girl’s dignity by virginal testing. Traditionally conserving a daughter’s virginity is one of the highest priorities for a family. She is representative of matriarch from Caco family. She is wise, candid, practical and astute with an intuitive knowledge of human nature and bottomless reserve of parable. Yet, she is also product of her world, content with her provincial village and accepting of its custom and order. Being a matriarch she is responsible patriarchal custom. She subsumes with the male patriarchy. She is a docile follower of patriarchy. She tells that the burden is not her alone. It is the patriarchal ideology and ritual custom related with familial prestige and honor.

Patriarchal ideology informs what appear to be even the most innocent of our activities. Patriarchal ideology continues influence to woman in their life. Lois Tyson in her book *Critical Theory Today* talks about patriarchal ideology. She states:

[. . .] patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl.” These two roles – also referred to as “Madonna” and “whore” or “angle” and “bitch” – view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order. Of course, how “good girls” and “bad girls” are specifically defined will alter somewhat according to the time and place in which they live. (89)

This given extract examines that how patriarchal ideology works to keep women and men in traditional gender roles and there by maintain male dominance. In the patriarchal tradition, girls have two categories -one is good and another is bad. The innocent girls who always follow the tradition and cultural norms, they are good and those who violate the patriarchal norms and values are bad for society. Tyson says that, “[. . .] bad girls violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance or behavior, or they have multiple sexual partners. Men sleep with “bad girls” but don’t marry them. They are used and then discarded because they don’t deserve better and they probably don’t even expect better” (90).

In the Haitian culture, there is only good girls are accepted for marriage. The bad girls are rejected because they cannot preserve the social and familial prestige. In the novel, the Haitian extremely rich man married to poor black girl. He has chosen her out of hundreds of prettier girls because she is untouched. He brings for her the white sheets and nightgowns in his wedding night. He buys a can of thick goat milk and he plans to sprinkle a drop of her hymen blood to drink. The girl doesn’t bleed in their wedding night though she is virgin. The man has his honor and reputation in front of society. He cannot face the town if he doesn’t have a blood-spotted sheet to hang in his courtyard next morning. He does his best to make her bleed, but she could not bleed. To make her bleed, what he does is:

So he took a knife and cut her between her legs to get some blood to show. He got enough blood for her wedding gown and sheets, an unusual amount to impress the neighbors. The blood kept flowing like water out of the girl. It flowed so much it would not stop. Finally, drained of all her blood, the girl died. Later, during her funeral procession her blood-soaked sheets were paraded by her husband to show that she had been a virgin on her wedding night. At the grave

site, her husband drank his blood-spotted goat milk and cried like a child. (155)

The above mentioned line clearly shows the Haitian patriarchal domination over females. The innocent girl was virgin till her wedding night and she was good for her husband but when she could not bleed, she transferred into bad girl and became victim of prestige and honor by her own husband. It is not the sexual terror of an individual rather it is the violence of patriarchy. In Haitian culture, those girls who are not virgin, they have no dignity. There must be bleeding in their first wedding night otherwise, patriarchy dominates them mercilessly.

Most of Haitian mothers are always sock about their adult daughter are virgin or not. If their daughters are not virgin and good, they are not easily accepted in traditional society. They are very conscious about their daughter. Martine is suffering from virginity test although she is a docile follower of this blind tradition. She is aware about her daughter like other women. She tells Sophie that, “You need to concentrate when school starts, and you have to give that all your attention. You’re a good girl, aren’t you?” (60). Mother must be careful about their daughter because they should be responsible whether their daughter is disgraced or not when the girl begins to menstruate, the mother is responsible for her purity.

Every mother must give virgin daughter to her husband for the reputation of patriarchal society. The old woman says, “If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me” (156). The given line explains that the compulsion of Haitian mothers to save their daughter’s virginity. It is not the mother’s desire rather this is compulsion. Otherwise, Haitian culture does not accept the girls those who are not virgin. The hymen testing process is cautiously run in Haitian culture from immemorial time and still continuous. When the mother able to give their virgin daughters to their husband, they feel their duty

fulfilled. If their daughters are not virgin, they spend unmarried life forever being dominated.

Patriarchy suppresses women from many perspectives. From a patriarchy standpoint, women's perspectives, feelings and opinion don't count unless they conform to those of patriarchy. Women are always inferior to men in the patriarchal society. They are delegate human beings. Simon de Beauvoir observes men are considered essential subjects or independent slaves with free will, while women are considered contingent beings or dependent beings controlled by circumstances. Men can act upon the world, change it gives it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Tyson says that, "A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is" (96).

Thus, the patriarchy ideology attacks woman from different perspectives. Sometimes it tries to attacks them physically and some other times it exploits mentally. In the novel, women are suppressed by patriarchy physically, sexually and mentally. The patriarchy psychologically attacks them make victim of their psyche. TanteAtie is psychologically exploited from Augustin in the case of love. The women are being used by the men after than thrown in dustbin as like a dust. As the same case, Augustin first loves Atie but after he left her because of her poor economic condition. Augustin is a rich man who wants to marry rich girl. Atie is like his toys to fulfill his sexual desire. Because of her miserable economic condition she could not marry with Augustin. She says:

That means we've worked the land. We're not educated. My father would have never dreamt that we would live in the same kind of house that people like Monsieur and Madame Augustin live in. He, a school teacher, and we, daughters of the hills, old peasant stock, *pititsoyet*,

ragamuffins. If we can live here, if you have this door open to you, it is because of your mother promise me that you are not going to fight with your mother when you get there. (20)

These above mentioned lines show the condition of Atie. She is a daughter of a poor peasant but Augustin is a teacher in school. There is a deep gap between their social and economic status. Atie has true love to Augustin. While Augustin marries other rich girl she becomes mental ill.

Atie cannot tolerate their relation because it gives her pain. She says that, “Don’t you ever tell anyone that I cry when I watch Donald Augustin and his wife getting ready for bed” (17). Her voice is enough to say that how Atie is suffering from his betrayals. So, the man hunts into heart of woman when he gets his self. After, Augustin’s deceive, she becomes alcoholic:

[. . .] TanteAtie stumbled into her room, her body rocking from side to side. She lowered herself to the ground, her large feet barely sidestepping my outstretched leg and Birgittie’s toes. TanteAtie’s eyes were red; she blinked quickly trying to keep them open. She snapped fingers and made face it Brigitte, to get her attention.

“Are you all right? I asked her.

“Fine, good.”

Her breath smelled like rum. She stretched her body out on the floor and within a few seconds fell asleep.

“Were you drinking?’ I asked.

“I drink a little to forget my troubles.” She said. “It is no more a vice than the old woman and her tobacco.” (142-43)

These above mention dialogue between Atie and Sophie shows the clear picture of Atie’s painful life which is given by patriarchy. Atie is divested by two great

betrayals: in her youth, Donald Augustine Promises to marry her and then suddenly marries another girl, and in her old age, Atie's best friend, Louise leaves for Miami without so much as a good bye. She is a character of great preservance. She is a character of great endurance and great love faced with a life of sacrifice and trivial pleasure. But not only is Atie's life not worthy of her, it seems callously wanders the night as if daring harm to fall her but nothing happiness.

In the other hand, Martine is suffering from double oppression; one is her rape in her youth and another is her nightmare. She is psychologically ill from sexual exploitation so she can't marry in her life because in Haitian society these girls who can't preserve their virginity, they can't accepted for marriage. Patriarchal society creates bondage for marriage. About the marriage Emma Goldman in her essay "The Traffic in Women" says that "marriage is the goal of every girl but as thousands of girls, cannot marry: our stupid social customs condemn them either to life of celibacy or prostitution" (104). So Martin becomes suffer from social customs when she was young she had raped by unknown man in her youth. She remarks:

"The details are two much," she said. "But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the sides of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body. I was still young girl then, just barely older than you." I did not press to find out more. Part of me did not understand. Most of me did not want to.

"I thought Atie would have told you. I did not know this man. I never show his force. He had it covered when did this to me. But now when I look at your face I find it is true what they say. A child out of wedlock always looks like its father". (60-61)

The above mention extract explains that Martine had been exploited in her past by somebody else. While she was returning home from school, she was raped from

unknown man. She didn't know that who the rapist was. She is unknown about the rapist till now.

After her rape, the Caco family becomes distract. They could not remain their dignity in society. Martine's mother had continuously tests her hymen before her rape. She thinks that it is her responsible to save her daughter's purity. She becomes failure to save her familial honor because her daughter raped by unknown man, an agent of patriarchy. The rape gives them a lot of pain physically and mentally. Martine's mother becomes nervous. Martine observes:

The old girl lost her nerve. She lost her fight. You should have seen us when we were young. We always dreamt of becoming important women. We were going to be the first women doctors from my mother's village. We are going to be engineers too. Imagine our surprise when we found out we had limits. (43)

All the dreams of Caco family had transferred into ash from this accident. The longing became failure because there is no place to them in their society. Martine becomes pregnancy from the rape and tries to kill her inborn baby before born. Every time she becomes mad and loses her mental balance. Sophie says, "For months she was afraid that he would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come out and tear out the child growing inside her. At night, she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares" (139). She cannot forget the rape. When she remembers that event then she becomes mad. To escape from the terror of mind, her mother sends her to a rich Mullaatto family in Croix-des-Rosets, Haiti to do any work. Though, she is pregnant and half insane, the family took her in anyway because her mother had cooked and cleaned in their house for years before she married with her father. Later, she flights to New York to escape from her trouble.

The nature of patriarchy is always dominated to women. It creates terror for women every time from the different kinds of domination. Physically and psychologically women are becoming weak in patriarchal state. They are subject matter of body politics. There is no social and legal justice in patriarchal tradition. Patriarchy shows only the fault of women not men. Men are its conserve. In this novel, the female characters are dominated from patriarchal tradition. There is a clear picture of patriarchal violence. The furious nightmare is one who is created by men's sexual abuse to dominate women.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the unforgettable exploitation of patriarchy ideology is sexual attack where women are suffering from its violence in their whole life. The rape and hymen test is the main sexual terror which gives vivid nightmares to women to make inferior. By this act, patriarchy philosophy wants to keep women always it's under. Martine is sexually exploited and suffering from vivid nightmare at night.

Sophie states:

Later that night, I heard that same voice screaming as though someone was trying to kill her. I rushed over but my mother was alone thrashing against the sheets. I shook her and finally woke her up. When she saw me, she quickly covered her face, with her hand and turned away.

"Oubyen? Are you all right?" I asked her.

She shook her head yes.

"It is the night," she said. "Sometime I see horrible vision in my sleep."

"Don't worry, it will pass," she said, avoiding my eyes. "I will be fine.

I always am. The nightmares, they come and go." (48)

In these above mentioned lines assert that, Martine is being victims of nightmare because there is a sexual horrible violence in her mind. Still, she couldn't forget this

event. When she sees her daughter, she becomes more anxious and recalls her past terrible story because, she sees the terrible face of huge man in her daughter's face. Sophie says that, "when she saw my face, she looked even more frightened" (81). Sophie is the main cause of her nightmare because she is rape -born child of unidentified father. Her presence gives Martine more pain. When she sees her, she recalls her past terrible scene of her youth.

Nightmare is the dangerous pain for everybody. It gives vivid terrible picture in mind about past event. The past changed into ghost and creates terror in mind through nightmares. Martine is suffering from its till now. The dialogue states:

"Do you still have trouble sleeping?" I tried to be polite.

"Its worse when I am here," she said.

"Are you having nightmares?"

"More than ever." She said.

"I thought it was my face that brought them on," I said.

"Your face?"

Because, I look like him my father. A child out of wedlock always looks like its father." She seemed shocked that I remembered. (169)

The above mentioned dialogue describes that the main cause of her nightmares is Sophie's appearance. Sophie is directly linked with the rape. So she is the representative figure of her father or Martine's rapist. Martine is suffering from double oppression. She says that, "I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related [. . .] the testing and the rape. I live both every day" (170). Thus, Martine becomes victim of patriarchal domination and exploitation.

In this novel, there is a luminous picture of domination in Haitian society. There is not only domination of patriarchy to women rather there is also women's struggle for freedom. They are searching for their identity and right in patriarchal

society. In the patriarchy, women are voiceless, and rightness. They have no identity. They are limited in certain area. Simone de Beauvoir in her work, *Myth and Reality* claims that, “woman is lost. Where are the women? The women are not women at all”(1000). According to Beauvoir, there is no identity of women in patriarchy. In sexuality and maternity woman as subject can claim autonomy but to be a true woman she must accept herself as the other. Beauvoir asserts that women have no their own identity. Their possessiveness is always depends on other. They are totally under the domination of men. The true woman is required to make herself object to be the other. So, feminists want to create the identity by themselves. Their struggle is for freedom from all the domination. They need their human right and end of the body politics. Patriarchy always suppresses them nevertheless they are fighting for their right.

In this novel, Sophie is too suffering from body politics and cultural tradition. First of all, she has become victim like her mother and aunt from cultural tradition, so-called virginity test of young girl, later she has sexually exploited from her own husband. These two events not only give her mental depress rather it gives her energy to fight against cruelty. She is a brave woman who violates these cultural and traditional rules and regulations. She is not docile follower of maternal tradition like her mother and grandmothers. She is a rape-born child. She doesn't know who the father is? She wants to fight against the tyranny of men and break all kinds of boundary of patriarchal society. She needs freedom not violence. She seeks her identity that who had given her birth in the selfish world. She states:

At home, when I couldn't sleep, TanteAtie would stay up with me. The two of us would sit by the window and TanteAtie would tell me stories about our lives, about the way things had been in the family, even before I was born. One time I asked her how it was that I was born with a mother and no father. She told me the story of a little girl

who was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of the sky. That little girl, she said was me. (47)

There is not real identity of Sophie. According to her, she was born with a mother and no father. She was born out of petals of roses, water from the stream, and chunk of the sky. Her aunt dismissed her true identity. She has recalled the past and imagined that her father might have been a Macoute who was very cruel and furious. She says that, “My father might have been a Macoute. He was a stronger when my mother was sixteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school [. . .]. When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threaten to shoot her if she looked up” (139). She can only imagine her unidentified father. In patriarchy, identity belongs to father not mother. So, Sophie’s mother gives birth to her but she doesn’t give her real father. Sophie has mentally distracted about her identity.

Sophie is a hopeful and insightful young girl who has borne by unknown father and rare by aunt after left her mother in childhood. Like other women characters, she is victimized sexually, mentally and psychologically. She too suffers from virginity test and sexual exploitation. In Haitian culture, there is extreme belief in virginity test. It is directly concern with traditional myth. Sophie has being tested from her mother on her own bed. Martine performs testing because she considers that it is her duty to protect Sophie until marriage. “A mother is supposed to do that until her daughter is married” (60). The logic of this practice intimates that woman is property and her worth is determined by an exchange value that is measured by her virginity.

There is no freedom to woman in patriarchal society. So, Sophie has no freedom to be close with opposite sex because it gives her honor of bad girl and prostitute. Sophie says that, “A good girl would never be alone with a man, an older one at that” (72). It is a mythical ideology to control young girl. Simon de Beauvoir

asserts that, “There are different kinds of myths. This one, the myth of woman, sublimating an immutable aspect of the human condition [. . .]. Thus, as against the dispersed, contingent and multiple existence of actual woman, mythical thought oppresses the Eternal Feminine unique and changeless” (996).

Simon de Beauvoir claims that myth is illusion of patriarchy to oppress women. It is never in favor of women. To being follower of this mythical illusion Martine tests Sophie. For Sophie, the testing begins once she articulates an adolescent interest in boys. “I was eighteen and fell in love. His name was Joseph and he was old. He was old like God is old to me, ever present and full of wisdom” (67). Sophie becomes close with Joseph an old musician. She loves him very much but her mother doesn’t accept their intimacy. Martine charges to Sophie that she has already lost her virginity. “You are already lost you, tell me you trust him and I know you are already lost, what’s his name?” (78). When Sophie returns home late one night, Martine decides she has no longer trusts of Sophie and begins the very practice of testing which she herself detested as a young woman, to maintain control over Sophie’s body and regulate her burgeoning sexuality. Sophie states:

The next night, after seeing Joseph, I came home to find my mother sitting in the living room. She was sitting there rocking herself, holding a belt in her hand.

[. . .] “Where were you?” she tapped the belt against her palm, her lifelines becoming more and more red. She took my hand with surprised gentleness, and let me upstairs to my bedroom. There she made me lie on my bed and she tested me. (84)

These given lines briefly mentioned that Sophie’s mother accepts the old Haitian tradition. She could not bear her daughter to be with a man before marriage. She is a blind follower of this humiliating tradition like her mother. Sophie describes the

condition of her virginity test although she is virgin but she becomes victim of her own mother. Still, Martine considers the legitimacy of her daughter and maintains the old Haitian custom of preserving a girl's dignity by virginal testing. Traditionally, conserving a daughter's virginity is one of the highest priorities for a family.

When Martine starts testing Sophie, she feels humiliation and hates her own body. She has ashamed from its nature. The mistrust and violation of the test degrade their relationship and inhabits communication. Sophie says that, "My mother rarely spoke to me since she begins the tests [. . .]. I wanted to tell her that I loved but the words would not roll of my tongue" (87). The test brings gap between the relationship of mother and daughter. They become like enemy at each other. Sophie feels every time alone and lost. She thinks that there is no longer any reason for her to live. She becomes psychologically weak after hymen test. Her mother gives continuity to hymen test. "[. . .] every time she tested me" (88). She tests Sophie every night and inserts her finger into her vagina.

Martine falls back on her mother's practice of testing and attempting to insert little finger in Sophie's vagina in order to make sure that Sophie's hymen is still intact or not. Though, its purpose is different from the mechanics of testing nonetheless suggest the violation of rape. To convince Sophie, about her humiliation and uncomfortable process, Martine begins to tell story of Marassas to Sophie:

The Marassas were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two. They looked the same, walked the same. Admiring one another for being so much like for being copies. When you love someone, you want to be closer to you than your Marassa, closer than your shadow. You want him to be your soul. The more you like, the easier this becomes [. . .]. The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man

who you didn't know the year before. You and I we could be like Marassas. You are giving with a lifetime with me. Do you understand?
(84-85)

In this extract, Martine aligns herself with Sophie as the two Marassas in order to signify their similarity and her unconditional love for her daughter. Martine emphasis on the scared bond between a mother and daughter seems to contradict her simultaneous testing of Sophie. Her words describe the urgency of her desire for a trusting bond of loyalty, while her action suggests an utter mistrust of Sophie. While testing Sophie, Martine ruins the very allegiance she hopes to realize with her daughter. Ironically, the story which Martine tells is of the Marassas, two inseparable lovers, and its explicit moral is that Sophie's interest in men would drive a wedge between her and Martine. Thus, though it is Martine whose testing hurts Sophie, her actions reveal her own deep hurt, her fear of loosing virginity and her jealousy of Sophie's love for Joseph. Sophie is Martine's double a witness to her nightmarish past but she is also her mother's twin, a piece of her own body, the savior who wakes her from those nightmares. Sophie is Martine's Marassas, her beloved daughter, her salvation and her destruction.

Sophie is also becoming target of patriarchal violence. Patriarchy has given her same pain like other female. She becomes hopeless while she has being tested by her mother. She could not forget the terrible pain. She says that, "My body was quivering when my mother walked into my room to test me. My legs were limp when she drew them aside. I ached so hard I could hardly move. Finally, I failed the test" (88). Sophie's sorrow at the testing, she has experienced at the hand of her mother. While Sophie values Haitian culture and tradition, she is highly critical of the ritual testing which she sees as a tool of the patriarchy.

Sophie is a revolutionary character in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. She struggles against patriarchal dominated society for her identity and existence. She fights for freedom from sexual violence. She is a strong woman who, have courage to violate the traditional norms. She becomes scapegoat of patriarchy as well as she has struggled for freedom and self-identity against it. She revolts for equity and liberation. Sophie is a luminal creature whose search for resolution drives the narrative. She doesn't want to be follower of tradition rather she wants to get escape from all kinds of domination, bondage, cruelty, humiliation and inhumanity. She does not want to leave under the patriarchal value and its hegemony. She protests the process of virginity test. She reinforces this theme in a conversation with her grandmother, saying, "I hated the test [. . .] it is the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. When my husband is with me now it gives me such nightmares that I have to bit in my tongue to do it again" (156).

Simon de Beauvoir says that, "We should kill them since we can't competence them; or better tranquilize them, instruct them, make them, give up their taste for jewels, make them our genuinely equal comrades, our intimate friends, real associates here below dress them differently; cut their hair short, say anything and everything to them" (999). Symbolically, Beauvoir gives courage to women to struggle against patriarchal violence. She wants to kill these myths that have created for make obstacle to women in their way. So, she raises her voice to destroy them. Similarly, Sophie wants to break the tradition. She could not accept easily to virginity test. While Martine continuously tests, she cannot bear her activities. She gives challenge Martine to break her own virginity. She narrates:

I was feeling alone and lost, like there was no longer any reason for me to live. I went down to the kitchen and searched my mother's cabinet for the mortar and pestle we used to crush spices. I took the pestle to

bed with me and held it against my chest. My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's finger back every time she tested me. (87-88)

Sophie deliberately breaks her own hymen with an inanimate object. Sophie's act is simultaneously an act of violence and one of will for freedom. Paradoxically, it is also an act of liberation; freeing her once and for all from the dreaded practice of testing. Just as her grandmother's testing of Martine finally came to end with Martine's rape, Sophie herself breaks her hymen to get escape from her mother's testing. She violates the traditional belief of her mother.

During the period of breaking hymen, Sophie imagines the story of a woman who could stop bleeding unless she chooses to renounce her human body. She says:

The story goes that there was once a woman who walked around with blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin. This went on for twelve long years. The woman went to many doctors and specialists, but no one could heal her. The blood kept gushing and spouting in bubbles out of her unbroken skin, sometimes from her arms [. . .] the woman was tired of bleeding. So she went home and divided her goods among her friends and loved ones. Then she went back to Ezulie for her transformation. (87)

The story suggests that the woman's body, her female form was what kept her soul imprisoned and bleeding, and that she could only find salvation in a different shape. More broadly, Sophie's action adds to the novel's continual comparison of violence done to women by men versus violence to them by other women. Sophie's womanhood involves coming to terms with her woman's body. But faced with

societal restrictions and norms, such as the cult of virginity, which are directly tied to her female form, a woman may choose to symbolically oppose those norms by doing violence to that most immediate prison and agent of oppression, her own body.

After, Sophie's revolt, Martine becomes more furious than previous state. She cannot tolerate her daughter's action. She bits her and scolds her. Sophie says that, "My mother grabbed me by the hand and pulled me off the bed" (88). Martine becomes failure in her responsibility. She loses her dreams that she need to fulfill from her daughter. She becomes cruel. "Go, she said with tears running down her face. She seized my books and clothes and threw them at me. You just go to him and see what he can do for you" (88). Martine exiles Sophie because of her disobedience about tradition.

Lois Tyson, in her book *Critical Theory Today*, says that "bad girls violate patriarchal sexual norms" (90). They could not be follower of patriarchal tradition rather they breaks the patriarchal norms. Sophie is the bad girl for her mother. She doesn't frighten with mother rather she elopes with Joseph. Martine is responsible for patriarchy and follows the every step of cultural tradition. So, Sophie does not self-surrender in front of her mother. She states:

I waited until I heard her moaning in her sleep. I gathered my things and stuffed that into a suitcase. I had to dress quickly. I Tiptoed downstairs and opened the front door.

I knocked on Joseph's door and waited for him to answer.

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

I was limping a little. My body ached from the wound the pestle had made. I handed him my suitcase and the pinky ring he had given me.

"I am ready for a real ring" I said.

"You want to get married?"

I nodded.

“But we have to do it now,” I said. “Right this very minute.” (88-89)

These above mentioned line describes the condition of Sophie’s elopement with Joseph. It is her revolt against domination. She wants to escape from her mother’s cruelty as well as she wants to give challenge her mother. She does this act to destroy patriarchal tradition. She becomes ready to marry with Joseph although she is wounded from the pestle. It shows that she is going to struggle against the virginity test.

Sophie marries with Joseph, but he could not understand her painful condition. Patriarchy wants to exploited woman even in their painful situation. Joseph is the representative character of patriarchy, which becomes ready for sexual passion though, Sophie is suffering from wound made by pestle. She says that “My body ached from the wound the pestle had made” (89). He shows his selfish behave towards Sophie where as she is unable mentally and physically for sex. Nevertheless, in this miserable condition, she is sexually exploited from her own husband. She says that, “it is very painful for me” (123). She has frightened to participate in sexual intercourse. Although, she thinks that it is her duty to husband and accepts easily it She states:

I had spent two days in the hospital in providence and four weeks with stitches between my legs. Joseph could never understand why I had done something so horrible to myself. I could not explain to him that it was like breaking manacles an act of freedom.

Even though it occurred weeks later, our wedding night were painful, it was like the tearing all over again; the ache and soreness had still, not disappeared [. . .]. However, I felt it was my duty as a wife. Something

I owed to him, now that he was the only person in the world watching over me. That first very painful time gave us the child. (130)

The extract talks about the painful condition of Sophie at her wedding night. She has wounded from pestle while she broke her hymen. There is deep wound in her vagina. So, she spends two days in hospital but Joseph does not understand her trouble rather he becomes eager for sex. Sophie could not explain him about her pain but she becomes ready to fulfill his desire because it is her duty. Their wedding night is extremely painful for Sophie. Despite her pain, she thinks that sex is her duty to him, as he is the only person left in the world watching over her. As a result of that night, she becomes pregnant.

Joseph is an agent of patriarchal society who sexually exploits to his own wife without her desire. Sophie does not satisfy with her husband because he could not heal of her trouble and pain. Sophie hates her own body and leaves her husband and returns Haiti. Sophie's return to Haiti suggests troubles beyond the remembered calm of her childhood. Here, to leave Joseph, Sophie does not want to be always victim of patriarchy. Her act is the revolt against patriarchy and quest for healing of pain. Symbolically, her healing of pain stands for her freedom from body politics.

Sophie doesn't like sexual activities with her husband because it is very painful for her physically and mentally. She says that, "I fell like it is an evil thing to do" (123). For Sophie, it is humiliation act. She wants to get escape from this humiliation to being separate from Joseph. She state that, "I hate my body. I am ashamed to show anybody including my husband. Sometimes I feel like I should be off somewhere by myself, that is why I am here" (123). She rejects the sexual relation with her husband. It justifies that she is going to against of sexual violence.

Sophie struggles against doubling. However, it is not limited to Sophie, for she sites this psychological distancing in Haitian cultural history and heritage. She

narrates that, “There were many cases in our history where our ancestors had doubled. Following in the *voodoo* tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split into two: part of flesh and part of shadow [. . .] still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives” (155). Sophie recognizes doubling as a tradition of the African *vaudou* religion. At the same time, she acknowledges the function of doubling in patriarchal Haiti to excuse mental disengagement during atrocious acts of violence. Doubling, therefore, is used by both the victim and the perpetrators as a coping method in the face of victimization and aggression.

For Sophie, doubling functions as a claim over her own body, such as when she mutilates herself with a pestle from her mother’s kitchen. Sophie associates the act with a Haitian folktale of a woman who could not stop bleeding from her unbroken skin. Sophie Says:

[. . .]. The woman was tired of bleeding, so she went home and divided her goods among her friends and loved ones. Then she went back to Erzulie for her transformation.

“What form of life do you want to take? Asked Erzulie. “Do you want to be a green lush plant in garden? Do you want to be a gentle animal in the sea? A ferocious best of the night?

“Make me a butterfly,” she told Erzulie.

“A butterfly you shall be,” said Erzulie.

The woman was transformed and never bleeds again. (88)

In the above mention lines, the woman wants to be a butterfly. She cannot tolerate the pain of bleeding. Eventually, the woman declares that she would like to be a butterfly, and upon transformation, she is freed from her burden. As Danticat illustrates this tale, Sophie inserts the pestle into her and rips apart her own flesh to transform her into something unacceptable to her mother. Sophie assumes the role of her victimizer

when she mutilates herself, but in doing so she reclaims her body from the sexual violence of her mother. Sophie rejects the doubling function with her husband. She says her husband that, “But we can’t even be together” (185).

In this novel, Sophie and other three women make sexual phobia group to share their pain and to struggle against patriarchal sexual violence. Sophie says that, “There were three of us in my sexual phobia group” (201). The whole group is suffering from sexual phobia. Sophie says, “Buki, an Ethiopian college student, had her clitoris cut and her labia sewn up when she was a girl. Davina, a middle aged Chicana, had been raped by her grandfathers for ten years” (201). The group runs through a series of affirmation, and then goes outside. Each woman writes the name of their abuser on a piece of paper and burns it over a candle, as Buki lets a green balloon free. Sophie can now without guilt, write and burn her mother’s name. She knows that her mother hurt her because she herself is hurt, and that it is up to her to stop the pain from extending to her own daughter.

These various violations reveal that at the fundamental level. Violence is especially directed towards women and their bodies. As a group, these women work to confront and move beyond histories of patriarchal domination, shame and trauma. They say: “We are beautiful women with strong bodies” (202). Symbolically, they declare that they are able to fight for freedom against patriarchal domination. Sophie has the courage to name her mother as her sexual abuser. As she burns the paper on which she has written her mother’s name, she acknowledges: “It was up to me to avoid my turn in the free. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares and never had her name burnt in the flames” (203). Thus, the sexual phobia group takes step against patriarchal sexual violence. The group represents those women who want to be independent and have to unite for their self-identity, self-dignity and liberation in patriarchal society.

Martine is raped by an unknown masked man and tested virginity from her mother in youth. These two representative events of violence give Martine mental torture and madness. She wants to go away to get salvation from her pain and patriarchal bondage. She loses her prestige and becomes unacceptable for marriage. Then, Martine leaves Haiti and goes to America for freedom. For her, America is a space which provides deferred dream of marriage can be realized. Here, she can class divide and marry up. But, because of the persistent body, memories of the sexual violation she doesn't feel worthy to cross the class divide even outside Haiti. Martine's choice is not to marry with anybody. She has suffered from rape, sexual abuse and nightmare.

With the change in circumstances, Marc loves Martine and she has been dating for ten years with him. While the intimacy increases between Martine and Marc, they become sexual partner. Martine becomes pregnant. She states:

I know you are not going to believe what I have to tell you. Sophie,
your mother is pregnant.

"Pregnant?" I stuttered.

Marc and I, we have-

"You sleep together?"

She nodded, looking ashamed.

How far along are you? I asked.

A month or so.

"Are you going to marry him?"

Jesus Marie Joseph. Am I going to do what? (189)

The above mention conversation tells that Martine has being pregnant again by Marc. She tells about the secret to her daughter. But she is not going to marry with Marc rather she is confused herself what she is going to do.

Martine is not ready to give birth to her baby. She cannot fulfill the desire of Marc. She thinks that the baby is a cancer for herself who gives her nightmares before birth. On the other side, she is not physically fit to beget baby. She narrates:

“Of course he wants to marry me, but look at me I am a fat woman trying to pass for light. And I have no breasts. I don’t know when this cancer will come back. I am not an ideal mother [. . .]. It is my decision, supremely, it is mine. I am very scared. I don’t know. The nightmares, they’re coming back

I feel like I sleep with ghosts. (189)

Martine is unable to beget this baby because that is her cancer. Symbolically, her voice states that the baby is the property of patriarchy. She cannot tolerate the pain of her life which has given by patriarchy. Marc is the representative figure of patriarchy, who makes victim her again from the nightmares. She thinks that she is sleeping with ghosts. So, she rejects Marc’s purpose of marry.

Martine’s pregnancy represents the final rebellion of her body against her. Just as sex, for Martine is not a matter of pleasure, pregnancy is hardly a matter of children. It is rather a deeply troubling effect of the use of her body by men. As the father of her second child, Marc is implicitly contrasted with Sophie’s father. But pregnancy becomes the demand that Martine cannot fulfill. This demand literally becomes unbearable when Martine begins to hear the unborn fetus talking with her like a demon or a bogeyman. She says that, “It has a man’s voice, so now I know it’s not a girl. I am going to get it out of me [...]. He calls me a filthy whore” (217). That she associates her unborn boy with her rapist rather than Marc. According to her, she is not recovered from the rape trauma.

Martin suffers from pregnancy and is a victim of nightmares continuously at the night. She imagines that the baby is a ghost who is frightening at night. She has

been mad again in her life and the cause is same that is produced by sexual violence.

At last, she commits suicide because she wants to be free from the sinful world.

About her suicide Marc states:

“I woke up in the middle of the night. Sometimes, I wake up and she is not there, so, I was not worried, Two hour passed and I woke up again. I went to the bathroom and she was laying there.”

“She was lying there in blood.”

“She had a mountain of sheets on the floor, she had prepared this. “She stabbed her stomach with as old rusty knife. I counted, and they counted again in the hospital seventeen times.” (224)

This extract shows that the terrible scene of Martine’s suicide. She kills herself with the rusty knife stab in her stomach about seventeen times. She did so, because she wanted to be free from the all kinds of trouble. For Martine her body is the only site over which she can exercise power. For her the death is the only way of liberating herself from the living torture that she has experienced since the rape.

Martine’s death represents an attempt to directly attack the body that has been the source of her greatest pain. Simultaneously, suggestive of suicide, abortion and murder, Martine’s repeated stabs represent as assault on herself, her child and her attacker. Martine’s suicide represents her ultimate revenge on her attacker, as she destroys the body that is both hers and his. Her battle for liberation must take place on the field of the body. At last, Martine represents the revolutionary and brave woman who is fighting for freedom against patriarchy and ready to die.

After her mother’s death Sophie distracts physically and mentally. She cannot tolerate the pain of her mother’s death. She returns to Haiti to bury her mother and again reconnects with the tradition that she values. Despite the painful customs ingrained throughout Haitian tradition, Sophie recognizes that “The sacredness of the

mother-daughter relationship is essentially Haitian. Somehow, early on, our songs makes and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of this land” (230). After her mother’s burial, Sophie attacks the cane stalks and releases her aggression against the site that originally caused pain for three generation of woman in her family. The cane fields where her mother was rapped and her grandfather died of heatstroke. That the cane fields are a pounding part of Sophie’s consciousness means that it is the scene of subjection that she must returns to before she can become whole:

I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground. My palm was bleeding. The cane cutters stared at me as though I was possessed. The funeral crown was now standing between the stalks, watching me beat and pound the cane. My grandmother held back the priest as he tried to come for me. From where she was standing, my grandmother shouted like the women from the market place, “oulibere?” Are you free? (233)

In the given extract, Sophie attempts to reclaim her own body as she unleashes pent up terror and fear attacking the very cane fields and cultural customs that disabled her mother and the entire Caco family by extension. Sophie does not simply act or react. Instead this, scene in the cane fields suggests a confrontation with cultural history and social practices as she uses her body as the vehicle to rewrite dominant narratives. Importantly here, however the violence is enacted on the cane fields rather than on her own physical body. In this way, she frees herself from the debilitating subjection implicit in the previous scenes. Sophie’s actions here must be understood as her willful remembering of devastations enacted upon the bodies of her family members. The cane field represents to patriarchy. The cane field’s violence is the violence of

patriarchy so, the attack of Sophie is the struggle for freedom from patriarchal domination.

The novel ends with a scene in which Sophie runs to the cane fields and violently attacks the cane stalks. Metaphorically, she is confronting her mother's rapist and going further back in history. The very site in which patriarchy was practiced; Sophie is willfully remembering the past traumas and fighting for her freedom to control her own life. She has been linked to the long chain of Haitian women whose bodies has been controlled by parties more powerful than themselves. In the funeral procession of her mother, Sophie uses the red coffin on her mother's dead body. This is high contrast with the color red which Sophie associates with her dead mother. Sophie says that, "It was too loud a color for a burial. I knew it [. . .] she was the only woman with that power. It was too bright a red for burial. I chose it" (227). The red is a color of power, passion, courage and revolt. Sophie is able to draw strength from her past and turn the trails of the past into a triumph of freedom.

Sophie is able to direct her opposition towards the cane fields and not produce any more violence on her own body. She has found a way to turn back and use her body effectively in the process. Though, this confrontation with the past Sophie acquires wholeness. As her grandmother says, "Sophie will now know how to answer to the question "ou libere?" Are you free my daughter? (234). Her grandmother's account "ou libere?" becomes the symbolic ending of story passed from mother to daughter. Put otherwise, it is in the telling of a tale that a woman has the chance to truly become free. In the contest of the novel, Sophie's grandmother's speech suggests the deep power of narrative to name, identify, reconcile and resolve.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie comes to understand how important memory is in defining her identity. "I come from a place where breath, eyes, memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head" (234). Sophie's

past is in built in her as her eyes as essential to her as the air she breaths. Furthermore, Sophie compares memory with her eyes shows how much memory affects the way she perceives the world. Sophie has witnessed closely how women had tried to escape their past and she has seen how divesting the result can be.

Thus, at the end, Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is the document of the women's struggle for freedom from violence. It is the battle field of these women who are fighting for freedom from patriarchal tradition and sexual violence. They are suffering from patriarchal tradition, cultural custom, sexual exploitation and the body politics as well as they are struggling for their right, identities, and freedom from body politics and patriarchal violence. Women cannot accept the patriarchal tradition, cultural norms and values rather they are ready to die against such kinds of domination. Danticat has explored the cultural custom, patriarchal tradition, and body politics in Haitian society in this novel. She has brought the clear picture of woman's oppression and their painful condition as well as she has shown the struggle of women's for freedom from patriarchal violence and body politics.

III. Women's Struggle and Subversion of Patriarchy

This research finds that, the luminous picture of patriarchal domination upon female and the struggle of women for right, identity and freedom in Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath Eyes Memory*. Domination, frustration, death and degeneration brought women struggle against patriarchy. Women question about their position and search their existence in patriarchal society. It gives clear picture of domination and also gives courage to women to fight against all sorts of social, cultural and religious domination especially in patriarchal society.

In the novel, the protagonist Sophie struggles against the notion of conventional domestic culture and patriarchal sexual violence. In patriarchal society a woman is considered as passive whose task is to look after the household work and fulfill the male desire. But, Sophie does not indulge in such work which assigned to women. She tries to come out of such bondage for the sake of her self-identity, autonomy and freedom. Identity, individuality and autonomy are the essential things for human being, without them nobody can be happy and success in their life. So, women also need these essential things and they fight for them with patriarchy. Sophie is being victim of sexual exploitation, domination and cultural terror. She protests of virginity test.

Sophie is revolutionary woman who is very determined in her attitude and way. She does not self-surrender in front of patriarchy; rather she becomes ready to struggle against patriarchal domination and ideology. She is suffering from patriarchal activities and violence such as virginity test. Virginity test is a cultural tradition and belief which is related with the purity of young girl. The main purpose of this test is keep young girl's virgin until their marriage for their familial honor and prestige. If the young girl destroys her virginity before marriage she becomes spoilt and characterless for society and she cannot preserve the familial honor and dignity. It is a patriarchal ideology to suppress women in their way. It is practiced by mothers to their adult girl because mother should responsible about their daughter's purity to be

follower of patriarchal ideology of virginity test. Martine tests Sophie's virginity on her own bed to be sure she is virgin or not. Martine herself is tested by her mother in her youth. Martine dislikes virginity test although, she is accepting to be docile follower of patriarchy.

Sophie goes against the virginity test because it gives torture and mental pain to her. She breaks virginity herself with the help of spice pestle to be free from her mother's humiliating activities. Later, she elopes with Joseph to give challenge her mother and patriarchal tradition. Women are being victimized from different kinds of patriarchal violence. They are sexually exploited, culturally dominated and victimized from inhumanity, cruelty and injustice.

On the other hand, there is extreme sexual exploitation upon female characters in the novel. Most of all, female characters are suffered from sexual violence. The rape of Martine, the forceful sexual intercourse of Joseph with Sophie, his own wife without her interest, the rape of Chicana and so many other sexual scandals are the representative event of exploitation. Directly and indirectly, women are being victim of sexual violence in their life. They are living in sexual terror although, they are struggling against it. The abandon of Sophie to her husband and mother, the unity of sexual phobia group and the suicide of Martine shows their protest of sexual violence.

In conclusion, the revolt of Sophie shows the struggle of woman against patriarchy. Patriarchy is responsible for all kinds of exploitation and domination. It creates different types of obstacle and loots happiness and freedom of women. All the female characters are suffering from patriarchal violence. In every step, women are made weak, powerless, rightness and inferior in patriarchal society. So in the novel, Sophie is struggling against patriarchal violence, tradition and ideology. She is searching her self-identity, self-dignity, self-esteem and social justice in patriarchal society. Sophie is the representative character of all dominated and exploited women who are struggling for their right and freedom.

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