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Feminine Allegiance and Fidelity in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

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Abstract

This study analyzes Joseph Conrad's novel The Secret Agent from the feminist point of view. Women serve family and society by even sacrificing their personal ambitions and resources. The research explores the reasons behind the valorization of a female character, Mrs. Winnie Verloc, who persevere the human values through her character; feminine allegiance and fidelity. Conrad's main motive is to represent the genuine level of allegiance and fidelity of a woman to protect family values and familial bonding. Nancy Chodorow's ideas have been taken as methodological tool to interpret. She proposes that it is a woman's mothering process that gives way to a gendered identity. Additionally she puts forward the ideas that a mother is naturally able to relate to her daughter, and this bond or connection between mother and daughter helps in the development of the feminine identity is clearly portrays in the novel. The research finds that it is essential to preserve feminine fidelity and allegiance in order to uphold family peace and social solidarity in every human society. The project argues that Conrad's this novel has contributed on representation of patriarchal oppression in British society through the diverse and extreme level of suffering faced by women character. Women characters in the novel are dramatized in stereotypical, traditional and pathetic way. But Conrad's main motive is to represent the extreme level of patriarchal domination and insensitive patriarchy through women's suffering which operated in the British society.

Keywords

Allegiance, Fidelity, Maternal, Sacrifice, Subordinate.

Feminine Allegiance and Fidelity in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

Mrs Winnie Verloc, the main character from *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad's Sacrifices her personal happiness for the sake of peace in her family. Conrad's through the portrayal of Mrs. Winnie Verloc deliberates that feminine allegiance and fidelity can still be preserved during social anarchy. Therefore, necessity of feminine gender and its contribution to maintain peace and harmony in the society is major endorsement of the text. The single motivating force in Winnie's life is her complete maternal devotion to her mentally disabled brother Stevie. Mrs. Verloc sacrifices her personal happiness. It is this devotion which introduces almost everything she does and thinks. The life of the docile, avoiding, dependent Stevie is managed completely by the maternal love of Mrs. Verloc. Stevie always feel happy and secure when he was with his sister. It makes her heart- emotional and offering of her happiness for the sake of future.

Therefore, it is only feminine quality that stimulates her to first sacrifice love for the sake of family security (32). She sacrifice her first love to provide family love and social security for her old mother and mentally disable brother , this only done by female. Winnie's father was the bread winner of the family but he was not able to manage his family because he was drunkard, most of the time he used to lose his sense. So that, in both cases either financially or emotionally he was unable to support his family and fulfill family responsibility whereas, as a female from her childhood, Winnie has a capacity to run her family. At contemporary time, Winnie challenges the conservative norms and values of the society by providing security to her disabled brother. Winnie take care her brother just like her own son. She was very serious about his life and security. She forget her all pain and her first love because "Winnie found an object of quasi- maternal affection in her brother" (7). As a result, she

sacrificed her young love in order to Marry Mr. Verloc. The choice to offering her own love for a relationship that could protect her family shows that Winnie really defines who she is by taking care of Stevie. “ However, he never had any fits and before the natural outbursts of impatience on the part of his father he could always in his childhood’s days, run for protection behind the short skirts of his sister Winnie” (8). She found her all happiness in the innocent face and pure sole of Stevie. She always protects her brother from any difficulties. Woman can do this because they love their family and family is the first priority for every female like Winnie plays a similar role in the novel.

Winnie sacrifices her young but poor lover too. She marries Mr. Verloc, who is good natured and free handed and has no objections to taking Winnie’s mother and brother along with Winnie. Mrs. Winnie’s family faces an economic crisis, the family security and basic requirement was supplied by Mr. Verloc. As a result Mrs. Winnie remains a loyal and devoted for seven years for the sake of her brother Stevie. Perhaps the most important reason for the presence of Winnie in the novel is to make her maternal fidelity, the more affectionate and significant thing separated from external circumstances. Stevie is a young disable boy but his heart is very kind, soft thus there were some accident happen with Stevie. He is quickly affected by the small event and his surroundings. Here can see the innocent nature on Stevie in these line “It seem that two office- boys in the building had worked upon his feelings by tales of injustice and oppression till they had wrought his compassion to the pitch of that frenzy” (8). Apparently, Stevie lost the jobs in the past because two jerks working in his office got him all riled up about how badly the boss was treating them. So Stevie decided to go ahead and set off a bunch of fireworks in the company stairwell to show everyone how he felt about the situation. The problem is that, Stevie got fired and the two office

boys just laughed about the firework and kept their jobs. This above line shows us Stevie really wants to help other people but other people always want to utilize him for their personal benefit. It depicts us early on that Stevie's niceness make him an easy target for jerk who want to make him do what they want. At that situation Winnie obtained Stevie from the firework place and supports him by saying soft and loving words. Then after, she keep him at his house and make him busy by providing him paper, pencil and compass to make drawing. In this way she tries to overcome Stevie from this trauma in his life. She is very protective for him

When the novel was published in 1907 British society was transforming to modern society. At that time society is in the transcendence phase, society is moving towards the modern society where, criminal activities lie and deceit and moral degradation is normal for everyone. But Conrad in *The Secret Agent* through the character Stevie and Mrs. Verloc shows some loyalty and humanity is maintained. Conrad skillfully combines the public and private spheres and the institution of terrorism with domesticity through Winnie. Whereas the bombing of the Observatory fails in the narrative, the ultimate act of violence and authoritative power lie in Winnie. Out of the three deaths described in *The Secret Agent*, those of spying Verloc, unnatural suicide bomber Stevie and Winnie, only one is described clear example of Winnie's psychological being that Conrad focuses on giving Winnie and ultimate voice in the narrative. Despite the social and political upheld, Joseph Conrad portrays women figure to display humanity.

Winnie Verloc and her mother show a very deep devotion to Stevie but it is important not to confuse their loyalty with Stevie's compassion. Deep down, the poor guy think the world is supposed to be a friendly place full of rainbow, hearts, stars, and horse shoes but in reality the world is covered with lies and deceits. Stevie's

compassion comes from a really deep emotional connection with the world while he is disabling but he never harms other people. Winnie and her mother's protective attitude towards him is more like a sense of duty or an ongoing project. They always try to save him from the outer world.

The Secret Agent is concerned on the social, political, humanity and rules and order that include pride, loyalty, compassion, lie and deceit in the society. The story is set in London in the period of 1886, during the time of anarchist unrest. During the time of colonization, people of different countries wanted to settle in England and they established their secret agent in London. People from Russia, Europe and France came in London and started their agenda and business. The local English people faced many criminal activities explosion and insecurity toward their property in the London. Terrorism, revolutionary activities created the crime in the society of London. Even in such condition, by creating peace and harmony in the family and society female try to maintain solidarity in the society. Therefore the novel through feminine fidelity and allegiance the social morality could be saved.

According to Conrad, *The Secret Agent* in which he reveals that the book plot is inspired by the "Greenwich Bomb outrage" of February 1854, which happened when young anarchist named Martial Bourdon, blew himself up in Greenwich Park after a bomb he was carrying exploded in his hands (56). While others like anarchists, Marxists and left wing revolutionaries were shouting that society in general had to be blown up so they could start over and get it right. Among all the spy games and explosions through, *The Secret Agent* is at its heart, is a family drama. The novel's title character Mr. Verloc is representing as a man with heavy eye and with the appearance of "having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed" (4). This physical appearance of Mr. Verloc is similar a well-to-do tradesman, but he gives off

an air of living off the vice and follies of mankind. He is a part of an anarchist organization that creates pamphlets under the heading *The Future of Proletariat*. Verloc “thoroughly domesticated” and content to stay close to home, near his wife and his mother in law (5), definitely seems to like his wife Mrs. Winnie, who in turn seems to think about nothing beyond the safety of her mentally disabled brother Stevie. So, Conrad purposefully wrote the book *The Secret Agent* to shake everyone’s faith in humanity, loyalty towards every person, question the rules that regulate society, collapse the ideas of fairness and order and expose the chaos behind everything.

A critic George A. Panichas take the novel as moral exploration. He writes:

A novel of rigorous moral exploration, it force one to see the things the world that one has hitherto not seen, or has refused to see, or has fear to see. As such this novel also helps a reader to gain some semblance of “moral discovery” and in the process, to discern more sharply the deeper meanings of lives viewed in the context of assertion that have a confluent and recurrent motifs in *The Secret Agent*: “This isn’t an easy world”; “life doesn’t stand much looking into” “it may be good for one not to know if irony becomes in Thomas Mann’s phrase” form of morality. (420)

George focus on the difficult lives of the common people imperial society, in Britain, imposes its power with domination, exploitation and dehumanization while extending its boundary of imperialism. At that time power of resistance and limits of opponents were growing in the societies which close together the way for the revolution. It means that the way the world is difficult for the people who are from working class, the way they are developing their consciousness for freedom from the domination of power. George analyzes that the novel has presented hitherto not seen acts of

characters. They are represented as moral beings who fought for freedom. According to him, the moral exploration of the text enforces one to observe the hitherto unseen things of the imperial world. Here, the people from minority have fear to see the world of colonization. They have hesitation; they could not sustain their life easy. The existence of the people in the society is very unrealistic. The world is not smooth for them because of the practice of imperialism. So, George mainly exposes his attitude on the basis of morality to discover the real existential lives of the people. In this sense this novel discovers the unseen morality of nineteenth century England.

Similarly, Christina Mathews in her article “The Manner of Exploding”: Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* and *Men at Home*”, Conrad’s provided unstable identities to his major Victorian characters that are playing a great role on the spy game of anarchism. Connecting *The Secret Agent* with its historical moment is, of course not new. Critics have often seen the novel as either engaged, consciously or unconsciously, with political issues facing late Empire Britain or as a novel concerned with family life in the same period. The first set of critics tend to see the novel’s domestic component- the married life of Winnie and Adolf Verloc- as metaphorically tied to the national political crises that are the novel’s principal concern.

They tend to see the national and traditionally political issues the novel raises- the anarchists with whom Verloc’s associates, the unnamed embassy that employs him- as window dressing for the central issue, which revolves around a domestic melodrama. For instance, Rishona Zimring argues that in *The Secret Agent* “nation and home coincide”, and Conrad figures “domesticity as violence” (320): his novel is an attempt to establish “a masculine domesticity which involves the reunification of the nation –as- home”. In her reading, women- insubordinate women like Winnie- are the dominant national problem. Similarly, Geoffrey Harpham traces a direct line from

the Home Secretary to the Verloc home, and, having followed this line, “announces that family dynamics lie at the heart of the novel” (99). Hence, Conrad found it difficult to return to England after a period of nationally important and exciting service abroad, often for the expressed purpose of establishing a respectable family.

Similarly, Stephen Skinner in “A Benevolent Institution for the Suppression of Evil”: Joseph The secret Agent and limits of Policing”. He illustrates the reality of the society where the police are not able to control the criminal activities in the society.

The police may appear to ‘suppress evil’ with varying degrees of success, but in Conrad’s world they ignore the more unqualified issues of social well-being and the emotional web surrounding criminal acts, so suppressing the emotional complexity that holds the key to the mystery they are seeking to explain. (9)

They are unable to solve the crime completely and are shown to represent a limited form of security that is immaterial to the deeper, existential moral ill- beings of urban society. Hence, Conrad is recognized as one of the modernist and powerful writers. His work *The Secret Agent*, one of his few land based tales, being set in London around 1886, is an unorthodox detective story and an emotionally charged domestic drama. It has received much attention from literary critics, especially due to its elaborate use of irony and juxtapositions to present Conrad’s dark interpretation of moral sorrowfulness of man as a social animal together with his designing, crazy critique of English society. Thus, Conrad’s life is therefore a sub textual element of varying visibility in his primary project of reflecting on human condition and his very test is itself subjectively and emotionally charged.

Likewise, Roger D Spegele in his article “Classical Liberalism” and Conrad’s “The Secret Agent”, takes skepticism involves a dim view of human nature, a deep

mistrust of idealism, and rejection of “divine truth” (83). Against these abstractions, Conrad sets combine, visible, and touchable reality. He wishes to clear out the delusions which wait for the ignorant and unwary; particularly the delusion that “ideas” or reason can liberate man from nature and lead in a harmonious, orderly political society. To set up such power standards leads not to man’s liberation but, on the negative, to his self control, annoyed and enslavement. One of the functions of city is the protection of the individual’s right to property and from the Verloc’s observation; property does indeed play an important role in the middle class society.

In the novel *The Secret Agent* Conrad uses of the strong word ‘profoundly’ contributes to the image of women as helplessly inflexible beings, as Conrad suggests that Winnie’s blindness to the importance of the country political situation, seeing as her lack of depth is something in which she herself believe in seriously. This concept is explored by critique Stephanie Brown as she states: “It is hard to imagine a character less politically inclined than Winnie Verloc; building on Conrad’s presentation of women being native dependent and simply unable to meet the means for political consent” (130).

Thoroughly, Stephanie Brown claims that the novel draws on gendered criteria for citizenship in order to designate appropriate political actors and forms of political participation. It means that, at Conrad’s choice utilize Winnie as a symbol for women, as political innocence acts as a reflection of the stereotypical societal beliefs. Brown goes on to discuss how an deal political community is generated by excluding attitudes and type’s people believes ‘unhealthy’ with regard to their influence on England’s political life- Winnie therefore represents the exclusion on women from the perfect polis. Conrad also discuss how Winnie makes “how force and her wisdom of that instinct” (130). This statement is unusual as it implies that strangely. Winnie

supposedly comes from the fact that she is lacking in political depth; it is worth noting that Winnie's unexpected actions of Verloc's murder suppose this statement to an extent. This description of female protagonist serve as a device of designing foreshadowing, as the reader is led to consider the ways in which a character as seemingly powerless Winnie can exercise her stereotypical image to aid.

When analyzing the characters critically, the researcher finds Mr. Verloc as a secret agent as described by Conrad, is indolence. He has been employed by an unnamed embassy to spy on revolutionary groups which then appoint him to instigate a terrorist act against the Greenwich observatory. He is a part of leftist organization that creates pamphlet under the heading *The Future of the Proletariat*. He is married to Winnie and lives with his wife, his mother-in-law and his brother-in-law, Stevie. Similarly, another character, Mrs. Winnie Verloc cares deeply for her brother, Stevie who has mental age of young child of working class origin; her father was the owner of a pub. Hence, the Verloc family has its origin of working class. Another member belonging to Verloc's family is Mrs. Verloc, her mother, who is old and weak. Her weakness and dependence over Mr. Verloc brings her to leave the household to live in an alehouse. This character's pathetic situation is the result of inattention of the government. After facing the entire problem Mrs. Winnie Verloc takes care of her family according to her capacity. Nancy Chodorow, in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* said that: Women are naturally seen as the automatic caretaker and primary parent in society due to sexual and gender role. Mrs. Winnie mother take care her two children in the absence of her husband. She runs small shop and from that income she provides need of her children. According to the Nancy, she represents "The mother is the early care giver and primary source of identification for all children. A daughter continues to identify with the mother" (3). Similarly, after her father death, Mrs.

Winnie takes care of her disable brother and old mother.

Even though, people of that time thought women were powerless they were not able to run their family smoothly in the absence of men but Winnie proved them wrong, married with Mr. Verloc as an option and supplied all the facilities to her disable brother and old mother. She challenges the male dominated society and puts her first step against the patriarchy society. She is success to unite her family after her married without her father.

Keeping in tone with other critic on Conrad, Joyce Carol Oates wrote that Conrad's "quite serious idea of a 'heroine' is always someone who "effaces herself completely, who is eager to sacrifice herself in the ecstasy of love for her man" (121). So how does Winnie Verloc, and Vicky McClure's portrayal of their character defy Mrs. Verloc is always ready to help her family, self-sacrificing features are always we found on Winnie life. Winnie, as critic notes, still positioned within the domestic sphere, marries for convenience and believes deeply "Life doesn't stand much looking into" (130). Yet Marchant's adaption gives focus to Winnie's role and demonstrates how *The Secret Agent* serves as a re-examination of the female within patriarchal society. Vicky McClure gives credence to Winnie as an active agent within the domestic sphere and touching conveys Winnie's character in a manner that transforms Winnie into a signifier for "everywoman". Significantly, Winnie is the only protagonist in the novel to manipulate institutional structure cleverly using the institution of marriage to escape an abusive father and marrying Verloc to ensure security for herself and her disabled brother.

The *Secret Agent* captures the time of unrest nineteenth century society. But Conrad's modern novel *The Secret Agent* reflects the problem of both an urban space and an urban society of the London in which Conrad sets the novel affected regulates

sphere where every character is linked to many other characters. For instance, through the character Mr. Verloc by his anarchist activities people in the market were not able to live in a peaceful environment likewise, his homely ambience is also not good because his spy friends came at their home. And talk about war, bomb blast and many other criminal activities. Rather than giving each person a sense of belonging the myriad connections only make them feel all the more lost and alone within the great city. At the same time, Conrad invests much time to narrate the relationship between brother and sister (Stevie and Winnie) that is primarily mediated through the sense of sight. Now the question arises- What is the basis of Winnie's devotion to Stevie? How is her devotion and loyalty different from Stevie's compassion? How is Winnie's devotion to Stevie similar to or different from her mother? What pushes her over the edge and makes her kill (own husband) Mr. Verloc?

Conrad's description of the female protagonist Winnie Verloc provides the readers with an insight into the generally contemptuous attitude toward women of the Victorian era. Conrad presents Winnie as some way "politically and intellectually ignorant" a notion which was carried by the patriarchal society of the late nineteenth century. The characteristics of Mrs. Winnie also indicate to the expectations of women to fulfill their purpose as wives and mothers as Winnie is said to be obeying an internal 'instinct', therefore suggesting that her sole motivation is to serve her husband and her brother Stevie. However, Conrad suggests that rather than providing her with a sense of fulfillment, Mrs. Verloc's marital position only creates in her life. Winnie ultimately comes to represent the Victorian woman; in Conrad's words 'equable', 'motionless', 'placid' (130). Therefore, these words allow the reader to consider the passive nature of women such as Mrs. Verloc and her mother are influenced by societal expectations.

Similarly, Conrad reflects the narrow minded attitude of Victorian society as he addresses political participation in relation to gender, implying that women are politically weak minded and valueless discontinuity of the state. Here, Conrad's build this idea by portraying Winnie as somewhat weak minded, stating that "she felt profoundly that thing do not stand much looking into" (130). According to this line Mr. Verloc does not understand Winnie's attachment to her brother Stevie. Conrad repeats this line a bunch of times when he is describing Winnie, and he does show us the real problem with Mrs. Verloc. She is devoted to her brother. She is the only one who intentionally chooses to be innocent in a world full of jerks but Conrad says she is the real fighter in the novel. Mrs. Winnie is always pulled back, because deep down, she feels like everything will work out if she stays in the dark and just thinks about Stevie and protects him like her own child. This idea of matter being 'looked into' hints at the nature of women, who during Conrad's lifetime were largely viewed as politically irrelevant and for this reason, those such as Winnie showed very little interest in diplomatic occurrences.

Winnie's perception that 'life does not stand looking into' means expressing that human life cannot stand consciousness. Because Winnie is the only fully conscious character in the novel besides the husband and mentally disable brother Stevie. She emerges as the hero, her loyalty and devotion lead her life in heroism. It is she who sees the horror of living and in her last moments, paradoxically, embraces this useless life. Accepting the meaninglessness she has discovered, Winnie end is tragic, not because she dies, but because she sees and fights as she does, she cannot live without meaning.

Another way Conrad addresses feminine fidelity and allegiance through central character Mrs. Winnie Verloc as a mother and a wife. He implants multiple

slights that hint at her subordinate nature, suggesting that her predominant purpose as a woman is to simply adopt a maternal and marital role. After marriage every woman's first duty is to take care of their husband and his family member. Mr. Verloc is going to meet his political friend in early morning. The climate is very cold as a loyal woman she suggests him to wear warm clothes because according to this society taking care of husband after married is the first responsibility of woman. For example, the first words spoken by Mrs. Verloc are simply "You'll catch a cold walking about in your socks like this" (130). Generally this dialogue shows women are very sensitive about their male partner's health. Thus demonstrating that her automatic response as a woman is to tend to Verloc as her husband and he was superior than her. Conrad intensifies the significance of her obedient nature by following her speech with the statement "This speech becoming the solicitude of the wife and the prudence of the woman" (130). Here Conrad informs the reader of how Winnie is almost subconsciously driven by her compulsion as a wife to the extent of which she can barely act without this influencing her. Similarly, Stephanie Brown states and discusses Winnie's fashion as a fulfilling role for herself as Stevie's mother and sister, yet this dependence fixes by Stevie to give her life purpose only contributes to the novel's assessment of her unfitness as a political actor.

Furthermore, Conrad refers to Mrs. Winnie's 'instinct' for a second time, stating that "The singleness of purpose had the unerring nature and the force of an instinct" (131). Here the words 'purpose', 'nature', 'force' and 'instinct' are particularly vibrant as they each related to the responsibility of Winnie as a woman deeply motivated by her marital position. Despite the purpose granted to Mrs. Verloc as a wife, Conrad also conveys a sense of isolation as he reveals that Winnie feels an acute pain of loneliness. The emotion employed by Conrad therefore marks the

suffering supported by Winnie as a result of her womanhood and her loyalty to her husband Mr Verloc.

Conrad suggests that Mrs. Verloc's loneliness is triggered by her marriage it has come to obstacle her ability to construct her own identity; instead she has become shaped by men. This is referred to by Critic John Palmer, who states that Winnie is one of Verloc's essential victims. This is represented through Conrad's description of her being "under her husband's expressionless stare" (130). It conveys a sense of ownership, hinting as Winnie lack of independence as a Victorian wife. The use of the word 'under' is significant, as it implies that Winnie is not only subject to Mr. Verloc's blink, but her as a being under him short term of social authority. The words 'stare' also hints at the treatment of Winnie and women as a social group in the late nineteenth century, as it suggests that her husband is always surveying her behavior due to the expectations and pressure of society. Conrad presents her as woman who cannot even properly consent to her own marriage stating that the portrayal of Winnie demonstrates how female permissions is merely shaped by fragile familial and economic bonds. This is suggesting that as a woman, Winnie's reasons for marriage are by no means romantic, simply practical a matter touched.

Similarly, there was a communication gap between Mr. Verloc and Mrs. Verloc. So, it is the main cause of their unsuccessful marriage. Another reason is Stevie's death. It is an important aspect of the explosion in Greenwich Park. That event brings big changes in their lives. The anarchist's characters are represented as the modern men as they believe on revolution through modern science which brings changes on society. Conrad intends to gain necessary wisdom, loyalty and humanity on the nineteenth century society through women's role in their family protection. There is no reason and in result gain after explosion of bomb in Greenwich Park also,

through the innocent and disabled brother of Mrs. Verloc, the writer intends to emphasize on the family relationship in the everyday life is also somehow affected by the modernity. In the concept of modern man there is no any kindness and morality for the human being. They thought they are superior, and they want to maintain peace by the explosion of bomb in the public place but they forget peace first comes from the family. According to Conrad, Stevie's death is an example of inhumanity and cruelty of modern people towards the innocent people and great loss of loyalty and trust of the family relationship.

Different critical opinions and interpretation in the novel, the female character Mrs. Winnie Verloc and her brother Stevie prove contribution of Joseph Conrad and popularity of his creativity in the field of art and literature especially in the English Literature. The novel has remained popular for the plot line and depiction of character which is realistic and leaves the audience/ reader edified, touched and moved. So, critics have different opinions and interpretations regarding the novel *The Secret Agent*. It is clear that though the text has been analyzed from various perspectives, feminist perspective of issue of representation has not been applied. Hence, the project aims to studying the novel of Conrad through the critical eye on the issue of suffering faced by female character. 'Theory of feminism' will be taken as a methodical tool to critique on the representation of patriarchy to cause the suffering faced by female characters in the novel.

Feminism is a doctrine that can be defined as a political cum literary movement which advocates for the equality and women's position in culture and society. Feminism concerned with the issue related to gender equality and women's right in various fields like politics, education, religion, sex, economy, raise voice for freedom and liberty. Moreover, it is a discipline which refuses to accept the

traditional male centered culture and faith of masculine chauvinism and superiority which reduces women as object, second sex, inferior and submissive. And feminist theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relation and sexuality. Theme explored in feminist theory includes discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, oppression and patriarchy.

To talk of this issue in particular, Barbara Welter in her essay '*The Cult of True Womanhood*' describes the women of nineteenth century America and Great Britain as a hostage in the home who composed four cardinal virtues, piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Mrs. she confronted her husband, grabbed a carving knife and stabbed him in the heart and killed him. The violent scene symbolizes the end of the Verloc's household and end of patriarchy. To reinforce the theme of isolation where the woman is considered as the other, Conrad regulated the couple's domestic life without any exchange or communication. "Verloc loves his wife- as a wife should be loved- that is, martially, with the regard one has for one's possession" (179). To maintain this system, women are used as sexual scapegoats by men and reversed as a shared desire or common goal. As a result, women are not permitted from attaining positions of power. Due to this domineering social construct, Winnie in *The Secret Agent* is shown as hopelessly weak and subordinate to her husband.

Through the suffering of women and the attitude of male characters regarding the women characters it is revealed that women in Victorian period were taken as an object to fulfill male needs either physical or domestic and nothing more As Ketu Katrak in *Politics of Female Body* highlights that, "Wifhood and marriage are portrayed at times as fulfilling and at other as enslaving" (165).The sufferings of all female characters like (Mrs. Winnie Verloc) plays and the attitude of male characters

like (Mr. Verloc) Conrad gives a vivid picture of suffering of British women in the male dominated society. Through feminist interpretation of the book the project will contribute on cultural studies. Conrad from every hook and corner dramatizes the issue related to female in British society in his novel. Conrad represents the same images of women and men in English culture in which male are supposed to be self-confident, rational, dominant and female as sacrificing, dependent, anxious to please, emotional and subordinate. They are dramatized as submissive, docile, faithful, and domestic in the house of males. Conrad by dramatizing the suffering of female character in his novel provides a way of analyzing the contemporary society in which women are behaved as objects in male dominated society.

The moral codes, values, beliefs, norms, ideology of English society are very orthodox and it is even more orthodox when it comes to women. They are supposed to follow the rules and restriction. As the society is male dominated women have been under the male ideology and supremacy. The ideology of the society, norms value, tradition, and religion, custom is the main determinant for the oppression of women as they are patriarchal in nature. These lines suggest that the condition of women under marriage institution is really pathetic. The wife has insignificance and meaningless of her existence inside a system called marriage institution and family. In politics of female body highlights that:

Sometime it was Mrs Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell.

Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips. Her hair was very tidy. Steady-eyed like her husband, she preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter. (4)

Mrs Verloc is just like a domestic worker. She realizes that and even calls Mr. Verloc

her 'Lord'. Mrs Winnie Verloc is an object for professional success or benefit while Mrs Verloc is also an object in the domestic world to provide physical enjoyment, social companionship and comfort for Mr. Verloc. She is just like a slave in the world dominated by her husband.

Winnie's story can and should be seen with in the contemporary political context of the struggle for women's emancipation, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become an important feature of the British political scene. Conrad was only too aware of the fact that Victorian notions of the role of women in society were increasingly seen as being anachronistic and no longer acceptable. The idea that women ought to be subordinate to their husbands and that their lives ought to be confined to the world of their daily household chores was being met with oppositions. In *The Secret Agent*, however, this opposition is provoked by an exceptional event which utterly devastates Winnie after the death of her brother. For this, which she blames her husband and not excuse him for his criminal works.

Similarly another feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, in her theory gender identity talks of gender as a "social construct". Gender is constructed by the norms and value of the patriarchal society. She states: "One is not born a genius, one becomes a genius and the feminine situation has up to the present rendered this becoming practically impossible" (200). Over all in the novel men talk about gender as dominated the women indirectly in their daily workout. There is a matter of construction. Various theoretical notion proposed by Simone de Beauvoir can be fruitful for the critical examination of feminine allegiance and fidelity in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. In her essay '*The Second Sex*', she says women should be educated like a male and women would no longer focus only on superficial aspects such a cosmetic and clothes. Their role would be enriched by going beyond being

only mother and wives. She also says that no women are born women by birth but she is constructed by the norms and values of the society. In the novel too, Mrs. Verloc's life is designed by the social norms and culture of that time. She spent her whole life looking after her disabled brother; she is limited in the four walls of the house and doing household works. She is treated as a voiceless a Victorian woman who sacrifices her personal happiness for the benefit of the family. On the other hand, in the British society men are superior then women they had all rights. Men could work at any job, have education and they had complete control over their marriage and wife.

Virginia Woolf talks of domestic violence which is also found in the novel. Mr. Verloc controls the whole family members. Mr. Verloc teaches his wife to be modest (Mrs. Verloc) to be soft and behave well to his friends (7). In the male dominated society there is lack of freedom and opportunity for women. Women are less valued than the male in the society. In her essay '*A Room of One's Own*' Virginia Woolf presents a female character Mary Beton was also suffering from the male domination in every field like education, in public places and in the economic sectors. Woolfs States: "Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). Female character in Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* undergoes the same problem. Mrs. Winnie Verloc is not educated; she does not have economic power she is depended on her husband for everything. In both cases female characters did not have a "private space" to improve their life. Mrs. Verloc lives in a small house with her husband, her brother Stevie and her widow mother. There is no place for her private activities. Due to the lack of private space she cannot express her feeling and not be able to improve her personality. She only thinks about her brother and family

she never gives time for herself. The lines state the same problem Stevie could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him (133). In his desperate attempt to think of a solution for all the pain and badness in the world, Stevie decides that he has to find an example of perfect compassion and bring everything back to it. For him, the best feeling ever is the feeling he had growing up when Winnie would take him into her bed. Stevie would never associate going to bed with anything sexual. Instead, he remembers the feeling of Winnie bringing him into her bed to comfort him when he was growing up. So he wants to take this example and bring the whole world to bed with him. This passage gives us a really close look at the bond between Stevie and Winnie, while also showing how impossible it is for Stevie to heal the world. All these activities show the lack of private space for Mrs. Winnie Verloc.

Likewise, we can also find Mary Wollstone Craft in her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She talks of about the educational system. If girls were allowed the same advantage as boys, women would be not only exceptional wives and mothers but also capable workers. She accepts that women's sphere is in the home a common belief during her time, but she did not isolate the home from the public life as many others had. She thought public life and domestic life were not separate but connected. The home was important to Wollstone Craft because it forms a foundation for social life and public life. However, involvement of women in every field or they are also active in social, economic and political life. According to her, marriage is like as friendship. But in the novel the relationship of Mr. Verloc and Mrs. Verloc there is no communication, this gap creates major problem in their marriage. Mary also used her theory middle class women must be economical independent. She also explains the

pressure of woman in the family. In the novel also Mrs. Verloc is completely a family woman who spends her all time for the loving, caring and solving the family problem. Winnie represents the middle class Victorian women, only focuses on the family, norms and value of the era.

This thesis explores feminist issue in the novel. It explores and analyzes how women character is treated and how easily woman sacrifices their personal happiness: shown to be the source of family happiness. The traditional notion about the role of women hindered the proper development of a women's personality. A woman is expected to be patient, meek, obedient, submissive, and faithful and is conditioned to subordinate her wish and desire under patriarchy and male dominated society. Patriarchal system, forces women to conform to this type of role so that they can be disciplined and controlled. Conrad wants to suggest that women remain as a victim because of such kind of sociological conditioning fine on them. The women characters of Conrad are submitting themselves to the injustice, violence and harassment done by the male characters in the novel. Conrad writes about Verloc injustice to Winnie. He writes:

He never offered to take Winnie to theatres; as such a nice gentleman ought to have done. His evenings were occupied. His work was in a way political, he told Winnie once. She would have, he warned her, to be very nice and polite to his political friends. And with her straight, unfathomable glance she answered that she would he so, of course. (7)

Mr. Verloc, through this dialogue with Mrs. Verloc, reveals his male domination to his wife. Male chauvinism and patriarchy survive high in the Victorian society. Conrad reflects the condition of women suffering due to norms and values is the factors in his plays. Conrad's has shown his woman characters in very pathetic way

tolerating all the mistreatments given by male but by this he just wanted to give reflection of the English patriarchal society. He is trying to give vivid picture of all possible aspects of social realities.

In one way or other, this novel illustrates the women's suffering. All female characters have degraded life. They do not experience the progress, freedom and pleasure in life. Conrad's has raised a variety of compelling issue such as the relationship between men and women, gender roles, marital status and human sexuality. Though the female characters try to free themselves from the cultural suppression and restriction for their identity, freedom within a narrow boundary they cannot get victory. They are forcefully controlled by the males like Mr. Verloc and Mr. Vladimir. Women are as the toys or any other means of entertainment for the male.

Women character never raises their voice against their domination. In British the traditional custom and belief are biased when it comes to women. Such belief and custom also facilitate the oppression. That is why there is not any revolutionary step taken by women characters in the novel. Their voices are never heard because they are represented by traditional Victorian society as shown in the novel. So, Conrad is just a medium to reflect the patriarchal attitude which oppresses women.

The females in patriarchal societies are taught to values the male's rules and values though these rules and regulation are against female freedom and prosperity. Conrad shows the British society with all its hypocrisy, taboos and social which demoralize women to minimal level. He highlights the factors which conditions the freedom of the female to live, grow and actualize herself the way men do. The manner in which religion, tradition and myth are misused to condition women into an acceptance of the secondary status causing them to lead claustrophobic and

circumscribed life. The norms, value, moral codes are totally in favor of men as the society is male dominated. Thus, this research unveils the condition of female suffering in each and every sphere of patriarchal society especially during Conrad's time.

Stevie applied himself to that past time with great industry, with his elbows spread out and bowed low over the kitchen table. Though the open door of the parlors at the back of the shop Winnie, his sister, glanced at him from time to time with maternal vigilance. (9)

As the quote above suggests, this is the first real taste you get of the devotion that Winnie has for her brother. The mention of the word "maternal" shows you that Winnie acts more like a mother to Stevie than a sister. The sense of this devotion will only get stronger as the story unfolds, but at this early moment, you are just given a hint of it. But the portrayal of female character is to tribute to female dignity. Which is more than mother's to Stevie than as a sister. Winnie watches Stevie as he draws his circles, a perfectly innocent activity that makes Stevie seem kind of childlike. Check out Conrad's wording, though, which does not say, "love," but "vigilance." Winnie's devotion to Stevie is not the same thing as compassion. It's protective, inflexible, and maybe a little competitive. Mrs. Verloc protects and cares him as a mother.

There had been a steady young fellow, only son of a butcher in the next street [...] that romance came to an abrupt end, and Winnie went about looking very dull. But Mr Verloc, turning up providentially to occupy the first floor front bedroom there had been no more question of the young butcher. (33)

Winnie sacrifices her love for her brothers well being. Who thinks that the end of Winnie's relationship with the butcher boy was something "providential" or good

sent? The woman turns a blind eye to the fact that Winnie has given up her true love for the sake of her family. She probably knows the truth deep down feels guilty about it. With this decision, Winnie no longer lives for herself, but lives only for the safety of her brother. It's not really clear if the novel supports her decision, because her sacrifice only leads to death. Winnie makes an enormous sacrifice to provide for her brother who is retarded and her mother who is weak when she gives herself in marriage to Mr Verloc who is shocking.

Although she dearly loves poor and needy butcher's son, he had "no accommodation for passengers [Winnie's brother and mother]" in his boat of life. Conrad's record Winnie's life from the time she was a young girl until the time the novel is set and show her unprotected as a woman who accept her domestic role. The Victorian domestic ideology roots on two central components: the binary logic of separate spheres whereby the feminine domain of private life and feeling opposes the masculine domain of public life and work, and the figure of the domestic woman capitalize both with a moral authority that derives from her sacrificial spirit and a socioeconomic authority that rests on the management of a house hold and the representation of familial virtues. The novel is set around the contemporary domestic ideology and demonstrates that throughout her life Winnie she has had to make compromises.

Mrs. Verloc, turning towards her recumbent husband, raised herself on her elbow, and hung over him in her anxiety that he should believe Stevie to be a useful member of the family. That ardor of protecting compassion exalted morbidly in her childhood by the misery of another child tinged her sallow cheeks with a faint dusky blush. (47)

Here, the narrator actually uses the word "compassion" to describe Winnie's bond

with Stevie. It suggests that this bond was created in their childhood, when Winnie had to protect Stevie from their abusive foolish of a father. We see here that Winnie's bond with Stevie seems to come directly from their experience of abuse, and she is come to think of Stevie as an extension of herself. He represents total innocence and helplessness to her, and this is probably why she is able to sympathize directly with the pain he felt, because she felt it too. Winnie's oppression has originated from an earlier bitter experience, the horrible paternal domination.

As we can see in the the memory of her father and his last words towards her is still alive in her mind. Winnie tries to express these scenes of violence through vision full of tasteless noise, deep sound and awful silence that she witnessed in her childhood. As a young girl, she protects Stevie from her father's violence.

She had wept because she was heroic and unscrupulous and full of love for both her children [...] of course, Winnie was independent, and need not care for the opinion of people that she would never see and who would never see her; whereas poor Stevie had nothing in the world he could call his own expect his mothers heroism and unscrupulousness. (128)

Stevie's mother figure that in order to make sure Stevie gets as much sympathy from Mr. Verloc possible, go live on her own in an almshouse. She does not do this to guarantee Stevie's protection, but just too slightly increase his chances. Both Winnie's mother and Winnie completely define themselves through their ability to protect Stevie. The end of this passage also makes Winnies mother seem a little self-congratulatory, since she seems to consciously think of herself as heroic for protecting her son. Here, Conrad might be hinting that Winnie's mother or kind of likes the ideas of being a martyr, and there might be some self- interest in the way she looks out for Stevie.

Might be father and son, she said to herself. She thought also that Mr Verloc was as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life. She was aware also that it was her work. And with peaceful pride she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she had taken a few years before. It had cost her some effort, and even a few tears. (148)

Like her mother, Winnie is not above giving herself a pat on the back for protecting Stevie. The passage also mentions the sacrifice that Winnie made in her younger years when she decided to break up with her young lover so she could marry the much older Verloc. The mention of the father symbol is just above as warm a thought as Winnie has throughout this book because she dreams of Stevie finding a place in Verloc's heart. Winnie is completely given herself to Stevie, and the only way she is ever going to feel happiness is if Stevie feel secure and happy. Then, again living through somebody else never tends to work out. It is actually Winnie's devotion to Stevie that make her lose her mind after he is dead, because she has no clue that she is without him. She remembers brushing the boy's hair and tying his pinafores- herself in a pinafore still; the consolations administered to a small and badly scared creature by another creature nearly as small but not quite so badly scared (192).

News of Stevie's death creates a huge flashback for Winnie, where she remembers the entire life she has spent caring for him. The whole thing has come to an end now, and Winnie's devotion no longer has anything to hold onto. The fact that Stevie's been completely blown to bits even rob her of a body to mourn over, and this fact is actually part of what inspires her to make a Verloc- kebab with her carving knife. The thought that her brother's been scooped up like kitty litter destroys her. This event in particular also reminds us just how young Winnie was when she started caring for Stevie. The closest she is ever come to having her own life is her romance

with the butcher's boy. These images of love, protection and fidelity overwhelm her, and she cannot reconcile this new world with no Stevie, with a husband who expects her to accept part of the blame for this destruction. Conrad writes:

The protection she had extended over her brother had been in its origin of a fierce and indignant complexion. She had to love him with a militant love. She had battled for him even against herself. His loss had the bitterness of defeat, with the anguish of a baffled passion. (137)

Here, we really get a good sense of Winnie's devotion to Stevie, and how there's a lot more to it than Stevie's brand of simple compassion. Winnie's given her whole life to Stevie and has done best who she is on her ability to protect the boy. That's why when Stevie dies, she basically dies with him. This is not just because she loves him, but She sacrifices her life for him. Winnie is a symbol of self- sacrifice.

Joseph Conrad's portrayal of female character reveals the ideologies of prejudice against women and patriarchy that operated in the hierarchal both colonialism and British society. Women's voices are never raised because they are represented as docile and fragile by Victorian society as. Man has all the right to do whatever they like in the society. All the rights are reserved especially for them. A woman does not have the basic rights also and cannot enjoy their in total freedom due to dominant patriarchal culture and tradition. Man and women are treated differently in Victorian society. Patriarchy complicates gender oppression where men and women are subjected differently. Women are only objectified collectively through the figure of child bearer and nurture of the cultural and family values of the society. Conrad's dramatizes these issues of female suffering in his novel. Although his characterization does not oppose dominant gender ideology where women figured in mainstream literary works embody notions of culture continuity and conservative

value but his sole purpose of doing this is to give the true sight of patriarchal norms and values which is orthodox in nature when it comes to women.

On the surface study of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* it seems that Conrad represents women in traditional manner as sensitive, meek, domestic, oppressed, other, and inferior and in same stereotypical way as most of the phallogentric literature usually does but deep study proves to the fact that he has not internalized the patriarchal attitude towards representation of women. The proof is Winnie characterization to exemplify Women's sacrifice for family bonding and happiness.

Conrad's through women's character suffering give vivid reflection of patriarchal society. There is a paradoxical saying that, to understand about the insensitive patriarchy one has to know the level of suffering faced by women in the society. So, through the medium of suffering and silence of women characters like Mrs. Winnie Verloc and her mother shows the corruption of insensitive patriarchy operated in British society during Conrad time. His sole purpose in representing all the female characters facing suffering and in all its helplessness is to give the true scenario of patriarchal norms and values which positions women to secondary level.

In this sense, the present research raises some of the issues of modern British society which demoralizes women to minimal level has tried to explore the deep rooted silence and suffering which women faced in many societies. As a result, this research attempts to represents the depressed voice of women and their suffering in male dominated societies. It further encourages all the people who are interested to help in such problems and make the concerned authorities aware about the situation.

The Secret Agent offers a different reading of the gender role and domestic structure that have produced complete misery in western middle class culture. Conrad

resolves the conflict between Winnie and the patriarchal house by making her leaving the falling down house. The paradise home that would embody the author's cherished ideals, Conrad's home was browbeaten by a political exile ironically, ends with the falling down of the novel's house. In *The Secret Agent*, the destruction of the house is first expressed through the explosion of Stevie's body into pieces, then through the brutal murder of Verloc by his wife, and finally by the suicide of Winnie. The novel advances visions of the fallen house – the house of an arrogant unquestioned patriarchy. On one hand, this fallen house symbolizes the idealization of the western society. On the other hand, it raises ideological issues in relation to the other, the oppressed inside home- women; and outside home (Britain) - the overseas natives. This idea is supported by the description of London, as monstrous and cannibalistic referring to the British Empire and to the deeds of the colonial system in the overseas colonies. In this novel, the gender discourse is metaphorically introduced. Conrad has demonstrated a keen awareness of the perception of the gender other and has eloquently challenged the habitual thought that circulated in his time.

The manner in which Conrad constructs the character of Winnie reflects a crisis of the Victorian social model on the one hand. Even though she has a large sum of money but she did not care about money. For her, her brother Stevie is more important than money. In the patriarchal society, money is everything for the male people. They can do everything for the sake of money, they commit crimes like the Greenwich Bombing for the sake of money, and they create violence in society for the greediness of money. They sell morality and humanity for money. For example, Comrade Ossipon commits the last terrible act of deception in the novel. He pretends that he will help Winnie escape from England after killing her husband, but at the last second, he pulls all the money of Winnie and jumps off a train. This event in the novel

illustrates that for male there is not any morality and humanity. But in the case of female, they can use the money for the household, purpose and their security they take it as a things to fulfill their desire. They think allegiance and fidelity is more valuable than the money. To establish a peace in the society it needs a humanity, love and devotion. If people only think about money then there is no peace and harmony in the family as well as in the society. It leads every one's life in a wrong track.

Mrs. Verloc, in the conservative British society to be a silent character and her, was chained by the different rules and norms of the society. To bring such society in right track their needs a woman like Mrs. Winnie Verloc. She is a brave and intelligent woman who can protect her family from her childhood and unite her family in a right way. Even Mr. Verloc a famous spy who was free and bread winner of the family is not able to protect his family. But his wife challenges him secretly and gives justice to her brother who is innocently used in the Greenwich Bombing and broken the wall of patriarchy for her emancipation. The ultimate power of women comes from their heart within that helps them to redeem their family and society.

Conrad highlights the issue which is endemic to the situation of England in order to help us understand how difficult it is for women here to arrive at an evolved state of mind being trapped within the matrix of religion and tradition. He illustrates the suffering of the women through critical angle to reveal the extent of patriarchy and its domination. Conrad brings a clear sight of patriarchy by dramatizing high scale of suffering that woman goes through. In England, patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies which keep females down, oppressed by the traditional system. Marriage is another oppressive institution which facilities the oppression of women. Women's personality cannot be developed or is hindered by the traditional notion about her role. Conrad exposes the British society with all its hypocrisy, taboos and social stigmas

which deteriorates woman to lowest level. He highlights various factors of society which deteriorate women to minimal level. By showing their humble surrender to male domination and justice Conrad seems to suggest that women should be more courageous, determined and assertive in dealing with their problem. He appears to urge the women for change in their conservative mind-set and to show more guts in their fight against injustice. Conrad's keen eye identifies the vicious and deprived women characters in the society and he exposes them in his plays through which he attacks on the patriarchal element of the society.

To recapitulate, this thesis explores gender inequality women had more responsibility than men. As bread winner of the house men has lack of caring, sharing and keep peace in the family. However, women who always taken as others in British society can easily balance the life, maintain peace and harmony in family. Only the female character in the novel keeps their promises about fidelity in the deep down of her heart rather than in mouth. It is only feminine allegiance and fidelity that provokes a woman to devote her life for the well being of the family.

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