## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, women were defined associating them either with their husband or with their father. A woman, to be recognized in association with men's appellation, is the most deplorable person. It makes her feel inferior and humiliated. Hence, the nature of my study is to insist that the culture and society should not look down upon women because they too as human beings have their self i.e. a separate and autonomous identity. Thus, women have been grouping for their hidden identity. To live without interference and being unrestricted, women must seek independent existence and detach themselves from the clutch of patriarchal hegemony, and the protagonists in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour" aspire for the same. Therefore, I choose the topic as Self at the Cost of Life for my thesis.

Both Edna and Louise Mallard have selves but their selves have moral restrictions designed by patriarchal society. They seek complete freedom where female identity is accepted without reluctance. Thus, protagonists in both the texts want to erase the line of demarcation between male and female at the cost of their lives.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is, as Chopin's biographer Emily Toth persists, "a case study" of nineteenth-century feminism (242). Indeed, Edna Pontellier's first consciousness of her awakening is described in terms that echo the nineteenth-century feminist concept of female identity. "Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe, as an individual, within and about her" (57). Her awakening makes visible her position in a patriarchal society and gives her the desire to seek alternative roles.

The hegemonic institutions of nineteenth-century society required women to be objects in marriage and in motherhood, existing as vessels of maternity and sexuality,

with little opportunity for individuality. As critic Margit Stange asserts, "Self-ownership was central to the project of nineteenth-century feminism" (506). Self-ownership connotated a woman's right to have possession of her fully realized human identity. Inherent in this concept was "not only sexual freedom and other aspects of personhood, but also a sense of place in the community and the universe at large through love, connection, maternity and other aspects of fulfillment" ( Toth 242). First popularized by Lucinda Chandler in 1840s and widely used by the feminist reformers who followed her, self-ownership would mean, "the woman […] has control over her own person, independent of the desires of her husband. Self-ownership was also closely linked with voluntary motherhood and thus became a program for putting women in control of sex and reproduction" (Stange 509).

Self-ownership, writes Historian William Leach, "meant that woman, not man, would decide when, where and how sexual act would be performed. It also meant that woman, not man, would determine when children would be conceived and how many" (Leach 89).

Self, at first, exists in the presumption of the right to withhold oneself as a mother. Edna, like the feminists, advocates self-assertion and soon determines that voluntary motherhood means withholding herself sexually. After her first successful swim, she stays on the porch refusing Leonce's repeated orders and entreaties to come inside to bed (32). Later Edna stops sleeping with her husband altogether, so that Leonce complains to the family doctor, "She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me […] she's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal right of women; and you understand we meet in the morning at the breakfast table" (65). It is by withholding herself sexually

then that Edna exercises the eternal right of women insisting that she has a self and that she owns that female self

Louise Mallard in “The Story of an Hour” undergoes the psychological process of awareness about her imprisoned self, as she hears the news about her husband’s death in a train accident, under the yoke of marital life. As she heard the news, she did not wait to listen to the rest of the story! She pretended as if she was shocked, fell straightly into her sister’s arms and started to cry. She, then, went to her room alone. There she sat facing an open window looking into the spring sky. She knew that something was coming but could not identify it. She mumbled out, “free, free, free.” She was relaxed after she had said that. Just when she is beginning to savor the sweet sense of freedom, her husband shows up at the house alive. When she sees him, she dies, not from the “joy that kills,” but because she is heart-broken and shocked at the reality. During the short interval of her life, she found herself accompanied by her free self and now, she could not go back to the old path of life. In the character of Louise Mallard, the author creates a woman who through the death of her husband comes to a profound realization of a new life and a self that she did not know existed. But ironically, Chopin also shows Louise’s feeling of independence to be a mere fantasy, because in actuality such a vision of freedom outside of marriage was an unrealistic goal for nineteenth-century women. Obviously, Chopin sets forth the universal theme of the importance of a women’s individual identity outside of marriage, outside of her role as a man’s wife.

Through Louise’s realization, Chopin offers a commentary about the effect of marriage and love on a Victorian woman’s sense of self. First, she suggests that marriage can kill love. The reader learns that Louise has loved her husband only “sometimes” because he has often imposed his “private will” on her (6). Even though she knows that

Brently loved her, she realizes that his kind intentions are nonetheless cruel because they restricted her independence and identity. She realizes that love is not as strong a need as is "self-assertion, which she suddenly recognizes as the strongest impulse of her being" (Chopin 6). Literary critic Barbara Ewell writes of the recurrence of this theme in Chopin's Work: "as Chopin often insists, love is not substitute for selfhood; indeed selfhood is love's pre-condition" (89). Louise could not love her husband because she did not have a sense of her own identity; she did not know herself. Chopin seems to be saying that by squelching individual identity, especially in women, marriage can squelch love. Love can flourish only if both partners are free. This idea was quite radical at the turn of the century.

Chopin suggests that freedom is a natural thing that the social institution of marriage upsets. When Louise is having her moment of revelation in her room, she communes with nature, the blue sky and "the tops of the trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life" (5). Her sister Josephine wants her to shut the window, but Louise refuses because she is "drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window" (5). Women at this time were usually confined to a domestic role, but Louise wants a different role. The open window and the natural images are symbolic of her desire to be free. As Ewell notes, Chopin's story suggests that freedom is a "human right—as natural as generation, spring, or even death" (90). Through the ironic end of Louise's short-lived vision of freedom, Chopin suggest that freedom is as an individual, freedom outside of marriage, is unfortunately unrealistic for a nineteenth-century woman. When she sees her husband alive, Louise dies of a heart attack, an attack that doctor calls "joy that kills" (7). The irony of the ending is that she is not overjoyed at finding her husband alive; rather the "monstrous joy" she has felt at experiencing her own freedom is actually the source

of her death. Now that she has found herself, she cannot go back to the inequality of marriage, and the only way out is death.

Nineteenth-century Victorian Society had a strict attitude towards sexual morality. People used to focus on self-control and sobriety. Leonce Pontellier's preoccupation with business and material goods echoes that nation. Rapid industrialization and growing cities created both tremendous wealth on the one hand, enormous parties, and gorgeously attired wives were the superstars of their day.

Chopin's generation of women had inherited the legacies of their abolitionist mothers. As the middle class thrived and standard of education rose, more women entered the work place and fought for women's suffrage and emancipation intensified. Her work explored the kind of anxiety, these changes raised about the role that women should play in the society and their sexual, romantic, and legal relationship with them.

Protagonists, in both *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour", answer the male fantasies with subtle portraits of the female psyche struggling to move beyond their constraints. We see Edna Pontellier treated by her husband as a valuable property, by Robert Lebrun as a romantic heroine, and by Alcee Arobin as a budding Femme Fatale (beautiful maid) even as Edna herself struggles to define her desires, and to understand herself as a separate and solitary being. Similarly, Louise Mallard perceives love of her husband to be the source of imprisoning her free self, which she realizes when she hears the news of her husband's death.

Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" was published in 1894 while *The Awakening* was published in 1899. Despite various interpretations regarding the theme in the texts, both of these share the distinctive common agenda of self as an invaluable

entity. Since the time of their publication, many critics have commented upon these texts in various ways.

The central character in the novel, Edna, begins neglecting her duties as a wife and mother. She abandons housekeeping, refuses guests, denies her husband, his conjugal privilege, and eventually moves from their home to a nearby cottage. With his drastically disrupted behavior, Edna's husband strives to maintain his social stature. Edna understands that, in his own way, her husband loves her more as 'property' than as a separate human entity with thoughts and feelings.

In the criticism of the novel, critics have commented on the symbolic stage of Edna's rebellion against the restraints of the Creole society a withdrawal into solitude that poses as a quest for free self. Edna must be a mistress on the household, receive callers on Tuesday afternoons and be the perfect mother women.

At the farewell party, Edna's appearance suggests, "the Regal Woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (72). Such fairy image of Edna seems to stand on the ruling system of the administration. Kenneth Elbe observes, "The central character, the married woman seeks love outside a stuffy, middle class marriage" (23). Similarly, Jules Chametzky is even more explicit: "What does surprise one is the modernity […] of Mrs. Chopin's insight into the women question. It is so much that she advocates women's freedom or celebrates the force of body's prerogatives […]" (19).

This feminist community, in contradiction of its advocacy of choice and control for women, was unanimously opposed to the use of birth-control devices. Suffragists, moral reformers and free-love advocates alike shared this opposition. Various kinds of contraceptive technologies were accessible to middle-class women. However, as Linda Gordon notes: "Nineteenth-century birth control practice was determined by ideology

rather than availability of technology. In the prevailing ideology of even the most radical feminist reformers, motherhood was inextricable part of female sexuality" (109).

Why did feminists whose goal was to win for the civil and propriety rights that would make them equal to men, choose to deny women the freedom to have sex without pregnancy? As Gordon points out: "The linkage of self-ownership with reproduction certainly reflects the reality of many women's lives which are dominated by multiple births and the attendant realities of risks, diseases and pain" (111).

Feminists were defining 'self'as sexual and as female because sex for a woman means a potential pregnancy. The possession of this sexualized self through self-ownership amounts to the exercise of a right to alienate (conformed by a right to withhold). Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in her 1899 critique of the sexual market attacked 'marriage' as a market in which "he is […] the demand […] she is the supply" (81). The feminist opposition to birth control technology reflects a commitment to this market: underlying their construction of female selfhood is the ideology of women's sexual value in exchange. As Stanton declares in her speech: "In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, first, what belongs to her as an individual" (19) and Margit Stange explicates Stanton thus: "What Edna Pontellier considers as her property is, first, her body. Her body is what she owns and what she owns with" (507).

Thorstein Veblen argues that the purpose of the ownership of personal property is to achieve social status or reputability. He insists that the original form of ownership was the ownership of women by men. He writes:

> Edna is an item of conspicuous consumption that brings reputability to Leonce. Such status-bearing wealth must be surplus wealth: useful

> articles do not serve to advertise the Owner's luxurious freedom from need. Edna must then appear to perform no useful labor (23).

Like Veblen, Chopin pokes fun at the figure of the male owner whose relationship to the world is mediated. In the opening pages of *The Awakening*, Leonce, rather ridiculously governs himself according to the notion of property rights; for example, he grants the caged birds rights to sing because they are owned by Mme. Leonce grants himself the rights to retreat to his own cottage.

Walter Benn Mitchaels is in the opinion that self- possession and self-interest are grounded in the possibility of intention and action coming apart. He comments:

> Adele's intentional embrace of motherhood gets its force from the unwilled nature of the 'torture' that it attempts to appropriate. Hardly able to speak after her ordeal in her childbirth, Adele whispers in an 'exhausted' voice think of the children Edna (54).

Adele and Edna Embody the two poles of motherhood. Adele is the mother-woman having no ownership of her body as she complies before her husband and Edna is not a mother-woman as she questions her bodily ownership. The axis of motherhood gives Edna her original sense of identity. "She is fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She will sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she [will] sometimes forget them" (20).

Admitting the fact of female self and freedom, Margit Stange writes:

> The freedom to withhold one has its complement in the freedom to give oneself. No longer sleeping with-or even living with her husband, Edna declares herself free to have sex with whomever she chooses. She tells

> Robert, I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose (107).

Edna supposes that her self-giving is chosen because she has presumed the choice of not giving. She has made her motherhood voluntary. Adele, in contrast, is the mother who never withholds and thus cannot choose but to give. Regarding the father's supremacy over mother, Patricia S. Yager comments:

> *The Awakening* is a subversive nocturnes [….] the child's response throws his subversive nocturnes […] the child's response throws his father's patriarchal assumption into even higher relief when Mr. Pontellier responds to his son's utter nonsense by chiding his wife: Mr. Pontellier returned to his wife with the information that Raoul had high fever and needed looking after… He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not the mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it (441).

In the nineteenth century, males were clearly dominant and authoritarian, while females were subservient and passive. Slowly, women began to question their assigned role and responded to the battle between the sexes in a variety of new ways—withdrawal, revolt, and action to change society. Significantly, as the hope for a new future merged with revulsion against a contaminated past, and as the vision of new woman fused with horror at the traditional woman, much female-authored literature oscillated between extremes of exuberance and despair, between dreams of miraculous victory and nightmares of violent defeat. Such are the characters in the fiction of Kate Chopin, American author of the late nineteenth century. In fact, literary critics Sandra Gilbert and

Susan Gubar claim that this oscillation "is perhaps most brilliantly depicted in Kate Chopin's terse, O. Henry-like 'The Story of an Hour"' (81).

When Kate Chopin tried to publish "The Story of an Hour" in 1894, she met with resistance from various magazines, who found the story too radical and feminist for the times. R.W. Gilder, the editor of the popular magazine Century, rejected the story because he felt it was immoral. Gilder's opposition to Chopin's tale of a woman freed by her husband's apparent death is not surprising, Since Gilder "had zealously guarded the feminine ideal of self-denying love, and was that very summer publishing Editorials against Women's suffrage as a threat to family and home" (Ewell 89).

Mary Papke argues that the conclusion of the story both " informs and warns" that if an individual changes but the world around her remains constant, then self-oblivion and death may result for a woman who dares to be different ( 76). Louise's family and friends, however, misinterpret the cause of her death, implying that Victorian society cannot comprehend the joy of a woman outside the confines of marriage. In fact, Chopin's readers at the time the story was first published may not have understood the irony of the ending. Elizabeth Mc Mahan notes "women in [Chopin's] did not seek self-determination, did not question whether they had any identity outside marriage". The tragic end of the "Story of an Hour" underscores the irony that only through her husband's death, and therefore the death of her marriage, can Louise see the possibilities in life for herself. When she realizes he is alive, she can be free only in death. As Emily Toth suggests, "The Story of an Hour" is "a criticism of the ideal of self-sacrifice that still haunted women at the end of the century" (252).

After Edna drinks the bliss of life with her free "self", she enjoys the momentum of enlightenment. She happens to envision the nature of the forthcoming days of her life

where she would celebrate the autonomy of her self. She boycotts even the memory of her past life that she had lived along with her male partner from her dream world. Now, for the first time, she realizes the meaning of living for own self. Hence, she seems to be determined not compromise with any other form of life excepting the one that was ahead of her. To her misfortune, her husband's unexpected return proves to be permanent barrier for her since she was yet to begin the new journey to meet her destination. Even so, she had already submitted herself to her newly discovered self. To adjust again into the previous version life was obviously the matter of shock for her. Had she given emphasis to her self would not have died of heart attack. Life with imprisoned self was worse than the death itself for her. Consequently, she lets her heart sleep permanently even before it could sense the panic cry of her "self" in the arrival of her husband.

Similarly, Edna Pontellier In *The Awakening* begins the journey of awakening from the sea itself. Following the command of the very awakened self, she tries her best to establish her own free identity. She goes against the conventions of the male dominated society. Finally, when she realizes that she could never celebrate permanent emancipation of her self, she goes and goes down to the ocean not to come back again. She renounces her physical existence in order to safeguard the freedom of self.

Anticipation of free self outside married life was matter of shock to nineteenth-century readers. American readers were not simply prepared for such a dare from a woman's pen. Protagonists in both of Chopin's texts were criticized as selfish, weak and immoral. My study will try to vindicate the charges against Chopin's protagonists.

Chopin had to bear the criticism for her radical and sarcastic attitude towards male chauvinistic society of the contemporary period. However, in the recent years both of her texts have gathered wide range of appreciations amidst the reader from worldwide.

Critics such as Cynthia Griffin, Elain Gardiner, Nancy Walker, Margit Stange, Emily Toth etc. have resurrected Chopin as a significant figure in American, particularly feminist literature. Both *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour" visualize not only misery of nineteenth century American women but also the largest number of 21st century Nepalese women because Nepalese, even at present, have no reproductive autonomy and have suffered domestic violence and marginalization by males. Therefore, I believe that it would be appropriate to relate contexts of these fictions with the plight of Nepalese women.

Being sharp aggressive towards male corruption on female body, Kate Chopin writes to alienate women from male ownership. She wants to dare and defy the old traditional patriarchal ideology of presupposing woman as mere submissive and acquiescent sexual object in the fist of male. Her heroines both in *The Awakening* and in "The Story of an Hour" are awakened from a hundred year long asleep and they seek for the autonomy of their individual selves. Hence, the major objectives of this research will be as pointed below:

I. To explicate the common issue of self in the both of the texts from recent feminist perspective and to insist upon the need of gender equality and sexual liberation.
II. To explore women's condition in the contemporary patriarchal society.
III. To examine the texts from feminist point of view.

I would like to admit frankly that I should not focus on other works of Chopin except *The Awakening* **and** "The Story of an Hour". My study will be confined with in the topic of Self at the Cost of Life: A Comparative Study of Chopin's *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour" and I will apply feminist criticism with focus on self to analyze the texts.

## 2. Feminism and Self

Feminism is a doctrine related to advocating women's rights for the equality of sexes, identity and freedom. Feminism tries to redefine women's activities, works and goals from female-centered perspective. It is concerned with the marginalization of all women; that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position, a second sex, a submissive 'other'. It seeks to liberate women from subordination to men, and to reconstruct society in such a way that patriarchy is eliminated. It makes an effort to create a culture that is fully inclusive of women's desire and purposes. It demands equal rights and opportunities for women in a political, economic, psychological, social, and individual sense. Now, feminism represents one of the most important social and aesthetic theories.

When we trace the women's subjection by men, we find that they are subjected from the beginning of human civilization. Adam's first wife Lilith objected the domination of her husband and demanded equal rights and she left him. She challenged the patriarchal marriage and preferred punishment from the gods. In Bible, Jesus Christ's attitude towards women is also guided by biasness.

Though feminism became a dominant force in the literary studies only late in the 1960s, it had its origin from two centuries earlier with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which is considered to be the first formal enhancement of feminist writing though many others had tried their hand before her too. Wollstonecraft, in her book, advocates for the political and social rights of women and argues that society never can retain women only in the convenient domestic role and alluring mistresses by denying their economic independence and encouraging them to be docile and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else.

The feminist revolutionary spirit implanted by Wollstonecraft, however, could not accelerate so speedily for more than coming one century. *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) by Margaret Fuller and *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill were only the two major works on feminism in the whole nineteenth century.

Virginia Woolf, by writing *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949), contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of feminism in the first half of the Twentieth century. Woolf focuses on situation of women authors throughout the history and their cultural, economic and educational disabilities within the patriarchal society that had prevented them from realizing their creative possibilities.

The feminist trend of her time was concerned for 'absolute equality' and the 'erasure of differences' between the sexes. However, Woolf voiced for traditional change as women's freedom and their suppressed values affecting the concept of power, family and social life that had shaped by men in the past. Beauvoir, on the other hand, insists against the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or 'other' to man as the defining and dominating 'subject' who is assumed to represent humanity in general. She argues that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which is described as feminine. She also attacks the patriarchal myths of women presuming the female essence prior to individual existence in the work of many male writers.

Feminism itself draws and shares a great deal from schools of thought such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis and deconstruction: the theories that tend to destabilize the center and subvert the hierarchy. Feminism, thus, has never been a well-concerted movement, in that feminist voices range widely from utter denial of male voices to

reconciliation between the two sexes as proposed by Virginia Woolf in her celebrated term 'androgyny'. Reviewer Erin E. Macdonald observes, "[n]o critic has considered how the issue of her desire for freedom relates to Chopin's experimentations with androgyny. The author recognized not only a need for androgyny in the behavior of the New Women, but also understood the limitations posed by centuries of conditioning" (15).

Elaine Showalter's *A literature of Their Own: British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is a prominent masterpiece of the theoretical work of feminism. It describes the female literary tradition in the English novel from Brontes onward as a development of subculture by arguing that since women in general constitute a kind of subculture with in the framework of a larger society, their work would demonstrate a unity of values, conventions, experiences, and behavior encroaching on each individual. Showalter divides feminist into two distinct modes.

The first mode is ideological which she terms 'feminist critique'. It is concerned with feminist as reader and it offers feminist reading of texts which considers the images and stereotypes of women in the literature, the exclusion and misconceptions about women in criticism, and women-assigned in semiotic systems. The second mode of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is the study of women as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' which provides the subjects, the history, the styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the devolution and the laws of female literary tradition. Likewise, Showalter, in her analysis of historical development of feminism presents three important stages of women writing: Feminine, Feminist, and Female.

First, is the female imitation of mainstream (male) literary tradition dated from 1840 to 1880 and includes writers like George Eliot and Bronte Sisters. The second is the protest against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights. It is dated from 1880 to 1920 and it includes the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope and Oliver Schveiner. The third stage is self-discovery, which aims at search for independent identity. It is dated from 1920 onward, and it includes the writers like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1997) is another brilliantly written massive book on historical study of feminism which stresses especially, the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar in this book, according to M.H. Abrams,

> Propose that the 'anxiety of authorship' that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to heroine [. . .]; such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (91)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that artistic creativity of the nineteenth century tradition which is perceived basically as a male quality, is in fact patriarchal superimposition upon the / writer who are imprisoned within it. In the image of 'Divine Creator', the male author fathers his text. Nevertheless, taking the same masculine cosmic author as their model, women end up copying or identifying with the dominant literary images of femininity which comes out of the phallocentric myth of creativity. They suggest the female writers first to struggle against the effect of socialization that becomes struggle against men's oppressive reading of women. But they further argue

that the women can begin such struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible.

## Self

Literally, self means one's own nature or special qualities. One's overall personality makes him her recognized in the society as separate individual. Jonathan Culler writes:

> A lot of recent theoretic debate concerns the identity and the function of the subject or self. What is this 'I' that I am – person agent or actor, self and what makes it what it is? Two basic questions underlie modern thinking on this topic: first is the self something given some thing made and second, should it be conceived in individual or social terms? These two oppositions generate four basic strands of modern thought. The first, opting for the given and the individual, treats the self , the 'I' as something inner and unique, something that is prior to the acts it performs, an inner core which is variously expressed (not expressed) in word and deed. The second, combining the given and social attributes: you are male or female, white or black, British or American, and so on, and these are primary facts, given of the subject or the self. (Culler 110).

Women are made economically and biologically inert as they are interpreted and controlled by the male-dominated hegemonic institutions and culture, which they condemn and search for freedom to have self-assertion and self-sufficiency.

The primary task of a philosophy of the self is to clarify what makes something a self. Feminist philosophers are acutely aware that this is not a value-free task. To get an analysis of the nature of the self of the ground, one must decide which entities count as selves. Since we regard selves as valuable-as members of our moral community and as worthy of respect-these judgments are in part judgments about which entities are valuable. Moreover, values enter into these judgments because we consider selves to be the sorts of things that can achieve (or fail to achieve) ideals of selfhood. Thus, philosophical accounts of the self have implications for conceptions of what is to lead a good life. As we have seen, many feminist philosophers argue that it is a mistake to hold that rationality alone, is essential to the self and the ideal self is transparent, unified, coherent, and independent, for they discern misogynist subtexts in the atomistic individualism of the Kantian ethical subject and homo-economicus. It is incumbent on feminist philosophers, then, to develop more satisfactory account of the self-accounts that are compatible with respect for women. Thus, a number of feminist philosophers propose reconstructions of alternative theories of the nature of the self.

Three traditions have been especially, influential in recent feminist thought—classic psychoanalysis, object relation theory, and post structuralism. Feminist philosophers gravitate toward these approaches for understanding selfhood because they do not share the drawbacks that prompt critique of the Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus. None of these approaches regards the self as homogenous or transparent; none supposes that a self should be coherent and speak in a single voice; none removes self from its cultural or interpersonal setting; none sidelines the body. In approaching these views, feminist bring out their implication in regard to gender, incorporate feminist insight into these theories, modify these theories to address feminist concerns.

Julia Kristeva transposes the classic Freudian conception of the self and the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious into an explicitly gendered discursive framework (Kristeva ). For Kristeva, the self is a subject of enunciation--- a speaker who can use the pronoun 'I'. However, speakers are not unitary, nor are fully in control of what they say because discourse is bifurcated. The symbolic dimension of language, which is characterized by referential signs and linear logic, corresponds to consciousness and control. The clear, dry prose of scientific research reports epitomize semiotic discourse. The semiotic dimension of language, which is characterized by figurative language, cadences, and intonations, corresponds to the unruly, passion-fueled unconscious. The ambiguities and nonstandard usages of poetry epitomize semiotic discourse. These paradigms notwithstanding, Kristeva maintains that all discourse combine elements of both registers.

Every intelligible utterance relies on semantic conventions, and every utterance has a tone, even if it is a dull monotone. This contention connects Kristeva's account to feminist concerns about gender and the self. Since the rational orderliness of the symbolic is culturally coded masculine while the affect-laden allure of the semiotic is culturally coded feminine, it follows that no discourse is purely masculine or purely feminine. The masculine symbolic and the feminine semiotic are equally indispensable to the speaking subject, whatever this individual's socially assigned gender may be. It is not possible, then, to be unsullied masculine self or an unsullied feminine self. Every subject of enunciation – every self – amalgamates masculine and feminine discursive modalities.

Like the unconscious in classic psychoanalytic theory, the symiotic decenters the self. One may try to express one's thoughts in definite, straightforward language, yet

because of the semiotic aspects of one's utterances, what one says carries no single meaning and is amenable to being interpreted in more than one way. In Kristeva's view, this is all to the good, for assessing the semiotic— that is which is conveyed, often inadvertently, by the style of an utterance – kindles social critique. The semiotic gives expression to the repressed, unconscious material. According to Kristeva, what society systematically expresses provides clues to what is oppressive about society and how society needs to be changed. Thus, she discerns a vital ethical potential in the semiotic (Kristeva 1987). Since this ethical potential is explicitly linked to the feminine. Moreover, Kristeva's account of the self displaces "masculine" adherence to principle as the prime mode of ethical agency and recognizes the urgent need for a "feminine" ethical approach. Viewing the self as a "questionable- subject- in process"— a subject who is responsive to the encroachments of semiotic material into conscious life and who is therefore without a fixed unitary identity--- and valorizing the dissident potentiality of this decentered subjectivity, Kristeva seeks to naturalize the fear of the inchoate feminine that, in her view, underwrites misogyny. In one respect, Nancy Chodorow's appreciation of the object relations theory parallels Kristeva's project of reclaiming and revaluing feminity, for Chodorow's account of the relational self reclaims and revalues feminine mothering capacities. But whereas Kristeva focuses on challenging the homogenous self and the bright line between reason, on the one hand, and emotion and desire, on the other. Chodorow focuses on challenging the self-subsisting self with its sharp self-other boundaries. Chodorow's claim that self is inextricable from interpersonal relationships calls into question the decontextualized individualism of the Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus.

Chodorow sees the self as relational in several respects (Chodorow 1981). Every child is cared for by an adult or adults, and every individual is shaped for better or worse by this emotionally charged interaction. As a result of feelings of need and moments of frustration, the infant becomes differentiated from its primary caregiver and develops a sense of separate identity. Concomitantly, a distinctive personality emerges. By selectively internalizing and recombining elements of their experience with other people, children develop characteristic traits and dispositions. Moreover, Chodorow attributes the development of a key interpersonal capacity to nurturance. A caregiver who is experienced as warmly solicitous is internalized as a "good internal mother" (Chodorow). Children gain a sense of their worthiness by internalizing the nurturance they receive and directing it toward themselves, and they learn to respect and respond to other people by internalizing their experience of nurturance and projecting it toward others. Whereas, Kristeva understands the self as a dynamic interplay between the feminine semiotic and the masculine symbolic, Chodorow understands self as fundamentally relational and thus, links to cultural norms of feminine interpersonal responsiveness. For Chodorow, the rigidly differentiated, compulsively rational stubbornly independent self is a masculine defensive formation-- a warped form of rational self—that develops as a result of father's negligible involvement in childcare.

Feminist philosophers have noted strengths and weaknesses in both of these views. For example Kristeva's questionable- subject- in – process seems to enshrine and endorse the very gender dichotomy that causes women so much grief. Yet, Chodorow's relational self seems to glorify weak individuation and scorn the independence and self-assertiveness that many women desperately need. Still, Kristeva's analysis of the psychic, social, and political potency of gender figurations underscore the need of

feminist counter- imagery to offset culturally entrenched, patriarchal images of womanhood. Chodorow's appreciation of the relational self together with her diagnosis of the damage wrought by hyper-individuation advances feminist demands for equitable parenting practices. These contributions notwithstanding, both of these views have come under attack for heterosexual biases as well as for inattention to other forms of difference among women.

Critical race theorists and poststructuralists have been particularly vocal about this failure to come to grips with the diversity of gender, and they have offered accounts of the self-designed to accommodate difference. Poststructuralist Judith Butler maintains that personal identity—the sense that there are answers to the 'Who am I?' and 'What am I like?'—is an illusion (Butler). The self is merely an unstable discursive node, a shifting confluence of multiple currents – and sexed/ gendered identity is merely a "corporeal style" – the imitation and repeated enactment of ubiquitous norms. For Butler, psychodynamic accounts of the self, including Kristeva's and Chodorow's, camouflage the performative nature of the self and collaborate in the cultural conspiracy that maintains the illusion that one has emotionally anchored, interior identity that is derived from one's biological nature, which is manifest in one's genitalia. Such accounts are pernicious. In concealing the ways in which normalizing regimes deploy power to enforce the performative routines that construct "natural" sexed bodies together with debased, "unnatural" bodies, they obscure the arbitrariness of the constraints that are being imposed and deflect resistance to these constraints. The solution, in Butler's view, is to question the categories of biological sex, polarized gender, and determinate sexuality that serve as markers of personal identity, to treat the construction of identity as a site of

political contestation, and to embrace the subversive potential of unorthodox performances and parodic identities.

By and large, recent feminist philosophy of the self reflects skepticism about modernist, unitary accounts of the self. In seeking to remedy the androcentric biases of the latter views, feminist philosophers emphasize features of the selfhood that other philosophical schools neglect, including intersubjectivity, heterogeneity, and social construction. Influenced by Jurgen Habermas's communicative ethics, Seyla Benhabib refuses to join poststructuralists in declaring the death of the autonomous, self reflective individual who is capable of taking responsibility and acting on principle . Although Benhabib is committed to viewing people as socially situated, interpersonally bonded, and embodied, she is also committed to the feasibility of rational philosophical justification of universal moral norms. Moreover, she argues that a narrative conception of the self renders the idea of core self and coherent identity intelligible without suppressing difference and without insulating the self from social relations. Autobiographical stories can include the many voices within us and the many relations that we have experienced, and those stories are constantly under revision, for they are always being contested by our associates' disparate self-narratives with their divergent versions of events. Nevertheless, these narratives do not collapse into incoherence, and they presuppose a core capacity to describe and reflect on one's experience. For Benhabib, this view of selfhood and reason is indispensable to feminist emancipatory objectives.

### 3. Passion for Self in *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour"

Both *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour" were written in the late nineteenth century in America, and the nineteenth-century society required patriarchal constructed model, which viewed women to be objects in marriage and in motherhood. It confines their identity to be good daughter, wives and mothers within the narrow domestic wall of household territories. There was the assumption that women should be obedient, polite and beautiful in order to please their husband. Women should have inferior self than that of men. Having sexual relationship before marriage and after marriage except with their husbands, re-marriage and roaming with a person of their choice was not acceptable for the convention of the society.

French-Creoles society of New Orleans had its own rules and laws concerning about the role of a woman in the society. Creoles society was conventional society, which did not open the larger space for women comparing to the men. It had orthodox belief that women should actively perform their duties and responsibilities loaded by the society. Women, in this society, were expected to exercise their self to please their husbands, children and family.

Edna Pontellier, a married woman with her husband and two children, living in the same society, was expected to be a good wife, mother and ideal woman for the happiness of her own family as well as the society. Edna is the victim of the socio-economic realities because freedom for her as a woman was not acceptable in the Victorian American society. So, the women were compelled to suppress their unexpressed desires, wishes, and ambitions lying beneath thousands of female souls in the nineteenth-century world.

Edna Pontellier, a protagonist of the novel having courageous soul, belonged to the unsweetened Creole society of Saint Louis in 1899, which was structured under male supremacy over female. Catholicism's implicit authority dominated the Creole society. The society regarded the lesser importance of the individual impulse than social ones. The Creole society dictated subservience of women to male domination. Most of the female characters have also followed the social laws and rules in the novel. The Creole women were very conservative; perhaps the most conservative group in the American society. They were frank and open in discussing their marriage and their children, but could do nothing because their very moral nature did not allow as to their chastity. They were committed as a group to their husbands and children and had a deep personal and religious commitment to fidelity. Adele is the good representative woman of Creole society. The Creole women in Chopin's term were "The "mother –women" […] fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious broad. They were women who idealized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings ministering angels" (Chopin19).

The above-mentioned remarks of Chopin suggest that the women's position in the Creole society was very poor. The women's roles were confined as the roles of a bird, which protects its baby birds by its wings. The women were supposed to give birth to the children and look after them properly by managing time and by casting aside their individual self and interest. Their main purpose was to please their husband and maintain their role properly. They were objectified and identified like angels, monsters and so on

The awakening is dominated by the female characters and their activities, the plot of the novel centers on position of females in relation to the male characters. Leonce

Pontellier, the husband of Edna and a businessman of Creole society, has superior views about himself and takes his wife as his personal possession, which may suffer from some damage. The narrator tells us that Leonce looks "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property, which has suffered some damage" (Chopin 4). Leonce Pontellier is also dissatisfied with Edna's take care of the children. He says, "If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (12).

Adele is a devoted wife and mother, the epitome of nineteenth century womanhood. She begins her days for her children, performing her domestic duties and ensuring the happiness of her husband. That was the expectation from the women in the Creole society. But Edna's treatment to her husband was somehow different than Adele which she did not like. She suggests to Edna, "Think of children, Edna Oh! Think of the children! Remember them!" (289).

On the other hand, Mademoiselle Reisz is an unconventional and unpopular old woman. She serves to Edna as an inspiration throughout her gradual awakening. She teaches her how to play piano and the passion of art in human life. She also makes her aware about her individual self and says, "courageous soul dares and defies" (302). Adele being aware of social norms and values warns Robert Lebrun, Edna's summer flirtation in Grand Isle. Adele warns, "She is not one of us, she might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously" (50-51).

The mother woman identity was preferred in Creole society. Adele's attitude shows that a woman should not flirt with male and should not love another male after marriage. Dr. Mandelet, a family physician has own view about women. He says: "Woman, my dear friend is very peculiar and delicate organism […]. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like

you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical" (Chopin 130).

This extract reveals the male attitude towards female in the society. They think woman as a 'peculiar' 'docile' and mysterious to understand. This remark clearly creates hierarchy between male and female. The value of women is emphatically defined. They are taken as beautiful objects and their sole purpose is to keeping their body beautiful to take care of their husband's property. Adele, with excessive naiveté says, "perhaps I feared to make Alphonse jealous […]. The right hand jealous of the left! The heart jealous of the soul! But for the matter the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become, dwarfed by disuse" (26-26 ).

Edna tries to receive love and new choice of life with the company of Robert. But he is not able to break the social convention. He replies, "because you were not free; you were Leonce Pontellier's wife. I could not help loving you if were ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away. I could not help telling you so" (280). This is how the position of the women in the society was very weak having no individuality, freedom, will and desires. Edna, being a woman has also the submissive position in her society like other female characters.

The another incident which shows Edna's subordinate position in the society can be seen when she, in the novel, engages herself most of her time on painting, ignoring her family duties. Leonce becomes surprised by her such unexpected behavior. "It shocked him. Then her absolute disregards for her duties as a wife angered him. […]. Mr. Pontellier became rude […]. It was the utmost folly for a woman at the head of household and the mother of children to spend in an atelier days would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family" (Chopin 146-147).

Leonce thinks that Edna's interest on painting ruins the family. He says, "In the Gods name paint! But don't let the family to the devil". He gives the example of Adele "There is Madame Ratignole; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to the chaos. And she is more a musician than you are a painter" (147).

The context of the story of an hour revolves around the inner psyche of a female character. It is the diagnosis of emerging revolution with Mrs. Mallard once being aware about the reason behind her imprisoned self. The indirect force of domination begins right from the news about the death of Mr. Mallard. Mrs. Mallard was supposed to react like that of nineteenth century women would do hearing the news about the death of husband.

"Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death" (Chopin-5). The very beginning sentence opens with the plight of central character. Although the cause of heart problem is mentioned no where later in the text, Mrs. Mallard's process of awakening while alone in the room hints at yoke of patriarchy to be the contributing factor to this. The sudden discovery of her own hitherto ignored self reduced the agony of her husband's death to zero. Everything, except the newly discovered self, proved to be unimportant for her by then. She was different from her contemporary by means of her realization about something new approaching to accompany her. For this reason, "She did not hear the story as many women would have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance" (4). She is no more nostalgic towards her past experience of married life. "And yet she had loved him — sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this

possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!" (4)

The above remarks refer to the process of transformation that Louise experiences after she recognizes the value of inner self for living. Her love to this newly identified entity called, self exceeded importance of love, which she felt was just an unsolved mystery. Whether she loved him or not was no more important for her. She was rather more concerned with her latest achievement and found it to be the ultimate essence of her being. "Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sort of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long (6).

Her dream world, the world of fancy is yet to be materialized. This is not only the indication of beautiful days ahead of her but also represents the pathetic condition of females of that era. Life, in itself, was simply a matter of burden for them. They could never realize the presence of spring and summer days in their lives for they were not living for themselves. They were merely the private property of their husbands, they had no personal choices, and they had no intimacy even with the incoming and outgoing breath.

Edna is an intelligent woman. She loves music. She is rather erotic. She is infatuated. She seeks love but her desires are not fulfilled. Therefore, she is wretched. She does not want to give up herself for her husband and children. Her husband does not give her much time. She neglects the roles of housewife and mother. Such unusual behavior shocks many of her neighbors. The society cannot understand her problem. She finds no one to share her agony and she thinks that living in such society without

being identified is worse than drowning in to the sea being known. Thus, Edna, by her heroic death, serves the social ideals for which women of that era were striving. She is an individualistic, iconoclastic, and passionate but courageous heroine and a role model for the feminists. She is a gallant, a freedom fighter of the nineteenth century because her devotion against moral and religious conservation is quite remarkable.

By concluding the novel with Edna's drowning, Chopin gives appearance of punishing Edna without really doing so. Most critics were able to read between the lines and decipher that Chopin was not real punishing Edna, but rather confirming her freedom. In this way, we can read Edna challenging the repressive and restrictive norms of traditional values, for which she sacrificed her life as martyr to restore women's freedom.

Chopin captures the essence of struggle for freedom equality and independence for which women have been fighting since long. Finally, Edna deserves her freedom after her death though she cannot experience it during her life. Hence, freedom begs for sacrifice and for sacrifice, Chopin provokes her audience to be ready to detach the patriarchal chain against women. To show the fettered condition of the contemporary women Chopin metaphorically presents a caged parrot in the opening and a chained dog at the ending of the novel. Both the parrot and the dog are kept in house for pleasure. In the same way, women are married and kept in home. Edna died instead of living life like that of a chained dog, which has to depend upon its master for every thing. Chopin seems to say that freedom can be achieved only through awareness, courage, struggle and sacrifice as these are the price for freedom.

Edna cannot function in the alternative role of the 'artist-women' for she cannot exist without love, sexuality, and connection. In this role, Edna is interpleaded to be

eccentric and isolated. She tries an autonomous existence in her move to what Chopin terms a "pigeon-house" (*The Awakening* 134). Her children are sent to visit relatives, and her husband is absent due to business obligations. Upon his retune, under the guise of a renovation of their home, Leonce moves to a hotel and explains away Edna's scandalous behavior. Fir a time, Edna lives in the illusion that she is indeed autonomous, a free single women without the burden of her role as wife and mother. However, it is only an illusion, for her husband her children are temporarily absent, rather than suddenly nonexistent. This temporary state of autonomy is echoed in Chopin's name for Edna's small new home, a "pigeon house" (134). Pigeons are not free, soaring birds; they fly away, but always return. Edna breaks with her familial connections and responsibility- part of the 'mother-woman' role – but she cannot fully escape them. She does not possess the strength or the desire to live a completely autonomous life, which would be necessary, according to Mademoiselle Reisz and according to patriarchy, to develop her selfhood and her artistry. The 'artist- women, an alternative, but clearly not an oppositional role, allows the autonomy Edna desires, but not the emotional and sexual freedom she craves.

The trouble in the novel begins when Edna's ego emerges. In the earl chapters, Edna is referred to only as Mrs. Pontellier, as a dependent of Mr. Pontellier. At this point, Edna's sense of self is still defined in terms of her connection with husband, Leonce. At the same time, Edna as a fictional character has not yet materialized from the text. A while after making her entrance, Mrs. Pontellier fights with Mr. Pontellier and finds what Chopin describes as "[a] indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some familiar part of her consciousness and filled her whole being with vague anguish" (*The Awakening* 49). In this state, Edna begins to realize her true place in

society. In prescribing the world around her, Mrs. Pontellier's self is emerging. And it is by the sea that Chopin first pulls out from the narrative and gives her an ego by referring to her by her given name, and walking through the sea of grass in the final paragraph, recounts her previous love interests.

"Today it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Leonce Pontellier-but Raoul and Etienne!" (*The Awakening* 299). The very idea what Edna says repeatedly to herself suggests her changing self perception. To attain her sole self and independence, she breaks the traditional chains like marriage, motherhood and family. By breaking the concept of marriage in Creole society, she establishes the innocent relationship with Robert Lebrun who provides her the sense of awakened self. But being a part of patriarchal society, he is not able to give full pleasure and satisfaction to her. The perception again shifts for the search for the self by leaving the role of 'mother-woman' and she lives in her small cottage where she has sexual relationship with Arobin. But that was temporary. She seeks candid love everywhere but gets startle to see flavor of domination and cruelty lying beneath every material relationship.

So the protagonist, Edna's interest of the self-conflicts with social norms and values. Chopin notes the social conditioning women of that time were allowed of the three options: to confirm, die or be shunned from that society. In Mrs. Pontellier's case, she begins by confirming to marriage and playing the part of the docile wife but she acknowledges that there are the things that her husband can do which she cannot. Awakened as, Mr. Pontellier's wife she acknowledges that she was not satisfied with her marriage.

In the beginning of the novel, performing a role of innocent good wife and mother of two children, Edna awakens t the new consciousness. Edna realizes that to achieve a free self was not possible without breaking the social norms and values. She knows that the identity of a woman is handicapped domination of male authority. She, therefore, takes many radical actions not only for destroying the set of existing social values but also for establishing the attentive values of the women's own. She rejects he traditional role of female as ''mother woman' and reconstructs the alternative role of 'free- woman which longs a female life with personal emotions, individuality and self- identity.

The maternal quality of her self-giving and its involuntary and selfless aspect overwhelms Edna again some time after the potlatch, when, just as she is about to 'give' herself to Robert, Edna is called away to witness Adele enduring the agonies of childbirth. The sight of Adele's 'torture' overwhelms Edna, leaving her "stunned and speechless" (*The Awakening* 109-111). When she returns to the little house, Robert is gone forever. Deprived of the chance to 'give' herself to her desire, she spends the night thinking of her children. Later she walks to the beach from which she swims to her death "not thinking of these things" (*The Awakening* 113). Withholding herself from motherhood, insisting on the right to refuse to 'sacrifice' herself from her children, Edna owns her self. In the logic of self-assertion, and voluntary motherhood, motherhood itself is ground on which woman claims ownership of her sexual value. Edna seizes the extreme prerogatives of this self-assertion withholding herself from motherhood by withholding herself from life and thus giving herself in a maternal dissolution

Awakened to the conditioned, Edna tries to stand alone with the action of her own instinctive and impulsive mind dominated by the message from the center of her being. The elusive 'self', according to her, is the only thing she will never give up. In her

awakening, she does indeed become a more natural being with growing freedom from social restraints. The essential purpose of her rebellion is to ease her passage from the socially defined 'mother-woman' position to the position of 'self', to journey from socially structured identity to the individual.

Neither the romantic nor the domestic traditions work for Edna and she fails to find a middle ground that would give her the strength she needs. Instead, she falls into an aimless depression, caught between cultural and emotional limitations. Edna, not yet prepared to risk a romantic attachment in favor of autonomy, represents the bridge between the passive, dutiful wife and the more aggressive independent woman.

Chopin's story implies Edna needs to become more significantly independent of men and to adjust to being self-reliant, before she can have a successful and fulfilling relationship. As she enters the water for her last swim, she is entering not only towards possible rebirth but also towards a regressive and reversionary stage. Chopin's last words tell us that she is headed toward mythic world.

Abandoning the male-made space and identity that had limited her only within the family in connection to husband and children, Edna re-creates a new space and identity of her own. Earning by gambling and selling, sketches release her free from financial dependency on husband and makes herself grow "[I]n force and individuality […] in ease and confidence" (Chopin).

Edna in her dinner party, fully exercises her new gained power and exposes her new identity by being "[t]he regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (*The Awakening* 107). The party is the story of Edna's final transformation into 'free-woman' having her own space and certain power and effect which she was striving for long.

But when Robert Lebrun, the conventional lover and Adele Ratignole, the 'mother-woman' in one way or another, remind her of her instrumentality--- Robert passionately envisioning a transaction in which Mr. Pontellier might set her free to belong to him, and Adele, exhausted by childbirth, whispering that she must think of the children. Edna realizes that the new world which she has recreated also is insufficient to provide her with entire freedom. Calling her new cottage which she hopes to become' [b]oth a spiritual and material room of her own" (Gilbert 355). 'Pigeon-house', Edna's maid awakens her to the fact that she ahs become no ore than domesticated, often a captive, bird, 'the pigeon which loves living in a beautiful small coop. Leonce's fictitious plan for remodeling his house on the other hand challenges her revolutionary mission and tries to make her surrender before the patriarchal power. But still driven by the need for self-determination, by the urgent longing for total freedom, and unwilling to accept the oppressive and hegemonic social limitations, to assert her autonomy and to become completely herself, Edna finally returns to the gulf to recapture the sense of freedom that exhilarated her by signaling her independence when, early in the novel, she learned to swim. In this final awakening, she realizes that the ideal she so desperately desires is not available to her mortal. Therefore, she decides to swim into the seas 'abysses of solitude'

Chopin writes in the novel that Edna finds "a way to elude the interpellation of motherhood and to escape from ideology" (*The Awakening* 108). She returns to the site of her awakening at Grand Isle. Rather than to succumb to the interpellations that create limited female roles, "single avenues" (Gilman79). Sanctioned by patriarchal ideology, Edna gives herself in suicide to the vast expanse of the sea, which is not only an image of endless openness and possibility but also one of chaos and dissolution. In life, under the

irresistible realm of ideology, Edna could exist only in female role of limitation. In death, she symbolically enters the realm of nature, as she waves into 'the sea' and becomes enfolded in its vast space of innumerable waves. Heroically, Edna's death makes a plea for the women's self-assertion and freedom in bourgeois patriarchal society

Many critics like Gilbert have argued Edna's last swim as "[a] defeat and a regression, rooted in a self-annihilating instinct, in a romantic incapacity to accommodate to the limitations of reality" (Gilbert 363). However, they seem to ignore her intense desire that never allows her to compromise for anything at the cost of her 'self'. Since she realizes that her freedom and individuality as a mortal has naturally been suppressed to be ineffective by her roles of mother and wife, the ultimate option for victory for her, now, is to elude them'—to the world that never let her exist without connection with them. The adventurous course that she has taken up till now, has led her so far that she cannot even think back and repenting, surrendering before the social oppressive power. Casting " [t]he unpleasant, picking garments from her" and standing "[n]aked in the open air," Edna is completely released from the social bondages. Feeling 'delicious,' 'strange' and 'awful' " [t]o stand naked under the sky" and experiencing "[t]he touch of the sea sensous"( *The Awakening* 177) with "[s]eductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring" (177) voice, she entertains her perfect freedom. Similarly, feeling " [l]ike some new born creature, opening its eyes in the familiar world that it had never known," (*The Awakening* 177)she achieves a complete spiritual freedom too. The voice of her father and sister, and "[t]he barking of an old dog" that Edna hears; and "[s]purs of the cavalry officer" that she recollects during her final swim make her celebrate her victory in the fantastic presence of the defeated enemies in her new achieved world the "the hum of the bees and the musky odor of picks" (*The Awakening* 178).

On the other hand, this also reflects the Louise's changed psychology and emerging vigor for life with no one to control her free self. Previously, life was a long and tiresome journey for her. It was only because her life was not in her control. Everyday, she spent, had concerned more with somebody else's happiness. Now the hangover of her past was completely over. She could imagine the life without any form of domination, every forthcoming moment would be determined as per her own choice. Hence, she was perfectly determined to celebrate the freedom of self, which was dominated by the patriarchal society until then.

Louise Mallard was growing confident of executing her dream world. Strengthened by her autonomous self, she began to germinate resistance against the possibility of being haunted by old form of life and its drawbacks. Her unwillingness to rejoin the role of submissive woman was reflected even in her physical activities. The narrator makes comments, "There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of victory" (6). The absence of patriarchy gave her the sense of victory over it. She found her self to be the leader of her own life. Her happiness was more of her success to entertain the free self than of the defeat of patriarchy. She just wished to remain unconcerned with her past life, under the domination of patriarchal society.

## Conclusion

Central characters in both of the texts bear the vigor for the freedom of their eternal selves. The zeal for the free self, however, differs from each other having influence of contextual factors. Notwithstanding this, the passion for autonomous self both of the protagonists hints at the similarity of underlying meaning as they reveal their preference to live the live the life governed by no other forces except by their own selves.

It was the news about the death of her husband, which empowered Mrs. Mallard with the realization that living for her own self, could be the ultimate path of her life from then onward. This was the first time ever in her life that she became conscious of her own consciousness. Now, she was beginning to realize the meaning and value of living for her private will. Once having the momentum with free self, she could never go back to the old path of her life that was designed by patriarchal society where there was no space for the female as a separate entity.

She was so much hypnotized by the new mode of life in the realm of free self that there could be no room for the older version of life, in which her role valued no more than a caged bird. She did not want even to do analysis over the bygone phases of her life. The issues, whether she loved her husband or just the vice versa was no more important for her. She just wanted to boycott the nostalgic feelings and had no complaints against the far left memory of past days. Whatever she had accomplished at the moment was splendid enough to celebrate the forthcoming days of her life. She could only enjoy imagining the days of her future, which were in embryo by then.

As Edna cannot find absolute freedom, she feels uneasy in the male dominated society and prefers death. Edna also experiments with an oppositional role that

significantly is not embodied by any female character in the novel, a role in which she is both freely sexual and autonomous. Because of her strong interpellation as a mother, a role dictated for married women by hegemonic ideology in her society, she finds that she cannot exist in an alternative oppositional female role. However, because of her awakening to her self, as an individual, she cannot exist in the female role sanctioned by patriarchal ideology. Her only escape from this ideology is death and hence Edna commits suicide at the site of her awakening, "the sea". In this way, Edna made a plea for women's Self at the Cost of Her Life. However, Adele, who can question her own self and fears the male sovereignty, has died many times before her death. She dies every time during her accouchement.

Edna Pontellier's last swim, therefore, is not a death at all or even if it is, it is a death associated with resurrection. It is a subversive questioning of the limitation of the reality. For swimming away from the whit beach of Grand Isle, from the empty summer colony and equally empty fictions of marriage and maternity, Edna swims, as the ending of novel suggests, not into death but back into her own life and vision. She only kills the old self to re-create a psyche freed from he doubts and fears imparted by the patriarchal society.

Both the protagonists, Edna in *"The Awakening"* and Louise Mallard in "The Story of an Hour", are the victims of patriarchal society. The whole stories in both the texts revolve around the female characters trying to reclaim their own identity by means declining the existing values in the society. Both of them fight for the autonomy of their imprisoned 'selves'. The nature of context, however, differs largely. Edna is quite a bold character, who dares go against the convention in an open manner. She is an extrovert type of woman, she lets the other characters, including her husband, know about her

quest for emancipation from male segregation. Driven by the passion for freedom of 'self', she exposes herself in extremist manner that was indigestible to the members of conventional society by then. She even does not hesitate to deny the role of mother when it has concern with the autonomy of her self.

While searching for her self-identity, she encounters different forces that make her realize her position in the society. In the beginning of the novel, Edna Pontellier performs her duty as the woman of the nineteenth century. Women, by then were taken as their husband's property, second sex, and submissive other. Women had no consciousness about the possibility of the freedom of their self. They were confined with in the household territory. Edna, as a woman of nineteenth century society had the same role. She found mistakes in the structure of the society and the deep-rooted concept of the male towards their wives. The' 'mother-identity was similar to the Pigeon in the cage. Robert makes important contribution to her gradual process of awakening by teaching her the art of swimming and tasting free self. By neglecting the so-called duties and responsibilities, Edna roams with Robert to liberate herself from the tradition. Robert became the only one hope for her and she liked to live her life by neglecting her husband and children. Nevertheless, Robert went far from her in order to maintain the prevailing rules and laws. It creates a kind of sad feeling in Edna's life. Then again, she makes another shift in her perception; she leaves the house, and stays in her own small cottage where there was no objection of her freedom and abnormal way of life. The small cottage that provides her the feeling of freedom and independence by putting away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance. She again changes her perception about life by establishing the sexual relationship with Arobin that gives her a new awakening but it leads her to the tragic self-realization. Finally, all of fluctuations of life have

created in her a new and separate identity in the society, which was ahead of time. It has become very difficult for her to return into her earlier identity, which was constructed by the society. The only way she wanted to exist in the society was sacrificing life for the 'self'. She had learnt to celebrate her self from the sea and finally she decided to claim the autonomy of her 'self' by drowning into the sea. She is fully conscious of her act. As she realized the presence of traditional life everywhere in her present, she decided to discard the life itself by drowning her into the vast sea.

Conversely, Mrs. Mallard is an introvert type character. Her process of awareness is confined with in her own psychological realm. No other characters, in the story, are concerned with her revolutionary attitude. However, her reaction towards her husband's death reflects the picturesque image of male chauvinistic society where female were kept like caged birds. In normal situation, nobody can remain unaffected when he or she hears the news of his or her spouse's death in an accident, but the way Louise Mallard reacts to her husband's death makes it clear that her position was pathetic. The influence of her previous life is still visible in her activities when she pretends to be crying at the news only because the people who were present over there could take her behavior otherwise. She is not courageous enough to follow commands of her inner self. For this reason, she has to maintain double standard. As she keeps herself locked in the room for a while, her determination to celebrate the life with free self is strengthened gradually, she is enthralled by the imagination of beautiful days when she would be living for herself alone, having nobody to follow her. Now, the very weak and submissive woman grows courageous enough to deny the presence of male partner in the upcoming days of her life. Empowered by the strength of eternal self she begins to envision the setting of her new life where even the memory of her past life could have no interference. Having been

filled with such preoccupied psychological state of mind to safeguard her ‘Self’ she could pay anything for it, be that her own life or something else. Her death at the sight of her husband in the final scene was natural because she had already emptied even the memory of him from her heart and her mind. Sharing the future life with him was unacceptable for her. Such form of life would have no meaning to her. It would be injustice to her self. Had she valued living alone more than the freedom of self, she would not have died of heart attack. Nevertheless, life without freedom of self was worse than death itself for her.

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