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Self-revelation in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*: A Study of Conceptual Metaphors

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract:

This research paper studies conceptual metaphors in Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical novel The Bell Jar (1963) in order to explore self-revelation of inner landscape of her mind and soul. Alter-ego to the author, Esther Greenwood, talks about her problematic self through metaphorical language. For the exploration, this paper brings theoretical insights from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Metaphor We Live By (1980) and analyzes metaphoric language used in the novel.

Interpretation of the conceptual metaphors leads to the finding that the novel is the reflection of Plath's mental instability and dilemma, dreams and desires, alienated self, and death drive caused by her psychological inconstancy and social restrictions that makes her feel like she is living in the bell jar. Particularly this research paper helps in understanding Plath's The Bell Jar in its symbolic level. In general it supports in divulging the underlying meaning, author's psychology, and his/her world view in life narratives by analyzing conceptual metaphors.

Keywords: self-revelation, conceptual metaphors, mental instability, dilemma, bell jar

This investigation interprets conceptual metaphors in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* to uncover the mental state of protagonist and her social understanding. By bringing theoretical insights from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory and other views about significance of metaphor in literary text, the research focuses on mental and psychological disorder of Esther and connects them to personal as well as public issues. The research observes the metaphorical language in the novel to prove the claim that the novel is divulgence of Sylvia Plath's problematic self, depression, alienation, quandary, and death drive caused by personal psyche as well as contemporary socio-political circumstances.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) is a well-known semi-autobiographical novel published a month before she committed suicide. Plath, an American poet and novelist, went through so many ups and downs in her life. In early childhood, her father passed away, in adulthood she suffered from mental disorder, her conjugal life could not last long, and she finally committed suicide after several attempts. She practiced a new genre of poetry called 'confessional poetry' in English literature. Plath's *The Bell Jar* blends autobiography and fiction.

The Bell Jar presents the story of mental breakdown of the protagonist and narrator, Esther Greenwood. Esther Greenwood, the alter ego of author, gets an opportunity to work as a guest editor for a magazine in New York where she attends many parties and participates in many programs with other eleven ladies friends. Meetings, interactions and dates with some of the young boys give her some better and bitter experiences. Back to home, Esther feels abnormal, undergoes psychological and mental problems and attempts suicide several times. For the treatment of her mental problems she consults with psychiatrists, spends a lot of time in different hospitals and asylums and gets treated with electric shock therapy. She dreams high but her personal problems and social expectations obstruct her. On the one hand, she desires to spend romantic life, get married and have children. On the other hand, she feels herself unfit in society and attempts to end her life.

Although *The Bell Jar* talks about personal experiences of Esther, it reflects the social and historical condition of the period. Set in America of the 1950s and early 1960s, the novel represents the post-war literature. The World War II ended which twisted the world history. Meanwhile, Cold War was still going on and America was facing Civil War too. Women's position was not satisfactory in America. There were double standards created for men and women. The second wave of feminism had also

begun in early 1960s to challenge traditional patriarchal values and assumptions rooted in American society and culture. The same year, when Plath's *The Bell Jar* was published, Betty Friedan published her famous book *The Feminine Mystique*, one of the notable book that contributed in feminist movement. So, multiple challenges were undergoing during the 1950s and 1960s in the USA. That period was the transitional phase in American history with both problems and possibilities.

In the beginning of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, the protagonist says that there is something wrong with her but reasons behind it remain implicit. The novel narrates the problematic life experiences of Esther. She talks about opportunities, obstacles and perplexities in her life. The story seems autobiographical, but the title, *The Bell Jar*, seems to have no connection with the story. The literal meaning of 'bell jar' is laboratory equipment for enclosing the things of experiment. Bell jar keeps the things inside it separate from outside environment. So, what has this 'bell jar' to do with Esther's life? What is the 'bell jar' in the novel? What is inside it? Is she herself inside the bell jar? Then, what is she covered with? These are the questions that strikes readers' mind while reading the novel. Not just the title of the novel but the narrative inside it has numerous metaphors. Without knowing the meaning of the metaphorical expressions, it is difficult to understand the self of Plath. This research paper aims to answer the above mentioned questions and find out the true revelation of the author's self in the novel.

This research paper aims to identify the problem with the narrator of *The Bell Jar* who also represents the life of Sylvia Plath. Esther seems to have some mental or psychological problems. The primary objective of this paper is to diagnose or investigate Esther's various aspects of such mental and psychological complexities on the basis of metaphorical language she has used. The language she has used represents

her thoughts, concepts or ideas towards certain things. Here, thought determines her mentality and attitude to see the world around her. Focusing on the metaphorical language, especially conceptual metaphors, the research will dig the hidden reasons behind the problematic self of narrator. Personal as well as public issues which are directly or indirectly connected with ups and downs in her life will be researched through metaphorical tools. The research also aims to relate socio-political and historical circumstances with the issue.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* has been widely researched since its publication. Personal as well as public issues raised in the novel have been reviewed by number of critics. The novel, according to researchers reflects contemporary socio-political situation. Azra Ghandeharion argues that in addition to personal experience of Plath's protagonist Esther, the novel projects various aspect of the 1950s America. According to him: " besides being a personal issue, her frustration is the outcome of socio-cultural factors. The lack of role models and the contradictory messages sent by the media lead to her anxiety, disillusionment and uncertainty" (64). On the one hand, media seemed to be encouraging women to be high achievers at school and college. On the other hand, they are taught how to cook delicious and be a good housewife. This duality of the messages in the media also shares responsibility in creating anxiety and frustration. Esther's role model is her mother but she is rooted with traditional beliefs and wants her daughter to follow her footsteps. Ghandeharion further states:

Mothers cannot provide their girls with viable alternatives. Young women have to emulate their mothers who have gone to college, held a job for short time, and once they were happily married, just gave up their dream for the long wished-for security that a husband could provide. Esther's mother and Mrs. Willard are two significant role models whom Esther criticizes. (67)

The above mentioned statement clarifies that study and job or career of women is only up to marriage. In Plath's *The Bell Jar* also mothers wish their daughters to follow the same tradition. Ghandeharion says that although Mrs. Willard is professor's wife and a teacher herself, she spends most of the time cleaning, cooking, washing, and other household activities. Esther's mother teaches her to be a dedicated woman like her. She has taught false and illogical notion regarding sexuality, virginity, and purity. Mothers have narrowed their daughter's choices. The alternative for them is "spinsterhood or loneliness, which in itself is scary" (Ghandeharion67). Living single in traditional patriarchal society is not normal. They are obliged to accept the traditional role of a good girl, loyal housewife, and a good mother. Between the 'self' they desire and the 'self' they are supposed to develop.

Likewise, mother daughter relationship in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, has been interpreted as a result of generation gap. As time changes, goals and lifestyle of people automatically get changed. But the old generation still feels difficult to update them which results in generation gap. Janet McCann argues that daughters used to take their mothers as a symbol of repression during the nineteen fifties. Because of the generation gap, there was vast difference between their thinking. For mothers, study was just the preparation for finding a good husband to get married. In contrast daughters took their study as preparation of career. McCann views:

Esther sees her own mother as a major cause of her illness and presents her in negative light...Esther, like Sylvia sees symbol as a fact; her mother is a symbol of the repressive time period. Actually the 1960s rather than 1950s were the time of great engagement between middle-class mothers and daughters; the mothers, if they went to college, often did so as a preparation for marriage. Now their daughters were filled with the ideas of professional

achievement and professional freedom. The mothers were horrified by the rejection of their values; they did what they could to constrain their daughters' experiments and bring them back to the fold. (13)

Esther Greenwood wanted to be a good writer and make her career herself. But her mother wanted her to be an ideal woman like her and share the identity of her husband by getting married. Study for Esther's mother is just a ladder to reach to a good husband. For Esther, a girl whose academic profile is good and goal of life is to reach far, nothing can be more suppressive than disturbing her dream. Esther has clearly said that she hates her mother.

The Bell Jar has been reviewed as a common psychological experience of coming of age. Transition from childhood to adulthood certainly develops eager and anxiety in person. Angela Billman writes: "perhaps the most distinctive thing about Plath's novel is its ability to make the readers feel as if at the same stage in their own lives, they had felt the same things that the main protagonist, Esther Greenwood feels" (9). In her view the novel speaks about common psychology of girls of her age. According to Angela, depression is not caused by her personal problems. She argues that she is a perfect girl of her time. She also argues: "Esther seemingly has everything_ beauty, brain, a college scholarship at prestigious university, a handsome boyfriend studying to be a doctor" (9). This is what an American girl of the 1950s wishes to have. So she argues that the tension of Esther Greenwood is patriarchal society which becomes obstacle for women. Through this novel, she adds, "Plath gives feminism a voice" (9). Her search for self is disturbed by American culture and patriarchal society. Esther or the girls of her age are not seeking happiness but their identity and freedom.

Researchers have studied the novel from feminist perspective. Allison Wilkins sees patriarchal dominance reflected in the novel. At dance club, Doreen dates Lenny and Esther has blind date with Marco, one of friends to Lenny. Marco gives her diamond and asks her to dance with him but she does not have mood. Later Marco misbehaves her, it invites fight between them, and she punches on his nose and it bleeds. He calls her slut and demands his diamond back. Marco, according to Allison Wilkins, represents patriarchal dominance in America. Wilkins claims: "Marco segregates all women into two categories: virgin or whore" (43). As Wilkins argues, it is common in a patriarchal society that if women deny following male and coming under their control, they call them bad girls and see negatively. Marco shows his brutal manner by trying to control Esther and use her for his interest.

The Bell Jar for some critics reflects the real life of American women in male dominated society. Women felt suppressed under the discriminatory rules and regulations of patriarchy. Patriarchal society had created boundaries for women which they were supposed not to cross. The novel, therefore criticizes the patriarchal norms and values. Marukh Baig writes:

The Bell Jar is a bitter critique of 1950s American societies. It is a bitter critique of 1950s American society that has rules, regulations, double standards and emotional as well as physical constraints on the female...Plath's novel criticizes the jar-like contemporary society for its double standards male dominance and hypocrisy. The double sexual standard in 1950s America gave men a privilege of premarital sex; however denied women of the similar sexual expression that generated a definite sense of depression and frustration in them. (8)

This statement by Baig clarifies that women were treated as the citizens of second standard as they were not given privileges equal to men. Double standards were also generated within women. They were categorized into 'pure or 'impure', 'virgin or prostitute', and 'good or bad'. Baig argues that Esther tries to challenge the standards created by male. He adds, " She wants to lose her virginity without losing dignity because for her it is merely a measure of feminist rebellion against the double sexual standards for men and women in the society" (10). In this sense, Plath's *The Bell Jar* can be read as a strong voice and resistance against existing gender discrimination. She challenges the stereotypes which have separated Esther's self, soul and body.

However, the novel also gets connected to historical and political context of America of the 1950s. Esther Greenwood, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, *The Bell Jar* starts the story with the news of electrocution of the Rosenbergs. This incident is the historical event of America. Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg were husband and wife executed by electrocuting in 1953 for spying. She starts the novel with this event for several reasons. According to Irish Jamahl, "The Rosenbergs' case still haunts American history, reminding us of the injustice that can be done when a nation gets caught up in hysteria. The Rosenbergs' trial was one of the most polarizing events in the early part of the Cold War" (65). The execution became controversial in the sense that many people doubted whether they really spied or not. Especially, many people believed that Ethel was not involved in spying. Through this reference to the Rosenbergs execution, she perhaps wants to talk about injustice in 1950s America. There are some resemblances between Ethel and Esther, too. Some critics take Esther as 'ghost of Rosenberg'. Similarly, another critic Marie Ashe claims:

Plath uses the Rosenberg's death which she refers to several occasions, to set the scene for her main themes Ethel Rosenberg's full name was Esther Ethel Greengrass Rosenberg. Plath's heroin is Esther Greenwood, and the similarity of the names draws a direct parallel between Esther and a woman many Americans believed had suffered a terrible injustice. (qtd. in Dunkel 66).

As Ashe has said, interconnection between the Rosenbergs' and the narrator, Esther cannot be underestimated since it is repeatedly mentioned in novel. The execution represents the injustice that women faced during the cold war. Esther brings this historical reference to talk about her condition as a common problem of contemporary women. According to Iris Dunkel, this historical event adds 'external tension' and 'cultural realism' to the text. By referring to this event time and again in the novel, Plath is trying to reveal the historical and political tension in the USA during the period the novel was written.

Behind the madness of Esther lie many causes. One of them is the gap between the experiences society expects and what she really experiences. In this connection, Navaya Chandran writes, "Esther observes gap between what society say she should experience and what she does experience. This gap intensifies her madness" (412). Her experiences differ from the general experiences of contemporary women. Esther undergoes several conflicts and confusion about various things in her life leading her to difficulty. Chandran observes that, "Esther seems to be perpetually in conflict with the idea of sexuality. She is initially at confusion with the idea of morality and her natural drives. Her false notion of sexuality sprang up mostly from the illogical advices of her mother" (413). It means her natural or bodily desires remain unfulfilled due to fear of morality. Her mother has taught her about the virginity, purity and so many things a woman should be aware of. These advices

become the obstacles for her to address the demand of her natural body. She gets confused whether to follow her mother and be a 'good woman' or fulfill her bodily demand. The conflict between her excessive sexual desire and morality causes her mental imbalance.

Most of the reviews and researches on Plath's *The Bell Jar* have focused on the feminist voice of novel. Similarly, researchers have connected the novel with socio-political aspect of the 1950s America. However, only the literal analysis of the novel does not give justice in understanding of novel. Study and analysis of the novel still remains untouched by researchers. *The Bell Jar* depicts the psychological condition of Esther caused by personal and public issues. I contend that psychological aspect cannot be separated from human thoughts and concepts. This research paper, therefore, tries to analyze the novel on the basis of use of conceptual metaphors and their significance to create overall meaning of the novel. The title of the novel, *The Bell Jar*, itself gives metaphorical meaning. It reveals about the mental condition of the protagonist, Esther Greenwood. The novel narrates Esther's experiences and thoughts about various things in her life. So many experiences are literally understood. But the underlying meaning is yet to be learnt. Knowingly or unknowingly, the narrator and protagonist, Esther has compared her thoughts with different abstract and concrete things. This analogy has meaning in its underlying level. The research paper makes the deep study of conceptual metaphors in the novel by examining specifically.

The research analyzes metaphors in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* in order to diagnose the mental as well psychological condition of Esther Greenwood, the mouthpiece of the author. More specifically, research focuses on the conceptual metaphor, also known as cognitive metaphor, in the novel. For the analysis of the

findings, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory is applied. In their book, *Metaphor We Live By* (1980), they discuss about conceptual metaphor in detail. This theory takes metaphor as a matter of thought rather than language and mere words. Lakoff and Johnson claim that everyday language is full of metaphor where knowingly or unknowingly, different ideas are used to talk about some other ideas. They categorize conceptual metaphors in three types: structural, orientational and ontological metaphor. Conceptual metaphor theory helps to find out the meaning of the expressions where one abstract idea or concept gets compared with other abstract ideas, concepts or concrete things. These two ideas are named source domain and target domain. Conceptual metaphor theory makes it is easier to find the hidden instincts behind the abnormal physical, mental and psychological condition of Sylvia Plath by analyzing cross-dominal correlation of compared concepts in language. Through mapping from one domain to another domain of the ideas, metaphorical meaning can be found in conversation and literary texts.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* blends autobiography with fiction. Plath presents her life experiences through fictional character, Esther Greenwood. This blending makes the novel autofiction presenting autofictive reality. Thomas C. Spear defines: "Autofictive reality is the text itself; not exactly autobiography nor novel, autofiction has traits of both. The text is clearly linked, however to the life of the author, even if not in conventionally autobiographical manner" (358). Autobiography presents real self of author where author himself/herself narrates the story where as fiction presents the fictional reality through fictional characters. When these two genres get merged together, it becomes autofiction. Plath's *The Bell Jar* shares the features of both fiction and autobiography. Therefore, this research focuses on the self representation of the author in the novel.

This study contends that the mental state and social understanding of Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* can be approached through the interpretation of conceptual metaphors as elaborated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphor We Live By* (1980). Human mind, the source or root of concepts, has control over human consciousness and functioning. The language spoken on the basis of concepts reveals a lot about our mental state and our world view. While narrating her story, Esther in *The Bell Jar* refers one concept in relation to another concepts ideas or objects. The way she talks about her mind, her life and environment around her exposes that she has some sort of mental and psychological problems. Sometimes she feels trapped in society she has been living and desires for freedom. Her desires, dilemma, suppression, depression and death drive reflects throughout her day to day language.

Understanding Plath's *The Bell Jar* in literal sense is like seeing iceberg in the ocean. Like the hidden part of the ice inside the ocean, the novel has deeper meaning. Conceptual metaphor theory can be one of the tools to enter into the ocean and see the hidden part of it. Metaphorical study will tell how Esther expresses her desires, how her desires are suppressed and, how she gets depressed. Elena Semino and Gerard Steen claim that "metaphorical patterns not simply as a part of writer's individual style but also as a reflection of his or her individual worldview" (239). Now, it can be claimed that use of metaphor in *The Bell Jar* is not just a style of Sylvia Plath but it reflects her mentality and her understanding of the world around her.

The first step in analysis of conceptual metaphors in Plath's *The Bell Jar* is to discuss about the title. Plath's protagonist, Esther time and again says that she has been living inside the bell jar. It reveals how her 'self' is suppressed inside certain boundaries. When her mother talks about Mrs. Guinea's support in her life and tells

her to be grateful for releasing her from city hospital and transferring to private hospital, Esther replies:

I knew I should be grateful to Mrs. Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing. If Mrs. Guana had given me a ticket to Europe, or around- the- world cruise, it wouldn't have made one scrap of difference to me, because wherever I sat- on the desk of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok- I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own soar air. (156)

This utterance tells a lot about the feelings and experiences of Esther not only in her society but all over the world. Her understanding of the world and her 'self' is guided by her experiences. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their work, *Metaphor We Live By*, argue that "our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to the other people" (7). Her concept about her and the world around her, therefore, has connection with her experiences and perceptions. Her concepts reveal how she sees the things and it also tells how she has experienced. Lakoff and Johnson also claim that the root of concept is our experience.

Of course, she compares society with the bell jar. Society is an abstract concept whereas bell jar is a concrete thing. Conceptual metaphor theory mainly focuses on the comparison between abstract and concrete things. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (10). In above mentioned Esther's reply to her mother, she takes life as chemical object inside the bell jar in laboratory. Two comparisons can be seen here in the extract: society is compared with bell jar and Esther is compared with chemical object inside it. These are two different semantic fields which Lakoff and Johnson call two different domains: source domain and target domain. In source domain, things happen literally where as features of source domain gets

metaphorically applied in target domain. The 'cross-dominal correlation' between them creates meaning. Bell jar is source domain. It refers to a cover for chemical objects in laboratory which creates a narrow space for the object inside it and keeps out of contact from outside environment. Society or the world where Esther lives is the target domain. The society has narrowed the space for Esther and kept her inside the social and moral boundaries not letting her freedom she needs. She feels suffocated and trapped like in a big jar. Her use of metaphor of bell jar reveals that she has been living very difficult life. Her 'self' is no more her. It lies under the control of other.

Similarly, the bell jar also symbolizes the madness of Esther. Throughout the novel, Esther reveals that she has some sort of mental problems. The metaphor of bell jar makes it clearer. Lakoff and Johnson argue that sometimes, knowingly or unknowingly, we use some concrete things to refer some abstract ideas and feelings. Madness is an abstract idea about someone's mental condition. For Esther living in madness feels like living in the bell jar. She feels herself blank and dead in madness. She tells: "To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream" (198). She expresses her feelings in madness like bad dream. Similarly when she feels recovered from her illness after treatment by Doctor Nolan she says that "All the heat and fear had purged itself I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung suspended a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air" (180). These two statements expressing her feeling in madness and feeling after she recovered from madness reveal that madness for her was like a bell jar. Like object inside the bell jar, she feels alienated from the outside environment because alienation is regarded as one of the symptoms of mental illness. After psychotherapy the 'bell jar suspended a few feet above' her that means she felt recovered.

Sylvia Plath's protagonist as well as alter-ego, Esther Greenwood repeatedly talks about her mental condition. But the way she reveals her mental problem looks metaphoric. She uses the word 'mind' as a storehouse of something concrete. She thinks it as an entity and container. Nguyen Ngoc Vu argues that "the conceptualization of our experience under the conceptual domain of material or tangible things helps us extract abstract experiences and ideas out and see it as object or concrete substances" (69). He gives an example of orientational conceptual metaphor: "My mind is not operating today". This sentence assumes mind as machine and the act of mind, i.e. thinking and memorizing as operation of machine. Similar kinds of examples can be seen in Plath's novel, too. Esther remembers her meeting with her boss Jay Cee and says: "I don't know just why my successful evasion of chemistry should have floated into my mind there in Jay Cee's office" (32). In this example she refers her mind as a pond or river where objects float over it. At the same time she refers her memory in terms of floating. When memories of the past events, especially bad experiences repeatedly come in mind they result in madness.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that our daily language contains a lot of metaphors. Sometimes we speak such metaphoric utterances without noticing them. But that tells many things about us. The concept lies in unconscious state of the mind and comes in speech automatically. While attempting suicide, Esther Greenwood thinks:

"I would simply have to ambush it with whatever sense I had left, or it would trap me in its stupid cage for fifty years without any sense at all. And people found out my mind had gone, as they have to, sooner or later, in spite of my mother's guarded tongue, they would persuade her to put me into an asylum where I could be cured" (133).

This whole extract in itself is reflection of her suicidal tendency. But "my mind had gone" is the key of whole extract. Here, she treats her body containing mind as a place and mind as person. Mind had gone means it can walk from one place to another. When something departs from particular place, the place remains empty. So Esther thinks her as mindless since mind has gone.

In conduit metaphor, according Lakoff's theory, ideas become object and mind works as container. Mind becomes an entity in that situation. In the beginning of novel, Esther tells us what her mind is filled with. She tells: "I kept hearing about the Rosenberg over the radio and at the office till I couldn't get them out of my mind" (1). Here the news or memory becomes an entity for Esther which can be put inside or get outside. Generally only concrete objects can be put inside or outside. Similarly, in hospital, Esther says: "A maid in a green uniform was setting the tables for supper. There were white linen table clothes and glasses in the paper napkins. I stored the fact that there were real glasses in the corner of my mind the squirrel stores a nut" (157). Here also, she takes mind as storehouse of something concrete, sharp and hard pieces of glasses. The main focus of this research is that the idea or substances that her mind is filled with reveal her mental condition. The bad memory of the Rosenbergs stored in mind causes her mental disorder. This haunting memory makes her traumatized. It symbolizes that Esther has some sort of mental problem caused by something prickly experiences in mind.

After analyzing Esther's language and concepts, it can be guessed that her madness is the product of her own psyche. On the one hand, she has her own desires and dreams while social and moral restrictions are on the other hand. Even she seems to be guided by pleasure principal and death drive herself. So, the conflict with society and within herself is one of the reasons behind her madness. Navya Chandran

claims it to be her psychological problem. He claims that, "Esther's slow descent into madness is the result of her ego's incapability that compensates between her id and superego, finally leading her to depression and neurosis" (415). From Freudian perspective Chandran observes Esther's madness as the outcome of trying to suppress the natural forces fearing the social moral restrictions. Esther has psychological problems. According to Chandran, "major psychic problem that Esther suffers from is neurosis caused due to poor ability to adapt to one's environment, an inability to change one's life pattern and inability to develop a richer, more complex, more satisfying personality" (413). Esther feels difficult to adjust herself in her social environments and becomes unable to lead her desired life. Neither can she change herself to be fit for society, nor to change society. It has caused her mental disorder.

Repeatedly, Esther exposes her sickness which has made her life difficult and miserable. She talks as if her body and mind is the storehouse of disease. Exaggeration of the feeling with analogy of different natural objects and processes indicates the seriousness of her sickness. She feels:

I thought I would die. I sat on the toilet and leaned my head over the edge of the washbowl and I thought I was losing my guts and my dinner both. The sickness rolled through me in great waves. After each wave it would fade away and leave me limp as a wet leaf and shivering all over and then I would feel it rising up in me again, and the glittering white torture-chamber tiles under my feet and over my head and on all four sides closed in and squeezed me to pieces. (37)

'Sickness' is an abstract idea, a human experience but she takes it as an entity which rolls on the surface of something. Not only that, she compares it with the waves of sea. It tells how serious she is. People feel sickness but can't see it moving, increasing

or decreasing. Unless we measure it with medical equipments, sickness is beyond measure for a common person. The best way to express their feeling then becomes use of metaphor. Esther experiences sickness in terms of substances which describes the level of her sickness. In this matter Lakoff and Johnson write:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experiences and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them and quantify them and, by this means reason about them. (24)

Human experience is beyond measure, uncountable and unexpressive. Even doctors cannot measure the experience of a sick person; no matter they may diagnose the disease or measure the degree. Therefore the use of metaphor helps to understand human experience. Esther measures her sickness as wave which is huge.

Sometimes, the words and language spoken by a person tell a lot about him/her. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Esther's language and selection of words and phrases reveals so many things about her physical, psychological and mental condition. Daniel Hunt and Ronald Carter argue that "Throughout the narrative, Esther certainly displays certain symptoms of mental illness. Esther's fictional state of mind is manifest in the verbal content of the novel itself" (29). According to them, her frequent comparative use of phrases such as 'like dead bird', 'like grey skull', 'like dead water', 'like hole in the ground', and 'like skin shed by terrible animal' reveals about her mental disorder. They further state: "The link between the figurative language we use and our cognitive processes means that metaphorical language reflects particular conceptual structure and cognitive habits that characterize an individual's world view" (32). It is like seeing the things around us wearing spectacles

of different colors. Mental condition and cognitive process determine how someone feels and sees. In this way Esther's world view and mentality can be measured on the basis of language she has used, too. Her language gets influenced by her mental condition.

People share their feelings in different ways. Some people express their feelings in literal language as 'I am feeling sick today'. But another way to express feelings is the orientational technique. In Lakoff and Johnson's term it is called orientational metaphor which organizes a whole system of concept in respect to one another. They clarify it as follow:

We will call these orientational metaphors since most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central peripheral. These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have the bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. Orientational metaphor give a concept a spatial orientation; for example 'happy is up'. (17)

The concepts get oriented toward certain spatial direction as if they can move. They give meaning on the basis of daily experiences. The concept 'happiness' for example is oriented 'up' and 'sadness' is oriented 'down'. If someone says 'I am feeling up today', he/she means he is happy. In Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Esther also expresses these types of orientational metaphors. Most of the times, she uses second spatial words of the pair like 'down', 'low', 'out' etc. Remembering the meeting with her boss, Jay Cee, she thinks:

I felt very low. I had been unmasked only that morning by Jay Cee herself, and I felt now that all the uncomfortable suspicions I had about myself were coming true, and I couldn't hide the truth much longer. After nineteen year of

running after good marks and prizes and grants of one sort and another, I was letting up, slowing down, dropping clean out of the race. (24)

The first sentence, 'I felt very low' reveals that she started feeling disappointed for knowing that she was running in a race without a proper destination. Her feeling is now oriented to downwards which refers to unhappiness. Spatial orientations like 'slowing down', 'dropping clean' and 'out of' are oriented to the opposite pole. These concepts make it clear that she wants to end the race. However, the term 'letting up' looks little bit confusing since it seems something like 'happy is up' types of metaphors. Conceptual metaphor theory says that orientational metaphor has 'experiential base' and they are culturally embedded. 'Letting up' is therefore not coherent with 'happy is up'.

The most important comparison in above mentioned extract is that Esther compares life with journey. Esther says that she has been running after good marks, prizes and grants for nineteen years. It means 'student life is journey or race'. Life and journey are two different concepts from different domains. Edward Slingerland, states that this kind of metaphor "arises out of our basic embodied experiences and gives us a way to think and reason about abstract things" (326). On the basis of Lakoff and Johnson's view on mapping, Slingerland beautifully maps two domains: 'purposeful life' and 'journey' as follows:

| | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| Journey - | purposeful life |
| Traveler - | person living a life |
| Destination - | goals of life |
| Linearity- | life plans (326) |

This analogy clearly shows the underlying structure between two concepts from different semantic fields. As a traveler moves toward his/her destination in journey, a

person makes plan and goes ahead to achieve his/her goals in life. Life as a journey crosses many turns, ups and downs, hills and vales, and many more amusing moments and obstacles. This mapping totally matches with Esther Greenwood's metaphor of race in above mentioned extract. She is a traveler (student) in long race (study) to certain destination (goals of life).use of metaphor is really beautiful and seems logical. But the problem with her is that she thinks this journey purposeless and wants to give up. She wants to get 'out of the race'. It also reveals that she wants to get rid from the race of life which seems to be true with her several suicide attempts later.

The language Plath has used in the novel metaphorically exposes her suicidal tendency. She seems guided by death drive. It proves that death is in her mind or concept which comes in her speech time and again. Esther Greenwood compares her life with a job. She admits: "I was beginning to resign myself" (175). Life and job belong to different semantic fields. To analyze this metaphor from the angle of Lakoff's mapping of conceptual domains, it can be presented as follows:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| Job- | human life |
| Appointment- | birth |
| Duties- | responsibilities of life |
| Resign- | to commit suicide |
| Retirement- | death |

From this mapping it is crystal clear that Esther Greenwood has been guided with death drive. The word 'resign' from the domain of job means to give up a position or job officially. Generally people resign from job when they have no more interest to continue or they are tired of it. They give up if they feel tired of doing the job. This metaphor of job discloses that Esther, the mouthpiece of the author has been tired of

life and has no more interest to live. She wants to give up her life before her natural death. It reflects the suicidal tendency of Sylvia Plath.

Sylvia Plath's dilemma in choosing the better career and its effect in her life is also manifested in the novel. This dilemma shares responsibility in her madness to some extent. She thinks, she has a lot of career opportunities in her life but she fails to choose the best for her. This dilemma of her life can be seen in her metaphor of fig tree. Fig tree is one of the dominant metaphors used in *The Bell Jar*. Esther, the protagonist of the novel is in her late teen. Till now she was studying and did not have to worry about any other things. But now it's time to do many things. On one hand she has her interest to be a good writer and independent person. On the other hand her mother and society expects her to be an ideal woman of their types. In this case, to talk about her dilemma and confusion, she narrates:

I saw my life branching out before me like green fig trees in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and happy home and children, and another fig was famous poet and another fig was brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and America and South America, and another fig was Constatin and Socrates and Attlia and pack of other lovers with queer names and off-beat professions, and other fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. (63)

The first thing noticed in the extract given above is that she compares her life with a tree which is branching. A tree starts branching when it is about to get matured. Esther is also getting matured since she is nineteen years old, about to enter in her twenties. From that point of her age, she has to think about several alternatives of

future life. The fig tree has multiple branches with full of fruits. People always refer future progress as fruit. Esther sees her future very fruitful. The wonderful future is in front of her. She sees a happy life with sweet house, husband and children. Similarly, she imagines her life as a successful writer and editor. She sees her life bright and happy ahead. But the problem is in choosing the write option. She further says:

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the fig I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (64)

She feels like sitting thirsty in the side of a big river. Although the fig tree, full of ripen fruits is in front of her she remains hungry. It clarifies the difficulty in choosing one among many. Her disability in choosing the one among many makes delay and the opportunity escapes from her life like over ripen fruits fall to the ground.

Allison Wilkins' understanding about this metaphor of fig is that "In Esther's metaphor, all the figs are delicious paths for her future, and her inability to pick just one fig shows her inability to make choices about her future. Instead of having a plan, or making a choice, she sees all her paths rot and become unfit for consumption. Esther is trapped by indecision" (47). It means when a person delays in choosing, the opportunity escapes from his/her life. Esther is in dilemma about choosing because there are so many opportunity in front of her and she has to choose one. All of them look equally good. She thinks choosing one means losing the other, which is equally important. In this dilemma, she fears that she will not be able to grab any of the opportunities.

Of course, she has lots of opportunities to make her future better and bright. But sometimes she thinks that her life is at the end. Comparing her life with telephone line, she says: "I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires. I counted one, two, three, nineteen telephones, and the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth"(102). Esther Greenwood thinks her life as a telephone line. Telephone line connects communication service from house to house with the help of poles and wires. She compares her nineteen years of life with telephone poles spaced along the road. As telephone poles are interconnected by wire, her life has been connected with memory and past experiences of life. The point to be noted is that she does not see a single pole ahead. It means she sees no life ahead.

Likewise, Sylvia Plath discloses her vague and stereotypical concepts regarding sexuality and virginity. On one hand, she wants to find a boy and have romantic relation. On the other hand, she thinks about remaining virgin and pure. Between these two concepts, there is a common thing that she assumes virginity as a property. Whenever she talks about sex, she assimilates it with a valuable property. She says: "I have been saving myself for when I get married to somebody pure and virgin" (57). Here the word 'saving' gives meaning that virginity is money. It resembles with Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor, 'Time is money'. People use words like 'spend', 'lost', 'waste', 'save', 'give' etc. to talk about time. In this sense time is taken as money in day to day language. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood uses some vocabularies related to money in order to talk about virginity and purity. She further states:

And that's how Buddy had lost his virginity. At first he must have slept with the waitress only the once, but when I asked how many times, just to make

sure, he said he couldn't remember but a couple of times a week for the rest of summer. I multiplied three by ten and got thirty, which seemed beyond all reason. After that something in me just froze up. (58)

She has been 'saving' her virginity but comes to know that Buddy Willard, her probable husband, has already 'lost' it. Vocabularies like 'saving' and 'lost' give virginity monetary quality. Furthermore, Esther says: "Ever since I had learned about the corruption of Buddy Willard my virginity weighed like a millstone around my neck. It had been of such enormous importance to me for so long that my habit was to defend it at all costs. I had been defending it for five years and I was sick of it" (190). Again, the words like 'corruption', 'weighed', and 'defend' give the qualities of money and property to virginity. Her concept towards sex and virginity also contributes in leading her to madness. She tries to suppress her bodily desire which psychologically affects the mind.

However, towards the end of novel, Esther Greenwood seems to have released from her physical, mental, social as well as moral troubles. One of the reasons behind her depression was her inability to break her virginity which is also the symbol of illogical moral barrier created by traditional society. Later, she did it with one of the professors named Erwin. Coincidentally, she almost recovered from mental disorder after long treatment in psychiatric hospitals and asylum. Narration of the events at the end of the novel differs from its starting. After electric shock therapy, she tells: "I woke out of a deep drenched sleep" (180). When she says 'out of sleep' it looks as if 'sleep' is some object, especially a container where man can contain. One of the researchers Tran Van Co argues:

We are the physical entity limited in certain space and separated from the rest of the world by our skin; we perceive the rest of the world as the world outside

us. Each of us is contained in limited space by the surface of the body, which is potentially orientational type of "inside-out". This orientation makes us imagine other physical objects also limited by the surface. At the same time we also see them as containers with inner space and separated from the world outside. (qtd. in. Nguyen Ngoc Vu, 68)

Keeping this argument in mind, Esther's term ' woke out of a deep drenched sleep' gives meaning that she was inside the boundary of sleep. Sleep is the state of unconsciousness. To come out of sleep means to get out of unconscious heading towards consciousness. Lakoff's orientational conceptual metaphor, " conscious is up, unconscious is down" also refers that 'coming out' or 'rising up' is oriented towards better or improvement. Moreover, coming out of sleep also indicates getting released from the entrapment of bell jar mentioned earlier. It signs Esther Greenwood's or Sylvia Plath's improvement from mental disorder.

To sum up, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) reveals the mental instability and dilemma of the author through metaphorical language. Observation of conceptual metaphors and common novel metaphors in the novel leads to the conclusion that Esther Greenwood, the mouthpiece of the author, exposes her desires, suppression, depression and death drive symbolically. Due to personal psychological and socio-cultural reasons, she feels entrapped in jar like environment. Esther's autonomous self is controlled by social and cultural values. Social restrictions and mental inconsistency become the hindrance for achieving her goal. Despite having numerous opportunities, she fails to choose the best of them because she is in dilemma whether to select her desired destination or the socially assigned one. Moreover, her twofold perception about sexuality and conflict between life instinct and death drive is projected symbolically.

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