

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Free Will and its Celebration

Free will refers to a desire for autonomy and individualism against all cultural norms and values. One does not consider his/her family members and social values while walking on the path of free will. Self is the most important and what is right for oneself. There has been always tussle between the society and the individual who chooses the path of free will. Society always asks one to follow the norms and values created by it which is favorable in regard to mass, but this opposes free will and autonomy of an individual.

Robert Kane defines free will as the most voluminously debated philosophical problem in the book, *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. He further adds, “The problem of free will arises when humans reach a certain higher stage of self-consciousness about how profoundly the world may influence their behavior in ways of which they were unaware” (4). He clarifies that without being self-conscious; the problem of free will does not arise. For further clarification he adds:

We believe we have free will when (a) it is “up to us” what we choose from an array of alternative possibilities and (b) the origin or source of our choices and actions is in us and not in anyone or anything else over which we have no control. Because of these features free will is frequently associated with other valued notions such as moral responsibility, autonomy, genuine creativity, self-control, personal worth or dignity, and genuine desert for our deeds or accomplishments. (5)

The above paragraph clarifies the weight of discussion on the topic of free will. It is

associated with almost all of our daily activities. But still there remains confusion, whether the activities are determined before or our free will is behind everything.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines free will as the power asserted of moral beings of willing or choosing within certain limitations or with respect to certain matters without the restraints of physical or divinely imposed necessity or outside casual law, spontaneous will or partially causeless volition. In addition it is defined as the ability to choose between alternative possibilities in such a way that the choice and action are to some extent creatively determined by the conscious subject at the time (907). This definition seems to oppose free will with determinism, the view that all events including mental are governed by casual laws. A Book on philosophy says every event is the inevitable effect of some set of circumstances that necessitated that event i.e. every future event is predetermined (Davis 17). As free will is to oppose determinism, the predetermination of events, complexities arises while using free will though people aspire for it. The determinists in opposition to free will say that the physical and mental state of an individual at a particular moment, together with the external stimuli at that moment necessitates the choice that is made. This is true as every moment of an individual's life has its beginning at birth. The development of the individual results from the interaction of the individual and the environment, and each step in that development is inevitable. Distinguishing free will and determinism, Davis puts:

To believe in free will is to be an indeterminist regarding human choices. To believe in free will is to believe that human choices are not governed by casual laws. People who believe in free will are called libertarians. Thus, we have: determinists who believe in determinism versus libertarians who believe in free will, which is

indeterminism relative to human choices. (17)

The difference between determinism and free will further clarifies the concept of free will. If we hypothesize number of people supporting free will and people supporting determinism, we may find large number of people supporting free will or liberty. The world history itself is an example. Humans had been always seeking freedom from the beginning of civilization. Great wars had been fought for liberty and free will, there had been revolutions against colonies, and people are ready to die for free will. World wars, anti-colonial movement, French Revolution, American Civil Right movement etc. are examples of revolution for freedom and liberty. Happiness of human beings lies where there is freedom and use of free will. Hence, they yearn for and it becomes cause of their celebration if they are able to fulfill their inner desire without any barrier.

In the Play *'night, Mother*(1983), Jessie is able to tackle determinism, the norms, responsibilities determined by the society and use her free will to take decision of her own choice, her inner desire. She is successful to use her free will being indifferent to her duties towards her mother. Her mother's plead for Jessie not to commit suicide has been a determining factor against Jessie's free will but she does so instead of this controlling factor.

Tracing out the history, the concept of free will goes back to middle ages. As discussed by Skirbekk and Gilje in *A History of Western Thought*, the concept of free will played an important role in the philosophies of St. Augustine. "Will takes precedence over reason and believing is not accepting something as true, it is passionately and intensely asserting that something is true" (120). Augustine's view of free will and the question of what an ethically correct choice are also connected with the philosophical-theological view of man's free will, original sin and the

problem of evil. The issue of free will combined with the question of identity took its height with the philosophies of Heidegger, Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir. The movement was given name of existentialism and their question existential-quest. The quest of self was the main subject of every existentialist i.e. who am I as an individual? Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Sartre in *Being an Nothingness* raised the same issue. As interpreted by Herman Philips, “Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is a revolutionary analysis of question of being and human existence” (4). “We are thrown into existence and we have freedom to choose our course in life” (28). For Sartre, “Human beings are condemned to be free and they have their own existential responsibility. Nothing is pre determined but we should create our own character through our action” (Furman and Avila 60). Simon de Beauvoir moves towards gender issue through her work, *The Second Sex*, hence she is given name of existential-feminist. She raises the issue that women are not ‘the second sex’ but equal counterpart of male, the name women is provided by the society, they are not women by birth. She encourages females to define themselves as equal sex, and create their autonomy.

1.2 Existential Condition and Suicide

Existential condition refers to the situation how an individual is living, what his/her expectations are, what he/she thinks and acts accordingly i.e. everything related to a conscious individual being. In Kierkegaard’s view, it is related specifically to an individual’s plight to have been thrown into this world. They carry anxiety for the gap in between their expectation and existence. Existential condition is a movement from essence to existence i.e. what they ought to be and what they existentially are (Stumpf 453). When there is gap between expectation and reality, one feels alienated from his/her essential being and hence realizes insecurity. He/she

tries to do something to overcome this insecurity and this effort further adds guilt and despair to their anxiety for gap. When one tries to actualize ones essential self and real life, life becomes full of anxiety. Anxiety is hence caused by awareness of a gap between essential self and existential self. This gap is the real existential condition which is full of despair.

Stumpf adds, according to Kierkegaard, existential condition as the cause of alienation and anxiety may lead a person towards activities like self-destruction and suicide. The person doing so thinks the activity as a step of transition from their existential to real self and which is achieved by making a decision, by an act of will and by commitment (454).

Jessie's committing of suicide in the play *'night, Mother* can be paralleled with the act of will, commitment to a real self. As Jessie realizes her existential condition, gap between her expectation and existence, it becomes reason of her anxiety, alienation and steps towards self-destruction i.e. suicide.

Going for the meaning of suicide, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines suicide as, "The act on an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally or the deliberate and intentional destruction of his/her own life by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind" (2286). Similarly *The Columbia Encyclopedia* defines meaning of suicide as taking of one's own life in a deliberate manner. Suicide may be compulsory, prescribed by custom or enjoyed by the authorities, usually as an alternative to death at the hand of others or it is thought to be committed for personal motives; it may be regarded as a heroic deed or condemned by religious and civil authorities (2647).

The step which Jessie takes i.e. suicide is the death that is not natural but self-intentioned. An individual plays an important role to perform the action. It is an act

of choice, made for oneself, to find out one's essence. An individual is bound to make such choices because choice defines an individual's essence according to Sartre (Moore and Bruder 166). Jessie is able to create her identity through this choice. Her action leads her to define her essence and that action is suicide.

1.3 Postmodern Setting

Postmodernism carries characteristics of exhaustion, pessimism, irrationality, transition, disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge, open endedness and simple in contrast to progress, optimism, rationality, search for absolute knowledge and elitism of modernism. M. H. Abrams states the term postmodernism as applied to the literature and art after world war when the effects on western morale of the first world war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of over-population. Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the counter traditional experiments of modernism but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by recourse to the models of "mass culture" in film, television, newspaper cartoons and popular music (168). To further analyze, he takes example of Beckett and other author's absurd, postmodernist writings and characterizes them to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying "abyss", or "void", or "nothingness" on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended (169). Some examples of postmodernist developments in literature are absurd, antihero, antinovel, beat writings, concrete poetry, metafiction, etc.

About postmodernism, Glenn Ward writes, “Postmodernism is not strictly speaking, a school of thought. It is not a unified intellectual movement with a definite goal or perspective, and it does not have a single dominant theoretician or spokesperson” (4). In spite of its indeterminacy in meaning, Ward has distinguished it from modernism as an erosion of modernist ideals and has put further, “But the postmodernist thinkers, rather than regretting the fall of the enlightenment, have actively sought to challenge its assumptions or have celebrated its supposed decline” (11). We find postmodernism as celebration of loss rather than regret. There was a feeling that all good ideas had been used up. Ward quotes from Fredric Jameson, “The writers and artist of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds...only a limited number of combinations are possible; the most unique ones have been thought of already” (30). Ward uses the term Post modern Theory synonymously to post colonial theory as moving from centre to the margin. We can see post modern theory rather as a democratic theory, a shift from tradition. In the postscript of the book Postmodernism, Ward summarizes the term as lacking of precision, recurring things, instability of meaning and disrupted by difference (202). Jean-Francois Lyotard defined it as a nascent state and that which denies itself the solace of good forms, which searches for new presentation not to enjoy them but to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable (246).

Whatever may be the definition, it is a period of indeterminacy, flexibility, hysteric activities, vulgarity, move from centre to margin, multiculturalism and more over celebration of loss. In context of American literary history, the period has been given name of chaos and cultural expansion. The time produced writers like Jack Kerouac, the progenitor of beat writing. Ultimate unrealities of all human actions were shown in Thomas Pynchon's *V*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. The

tendency towards a confusion of fantasy and reality was manifested in the works of Kurt Vonnegut: *Mother Night*, a portrait of paranoid self-destruction, *Cat's Cradle*, a story of universal destruction, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, combined historical horror of world war II with science fiction fantasy to suggest the only possible hope for humanity lay beyond our own corrupted plan. A single poem "Howl" established Allen Ginsberg, a charter member of the beat generation. James Dickey presented the ambiguous feeling of those who seek to escape civilization. A stronger hold on the American imagination was achieved by Sylvia Plath but she ended her brief life with suicide. Poet Frank O' Hara came up as a hero of gay activist movement with frank revelation of his homosexuality. Edward Albee and Sam Shepard developed electrifying plays. Promising Black American dramatists like Amiri Baraka, Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, etc. came to fore in between the years 60s and 90s. Another financially successful playwright was Neil Simon. These fresh inspirations were indeed found through the cultural transformations of the period largely as a result of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s. To list some self-reflexive Asian American writers are Frank Chin, Maine Hong, Amy Tan, Cathy Song, Bharati Mukherjee and Native American writers are N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Morman Silko etc.

Autobiographical and confessional notes developed with the works of Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Sylvia Plath. Personal voice took poetic voice with the work of Charles Wright, Alan Shapiro, Rita Dove, Robert Pinsky, Karl Shapiro etc. Toni Morrison was another remarkable African American female novelist to receive Nobel Prize in literature. Besides Morrison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni Alice Walker etc. were some other African-American writers. At the end of the century, some Hispanic writers like Cisneros, Hinojosa etc also came to

light in the time of this transformation.

These all are works of experimentation, cultural transformation, person oriented instead of society, minor themes, pessimism, exhaustion, irrationality, open ended, and much more work of disillusionment and celebration of loss. They do not follow a fixed trend, simple and informal language is used in those works. The play *'night, Mother*, being written in 1983, carries postmodern theme i.e. experimentation. Norman too experiments new theme of suicide as a victory, a celebration of free will in her Pulitzer Prize winning play *'night, Mother*. With this theme she moves away from tradition and there is celebration of loss which was the main feature of postmodernist writings of the period.

1.4 Feminism and Feminist Movements of Seventies

Feminism is related to the feminist social movement that seeks equal rights for women, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own carriers and life patterns. But they have to fight against the established norms. "Women writers and women readers always had to work against the grain" (Selden 134). The grain is patriarchal norms, the roles provided to females. Patriarchy has given role to males in the public worlds of economics and job whereas to females role of domestic spheres of house keeping and child bearing. Feminist criticism sometimes summons up the furies in their works against the patriarchal culture in order to create a less oppressive climate for women writers, readers and to deconstruct male dominated ways of seeing. In this regard, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft through her work, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' raised voice against the grain. Her argument was that, society denies women's economic independence, treats them as domestic slaves and encourages them to be docile and attentive towards their looks (395). After Wollstonecraft, writings of Germane

Necker de Stael and Virginia Woolf contributed significantly in the last decades of 19th century and second decades of 20th century. They questioned on socio-economic status of women. Later in the fifties, a very strong feminist voice was raised by Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist writer. She argued on given existence of woman as she wrote in *The Second Sex*, “One is not born but becomes a woman” (De Beauvoir 295). Here Beauvoir somewhat supports Virginia Woolf in her view that the reason of woman’s lacking behind is the civilization itself, its construction of rules and regulations and criteria provided to female. Women are given name of ‘other’ to men’s subject and the category of the other is as primordial as consciousness itself (De Beauvoir 16). Discrimination towards women has its root in the beginning of civilization, men made the rules and women were trapped in the men made role. Apart from these writings, no other feminist voices were heard, there was not any radical change in the society before seventies. But a full fledged feminist movement began in the early seventies to argue that the aesthetic criteria for works considered to be classics are self-perpetuating, established within academic institutions and populated mainly by white upper-class. The criteria for greatness served to exclude from the canon most writers whose sex, race or class diverged from the main stream mainstream. A parallel effort through the 1970's was the construction of American woman's literary tradition. The major works of gynocriticism – Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic*.

According to *Encyclopedia of American Literature*, before 1970s, the classics of American literature were supposed to be only male literatures of Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner to take some example and only one name is of woman i.e. Emily Dickinson. With the entry of feminism into the

American academy, questions arose: why were there so few so-called great American women writers? Why were women portrayed so negatively in American classics? Who set the standards for quality in literature, and whose interests did those standards serve, such questions resulted in a feminist reevaluation of the canon (314). As a result various feminist writings came into fore to reply these questions.

Feminist criticism contributed to the diversification of the American canon i.e. inclusion of more women writers in anthologies and course syllabi, as well as positive reassessment of female authors whose names had long been familiar but whose reputations were unsteady. In addition to Emily Dickinson, the women writers whose critical stock rose since the feminist academic re-evaluation of the 1970's and 80's include H.B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Little Women*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and the writings of Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, Hilda Doolittle, Marrian Moore, Lilian Hellman, Gwendolyn Brooks, Adrienne Rich, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Alice Walker, Tony Morrison etc. All these female writer's works can be read as representing feminist perspectives and all have provided fruitful ground for feminist criticism from many different approaches. Marsha Norman as she started writing in 1977, her works is highly influenced by the feminist movement of 70's in America.

1.5 Norman's Theme of Problematic Human Nature

Norman writes all of her plays about largely forgotten people, individuals whose lives seem small, perhaps even mean, but who, faced with some large and overwhelming problem, rise to their own varieties of eloquence. She is also known for her ability to write compellingly about the psychic pain of ordinary, often inarticulate, and generally forgotten people. Problematic human nature is given priority in almost all of her plays and the problems are universal as Robert J. Forman

writes:

Inevitably, she seizes on the single moment of greatest crisis in the lives of these people, that which allows them to rise to their greatest nobility. Though she is from the South, she makes every effort to create characterizations and settings that rise above regionalism to stand as contemporary and universal. (289)

Her plays often have small casts and deal with a single moment of overwhelming importance for the protagonist. The dramatic conflict centers on the recognition of this problem and its resolution. Her plays focus on some difficulty that relates to the inner life of the protagonist. The dialogues in her plays are often the cathartic conversations of ordinary people, given in simple language and without learned allusions but nevertheless profound, because they mirror the unexpressed thoughts of many individuals. Forman adds:

Normally inarticulate, often nondescript protagonists find hidden strength and depth of feeling they had never before recognized in themselves, and they face their problems with determination. The solution is often a radical one. Though the outcome may be tragic, the central character is usually personally triumphant. (292)

Here Forman asserts the characters in Norman's plays recognizing themselves and finding problems themselves as the story or dialogue proceeds. The lively example among her various works is *'night, Mother* which supports Forman's views. Both Jessie and Thelma recognize themselves, their existence and their problems. Jessie moves forward for the solution though the radical one. The outcome i.e. suicide seems tragic but Jessie is personally triumphant.

Jessie Cates is typical of many suicide victims; Jessie in her late thirties

determines to kill herself while she is in relative control of her own life. There is no reason behind her decision, neither her epilepsy nor her depression concerning her failed marriage or delinquent son. Also she does not provide any strong reason for her decision of suicide, rather calls it a rational decision. Mother Thelma learns about Jessie in final ninety-minute conversation with her daughter than she has in her lifetime. Thelma tries to convince her daughter not to take such action but there lies some purpose. The real objection Thelma has towards Jessie's suicide involves her concern for herself. Thelma in her early sixties has begun to feel her age and has become inordinately dependent on her daughter.

Norman's another play, *Getting Out* deals with the difficulties of Arlene Holsclaw, a newly released parolee who served an eight year prison term for robbery, kidnapping, and manslaughter. Eight years have greatly changed her, but she must still come to terms with her past as well as face an uncertain future. Her past is first represented by Arlie, her younger and uncontrolled self, that part of her capable of committing the earlier crimes played by a second actress, Arlie literally invades Arlene's shabby apartment on the first day of Arlene's new freedom. Arlie is foulmouthed, crude, and defiant in contrast to Arlene's attempt to be quiet, reserved and self-confident. The alter ego declares that Arlene is not really free and Arlene remains a prisoner to her younger self that will surface again.

Third and Oak, a pair of one-act plays: *The Laundromat* and *The Pool Hall* by Norman explore psychological terrain similar to her other plays. In *The Laundromat*, a widow and a woman trapped in a loveless marriage meet by chance in a local coin-operated laundry and fall into a discussion of the ironic similarity of their lives. Both desperately need love, though neither can find it. As she would often do subsequently, Norman imposes a strict time limit on conversation and action, as long

as it takes to finish a week's washing, and the commonplace setting further highlights the banality of her characters' lives. *The Pool Hall*, the second half of *Third and Oak*, takes the form of a parallel conversation between the owner of the hall and the son of a famous pool shark. It similarly deals with personal frustrations and unrealized hopes.

Marsha Norman born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1947 was daughter to a fundamentalist Methodist. She had a very solitary childhood and her mother's religious views prohibited her from playing with other children's, watching television and movies and listening radio. She credits her loneliness as a child the reason she became a writer. Playing the piano, reading books, and attending the theater where permitted to her and she saw children's plays at the Actor's Theater of Louisville as well as later productions of Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie* and Peter Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* which remained influence on her plays.

Getting Out is her first play written in 1977. After the success of this play she moved to New York. There she wrote her later works. *Third and Oak*, *Circus Valentine*, *The Hold Up*, *'night*, *Mother*, *Traveler in the Dark*, *Sarah and Abraham*, *Four Plays*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Red Shoes*, *Trudy Blue*, *Collected Plays*, *Last Dance* etc. are her major works in which we can find the reminiscences of her childhood. The environment she was provided in her childhood credited a lot to her in becoming a successful female playwright.

Chapter 2

Perspectives on Suicide and Will

2.1 Suicide and Psychoanalysis

Suicide is the death that is not natural, not even forced like murder but self-intentioned in which person committing suicide is fully responsible. Suicide is one of the four modes of causes of death where other three are natural, accident and homicide i.e. murder according to Craighead and Nemeroff (1962). Hence suicide is fully intentioned death where an individual play an important role. We can take example of Jessie in *'night, Mother*, claims her death to be fully self-intentional, no one is behind her death for which we can call her action as suicide.

Gove and Webster have added the meaning of suicide as a voluntary and intentional act of self destruction when one is in sound mind. In their words, the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally self-destruction is the deliberate and intentional destruction of own life by a person of years of discretion and sound mind (2286). The meaning is completely psychological; suicide has been defined as the act of taking one's own life not in madness but in complete consciousness. It is decision of a responsible and a mature person and the person committing suicide always find it a genuine decision. Jessie's viewpoint and decision are similar to this definition. Her act of self-destruction, she claims to be a voluntary act and a genuine decision □ a solution to her unwanted, boring existence.

Suicide has been analyzed from various perspectives, among them psychoanalysis is also one major theory. Psychoanalysis studies and understands human mind and human behaviors and treats accordingly. Austrian psychologist and doctor, Sigmund Freud fathered psychoanalysis in order to treat patients suffering from neuroses. His psychoanalytic therapy is associated with tripartite model of the

structure of mind: *id*, *superego*, *ego* and two types of instincts: *eros* and *thanatos*.

The structural elements within the mind, *id* is the part of mind which belongs to unconscious and the desires which require satisfaction resides in it; *super-ego* is that part which contains the 'conscience', viz. socially acquired control mechanisms, usually imparted in the first instance by parents which have been internalized; while *ego* is the conscious self created by the dynamic tensions and interactions between the *id* and the *super-ego*, which has the task of reconciling their conflicting demands with the requirements of external reality. It is in this sense that the mind is to be understood as a dynamic energy-system. All objects of consciousness reside in the *ego* and the contents of the *id* belong permanently to the unconscious mind, while the *super-ego* is an unconscious screening mechanism which seeks to limit the blind pleasure-seeking drives of the *id* by the imposition of restrictive rules. Our conscious mental life is only a small part of our total mental life. Our conscious processes are strictly determined by unconscious factors. The unconscious is thus the core of our personality (Skirbekk and Gilje 377-378).

Freud emphasized the existence of unconscious mental processes in all human beings, and showed that psychoanalysis can reveal the unconscious causes of the phenomena of daily life. He analyzed the 'faulty acts' of everyday life, such as slips of tongue, lapses of memory, dreams, as well as jokes are not meaningless, but are in fact expressions of unconscious motives and intentions. These motives and intentions may gain a new meaning through psychoanalytical exploration of the unconscious. The symptoms that are apparently incomprehensible or meaningless may gain meaning when we view them as expressions of unconscious motives and intentions. The therapeutic goal of psychoanalysis is to recapture unconscious and repressed material and make it accessible to the *ego*. Though controlled by *super-ego*, mind

finds some defense mechanism to give outlet to the unconscious desires i.e. displacement of desires in words of psychoanalysts. If those desires are not displaced, it can take acute form and lead the person to various mental problems and crimes. Too much repression of unconscious desires may lead a person to madness, frustration, depression and sometimes even self-destructive activities like suicide as an outlet to repressed desires.

Deeply associated with the structure of the mind is Freud's account of the instincts or drives: *eros* and *thanatos*. The instincts, for Freud, are the principal motivating forces in the mental realm, and as such they energise the mind in all of its functions. There are many drives but these two, *eros* and *thanatos* are two broad categories of human instincts. *Eros*, the life instinct which covers all the self preserving and erotic instincts, is the positive drive and *thanatos*, the death instinct, which covers all the instincts towards aggression, self-destruction and cruelty. *Thanatos* is the irrational urge to destroy the source of all sexual energy in the annihilation of the self (Tyson 24-26). *Thanatos* is the negative force when internalized leads to destruction of self like suicide and when externalized leads to destruction of other, murder, rape, terrorism, wars(I and II world wars), for example. Both drives are present in an individual but the domination of one determines a person's behaviours.

Analyzing various scholars' views on suicide Craighead and Nemeroff put:

For Freud, suicide was essentially within the mind and the principal psychoanalytical position on suicide was that it represented unconscious hostility directed toward the ambivalently viewed love object. Gregory Zilboorg refined this psychoanalytic hypothesis and stated that every suicidal case contained not only unconscious hostility

but also an unusual lack of capacity to love others. Robert E. Litman sees the factors affecting suicide are emotional states: rage, guilt, anxiety, dependency as well as a great number of specifically predisposing conditions: feelings of abandonment particularly of hopelessness and helplessness. (1653)

Suicide has been seen as not a movement toward death but flight from intolerable situation, it has been taken as a self-intentioned and self-destructive act. Contributing those views on suicide, Lois Tyson asserts:

A relationship to death whether or not we are traumatized by it, is a principal organizer of our psychological experience and death is the subject which seems to him, has given psychoanalytic situation theorists the most trouble because of its importance in their own as well. (23)

Paraphrasing his views, all our psychological experiences are guided by death instinct. As every human being has death drive, there is high possibility of self-destruction in every human being. The subject of death and self-destruction has also become a central subject matter and problem of psychoanalytic theorists.

Hence, suicide, the act of self-destruction seems to have very close relation with psychoanalysis, which studies the ways mind expresses feelings and those feelings range from anxiety and fear to hostility and sexual desire. Psychoanalysis is the area which understands human behavior more than any other fields and hence the literary texts, which are about human behaviour. When we look at the word through a psychoanalytic lens, we see that it is comprised of individual human beings, each with psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behaviors that are the direct results of early

experience.

Since the goal of psychoanalysis is to help us resolve our psychological problems, often called disorders or dysfunctions, the focus is on patterns or behavior that are destructive in some way. The repetition of self-destructive behavior reveals the existence of some psychological difficulty that has probably been influencing us for some time without our knowing it. Ryan adds that the notion human beings are motivated, even driven by desires, fears, needs and conflicts of which they are unaware - that is unconscious was one of Sigmund Freud's most radical insights and it still governs psychoanalysis today (15). According to Freud's theory the unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about, because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them. But one unconsciously provides them the outlet through some destructive behaviors. If a psychoanalyst wants to control such behaviors, they should recognize the psychological motivations for such destructive behaviors and cure accordingly.

2.1.1 Theorising Self-destruction

A full-fledged development of theory of self-destruction occurred with the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. Freud discovered that life is not only ruled by desire for food, love and sex but also by destructive instinct like will. He categorized them as life instinct i.e. *eros* and death instinct i.e. *thanatos*. *Eros* is biologically normal aim of development whereas *thanatos*, a failure of normal development, a deeply rooted striving for inorganic state. Erotic instinct always tries to establish greater unities and preserve them by binding together. In contrast, *thanatos* tries to bring the living matter back into an inorganic condition (Fromm 7). The origin of the

theory of 'self-destruction' has been traced out in Freud's work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as he writes:

The aggressive may not be able to find satisfaction in the external world because it comes up against the real obstacles. If this happens, it will perhaps retreat and increase the amount of self-destructiveness holding sway in the interior . . . impeded aggressiveness seems to involve a grave injury. It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction.

(Fromm 445)

Death instinct is the root and expression of destructive as well as aggressive instincts. Aggressiveness, destructiveness, sadism, desire for control and mastery all are manifestation of some hidden forces. Death instinct should get outlet in destruction of others, otherwise it would turn to destruction of self. When external factors like society controls destruction of others, it finds outlet in self-destruction.

Regarding the origin of instincts, all our desires and instincts are originated and reserved in the *id* which is lawless, asocial and immoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without any regard to social conventions, legal ethics, and moral restraints. If unchecked by conventions, ethics and morality, it would lead us to destruction of others as well as self to satisfy its impulses for pleasure. Its ultimate concern is for instinctual gratification, heedless of consequence. Acts like alcoholism, drug-addiction, masochism, suicide and other teleological activities are the different forms of self-destructiveness. Meyer writes, "Some clinicians feel that in many alcoholics, their addiction is related to deep feelings of inferiority, coupled with an inability to cope with frustration and it also may be rooted in a desire for self-

destruction” (518). What we get from this line is that frustration is the major cause of aggression and destruction whether it is external or internal. Masturbation, homosexuality, rape, sadism can also be taken as example of destructive activities which result from sexual frustration.

Frustration if not satisfied in the primary stage, it become intensive and starts working as aggression, the destruction of others. If it becomes unsuccessful, returns back to the same person and takes form of depression, harming to self. The manifestation of depression is found in alcoholism, drug addiction etc. consequently leads a person to suicide directly or indirectly.

In context to literature, from the ancient period, self-destruction has also remained a central subject matter of literary writings, directly or indirectly. Aeschylus has depicted destruction of the city Troy in Trojan War through his play *Agamemnon*, Prometheus has been seen as a self-destructive character, similarly Oedipus too behaves as a self-destructive character in Sophocles’s drama *Oedipus Rex*, Satan invites his own destruction by challenging almighty God in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In later years, Mrs. Pontellier in Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Miss Julie in Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, Hedda in Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, Jessie in Norman’s *’night, Mother*, Tess in Hardy’s *Tess of the d’ Urbervilles*, Anna in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* etc. are examples of self-destructive female characters.

It is not necessary all self-destructive activities to be suicide, but the activities done under psychological disorder brings miseries in life for sure and frustration appears to be the main reason in them for being destructive.

2.2 Rejectionism and Suicidal Trend in Feminist Writings

Feminism asks why women have played a subordinate role to men in human societies. Ryan analyses it is concerned with how women’s lives have changed

throughout the history, and it asks about women's experience why is it different from men's either as a result of an essential ontological or psychological difference or as a result of historical imprinting and social construction (101). His view clarifies that feminist criticism is related with the studies of literature by women for how it express the particularity of women's lives and experience. And it studies the male-dominated canon in order to understand how men have used culture to further their domination of women. According to its study, the western cultural tradition has, through its use of binary oppositions, helped assure male rule. Men are associated with reason, objectivity, logic and reason, and the like. The androcentric culture is so rude towards female that it equates women with castration and death. In this right we can say that western civilization is pervasively patriarchal □ male centered and organized in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social legal and artistic. There is no way out for female apart from death. It is a great satire on patriarchal society that death is more solacing to female than life.

The prevailing concept of gender is cultural construct generated by the patriarchal biases of our civilization. The biases are not only in society but even in works of art. Traditionally considered great literatures are only written by male and the heroes of such works are also male. For example Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Faust, Huck Finn, Leopard Bloom □ who embody masculine fields of action, the female roles are marginal, subordinate, lacks autonomous female real models, implicitly address to male readers. In this context Simon de Beauvoir through her book, *The Second Sex* analyses the biasness that, the cultural mechanisms of oppression has left women to be other to man's self, she asserts, "one is not born but becomes a woman" (295). Beauvoir is found to merge feminism with existentialism

as she focuses more on private world rather than social. Articulating what is it to be other; she ridicules certain popular myths, including that of "feminine mystery".

Another important feminist reading of the western philosophic tradition was conducted in France in the 1970s and 80s in the work especially of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray argues that the subject of knowledge and reason is always defined in the western tradition as masculine and it comes into being through the subordination of the feminine (Ryan 102). She means according to masculine western traditions ☐ women represents all that exists outside the subject, she is material, improper, indeterminate, incapable of conscious mastery, without self-identity, in-difference, formless and multiple.

Feminist criticism is also concerned with the creation of a counter-canon of women writers excluded from the male-dominated literary canon. Historical feminist criticism analyzed women in context to society and cultural norms whereas postmodern feminist criticism is rather self-oriented, confessional, 'self' is important than anything else. We find later feminist criticism associated with psychoanalysis, existentialism, post-structuralism and Marxism. Feminist criticism assumes that women are oppressed economically, politically, socially and psychologically by patriarchal ideology, women is other and marginalized and feminist activity has its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting gender equality, a cultural construction.

As described in *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing* by Hoffman, the feminists' effort to determine new values to judge any area of life is seen as a rejection of existing values and extension of new values. 1945 onwards, the impulse to create an identity draws a wide context that is not only literary but also historical. An authentic literature reflects actual life. An authentic feminist literature

reflect the question “who am I?” the question of identity. In concern to rejectionism, Hoffman writes, “It finds clues to identity in psychology and the social sciences: reports on behavior in the real world diminish the restrictive force and the misdirection of old ascribed images of femininity” (345-346). The later literary writings by women tend to reject the prevailing images, hence cross the border. Such trend can be found in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia woolf, and Doris Lessing.

Then after emerged the trend of steady, unromantic concentration on lived experience of women and renewed self-consciousness typical of sixties and seventies. The women writers presented it confessionally, as a testament to the way things are. They described on madness and suicidal attempt to give impression of their doomed life. Writers like Emily Dickinson’s sensibility was confined for its data, to the private world of women, Kate Chopin touched a note that has become increasingly significant when she described the heroine of *The Awakening* as a family prisoner and sought freedom which begins in her death. Edith Wharton, placing her women in society, still found a major theme in the limitation that society laid on them as prisoners of a slightly larger world. Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow continued the serious explanation of women’s lives. The distinguishing feature of women’s literature is that the everyday existence of women is being investigated for its own significant value. We find in women’s writing, first description of the dependence on men; second their anger at the situation and rebellion which give them inner strength.

In the later years Plath and Sexton functioned not just as authors but also as exemplary figures for their readers. They acted out familiar scenes, but carried the action beyond what is expected. The subject matter, destructiveness was found in their real life too. Both of them married and had children, went through series of

madness, marriages broke up and at last each end their life with suicide. Their struggles and tensions and wish for self-destruction were recorded in their work and their lives reinforce their words. Plath's "Ariel" shows her death provisioned. Sexton's poetry, like Plath's is much involved with the tensions between rules about motherhood and daughterhood and the realities of obligatory relationships. For Plath, Sexton and other women curators, the activities of madness and self-destruction are metaphor for the absurdity of the rest of life brought by newly felt contradictions and frustrations. In this regard Hoffman writes:

Madness becomes a limit toward which victimization and powerlessness push women; but there is also a sense in which madness is chosen as a revolt against normality when normality can no longer support a life that includes joy, freedom and imagination. (373)

The eccentric characters of O' Connor and McCullers, who have fallen into madness measure and criticize the values of orthodoxy, can be taken as examples. Other women writer's like Toni Morison, Joan Didion, Gain Godwin, Anne Sexton made serious attempts to understand situations of alienation and madness leading to death cause of their traditional roles.

Characters are the weapon for those writers who attempt to revolt against patriarchal norms through madness and self-destruction of their characters. Mrs Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, when finds herself to be a domestic doll and slave, decides to free herself through suicide, Miss Julie in Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, when she knows about Jean's fraud, she cannot tolerate. This leads her to frustration, her death instinct defeats her life instinct, and as a result determines to end her life. Hedda in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* when she has no hope for better future, she decides to end her life with a shot. Similar case is of Jessie in Norman's *'night*,

Mother, she decides to shoot herself when she has no hope for better future, present is without any identity of her own, as she desires to find out her identity she finds it in suicide. Self-destructive sense of guilt contributes downfall of Tess in Hardy's *Tess d' Urbervilles*, she hangs herself after killing Alec for his wrong doing. Anna in Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* runs with her lover leaving her husband and child in search of pleasant future but it turns upside down when she finds fading of her lover's love towards her. As a result she cannot control her psychological disorder, becomes depressed and consequently commits suicide. It is not necessary all self-destructive activities to be suicide which is exemplified by Sarah Woodruff in John Fowel's novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. She destroys the chance for her prosperous and happy life, she deliberately leads her life towards struggle and challenges.

Among self-destructive women characters, frustration appears as the prominent psychological cause of their personality disorder which influences them to behave in an irrational way encouraging them towards destructive activities which seem tragic in surface level but a celebration of free will in post-modern sense. It is an opportunity for them to challenge the prevailing social norms and values.

2.3 Existentialism and Suicide

Existentialism according to Perkins and Leininger is the term which represents a diverse European philosophic movement that became so influential in the 20th century and which grew to represent a cultural attitude (303-304). Before existentialism, idealism was popular in western philosophy. Individual's problem was not given importance rather taken as hazard by the philosophers like Hegel. Skirbekk and Gilje put, "Reconciling individual freedom with social solidarity was, for Hegel, the basic problem of modernity"(315). Hegel supported the importance for social problem, not individual and according to him freedom is gained when one is bound to

a family or society. Skirbekk and Gilje further add on Hegel's view, "Mutual recognition between a man and a woman within the socially recognized institution of marriage reconciles freedom in the form of love and romance with mutual identity and social recognition" (315). Hegel's thought on woman is that she gains her complete recognition within the family as wife and mother made him enemy of modern feminists as well.

Moore and Bruder say existentialism came against such collective identity with the themes that traditional and academic philosophy is sterile and remote from the concerns of the real life; philosophy must focus on the individual in his/her confrontation with the world; senselessness, emptiness, triviality, separation and inability to communicate pervade human existence, giving birth to anxiety, dread, self-doubt and despair which are existential predicaments (148). Existential philosophers do not guarantee these existential predicaments can be solved but without struggling with these problems, the individual will find no meaning or value in life. They believe on struggle for existence and rejected systematic and schematic thought in favor of a more spontaneous mode of expression in order to capture the authentic concerns of concrete existing individuals (Stumpf 450).

The existentialists though believe on existential predicament, they carry diverse views. Kierkegaard emphasized the individual's will and need to make important choices. Existence in this earthy realism must lead a sensitive person to despair. Despair according to Kierkegaard is the inevitable result of the individual's confrontation of momentous concrete ethical and religious dilemmas and the result of the individual's making for himself and alone the choices of lasting significance. Despair is the sickness-unto-death which is the central philosophical problem and nothing earthly can save a person from despair. Regarding philosophy, Kierkegaard

said that, philosophy must speak to the anguished existence of the individual who lives in an irrational world and must make important decisions in that world (149).

Through the book *Being and Time*, the influential and fundamental source of modern existentialism, Heidegger propounded the view that human being is "thrown in the world" and soon experiences both fear and dread when confronted with forces beyond understanding and everything starts with nothingness and ends in nothingness, the whole universe is nothing but this nothing is everything (163). Together with this he located fundamental difference between humanity and being. Only people can raise the question of their being, they are aware and have relation with their own being as they can find themselves as "Thrown into the world". Stumpf says, Heidegger also coined a new word to describe more accurately the experience of human existence i.e. 'Dasein' but the term 'Dasein' is not individual person but whole humanity. It covers wide field and characterizes whole humanity (470).

The term 'Dasein' was taken as something abstract by the latter existentialists who focused on individual person's essence and existence. For example Sartre who through his essay "Existentialism and Humanism" provided the concepts that, there is no God, hence there is no maker of man and no such thing as a divine conception of man in accordance with which man was created; an individual is thrown into existence without an actual reason for being and existence precedes essence (Moore and Bruder 166). Sartre means to say that man is created by chance without any divine pre-conception and he/she creates his/her characteristic on his/her own. He/she exists first i.e. springs up in the world, experiences himself/herself, and then only defines himself/herself. Man is nothing other than what he makes himself, he is determiner of his own future.

In context to determinism question Sartre says, "There is no determinism, man

is free, is condemned to be free"(Moore and Bruder 157). Nothing forces us to do what we do, we are free without excuses i.e. we cannot blame the circumstances for our done actions. We are universal legislators of right and wrong, good and evil.

Another important 20th Century existentialist who contributed for the analysis of existential problem is Albert Camus. He is also the one to analyze the question of suicide to be a primary philosophical issue. "His major view is that, life is absurd". Absurdity of life in frustrating human needs according to Camus is that hoped-happiness often turns to misery and despair □ even though many hide this tragedy from themselves behind a facade of baseless hope (Moore and Bruder 154). The human frustration occurs because of their unfulfilled hope. They find the hope baseless and it turns into misery and despair consequently to frustration. Camus likened life of human to the fate of Sisyphus in the myth at the same name. In the work "Myth of Sisyphus", Sisyphus had provoked the wrath of the gods and was condemned to roll a huge stone up a hill, only to see it roll back down again. This act repeated itself forever. Human beings are similarly condemned to lives of futile and hopeless labor without reasonable hope of fulfilling their true needs. No matter how hard we try to live a meaningful existence, but in vain.

We have unjust destiny but committing suicide is our weak mindedness according to Camus (Moore and Bruder 154). Camus taught us to struggle against the Sisyphian fate to the end not to give up by ending our life. He asked everyone to rebel against the absurdity and tragedy of life to provide meaning and value in life. He adds, "Only through struggle with an absurd world can the individual achieve fulfillment, solidarity with others, and a brief love of this earth" (Moore and Bruder 155). Camus is against giving up but struggle till last.

Even among the existentialists we find paradoxical views. Sartre defends for

use of freewill; an individual may choose any action that may be even self-destruction so as to create favorable condition. But Camus asks to struggle till the end; he is against self-destructive activity like suicide. Similarly, for Heidegger everything i.e. the whole universe is nothing, starts and ends in nothingness whereas Sartre says an individual starts life with nothingness but creates his/her own characteristics after his/her existence, the actions he/she performs. Though the views of existentialists are different, the common thing is that they have concern in humanity.

2.4 Will in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

The major philosophers who have discussed on concept of will are Schopenhauer and Nietzsche though their views on will are different. Schopenhauer is rather pessimistic and Nietzsche optimistic in his views. Moore and Bruder put, human beings are rarely rational in their actions for Schopenhauer and are blindly driven by will to pursue selfish desires. They add “Schopenhauer’s world is peopled with vicious little men who commit atrocities in pursuit of trifling objects” (133). This will makes humans a violent part of grotesque scenario that has neither sense nor reason, in Schopenhauer’s view. For making the concept of will more clear, he divided the world onto two parts: *noumena* i.e. things in itself and *phenomena*, the world we experience. According to Schopenhauer, it is the will that does the structuring of our own phenomenal world. Hence, all our actions are objectification of will, it is the force that makes plants grow, forms crystals, turns magnets toward the north pole ☐ in short, does everything, turns all desires into action. Although will is what we essentially are, it is also the ultimate cause of our suffering. Will produce conflict among individuals, inspires us into believing that obtaining what we want is important, continually stimulates new desires and generally inspires acts of evil. The will causes us to suffer and to inflict suffering.

Summing up Schopenhauer, the world is not driven by reason but not by will with this view, he became pioneer in espousing voluntarism, the view that will is the fundamental metaphysical principle underlying all reality.

Nietzsche too read Schopenhauer's concept of will and became convinced that the world is driven by will, not by reason. But Nietzsche moved away from Schopenhauer's pessimism. In Nietzsche's view, moralities are social institutions, and basically there are just two moralities: master and slave morality, the morality of the masses (Stumpf 244). Slave morality, epitomized by Christian ethics emphasizes such virtues as compassion, humility, patience, warm-heartedness etc which glorify weakness. Master morality, by contrast, is the morality of noble individual who are egoistic, hard, intolerant, but bound by code of honor to their peers. Nietzsche also rejected Hegel's idealism and other similar rationalist metaphysics and came with the concept that the world is driven by the will-to-power (149). This view can be paralleled with free-will-determinism issue; Nietzsche supported free-will. For Nietzsche, the will to power is the primer life force, whose essence is the overpowering and suppression of what is alien and weaker and which finds its highest expression in the superman (244). Nietzsche figured that western society had become increasingly decadent, people are enslaved by a morality, and they have become part of a herd, mass that is willing to do what it is told, coward and fearful. The mediocrity of western civilization, Nietzsche believed was a reflection of these qualities and the rare and isolated individual, only the superman can escape those trivialities of society.

The superman, according to Nietzsche embraces the will-to-power to overthrow the submissive and mediocre "slave" mentality that permeates society and dominates religion. In his embrace of the will-to-power, the superman not only lives

a full and exciting life but creates a new rather than discover values. For Nietzsche the one who embraces the will-to-power is only an ideal human being. He wants every human being to possess will-to-power.

2.5 Critiques on Social Construction of Suicide

In the last third of the twentieth century, diverse continental voices were raised against what they saw as suspicious assumptions about the meaning of right and wrong, the nature of language, and the very possibility of human self-understanding. Moore and Bruder put, some has been suspicious about western metaphysical systems that they claim lead to the manipulation of nature or that set up a certain ethnic or culture perspective as absolute truth. Some has raised suspicions about the common assumptions that language in some way represents external reality (437). Among them Michel Foucault explores the deeply ingrained social power systems that shape how social institutions deal with the sexuality of their members and with those who are sick, criminal, or insane. Another French Philosopher Jacques Derrida developed the technique of deconstruction in literary and philosophical criticism to show that language meanings cannot be tied down and hence certain passages expressing truth becomes suspicious indeed.

Michel Foucault says, “Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse that it accepts and makes functions as true” (Moore and Bruder 437). Foucault here is critical saying, how we have come to be trapped in our own history, in historically emergent systems of thoughts and action that determine our most behavior. His intention is to illuminate the chain of our present order of practices and open up the possibility of changing them by inventing new forms of thought and action.

The human sciences construct particular conceptions of human nature, which are then used as a basis for theories about how individuals and society should operate. His refusal to embrace the idea of a pre-given self or human nature, his location of the self in a historical context is characteristics of his work as whole. Mautner adds, “Discipline for Foucault is a set of techniques for governing human beings with both enhance their capacities and ensure their controllability” (154). This control requires detail knowledge of individual behavior and human sciences e.g. Psychology and modern medicine are now understood to have been made possible by, and to assist in, the spread of disciplinary power. Discipline ask people to turn them into certain kinds of subjects bringing them to act in accordance with disciplinary norms and standards, behavioral ideas which the human sciences define as normal, natural or essentially human. Foucault claims this discipline to be interwoven with power for its correctness; otherwise they might not be correct. Foucault encourages to break such power impositions by practice of the self □ practices carried out by people on themselves, forms of self-relation, relate ourselves to the modern era by discovering and acting in accordance with our essential nature or true self. Though our present form of self-relation is caught up in the disciplinary order, it is not the only possible way of relating to ourselves.

In this term of the possibility of establishing a different way of relating to ourselves that Foucault comes to address the issue of freedom. For Foucault, we are not passively shaped by forms of power, power always involves a relation of struggle, in which some try to direct the activities of others, who in turn resist and strive to counter these impositions (Mautner 155). Systems of power emerge to the extent that resistance is overcome and individuals are rendered docile and predictable. At the same time, the possibility of resistance can never entirely be eliminated. And since

modern systems of power involve bringing us to identify with a certain conception what we essentially are. Foucault suggests that we need a different way of relating ourselves, not self-discovery but self-detachment and self-creation (155). He means that we need to detach ourselves from existing way of being, thinking and acting to invent new ways not caught up in the disciplinary order which he terms as the work of freedom.

Foucault is against our belief that whatever has been written in doctrines of human sciences are true rather, it is the weapon for impositions of power. To be free from the trap of those sciences or disciplines one should create oneself.

Another Philosopher who suspected social systems is French Philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida Who is also known as Father of deconstruction. Moore and Bruder put, Derrida questioned on language or text for possible multiple meaning and named it as 'the free play of signifiers' (444). A signifier refers to a chain of signifiers in our mind. Deconstruction thus offers a radical vision that our mental life consists not of solid, stable, meanings but of a fleeting, continually changing play of signifiers. What we take to be meaning is really only the mental trace left behind by the play of signifiers and that trace consists of the differences by which we define a word. Meaning seems to reside in words/things only when we distinguish their difference from other words/things. Rat is rat only because we believe it to be different from cat and dog. So the word rat carries with it the trace of all the signifiers it is not. Thus, Derrida is suspicious of any claim to final interpretation he calls such claims absolutely ridiculous. He wants to break down the binary thinking of the structuralists and others, who tend to privilege the first term in each dyad: male/female, white/black, mind/body, master/slave, and so on. Derrida suggests that the first term has significance only in relation to, and only because of the

second term i.e. a master can be a master only if there are slaves, the existence of the master is dependent on the existence of the slave. Here, Derrida's method seems to be seeking to bring to the foreground the less privileged terms and thus the implicit assumptions embedded within language systems.

Regarding western philosophy, he calls it logocentric as it places at the centre of its understanding of the world; a concept/logos/presence that organizes and explains which he says is western philosophy's greatest illusion (Tyson 249). For Derrida no concept is beyond the dynamic instability of language, which disseminates an infinite number of possible meanings with each written or spoken utterance. Deconstruction thus says language is the ground of being, but that ground is not out of play: it is itself as dynamic, evolving, problematically and ideologically as the world views it produces. It is not a product of our experience rather a conceptual framework that creates our experience, our expectations, our beliefs, values, all which are carried by language □ determine the way we experience our world. For this reason, there is no center to our understanding of existence; there are instead, an infinite number of vantage points from which to view it.

Chapter 3

Suicide as a Climactic Act in *'night, Mother*

3.1 Death as a Wish for Unification

Male and female together forms a unified whole, they are two wheel of a chariot, this cliché has been taken as granted from the time immemorial. However, the relation of male and female in the unified whole was supposed to be only of husband/wife and lover/beloved before emergence of psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. But Freud involved anyone of opposite sex in this whole.

Man and woman are incomplete without each other and the absence of one makes the other restless, depressed. They try to meet the lack one way or other and while doing so they are guided by their unconscious mental life as Freud says that conscious processes are strictly determined by unconscious factors and the unconscious is thus the core of our personality (Skirbekk and Gilje 377). Freud emphasized the existence of unconscious mental processes in all human beings and unconscious causes of the phenomena of daily life can be revealed. All trivial acts of everyday life such as lapses of memory, slips of tongue, recollection of past are not meaningless. In *'night, Mother*, the two heroines act similarly. Mama and Jessie are staying together in the country house of Mama, they both lack male figure in their life. Jessie is divorced, her son has been a criminal, her brother is staying away and father is already dead. From the dialogue between Jessie and Thelma (Mama), we come to know Jessie's intimacy with father. She misses her father more than anyone else, her husband, mother or son. She would not have decided to commit suicide if her father were alive as she claims "Waited until I felt good enough" (1260) and later she says she misses him more than anyone else (1267).

Jessie is familiar with everything related to her daddy. She tries to identify herself with daddy, she searches daddy's gun to shoot herself, and she wants to use particularly her father's gun, she rejects to use her husband Cecil's gun though it was in good condition:

MAMA. That gun's no good, you know. He broke it right before he died. He dropped it in the mud one day.

JESSIE. Seems O.k. I had Cecil's all ready in their, just in case I couldn't find this one, but I'd rather use Daddy's. (1260)

Though not in a very good condition, Jessie is determined to use her father's gun. Jessie's intimacy with her father is further clarified by Jessie's wish to wear around her neck, the similar sign worn by Daddy:

JESSIE. I want to hang a big sign around my neck, like Daddy's on the barn, GONE FISHING. (1263)

She desires to unify herself with her father. She is her father's daughter. She desires to rejoin him in death. Thelma on the contrary, does not have intimate relation with her husband. Jessie remembers everything related to her father whereas Mama does not:

JESSIE. I remember you liked that preacher who did Daddy's . . . and pick some songs you like or let Agnes pick, she will know exactly which ones. Oh, and I had your dress cleaned that you were to Daddy's. You looked real good in that.

MAMA. I don't remember him. (1274)

Mama claims not to love her husband and blames herself for this rudeness and she is jealous of her daughter Jessie for being intimate with her husband:

MAMA. How could I love him, Jessie. He wanted a plain country woman and I didn't have a thing he wanted. He got a share though. You loved him enough for both of us I was jealous because you'd rather talk to him than anything.

JESSIE. You were just jealous because I'd rather talk to him than wash the dishes with you. (1267)

Here, Mama claims her ownership, indirectly to male figure and things related to that figure. Mama too realizes her emptiness but never tries to take any radical action to fulfill it. Both of them have "hole in their soul" and they hunger to heal that hole (Brown 63). Fragmented and confused they search for the missing piece, psychically, they long for a cohesive self. Mama's appetite for food is to satisfy her psychic hunger. All over the play, *'night, Mother*, Mama is shown crazy for food. But Jessie could not find any food that will satisfy her and hence chooses death as means of satisfaction. Because she has no "appetite" for life, she opts for death (Brown 73). Ultimately, Jessie gets what she wanted – death which releases her from her incomplete existence and Mama also gets what she wanted. Finally, Mama gains guts to communicate in a powerful way never before possible, she becomes able to communicate with her daughter in true meaning though it costs her daughter's death.

Traditionally, we symbolize kitchen as a heart of home, symbolizing mother, warmth and nurturance, we break bread there and experience connection and relationships that sustain or survival on the outside world. Kitchen functions as a womb – a warm and safe place (Brown 75). But our heroine Jessie walks away from kitchen to a locked bedroom which Thelma cannot penetrate. This symbolizes Thelma's desires are satisfied within her home with sweet candies but Jessie could not be satisfied with those things, hence, departs from her mother's world. Jessie hungers

for understanding; she wants control upon the situation, upon her life. She loves her mother but she leaves her, she cannot sustain her life on the likes of sugary snowball, peanut brittle, and Hershey bars of her mother's interest (1258). Her only hope is to separate from her mother and reunite with her father - in death. However before she goes, she stocks Mama's sweet, lists Christmas presents etc. Jessie wants Thelma to realize that her mother's choices are not sufficient to satisfy her psychic hunger, and also that Mama has no more control over her. They attempted their best to fulfill each other's longing by giving company to each other but in vain, Mama's company could not satisfy Jessie's deeper longing. Jessie's longing was for her father, ultimately decides to commit suicide in order to be unified with him.

With this decision of Jessie, Thelma realizes her daughter's separate self as she cries at the end of the play, "Forgive me, I thought you were mine" (1277). Thelma always wanted her daughter to be content within her but her desire to keep her daughter under control is shattered with Jessie's decision of suicide. Thelma's rage at this failure is seen as she complains, "I should've known not to make it. I knew you wouldn't like it. You never did like it" (1267). Thelma realizes the fact that a female's company was not enough for her daughter Jessie.

As a tool for unification with her father, Jessie chooses suicide, which is a self-intentioned, self-destructive act, not forced like murder. Jessie's self-destructive action is the result of lack male figure in her life. All the men in her life, including her beloved father, have fled away. Jessie's identification with her father is so strong that she uses his gun to kill herself. Not only this, she inherits her father's epilepsy, fits green eyes, straight hair as well as introvert nature as Mama says:

MAMA. Your daddy gave you those fits Jessie. He passed it down to
you like your green eyes and your straight hair. (1272)

Apart from those inheritance, Jessie also tries to similarize every happenings in her life with her father. She asks her mother to perform her funeral as of her father, she asks to call the same preacher who was on Daddy's, asks mother to wear the same gown worn on Daddy's funeral and so on (1274). The play shows Jessie's intimacy with her father and his death is greatest lack in her life and in order to fill the gap she efforts from the beginning – her introvertness, fits, epilepsy, talking about father and finally suicide in order to be unified with him. The courage she needed for performing this action is controlled by her death instinct, *thanatos*, which is present in every human being as said by Freud. In opposition to *eros*, life instinct; death instinct is the urge to destroy the source of all sexual energy in the annihilation of the self, it is the force when internalized leads to destruction of self like, masochism, introvertness, alcoholism, drug-addiction etc.(Tyson 24-26). Jessie chooses suicide as an act of self-destruction which arises cause of misery in her life after her father's death, to meet the gap between her father and she herself, she commits suicide. The present is unsatisfactory for her, she wishes to die in search of something enough, something satisfactory. Her mother's company could not provide her this satisfaction:

MAMA. Everything you do has to do with me, Jessie. You can't do anything, wash your face or cut your finger without doing it to me. That's right! You might as well kill me as you, Jessie, it's the same thing. This has to do with me, Jessie.

JESSIE. Then what if it does! What if it has everything to do with you! What if you are all I have and you are not enough? What if I could take all the rest of it if only I didn't have you hear? What if the only way I can get away from you for good is to kill myself? What if it is I can still do it! (1272-73)

Mama's company is not everything and enough for Jessie, she is very much determinant to go away from her mother and to be unified with her father. The desire for unification is so dear for her, her mother tries to divert her from the decision by luring her of foods, better situation, company of her son and husband and also threatening her of death, but in vain:

MAMA. You don't know what dead is like. It might not be quite at all. What if it's like on alarm clock and you can't wake up so you can't shut it off. Ever.

JESSIE. Dead is everything and everything I ever knew, gone. Dead is dead quiet. (1261)

Death seems so satisfying and solacing for Jessie. As she used to love peace and loneliness, death will cope with her interest of remaining in peace by providing her solitude. Mama threatens her of suicide as act of sin and going to hell but she defends her by saying that Jesus too committed suicide. Jessie's desire and satisfaction in death is further clarified by the following dialogue:

JESSIE. I sure am feeling good. I really am. The double vision's gone and my gums aren't swelling. No rashes or anything. I'm feeling as good as I ever felt in my life. I'm even feeling like worrying or getting mad and I'm not afraid it will start a fit if I do, I just go ahead. (1271)

With this dialogue she is able to make her mother realize that she is not sad, not for even a percent, she is feeling so good that she has never felt before. The death is as solacing for her as her father's lap. The solace in her father's lap, she will find again

with her death, she will be unified with her father for whom she is so crazy, ready to leave this world.

3.2 Pessimism in Jessie and Thelma: An Outcome of Existential Entrapment

'night, Mother is the play in which we find two women, mother Thelma and daughter Jessie in some existential condition. Jessie, a woman in her late thirties or early forties, announces to her mother that she is going to kill herself at the end of the evening. Mother disagrees to believe Jessie's decision because no crisis has preceded this decision, nothing has happened at all as Thelma says:

MAMA. Your're not going to kill yourself, Jessie, you are not even upset. People don't really kill themselves, Jessie. No, mam, does not make sense, unless you're retarded or deranged, you're as normal as they come, Jessie, for the most part. We're all afraid to die.

JESSIE. I'm not, mama. I'm cold all the time, anyway. (1261)

Jessie too agrees at first that she has no tension at all but later she discloses her existential quest. Jessie finds her self hidden somewhere, she becomes restless when she finds her identity in crisis and autonomy lacking. She recognizes her future to be as bleak as her life has been disappointing and filled with failure she has no hope for progressive future at that point:

JESSIE. Mama . . . I'm just not having a very good time and I don't have any reason to think it'll get anything but worse. I'm tired. I'm hurt. I'm sad. I feel used.

MAMA. Tired of what?

JESSIE. It all. (1263)

Jessie has no hope for future and hence she gives importance to self more than anything, her responsibility towards her mother. The repetition of “I” in her dialogue proves her intention of providing importance to self. Every step taken by the heroine Jessie is exploration of her self. She seeks the identity of her own inconsiderate of her father, husband, son and her mother, the only relative she is living with. Her desire of freedom, self-identity, and autonomy reaches its height when she decides of committing suicide ignoring her mother’s plead. Divorced, alienated from her criminal son, struggling with – and only recently gained some control over her epileptic seizures. She lives in a world isolated from outside support and friendship, the father she loved has died, she is not close to her older domineering brother and his wife. Jessie explains that she has been thinking about suicide for years and has chosen this moment simply because she now feels good enough to do it (1260). The power of the play *'night, Mother* lies in its relentless movement toward the final gunshot. No matter how much we do not want to believe it will come, we are forced to share with mama a growing realization that the evening will end with Jessie’s death. Though Mama disagrees to believe in the beginning, she comes to realize the reality of Jessie’s saying at last:

MAMA. . . . Who am I talking to? You’re gone already, aren’t you?
 I’m looking right through you! I can’t stop you because you’re
 already gone! (1274)

In concern to death Sally Browder asserts, “Death lends to all of human existence an urgency and poignancy, a sense of meaning that arises from the awareness that life will not last as thought” (109). In Jessie’s case too, the knowledge of her existence and desire to take control over it provides her the sense of immediacy in her life ending by suicide. Her suicide arms her with a power, a sense of control

over her life. It is the lens through which she views her real existence, an existence so detached, filled with boredom and that she chooses to continue normally before shutting it off and to do so she is very much determined. She defines her suicide to be an act of redemption as she provides the meaning of suicide, “Jesus’ was a suicide, if you ask me” (1261) and she seems to be content with her decision. Her suicide is an escape from the world in which she lacks the strength to act with freedom and control, she leaves her empty existence and creates new. However, Jessie blames no one for motivating her of doing so but her existential condition. On Mama’s asking, Jessie replies:

MAMA. Sad about what?

JESSIE. The way things are. (1262)

For Jessie there is no control of any people upon the situation, things are there like that on the hands of time, but with her decision of suicide she takes control of everything, the situation and the time itself. Jessie is rather cool in her decision but on the contrary it becomes a great shock for her mother. Mama’s humanity together with her need of Jessie’s company makes her response to the decision with shock, hurt and anger. We can recognize her emotional plight as she claims she is helpless without Jessie:

MAMA. Don’t leave me, Jessie! How can I live here without you? I need you! You’re supposed to tell me to stand up straight and say how nice I look in my pink dress, and drink my milk. You’re supposed to go around and lock up so I know we’re safe for the night, and when I wake up, you’re supposed to be out there making the coffee and watching me get older every day, and

you're supposed to help me die when the time comes. I can't do that by myself, Jessie. I'm not like you, Jessie. I hate the quiet and I don't want to die and I don't want you to go, Jessie. How can I How can I get up every day knowing you had to kill yourself to make it stop hurting and I was here all the time and I never even saw it. And then you gave me this chance to make it better, convince you to stay alive, and I couldn't do it. How can I live with myself after this, Jessie? Stay with me just a little longer. Just a few more years. I don't have that many more to go, Jessie. And as soon as I'm dead, you can do whatever you want.

(1273)

Jessie is Mama's only stick for her old age, her husband is no more and her son is living in a separate house. Jessie takes care of her each and every minute everyday needs. Jessie is mother to her mother. Mama is so afraid of losing Jessie. Later on we come to know that Mama is not sincerely worried of Jessie's death but she is worried of herself. She is rather selfish, she wants to keep Jessie alive for herself and till her own death, she is afraid of her loneliness.

Jessie is rather cool on the contrary, she is not stereotypically depressed, anxious or disturbed in any visible way, and she behaves normally till the end. Her attempt to behave ordinarily in an extraordinary situation is the sign of bearing of her unwanted existence. Jessie behaves as if she is reporting her everyday routine of ordering of milk, organizing location of cookies etc. Her intention behind reporting her mother is just to let her know, she does not want her mother to save her:

JESSIE. I only told you so I could explain it, so you wouldn't blame yourself, so you wouldn't feel bad. There wasn't anything you

could say to change my mind. I didn't want you to save me. I just wanted you to know. (1273)

Jessie's reporting is just for formality, so that her mother will not feel bad and she doesn't have any desire to be stopped by her mother. The shallowness in mother – daughter relation is seen from the above dialogue. The play depicts Jessie and Mama as two individual being thrown into the existential condition. It is not necessary the existential condition to be favorable for all, is not favorable for Mama and Jessie too which is the reason of their pessimism. Some people like Jessie seeks to change the condition and make it favorable for themselves which is their existential choice. They have right to make an existential choice, as an existential choice Jessie chooses suicide:

JESSIE. I can't do anything either, about my life, to change it, make it better, make me feel better about it, live it better, make it work. But I can stop it, shut it down, turn it off like the radio when there is nothing on, I want to listen to. It's all I really have that belongs to me and I am going to say what happens to it and it is going to stop. And I am going to stop it. (1265)

Jessie's dialogue shows her realization of meaninglessness of her life and importance of her individual existence. Everything was going monotonously before Jessie's realization of significance of her individual. As she becomes self-conscious, she finds her identity in crisis; she finds herself used and no way out for better condition during her living. As an individual's right upon oneself, right to use free will, she prefers committing suicide than living the life without any meaning. She finds suicide as proper use of her free will and revolution against women's doomed life. It is also the celebration of her free will.

In regard to criticism on Jessie's chosen death, K. E. Berney agrees on Jessie's choice of suicide as an exercise of free will as he writes, "Jessie makes an existential choice – the exercise of her free will from which she never waivers" (1308). Jessie realizes the boredom of her life and becomes desperate to get out of it and the only way out she foresees is suicide, and she is very much confident in doing so. Some critics have universalized the matter of Jessie. Robert Fledberg writes, "Humanity shares with Jessie a sense of anguish, forlornness and despair over being alive without meaning" (5). Here he identifies Jessie's dissatisfaction with her meaningless life with whole humanity, Jessie becomes representative of such people who want to break their meaningless life by creating something new, define themselves the boundaries of their existence.

In the play, when Jessie chooses suicide, she not only defines the boundaries of her existence, she draws the boundaries between mother and daughter as well. She makes a choice that is not of her mother's choice. Thelma is also not less disappointed by her life. Her marriage was unhappy, carries guilt for Jessie's epilepsy and her son is not living with her but with her daughter-in-law. She acknowledges the unattractiveness of her life by saying that she doesn't have anything she wanted and doesn't want what she has got (1266). But still she is content with whatever she has got. She agrees of throwness into the family as a woman, roles given, does not have any complain. She tries to sweeten the limitation of her life, her existence as a woman with dishes of candy scattered throughout the house. Jessie is different from her mother as she is not content with the given existence, she is rather radical, and she does not accept domination by male figure, the role given to her by patriarchy. She steps forward for existential quest:

JESSIE. He calls me Jess like he knows who he's talking to. He's wondering what I do all day, so it's mine to wonder about, not his.

MAMA. Family is just accident, Jessie. It's nothing personal hon. They don't mean to get on your nerve. They don't even mean to be your family, they just are. (1262)

Jessie does not tolerate domination and interference by anyone else, she wants to create her individual existence different from what is determined by the society. We can call her radical feminist who fights for and searches her own existence. Unlike Jessie, Mama accepts social determinism, hence she asks Jessie to be like her but Jessie waives from her desire, her imposition, not only from her imposition but also from imposition of society. Jessie uses her right upon oneself but Thelma does not. Jessie further defines the difference between her mother and herself as follows:

JESSIE. Mama, I know you used to ride the bus and it's hot and bumpy and crowded and too many noisy and more than anything in the world you want to get off and the only reason in the world you don't get off is it's still fifty blocks from where you're going? Well, I can get off right now if I want to, because even if I ride fifty more years and get off then, it's the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I can get off. As soon as I've had enough, it's my stop. I've had enough. (1264)

Mama is the one who waits time to act, she fully performs the role given to her even if she does not want to or boring for her but Jessie in opposition acts before time, she does not obey the role given to her by society but acts accordingly whatever she feels like. Her decision of suicide is also the act of her free will, it is her refusal to accept

her mother's choices, she is very much determined that she will not be like her mother. Mama tries her best to make her daughter like her but in the end. She can not even keep her daughter alive.

In regard to mother-daughter relationship, Nancy Chodorow puts:

The mother-daughter relationship is characterized by an essential continuity not present in mother-son relationships. While mothers treat sons as separate beings, encouraging their autonomy, mothers identify their daughters treating them as existence of themselves. (51)

The way of treating differently of a mother has its root in patriarchy. Patriarchy has always made male superior, decision maker, economically strong whereas dominated woman as a domestic slave, it has confined their role within household, made them economically dependent, and the same woman who has been victim of patriarchy makes other victim whenever they get chance. This has remained a tradition but today's woman do not want to remain confined rather they tend to shift from tradition. Mama being a traditional woman lets her son Dawson to live separate life whereas makes Jessie a domestic slave as herself, even at the end she tries to avoid Jessie of committing suicide which is her right upon oneself.

Regarding imposition of patriarchy upon women, Browder puts, "Women's lives are embedded in relationships, their identities are formed, nurtured, sustained and understood in connections with other people" (111). Only those women like Jessie can create their own identity moving away from trend, breaking those embedded relationships, otherwise they have to remain within their bleak existence similar to Mama. Browder further puts, "At some point most mothers and daughters recognize that they are pitted in an ageless struggle by their mutual efforts to maintain

their relationship in its earliest form or to alter it The daughter resists her mother's attempts to control her life" (111). Thelma and Jessie both try to maintain their relationship contributing to each other. Jessie takes care of each and every necessities of Mama but when Mama tries to impose the things upon her she waivers away from her responsibilities. She takes control of her own life and does not let Mama to do so and the same time repents for what her mother has not been able to provide her. Jessie comes to the realization too late that she has been assigned of the works by her mother. Her isolation and reliance upon her mother as sole companion are insufficient to provide her with a sense of self, a sense of meaning in life as she says to her mother:

JESSIE. What if you are all I have and you're not enough? (1273)

Thelma hides the truth in order to keep her daughter away from some bitter realities but at the same time she fails to equip her daughter to deal with reality. Thelma's fault is for believing she could provide everything for her daughter, that could be enough. Jessie too shares mother's fault which she comes to realize later together with her mother and in order to assure her mother she says that if they made mistake in their life, they made it together (1263). Jessie's fault is to obey her mother. She could not recognize her separate identity before, that is why she could not be independent. Thelma's effort to encourage her daughter's dependency and identification with herself shatters with Jessie's search of self. Browder puts on Thelma's effort:

Thelma's is also a struggle with her own ambivalence about rearing a child who may serve to remind of her own limitations. She must enable the daughter to develop a sense of self-sufficiency while being

charged by society to engender qualities that may not contribute a sense of power or well-being. (113)

The qualities that we think of as characterizing a good mother are not necessarily qualities that enable young daughters to attain autonomy. Mothers either love their children too much or not enough and daughters either love or hate them for whatever they do. For daughter, the choice is between security and risk, loyalty and self-assertion, submission and power, either this or that. The reality is that self which we cannot help being is known first than any other relationships for daughters like Jessie. One either learns the courage to experience meaning in life and the power of a separate self like Jessie or shares the painful expression of woman's reality – doomed to assigned tasks like Mama.

To conclude, Jessie and Mama both are pessimistic characters, both are in some existential entrapment but the difference between them is that Jessie rises over that entrapment by use of her free will whereas Mama does not effort to change her existential condition. Hence remains in the same condition till her death. She accepts the set roles assigned to her by patriarchal society. She sets her boundary within her home, kitchen and food items. She even wishes Jessie to follow the same thing. She tries to control her daughter in her decision of suicide but Jessie is desperate to commit suicide, Jessie escapes from the prosaic circumstances she can not abide by using her free will, Jessie takes control of her own life by ending it before the last station.

3.3 Jessie's Suicide as Will-to-Power

We all are guided by our individual will, will resides in us as a life force to lead our life, moreover, we desire to achieve more, take control upon things and

people which is “will-to-power” in Nietzsche’s term. Our heroine Jessie though confined within a limited opportunity and determined role, she flies higher with will-to-power, she desires to break the confinement to live the prosaic life without any intimate relationship. She lives with her mother taking care of her but it is her compulsion not her wish. She is support for her mother and her mother for her. Together with Jessie Mama also resides will-to-power but she cannot cross the boundary of her kitchen, home and social confinement.

The concept of will has been defined by many philosophers and discussed by many scholars. Robert Kane asserted free will in opposition to determinism the most voluminously discussed issue. According to him the problem of free will arises when human reaches a certain higher stage of self-consciousness. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are two major philosophers who have discussed on concept of will. Among the philosophers the definition of will differs. Schopenhauer is rather pessimistic whereas Nietzsche optimistic in his views. For Schopenhauer, human beings are rarely rational in their actions and are blindly driven by will to pursue their selfish desires, will makes humans a violent part of grotesque scenario that has neither sense nor reason (Moore and Bruder 133). It is will that does the structuring of our phenomenal world, all our actions are objectification of will, it is the force that makes plants grow, forms crystals, turns magnets towards the north pole – in short, does everything, turns all desires into action. Though will is what we essentially are, it is also the ultimate cause of our suffering, will produces conflict among individuals, inspires us into believing that obtaining what we want is important, continually stimulates new desires and inspires evil to act, it causes us to suffer and inflict suffering. If we look at Jessie’s action of committing suicide through the window of Schopenhauer’s will, it is totally a morally degraded act, selfish desire. It is a desire

which causes suffering though not for herself, suffers her mother. But we are known to the fact that, the will to commit suicide arises in Jessie when she reaches a certain higher stage of self-consciousness, when she desires to gain her autonomy, control upon her own life, to gain something lacking in her life. At any point her desire is not selfish, it is her individual right upon oneself to desire for betterment of life. As it is not possible in life, she finds it in her death and she is proud of her decision, she is not sad at all rather happy as she claims herself, death will be solace to her, it will provide mental satisfaction; it will be everything for her:

JESSIE. Dead is everybody and everything I ever knew gone: Dead is dead quiet. (1261)

JESSIE. I sure am feeling good. I really am. The double vision's gone and my gums aren't swelling. No rashes or anything. I'm feeling as good as I ever felt in my life. (1271)

This is answer for the question on selfishness of Jessie's desire, she is nowhere selfish. She should have right to take her life according to her free will, her desire.

Jessie is much more driven by Nietzsche's will-to-power which is optimistic in contrast to Schopenhauer's will. Every human being, every society is guided by will-to-power, not by reason. Will-to-power is positive life force for Nietzsche and its essence is the over powering and suppression of what is alien and weaker and it finds its highest expression in superman (Stumpf 244). The superman, according to Nietzsche embraces the will-to-power to overthrow the submissive and mediocre "slave" mentally that permeates society and dominates religion. In his embrace of the will-to-power, the superman not only lives a full and exciting life but creates a new rather than discover values. For Nietzsche, the one who embraces the will-to-power,

the superman is only the ideal human being. In concern to Jessie, she is an ideal human being, superman for Nietzsche because she embraces the will-to-power.

As the circumstances, responsibilities towards her mother stands as an obstacle in embracing will-to-power, she decides to commit suicide in order to embrace will-to-power. By doing so, she overthrows the submissive and mediocre “slave” mentality that dominates society and people in the society. Many people hesitate to go against set confinement like Mama and can never progress in their life, they cannot differentiate in between what is right and what is wrong for themselves. But Jessie is different, she is above them, she is very prolific in deciding what is right and what is wrong for herself. She entertains to impose power rather than accepting other’s imposition. She does not cope with her husband in every step:

JESSIE. I told him he didn’t have to spend so much time on it, but he said it had to last, and the thing ended up weighing two hundred pounds and I couldn’t move it. (1270)

Here ‘move it’ is rather symbolic to her co-operation, obedience towards her husband. Later when Mama says that her son Ricky is too much like her husband Cecil (1270), she defends her Mama’s saying by claiming her son to be like herself (1270), she says that she laid the floor for her son to be like her and he is extension of her. She is never submissive as her mother but desires to create new environment favorable for herself and does not regret for past. She lives in present and desires to make better future using will-to-power.

Jessie never compromises with the situation, she has gut to face it and change it. She leaves her husband when she had to choose between him and smoking (1269). She replies to Mama’s suggestion on compromise with her husband as follows:

MAMA. Jessie, Cecil might be ready to try it again, honey, that happens sometimes. Go downtown. Find him. Talk to him. He didn't know what he had in you. May be he sees things different now, but you're not going to know that till you go see him. Or call him up! Right now! He might be home.

JESSIE. . . . Nothing's changed Well, a little more than that I was trying to say it's all right that Cecil left. It was . . . a belief in a way. I never was what he wanted to see, so it was better when he wasn't looking at me all the time. (1270)

Jessie denies to compromise with her husband, creates her separate life but it is also true that she does not blame her husband. Mama also tries her best to use her will-to-power, she imposes her authority as she can upon her daughter, and she is disappointed when Jessie chats with her father and watches television instead of washing dish with her (1267). She imposes Jessie's marriage with Cecil; she imposes her not to die and also other negligible works:

MAMA. Everything you do has to do with me, Jessie. You can't do anything, wash your face or cut your finger, without doing it to me. (1272)

Mama's effort to take control of her daughter and imposition of things is for her own betterment. Though Mama efforts for will-to-power, she is unsuccessful because she is not so determined like Jessie. Her indeterminacy is seen in her dialogue, she uses "may be" for several times (1272), she has lack of command or her command is ineffective. As a result cannot resist her daughter of committing suicide. Jessie on the other hand is successful in using of will-to-power through her suicide,

she takes control of her own life. She also makes her mother realize that she is not extension of her mother but a separate self who can take control of her own life as well as her mother. She knows her mother is helpless without her but imposes upon her mother, the doomed life mapped by her before her death. Jessie attempts to alter the status quo by retelling the events of past as well as of future (Brown 58). Jessie, by mapping out her mother's actions for the moments to years after her suicide (1275), changes the balance of control. In the final seconds, we see Thelma begin following the "script" that Jessie has set out for her like washing the hot chocolate pan and calling her son (1276-1277). Though it took her death to do it, it is now Jessie who controls the future of the two of them. Jessie is victorious in using her will-to-power by taking control of her mother's future as well as making her future better after death.

3.4 Jessie's Resistance of Social Role

Nowhere is it registered that we have to obey social roles, otherwise We follow social roles assigned to us because it has been tradition to follow it, our ancestors are following it. Society calls them immoral who try to outface social role but they do not look at another façade of their action and they also do not have instrument to measure the deeds of people which they suppose to be crime. They say so on the basis of mere social construction. Similar is the case with Jessie, her suicide may be positive for her but society is wrong to call it negative action.

Sixties is the time when the suspicion on social construction took its height. Diverse continental voices were raised against what they saw as suspicious assumptions about the meaning of right and wrong, the nature of language and the very possibility of human self-understanding. Among them, Foucault and Derrida are two major philosophers to explore deeply ingrained social power system and suspect

logo centric western metaphysics respectively. Foucault's theory is famous as power theory whereas Derrida's is famous as deconstruction theory. According to Foucault, each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: the types of discourse that it accepts and makes functions as true (Moore and Bruder 437). We are trapped in our socially constructed rules and regulations; we are trapped in our own history which determines our behavior. Our present order of practices can be changed or illuminated by inventing new forms of thoughts and actions as does Jessie. Foucault is against our belief that whatever has been written in doctrine of human sciences are true. They are mere weapons for imposition of power by the people in position, in regard to feminism the weapons are for imposition of power upon woman by male figures who hold authority. To be free from those set social roles, better to say social trap of those discourse, one should create oneself, should question upon those social constructions and social roles. Jessie is perfect idol of the person who breaks such confirmation, power impositions by acting in accordance to her essential nature or true self. However, the actions are supposed to be radical action in the eyes of society. Society always constructs particular set values, rules and human nature which are used as basis about how individuals and society should operate. These constructions, called disciplines control people in their thoughts and actions and these constructions are not obeyed by the people in power e.g. popes of church, judicial and legislatures. Though our present form of self-relation is caught up in the disciplinary order, it is not the only possible way of relating to ourselves. Foucault encourages to break such power impositions by practice of the self – practices carried out by people on themselves, forms of self-relation, relate ourselves to the contemporary period by discovering and acting in accordance with our nature or true self. People should break the construction as it was set in ancient time in accordance to their convenience

which is not applicable to people of today. Foucault says there is possibility of resistance by using our freedom, we can struggle against these impositions (Mautner 155). Jessie dares to question and counter those impositions:

JESSIE. They know things about you, and they learned it before you had a chance to say whether you wanted them to know it or not. They were there when it happened and it don't belong to them, it belongs to you, only they have got it. (1262)

Jessie here is convincing her mother about the imposition of patriarchy upon female which she is not ready to accept, Jessie steps forward using her freedom. She wants everything own by her father, she wants to experience everything experienced by her father, the male figure of patriarchal society. She desires to kill herself with her father's gun, she desires to wear her father's GONE FISHING sign (1263), instead of washing dishes with her mother she watches television and charts with her father (1267), not only this she desires her funeral to be like her fathers as Jessie instructs her mother:

JESSIE. I remember you liked that preacher who did Daddy's, so if you want to ask him to do the service, that's O.K. with me . . . And pick some songs . . . let Agnes Pick, she'll know exactly which ones. Oh, and I had your dress cleaned that you were to Daddy's. (1274)

She wants to equate herself with males, wants to take the facilities they are taking. Like a person in power, she sets every activities and works for her mother after her

death (1275). Mama is so used to obey the role provided to her that she asks each and every thing to Jessie before her death like a child:

MAMA. What will police say?

What if Dawson and Loretta want me to go! Do you
want me to wash my hands? (1275-1276)

Mama seems so helpless or lets say her brain is totally washed by the set values that she can not use her common sense in such minor matter. Her belief in set values is so deep rooted that she can not take Jessie's action of committing suicide as granted even in Jessie's regular insistence to take it easily and break the rules which are inconvenient for an individual:

MAMA. Jessie, I can't just sit here and say O.K., kill yourself if you
want to.

JESSIE. Sure you can, you just did. Say it again.

MAMA. Jessie! (Quiet horror) How dare you! (Furious) How dare
you! You think you can just leave whenever you want, like you're
watching television here! No, you can't, Jessie. You make me
feel like a fool for being alive, child and you are so wrong! I like
it her, and I will stay here until they make me go, until they drag
me screaming and I mean screeching into my grave, and you're
real smart to get away before then You know who they're
going to feel sorry for? Me! How about that! Not you, me!
They're going to be ashamed of you. You, Ashamed! If
somebody asks Dawson about it, he'll change the subject all fast
as he can. (1274)

Here, in this point we can characterize Mama as a highly conservative, traditional woman. She is so much afraid of Jessie's radical action against the social construction. Instead of finding reason for her suicide, she is more concentrated towards what society will take her action. Her pitiable condition to accept social role is clarified by the words like screaming and screeching into grave. She is so afraid to alter the norms. However, she agrees with Jessie's with Jessie's action as she says to be smarter to get away before but her acceptance is dominated more by fear of society and cause of this fear she tries to convince Jessie not to commit suicide. Jessie on the other hand is not affected by her mother's request; she is very much determined and claims her action to be right for creating her self-relation.

While doing so Jessie is playing role of mother and mother of daughter. This situation we can call rupturing of hierarchy according to Derridian deconstruction theory. In the play, Mama becomes a child and Jessie the one who takes control of the future of both of them by letting her mother to live a doomed life after her death and asking her to follow the instructions set by her. Mama being a traditional woman is afraid of rupturing the hierarchy and hopes to maintain the status quo, whereas Jessie as a post modern woman tries to move beyond Mama's right to Mama's expectations. In this regard, Linda Ginter Brown says, "There is inversion and revolution in mother-daughter role, wherein the daughter plays mother to her mother, however, the inversion is cyclical one" (59).

Though Jessie takes role of her mother imposing things upon her, she is willing to take care of her mother. Thelma feels herself unable to function without Jessie to organize things and asks her to do. Yet at times, Thelma more or less successfully takes on role of mother. She claims she can fill bottles . . . and change the shelf paper and wash the floor but only if Jessie will choose to remain alive

(1261). Thelma is being tricky to convince Jessie of not committing suicide. Thelma and Jessie both are trying to find something missing from their socially assigned role. Not being satisfied by what they are assigned, they are resisting social role.

The revolution is not only of socially assigned role but symbolically of life and death itself. According to societal norms, the mother is to pass her life on to her daughter by dying in process. Mama tries her best to maintain the process as she says to Jessie:

MAMA. Stay with me little longer. Just a few more years. I don't have that many more to go, Jessie. And as soon as I'm dead, you can do whatever you want. (1273)

Mama is trying to maintain the tradition that daughter should die only after her death. But Jessie resists this tradition too by killing herself before her mother. Mama is totally shattered with this radical decision of Jessie. When Jessie takes permission of her to go to the room to shoot herself, Mama reacts in a very contradictory manner.

MAMA. Let me go, Mama.

MAMA. I can't. You can't go. You can't do this. You didn't say it would be so soon, Jessie. I'm scared. I love you. (1276)

The two words that Mama uses are very contradictory. She says she loves Jessie but she is also scared at the same time, scared of society what she will reply to them of Jessie's suicide. Her Mama leaves space for us to suspect upon love toward her daughter. Traditionally, mother figure stands for selfless love but Mama is more scared of her reputation in the society. Jessie is again successful in rupturing this set belief by disobeying her mother, by compelling her mother to burst out those

contradictory words. At last, Jessie is victorious to make her Mama appreciate her decision as Mama says, “You’re real smart to get away” (1274).

Furthermore according to Derridian concept, Western philosophy and the set values are logocentric i.e. it places at the centre of its understanding of the world, a concept/logo which he says is the greatest illusion of Western metaphysics (Tyson 249). Derrida sees no centre because every concept is made up of language and since language itself is free play of signifiers, it disseminates infinite number of possible meanings and hence it is dynamic and instable. He means to say no concept is beyond the dynamic instability of language. Then in case of Jessie how can we say suicide a sin, a crime. It is language which makes it a sin, a crime and language itself can deter its prevailing meaning with its instability. At some point the negativity of term suicide can turn positive. As Derrida says, meaning seems to reside in words/things only when we distinguish their difference from other words/things (Moore and Bruder 444). For example, rat is rat only because we believe it to be different from cat and dog. So may be the term or action of suicide. Suicide carries negative values because we find it different from natural death or murder. Death is after all death whether it is self-intentioned like suicide or natural or forced like murder. Derrida is suspicious of any claim to final interpretation; he is against binary thinking of structuralists who tend to privilege the first term in each diad: Natural death/suicide, male/female, white/black, master/slave etc. According to him, so called superior first term has significance only because of second term, day has significance only because of night. Then why people call night derogatorily dark, similar may be the case with suicide and natural death and murder. Murder and natural death has positive significance because suicide is taken negatively. If this hierarchy is ruptured, then no question stands behinds its negativity.

To sum up, Jessie is victorious in resisting social role from all points of view. She does not remain confined within the societally assigned role but seeks for possible vantage point which she finds in suicide. She is successful in rupturing hierarchy between male and female, mother and daughter and the most important one suicide and natural death or imposed death like murder.

Chapter 4

Jessie's Triumph on Celebration of her Free Will

It has been our tradition to follow the values set by our culture, society but when one finds them uncomfortable and tries to step ahead, it becomes a radical action – a shift from tradition. The question is problematic whether we should follow the set values or move for our individual comfort, whether we should think of many or self only. However, the shift from tradition is found more today than the past. People are being more individualistic, more self-oriented. Today self always comes first.

In concern to the chosen text '*night, Mother*' by Marsha Norman written in 1983, we find two females – one representative of traditional American society and the other, representative of late 20th century American woman. Mama is a traditional woman content with the role given to her by her society, whereas her daughter Jessie is opposite to her, dissatisfied with what is provided to her. The question of identity and meaninglessness always strikes her and she becomes restless. She questions herself why should she follow what her Mama has been following, where lies her autonomy, her identity without her family members: her father, husband, brother, son and her mother.

Looking at Jessie's search from existential perspective, whatever Jessie is trying to seek is her existential quest as described by the existentialist like Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir. It is her existential right to choose her own path. As an existential being, she discards the role provided to her by the society and chooses her own action. When she finds her existence in crisis, her identity in danger and meaninglessness in life, she chooses suicide as the proper solution to all these

problems. With this decision, she gains her autonomy, her importance and she is able to claim her right upon herself. She even becomes successful in making her mother realize that she is not her mother's continuation, she is not her mother's control but a free individual being, a separate being.

From the feminist perspective, Jessie is victorious to defend perhaps the most famous line of *The Second Sex*, "One is not born but becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 267). She has not brought her role as a woman by birth but assigned by the society. So, in order to break the social construction, in order to define her identity which was almost hidden in the patriarchal society, she takes radical step like suicide. Anne Marie Drew defines Jessie's suicide as a bold act of emancipation and believes it not to be negation but rather a triumph (88). Jessie commits suicide not under pressure but very leisurely, very calmly with a long term plan. The action she takes is her self-assertion. Her existential condition as a woman and lack of identity enforces her to define an identity of her own through some action i.e. suicide. Apart from self-assertion, her action can also be defined as celebration of her free will and victory on revolution against patriarchy. She is very glad in her decision as if she has won a battle and in true sense she wins the battle of her life through suicide. She is also successful in making her mother realize that she can not follow the imposition provided to her by social construction, patriarchy. The role she defines for herself is self-made and there lies her victory.

Looking at the social construction through deconstructionist view, society always tries to maintain hierarchy between male and female, mother and daughter, virtue and vice, moral and immoral, holiness and sin and so on. It has always made one superior and another inferior and those inferior one are always fighting for their position and equality. Jessie being a victim of patriarchal society stands against its

norms for revolution. Through her decision to commit suicide, she is victorious in rupturing the hierarchy between male and female, mother and daughter, holiness and sin and life and death.

Jessie's decision of committing suicide also can be taken as will-to-power. She takes control of herself, her mother, her life as well as of time through this decision. With her sudden and radical decision, she takes control of overall situation and time itself. Her death is not on time and natural death but self-created one. For her own happiness and convenience, she decides to die before time. Anne Marie Drew writes in this matter, "Nothing in her universe makes her believe that time will improve things. Thus, she embraces suicide as her way of triumphing over time" (87). Hence, it is proven that Jessie is successful in gaining victory over time, she is empowered with her decision of suicide.

In her life, Jessie lacks a male figure: she is divorced from her husband, alienated from her son who has been a juvenile delinquent, her brother Dawson stays separately with his wife Loretta and her father is already dead with whom she has very intimate relationship. She stays with her mother as an only companion to each-other but her mother's company is not enough for her. Absence of her father who was so dear to her makes her restless; it creates psychic hunger in her. As a result, she tries to find out the way to satiate her psychic hunger. She desires to fulfill the gap between her father and her and that leads her to commit suicide. Suicide comes out to be the most possible way out to be unified with her father; suicide brings unification with her father.

It is indeed hard to view suicide as a triumph when most people who commit suicide live behind them grieving relatives. For many suicide is a sin of despair – an acting out of the belief that we are past the saving reaches of God (Drew 88). But

God and grieving relatives are not a consideration for Jessie. She knows what is right and what is wrong for her. Her individual universe, as she sees it, holds no hope for her. Her death is the agent of transformation to freedom, autonomy and individualism. We normally equate loss of life with death but Jessie does not. Suicide does not really mean dying for Jessie but it is a progressive act towards her victory.

To conclude, Jessie is victorious from each and every aspect by celebrating her free will and this celebration of her free will she finds in suicide. She is victorious in her revolution against patriarchy – it could not move her from her decision, use of free will, she is victorious in gaining her autonomy, creating her identity, making pathways towards will-to-power, rupturing the hierarchies of social construction and being unified with her father. It is suicide which leads her to this victory. Hence, we can say she celebrates her free will in suicide, the celebration of loss according to postmodernism.

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