

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

**Emerging Feminist Consciousness in Sophoclean trio –
*Oedipus Rex, Antigone and Electra***

**A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in English**

**By
Mukti Ram Aryal**

**University Campus
Kirtipur
July 2006**

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

This thesis entitled "Emerging Feminist Consciousness in Sophoclean trio – *Oedipus Rex, Antigone and Electra*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Mukti Ram Aryal has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date:

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Acknowledgements

The present study could never have come into its present form without the scholarly guidance and encouragement from Dr. Sangita

Rayamajhi of Central Department of English., Tribhuvan University. I express my sincerest gratitude to her

I am highly indebted to Prof. Chandra Prakash Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English for granting me a chance to carry out this research work. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma for his valuable suggestion. Similarly, I am highly indebted to my respected teachers Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, Mr. Sajag Rana and Srijon Chhetri for providing me valuable suggestions and constructive guidelines.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents and dear brothers without whose continuous encouragement and support my dream of achieving master's degree would have remained unfulfilled. I would like to thank my friends especially, Jitendra and those who have directly or indirectly helped me in bringing this research work to completion. I cannot forget Manique Computer Service, Kirtipur for its kind help.

July, 2006

Mukti Ram Aryal

Abstract

The present research focuses on the aspect of Feminism in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*. It studies the emerging

rebellious and dominant role of conscious female characters. The present work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives the general introduction to the work. The second chapter makes the study of feminism. The third chapter analyzes the text to show women's consciousness of their situation in ancient time in Athenian society. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the work.

I. INTRODUCTION

The research work studies Sophocles' great tragedies – *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra* from the feminist point of view. The study focuses on the emerging feminist consciousness in the plays, which is gradually becoming dominant from Sophocles' earlier plays to the later ones with the rise of some rebellious ladies.

Sophocles was born in the fifth century B.C. in Athens. The commencement of his dramatic career was by a victory in competition with Aeschylus under exceptional circumstances. At the time, drama in Greek was developed through the ritual performance to god, Dionysus. Sophocles was awarded more prizes in those dramatic competitions. For more than sixty years Sophocles continued to compose and exhibit tragedies and satyric plays. It has been estimated that he has written one hundred and twenty plays. When Sophocles began writing he broke with an old tradition by not acting in his plays as other playwrights Aeschylus and Euripides did. He also introduced innovation in the structure of his plays by reducing the size of chorus from fifty to fifteen and by adding pointed scenery, more props and a third character to the two that Aeschylus and other tragedians used.

Sophocles was an avid reader of the epics of Homer. Many of his plays derive from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* although he always adapted the materials of others to his own purposes. His characters are great heroes like king, ruler, army general or commander who reach high and fall because of inherent defect or flaw. His use of irony, best known as

Sophoclean irony is one of his techniques used in his plays to have certain effect on the audience. He was of strong religious temperament, filled with reverence for his country's gods. He declared himself to be only the interpreter of the heroes and divinities who are looking down upon him. As a religious man he touches myth with irony, the struggle of humanity with the irresistible march of fate. Women have been portrayed in different ways in the works of art written by male writers from the beginning of the history of civilization and art. A work of art in the classical age was greatly influenced by the socio-cultural surroundings. Mythology and philosophy occupied more space in the creation of literature. They took it for granted that God is the generator of worldly truth. For them women were defective men. Whether classical philosophers made the maxims to guide artists or they observed that they certainly accepted that creation begins from a super-soul or a super-man, women, therefore, were incomplete. The literary works of the classical period amply exemplify the artist's conformation with the norms of the patriarchal society and their presentation of women as subjects of entertainment or of wish fulfillment. However, Sophocles has portrayed the role of his female characters in his tragedies as dominant, bold and rebellious challenging the patriarchal values in ancient times.

Women have often been regarded as inferior beings from the very beginning of civilization. It has been the practice that men have occupied superior position in every field of human activities. They have always tried to keep women under their control. All the world is on the side of the

male and the female is projected as "other" in their works as, "Frailty thy name is woman" said Shakespeare (Hamlet II, III). Similarly Aristotle was more inclined to believe that women were incomplete in some way. He says, "A woman was an unfinished man" (qtd. in Gaarder 116). Legislators, priests, philosophers and scientists have striven to show that the sub-ordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth.

Classical feminists and Renaissance feminists view that tragedies victimize feminine representation. Sophocles was fully aware of patriarchal dominance. Athenian society was patriarchal society where there were patriarchal ideologies such as, if there is conflict between man and woman, man is the winner, woman should be silent, they should not go outside, should please male, whereas the male was thought to be domineering, ruler, protector of women, fighter, courageous, "Lack of tenderness towards women was the rule at Athens " (Anoulih 136). Therefore, Sophocles has tried to represent the strong voice of females against patriarchal norms. The females have been able to raise their voices due to their consciousness of their position in society.

Sophocles's deep study of the Bible and Homer has a great influence in his tragedies. Bible itself marginalizes women as the "other". The book of Genesis says that Adam was created by god and Eve was created out of Adam's rib. He dreamt and found her. Eve was good as long as she obeyed God and Adam. She changed into a demon as soon as she disobeyed.

In a similar way Homer's *Iliad* also projects women as the other. The plot of *Iliad* begins from the claim of possession of a maid. Achilles first possessed her but Agamemnon wanted her. As a result Achilles withdrew from the battle. In the next event Paris proposed to be the husband of Helen, Menelaus, her husband fought to possess her. The war was merely for Helen and for her possession. Helen regarded to be the most beautiful woman of the period became an object to be desired, fought for, and possessed by men. *Odyssey* is the next great work by Homer. This work is influenced by the same patriarchal society of Homer's time. In this characterization of male and female, man is active. He determines his own destiny with his efficiency and remains independent. On the other hand, women are submissive their desire depends on man's ability.

Thus, as he was aware of this mythical background, Sophocles attempted to rupture the hierarchy between man and women by presenting the powerful role of women characters in his tragedies.

Feminist critics argue that there should not be oppression and discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, class and religion. They fight for the equality between man and woman and want to change the whole established norms of the patriarchal society. In this way, Sophocles leaves much gap in his tragedies for feminist critics. Athenian society took it for granted that males are bearers of culture, they are profunder of all norms of society and under them everything exists. Men should rule over women.

Sophoclean Plays

Only seven of the dramas of Sophocles have come down to us, but these were with one exception, composed in the full maturity of his tragic power, and each resplendent with its own peculiar Excellencies. In *Antigone* heroism is exhibited in a purely masculine character, in *Ajax*, the manly sense of honor in all its strength. In the *Women of Trachis*, are described the sufferings of Hercules and the levity of Deianeira, atoned for by her death; *Electra* is distinguished by energy and pathos, and in *Oedipus at Colonus* are a mildness and gracefulness suggestive of the character of the author. While we cannot divide the plays of Sophocles into distinct groups indicating certain periods in his dramatic art, he himself recognized three epochs in his own style first, the tumid grandeur borrowed from Aeschylus; second, a harshness of expression due to his own mannerism; third, the style that seemed to him best fitted for the portrayal of human characters.

Sophoclean tragedies, *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra* have elicited various criticisms from the classical time to the present. Some identify Sophoclean tragedies as traditional and conventionally moral; some argue that they are related to human nature. However, the present researcher views these three plays from the feminist point of view.

Gender discrimination prevalent in the human society is the root cause of ridiculing women in the work of art. So, Sophocles, in his plays, especially *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra* has portrayed the role of

women gradually becoming dominant with the rise of some rebellious ladies in the society.

Nicole Loraux, in *The Rope and the Sword* states, "The only ones to take flight are those who are too feminine, but those who go against the males are manlike, and rebellious females" (242). So, Jocasta, in *Oedipus Rex*, Antigone in *Antigone*, Electra and Clytemnestra, in *Electra* raise their voice against the patriarchal values.

In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is the dominant character that is powerful, protector of state, in the play. Jocasta is mother and wife of Oedipus. From the very beginning she comes across as a strong woman. She is a woman who is ready to speak out her mind and attempts to pacify conflict. This is the result of her being conscious. Although Oedipus does not take her decision and suggestion seriously, she exhibits her prudence and wisdom. She is a fully conscious woman though she cannot protest strongly. In the end, she commits suicide by hanging. This way of dying of a woman character in the play shows a kind of protest against gender discrimination.

In the times of the ancient Greeks, women had an unpretentious role. They were expected to take on the accepted role of a woman. In most cases, a woman's role is restricted to bearing children, raising them, and housework. Ormand writes:

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Antigone, and Medea, "the dominant female characters impacted upon men with authority and political power. It is an inescapable fate that

one of these characters will fall, and that the gods have control over everyone's fate. Each dominant female character portrays her willpower and commitment to their beliefs. (67)

In *Antigone*, Antigone and Creon are the main characters. This play deals with the conflict between man and woman, Antigone and Creon, and also shows the enmity between two female characters, Ismene and Antigone. In the play, Antigone is projected as the masculine girl who is dominant, powerful, and rebellious and is dead against man made law of the state. On the other hand Ismene represents the female identity of that society, who is subordinated, cowardly and who wants to live under established law. For her to be bold and cross the law of the state is a sin because a woman is meant to remain silent. Antigone wants Ismene's help to bury her brother's corpse but Ismene does not agree with Antigone as a result they are not on good terms with each other. Antigone, going out of patriarchal norms, is put in the dark cave, for protesting against male values. Hence, she is depicted as bold, rebellious and dominant.

Sarah. B. Pomeroy says, "As one of the first feminist in world literature, the character Antigone, of Sophocles' Oedipus Cycle, displays fine characteristics of a great female leader in order to stand up against male dominance for her religious, political and personal beliefs" (125). This shows women's growing consciousness though they cannot radically go against male values.

In *Electra*, Electra and Clytemnestra, two females, mother and daughter are dominant characters, and they retaliate against each other. If

one were to die the other would lead a comfortable and happy life. So, they are violent and rebellious ladies who do not even hesitate to raise a sword. They don't even hesitate to kill the male for peace and prosperity in society. Electra wants to kill her mother and uncle for the restoration of her father's reign; on the other hand Clytemnestra kills her husband, Agamemnon, to please Aegisthus. So this shows the violent and dominant role of female characters in the plays.

Kirk Ormond in, *Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedies*, focuses on the treatment of the gender issue in Sophoclean tragedies and gender ideology in ancient Greece, which will be fruitful to study Sophoclean tragedies to find the rebellious and dominant role of women in the patriarchal system. Ormond explores the rebellious role of Antigone in *Antigone*. But, Ismene is not as bold as Antigone. The dialogues between Ismene and Antigone clarify this:

Ismene: Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

Antigone: You must decide whether you will help me or not

Antigone: Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way

Ismene: Our own death would be if we should go against

Creon and do what he has forbidden! We are only women; we can't fight with men, Antigone! (72-73)

Sophocles has shown the consciousness of women emerging from earlier plays to the later ones. To find out the evolutionary role of women from Sophocles earlier play, *Oedipus Rex* to his later play, *Electra* and to arbitrate the rebellious violent and dominant nature of women in the

patriarchal system, the study will employ the feminist theory that the models created in good works of art, combining with the criticism of Sophocles' tragedies for a detailed analysis.

Sophocles has artistically depicted his women characters as gradually emerging from less conscious and less dominant to a more conscious and more dominant state.

The present work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a short historical background to *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*, a short introduction to Sophocles in relation to feminism, a brief outline of above three tragedies; an introductory study, and a short review. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work.

The second chapter tries briefly to explain the theoretical modality applied in this research. It explains shortly the history of feminism, school of feminism, kinds of feminism, distinction among feminist, female and feminine and the feminist reading of tragedy.

On the basis of the theoretical modality outlined in the second chapter the third chapter analyzes the text at considerable length. It sorts out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study. It mainly includes the gradually emerging feminist consciousness in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research. On the basis of the textual analysis in chapter three, it concludes the explanation and arguments put forward in the preceding chapter – that feminist consciousness is growing from Sophocles's earlier plays to later ones.

II. A THEORETICAL MODALITY

Feminism

The term “Feminism” originated from the French word “Feminisme” which was coined by the Utopian socialist Charles Fourier. The term was first used to denote the support for women's equal legal and political rights with men. Now feminism also refers to any theory which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination or oppression. Thus, the aim of feminism seems to identify and remedy the sources of all kinds of oppressions and subordinations.

History of Feminism

Feminism is a struggle of women for womanhood. Feminist writers focus on the women's rights and their emancipation. They also cast their view on the liberation of women from the patriarchal society. Feminism affects the world politically, culturally, spiritually and economically. They reject the tradition of masculinity. Feminists regard women as human beings and debate for the equality of sex.

Feminist writers seek to change the world which has hierarchal relationship between the male and the female as Sophocles presents the world in his tragedies. It is a change of mode of thinking that prevailed in the world. Feminists feel that females are in fact made inferior not by nature but by social mechanism. Most thinkers, philosophers, scientists, leaders and prophets including gods being male, they have always been given undue advantage to males over females. Thus, feminists fight against contemporary culture and tradition which is male dominated.

Feminists reject the wrong belief of cultural ignorance on women. Feminists aim to eliminate the oppression and discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, class and religion. “Feminism is a perspective, a world view, a kind of activism and political and spiritual theory” (Ruth 4).

In early 19th century rural England, wives were taken as slaves and sold by their male counterparts. Women were taken as the weaker sex to the superior physical and economic power of a free and independent male. Women were paid less attention than males and were not allowed to study or go to school as the males. They were not given systematic training. Feminism questions such long-standing dominant, male phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. It attacks the male notions and of value in literature and criticisms. To subvert the complacent certainties of patriarchal culture, it offers critiques of male authors and representatives of men in literature and also privileges women writers. So, Mary Wollstonecraft first raised her voice in support of education and emancipation of women. She was the first feminist theorist and with her publication of *A Vindication of Rights of Women* feminism gained momentum. The lack of sufficient training was felt to be one of the major disabilities in women’s struggle for independence. The Industrial reinduction brought a radical change in the life of western society in the second half of 18th and 19th C. The increasing development of industries resulted in the decline of domestic industries which had an impact in the income generation of women. They were underpaid and given poor education. Thus, the women of middle class raised their voice

for equal opportunities and higher education. So the several acts were passed for the benefit of women and children.

At the same time women were fighting against slavery and poverty. They also fought for the self-consciousness and emancipation of women. Then, they entered into social enterprises and formalistic work.

Francis Wright who was one of the first women orators, raised her voice for the better education to be offered to women. American Women Suffrage Association was established for the betterment of women, Nevertheless, for the 19th and 20th C the American Women Suffrage Association fought for the emancipation and betterment of women. This culminated in the winning of the vote in 1920. And then feminist movement remained dormant for forty years.

After 1960 feminist literary criticism came into existence. The feminist literary criticism is a political movement which expresses social, economic or cultural freedom, and equality between women and men.

Since ancient times women were regarded inferior to men. They always had to fight against the trend. Roman Seldon adds, "Aristotle declared that female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities" (134).

This statement expresses that females were regarded as less powerful and kept under patriarchal systems. So, women revolted against patriarchy.

The feminist theory is used for the study of sex discrimination and their power relationship. It also expresses the female voice against the dominated patriarchal society which is clearly expressed by Kate Millett.

Among the feminist writers Virginia Woolf in the 20th C was more significant of her writings including *A Room of One's Own* (1929) supply the consciousness and women's emancipation. The modern feminism is made stronger by the publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949). In the feminist world she launched a more subtle and radical mode. She projects that male writers usually assume the female as a negative "object" or "other" man who is supposed to be the dominating and defining "subject" (qtd. in Abrams 91).

Gilbert and Gubar's, *The Mad Women in the Attic* (1979) stresses the psychoanalyses of the women writers in 19th century. Its authors propose that the "anxiety of authorship" resulting from the stereotype, that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to the idealized heroine. Similarly, black women fought for the emancipation of women in America. All feminists were inspired by the male ideology. So, Mary Wollstonecraft was inspired by the male dominated ideas of French Revolution and Simone De Beauvoir was deeply influenced by Sartre's phallogocentric ideas.

The feminist movement has been running since 18th C. Different writers played significant roles for emancipation of women. They developed various approaches to feminist criticism and interpret feminism from different angles.

School of Feminism

French Feminism

French feminists believe that western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience. They tried to deconstruct the language, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social practices, culture and the male centered thinking. They claim that the culture and religion which supports male domination can be overcome by language. Helen Cixous argues that females should express their sexuality in their language to overcome the dichotomy between the male and the female. She deconstructed the relation of male and female e. g. Sun/moon, culture/nature, man/ woman.

These binary oppositions are rooted in patriarchal society. Here, she suggests that the active partner is always the richer. So male is the victor, female has always been marginalized by the cultural traditional value of the contemporary society. With the impression of Jacques Derrida's philosophy she regarded women as the source of energy because the women used a new language in their writing. Roman Seldon says that the female counterpart can overcome the male when they can project their sexuality in their writing. Her famous essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) is an example of women's writing where the women put their bodies into writing. She rejects the binary opposition of male and female and support the deconstructive method of Derrida. Roman Seldon suggested that to get rid of the patriarchal domination women should invent their own language. She admires in women a sexuality that is

remarkably superior to the phallic single mindedness. She insists on the libidinal impulses in women's writing, Cixous is convinced that women's unconsciousness is totally different from men's and that it's their psychosexual specificity that will empower women to overthrow masculine ideologies and to create a new female discourse. She argues that if all the biological defenders were swept out then there will be feminists. She rejects the dichotomy between male and female.

Another important feminist is Julia Kristeva. She focuses on the differentiation between semiotic and symbolic order of language. She questions femininity and prefers to see it as a position. According to her new femininity is marginalized by male dominated society. She opines that feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal. Semiotic means the stage where baby and mother are fused together inside the womb of the mother and symbolic is associated with the law of the father. Avant-gardes poets are regarded as semiotic because they enter the body of a mother and resist the body of a father. She sees this poetic renovation as the feminist liberalization. Thus, the feminist movements invent anarchism which is found in Avant-gardes. They use it to dominate the male dominated society. And associated with the mother feminine language is threatening to patriarchal culture.

French feminism has been much influenced by psychoanalysis, the psychoanalysis of Lacan, "French feminists by following Lacan's theory have overcome the hostility towards French shared by most of the feminist" (Seldon 145).

To derive the meaning of the text, they placed the language as a political agenda. They opined phallogocentric as their language. This comes from within the signifying process. According to Lacan, a child when he identifies himself with the phallus of the father, it will enter the linguistic order and symbolic order of language. The father signifies what Lacan calls the "Law" and entering into the father the child will fall in post structuralism anxiety. The woman is a signifier and not a biological female. Lacan says that women can't identify with phallus and thus can not enter into the male symbolic order of language.

Luce Irigaray emphasizes on the need of women language. Based on Lacan's concept of symbolic order of language they developed "Ecriture Feminine". She argued that female sexuality is an unknown identity. She opines that women specificity distinguishes them sharply from men. She rejects the view of Freud and Plato about women that women are irrational and invisible as imperfect man. She supports Cixous and says that the male language is rational because their sexuality is centered on the penis, whereas female sexuality is irrational, non-Linear, and incomprehensible to men because female sexuality is diffused over their body and therefore, the writing of the female has a force which can overcome the patriarchal language. Their writing is expressed through their body.

Irigaray further expresses that female sexuality represents women's relationship to masculinity and language. She opines, "Women like the mystic is able to lose all sense of personal subjective being, and is, therefore, able to slip through the patriarchal net" (Newtman 89).

She expresses that the male sexual organ is centralized whereas female gets pleasure in touch and therefore women's writing is connected with fluidity and touch. As a result her style of writing will overcome the male's style of writing. So, female writing should express their body, so the female can't be defined:

Marx has said for the women's oppression and Engels in the origins of the family opines that the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male, thus legitimating the familiar equation of husband with the bourgeois and wives with the proletariat. (K. K. Ruthvan, 29)

Marxism identifies capitalism as the class system. Capitalism is the source of all oppression and opines that the subjection of women will be due to the oppression. So when such capitalism is discarded from the society then only the suppression of women will be removed from society.

American Feminism

Another important feminist criticism is the American one. They focus on textual analysis. There are two modes of American feminism. There is the feminist critique or feminist reader propounded by Elaine Showalter, e.g. Kate Millett, Carolyn Heilbrun and Judith Fellerly are some of the feminist readers. Feminist critics may also deal with books written by men. In her "Sexual Politics" Kate Millett expresses about the male authors and attacks the bias and Freud's psychoanalytical theory and also analyzes selected passages written by D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Henry Miller. They follow the ideological model. These

critics examined the women's position in patriarchal ideology and degrade women as submissive sexual objects (qtd. in Abrams 92).

Kate Millett expresses that feminism is a political theory, a cultural and spiritual product where gender discrimination is wiped out and women are allowed to take free breath as men do in the society. Millett's approach is concerned with the study of social, institutional and personal power relation between the sexes. Toril Moi opines that "for Millett the essence of politics is power" (qtd. in Jefferson 205). Male is the overall in society and the females were kept under patriarchy which forms the ideology for power. She opposed this view of cultural tradition and fought for the emancipation of women against such oppression. Her sexual politics opens the way to the women's emancipation. It clearly marks the way in the political feminist writing in literature. She opines that patriarchy (the father figure) oppresses women in the society, treats women as inferior, as a good wife and underpaid. They were bound to keep within the four corners of domestic rules. Millett tries to differentiate gender and sex. To her, gender has a cultural meaning attached to sexual identity whereas sex has a biological aspect. According to her with sexuality gender should not be isolated, that male should not dominate the female, and that *Sexual Politics* means the fighting against the unequal relation of domination and ordination by the male counterparts.

The modern feminist writers like Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, and M. Ellmann emphasize on the emancipation of women and express their aggressive feelings (qtd. in Guerin et. al 197).

Women were taken to be inferior and were looked upon as black and working class. But Kate Millett approaches the view that all these should be wiped out and women should be treated as human not as female or oppressive group. To her, gender plays an important role here, and should be treated equally by the cultural, traditional as well government rules and regulations. Roman Seldon adds:

The argument of each oppressed group takes similar forms. The oppressor is seen as consciously endeavoring to sustain the oppression indefinitely through ideology, each defends its members against misrepresentation and stereotyping in fiction and the media and each conducts a political struggle to raise consciousness among the oppressed and effect a radical change in the power relations between oppressors and oppressed. (138)

They argue that this theory is one which helps to wipe out the ideological oppression of women by men. In *Sexual Politics* Kate Millett becomes a critic of patriarchal society. She points out the male's oppressive rule on females in her book. She opines that male writers in their fiction expose oppressive sexual politics. They (feminists) regard male dominance as the primary thing which is unique in social and economic forms of oppression.

Another group of critics including Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Elaine Showalter propounded other models of feminism. They prefer to feminist writing or Gynocriticism. Gynocriticism means the study of

women as writers and its subjects are the history, styles, themes and structure of writing by women. Showalter's *Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* are the only valuable examples of Gynocriticism.

British Feminism

British feminism is another important mode of feminism. British feminists focus on cultural practice, products and knowledge. They emphasize on art and culture. Rosalind Coward looks at the female desire among the various cultural phenomenons. They opine that there is relationship between the author, text and sex and that a feminist text can be made by male or female authors who are political and cultural and not biological.

According to British feminist critics, women are the victims of the socio-cultural construction. Women have been suppressed in the capitalist society by means of economic exploitation. The critics see patriarchy as an ideology in the form of controlling values. So the critics suggest that gender equity will be attained only with the complete alteration of the economic system of the society. Mary Wollstonecraft opines, "Either nature has made great difference between man and woman or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial" (140). Then John Stuart Mill and William Thompson emphasized on the equality of women and men attempted to attain legal and political rights for woman. They denied the existences of natural difference

between man and woman. These critics were interested to depict the economically exploited and socially oppressed women within the texts.

Kinds of Feminism

Feminists are plural. Their views, concepts, and approaches change from one another in course of time and by the trend of theory. Women's state and their oppression and subordination are variously explained.

Generalizing all these concepts Barbara Milech has tried to categorize the school of feminist theory into four.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism imagines that women are morally and intellectually equal to men. But women lack opportunity to access to social institutions. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) was an extended defense of women as a rational being. She emphasized that women are capable of benefiting from education and of performing the duties of citizens. Liberal feminism is further cleared as:

Liberal feminists attack the concept of unequal pay for equal work and unequal pay for comparable work and they lead many political and legal efforts to change our systems in accordance with these beliefs. They focus attention on providing more opportunities for choice for both women and men and point to changes that have occurred through such efforts. (Kahnun 268)

But liberal feminists neglect the biological and social differences between men and women. They also neglect the differences which

undermine women's ability to make equal use of their political and legal rights.

Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminists identify capitalism as the material base of a class system which is the main source of all oppression of women. They foresee no real change in sexual division of labor as long as the economic system remains unchanged. They suggest that gender equality will be attained only with the complete alternation of the economic system. Barbarah Milech says:

Marxist feminism concentrates on the way in which industrial capitalism organizes women's labours, ensuring through it's ideologies of family and motherhood that women willingly undertake the unpaid reproductive work of bearing and raising the next generation of workers, similarly, unpaid domestic work of caring for the current generation and the poorly paid productive work of providing a cheap labour force that can be moved in and out of the economy as necessary. (125)

Women help to maintain the current economic system through their responsibility for family consumption and childcare and they guarantee a market for products and train the new generation of disciplined workers. Despite these facts women are accused to be uncommitted workers and are poorly paid than the male workers. So, Marxist feminists are convinced

that women's suppression has been caused by the unequal economic system of our society.

Radical or Cultural Feminism

Radical feminists argue that Marxist explanation for women's oppression is inadequate. They blame that Marxist feminists fail to recognize the fundamentally different interests of men and women. For radical feminists, it is patriarchy which is the problem not economic condition.

Radical feminists think the texts values, norms, laws etc. are already obsessed by patriarchy so feminist critics should establish feminine elements which subvert the patriarchy. Ruthven says, " Women are not inferior by nature but made inferior by culture, they are articulated into inferiority" (45).

They argue that men benefit from women's location in the home in several ways. Men have monopoly on the valued activities in the society and they are granted extra power. They complain that gender is socially constructed and that its construction has enforced unequal relations of power. So Toril Moi defines feminism as "The words feminist or feminism are political labels indicating support for the aim of the new movement which emerged in the late1900" (204).

Now the question arises what the new women's movement is and what their goal is. The answer comes in the definition of Andrienne Rich:

Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described

is not the whole world ... Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male created ideologies, and that we proceed to think and act, out of that recognition. (qtd. in Ruth 3)

Radical feminists believe that oppression of women is the model for all other forms of oppression. They involve in the identification and removal of all aspects of women's subordination. Their main issue is that women's oppression has been caused by the social identity of 'feminine' and 'masculine' provided by society.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

The feminists of this school speculate how the identities of masculine and feminine are produced through the operation of language both within society and within psyche. To derive the meaning of the text they placed the language as a political agenda. They opined phallogocentric as their language. This comes from within the signifying process.

According to Lacan, a child when he identifies himself with the phallus of the father it will enter the linguistic order and symbolic order of language. The father signifies what Lacan calls the law and entering into father, the child will fall in post-structural anxiety. The woman is a signifier and not a biological female. Lacan says that women can't identify with the phallus and thus enter into male symbolic order of language.

Luce Irigaray emphasizes on the need of woman language. Based on Lacan's concept of symbolic order of language, they developed *Écriture féminine*. She argued that female sexuality is an unknown identity. She

opines that women specificity distinguish them sharply from men. She rejects the view of Freud and Plato about women that women are irrational and invisible as imperfect men.

Distinction among Feminist, Female and Feminine

There are some distinctions between these words. These distinctions show the political and theoretical aspects in feminism. The confusion may be removed only by knowing the difference between these terms. Toril Moi expresses these terms clearly in her essay entitled, "Feminist Female and Feminine".

She opines that the words feminist or feminism is political label indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. Feminist criticism then is also a special kind of a political discourse.

Feminist criticism is a critical and theoretical practice fought against patriarchy and sexism. Feminist critics show that female is suppressed by male. Toril Moi expresses that femininity is mostly affected by patriarchal society. Male writer steals female's literature. To support this she cites an example of Dole Spender's books, *Woman of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*. In this way patriarchy dominates female.

Human beings are born either male or female. Femininity is a set of culturally defined characteristics of female sex. Female denotes the physical appearance of women. Most of the critics view that female experience can only produce feminist analysis of women's situation on

the other hand, it is not necessary to be a female for becoming a feminist. Feminism is a matter of gender.

Feminine represents nature and culturally formed traits. Human being is born either male or female but they are made masculine and feminine by the culture. For this the binary opposition of Helen Cixous is suited Cixou's deconstruction of feminine masculine opposition remains valuable for feminists. Thus, the word feminine refers to the gender and the social roles imposed upon women by so called masculine 'men'. So 'sex' and 'gender' are entirely different matters.

Classical and Renaissance Feminist Reading of Tragedy.

Renaissance feminists (for examples, Woodbridge, Callaghan, Neely, Bomber, Figes, Sprengnether) opine that tragedy is anti-feminist because tragedy victimizes its feminine representation. Female characters are portrayed in tragedies as submissive or violent or beautiful objects to be possessed by male and at the end they undergo a pathetic situation. Male characters have an active role, such as brave, wise and superman in the play that victimizes female representation in the tragedy. In this way tragedy depicts the social hierarchy such as man as powerful, dominating and intelligent being whereas female is naïve, imperfect man, and docile being.

On the other hand, feminist critics of classical Greek and Roman tragedy (for example, Sarah B. Pomeroy, Nicole Loraux, Elisabeth Bronfer, Mary Lefkowitz) point the study of tragedy in a different direction. For Pomeroy, Greek tragedy does not reflect the ordinary reality

but the extra-ordinary epic mythology that provided the plot of these plays. Tragedy represents not what is but what might be and what it revives is old social myth. It does so to provide a new interrogation of traditional notions such as feminine being submissive to masculine will, acceptance of social isolation and a willingness to die, if necessary, by suicide. In tragedy, says Loraux, male and female behavior can disregard the division of humanity into man and woman thereby showing how each character whether by conformity or by deviation lives out a destiny as an individual man or woman. There are dimensions of both reality and imagination to these lives, while the city would like to make them fundamentally a matter of social reality.

Thus, tragedy revives patriarchal ideology which separates men and women in the society by imposing certain laws for women and men.

These feminist critics' reading, focus attention on the fore grounded representation of the feminine. Tragedy is the representation of social and political hierarchy. So tragedy gives birth to gender discrimination. So the world of tragedy is on the side of the male and the female role in tragedies is like that of a doll or plaything which can be modeled according to the wish of the player. Feminist critics of the Renaissance wanted to change the tragedy because tragedy is the product of patriarchal norms which establish a long dichotomy between male and female. Tragedy victimizes females by creating what role they should perform in the society, and what they should look like. Tragedy teaches that a decent woman should not even attempt to cross the established rules and regulations of the society

and that she should not revolt against men, that she should be demure not dauntless, she should always be under the control of men. She should please man throughout her life which gives her identity and a complete satisfactory life.

The proper behaviour of women and men is explored in Sophoclean tragedies. Women should be submissive and modest, is the male thinking adopted from classical period to the present. Ismene in *Antigone*, Chrysothemis in *Electra* and Jocasta in *Oedipus Rex* act the role of normal women because they accept male superiority and have internalized the reigning patriarchal ideology though they are conscious of their situation in relation to men in society. However, the female characters, Jocasta in *Oedipus Rex*, Antigone in *Antigone* and Electra in *Electra* have powerful and dominant roles. They are conscious of the discriminatory attitude towards women, which is the result of their feminist consciousness.

III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Emerging Feminist Consciousness in Sophocles' Three Plays

Generally Sophocles' plays often deal with the specific struggle of a strong-willed individual against fate. However, this thesis presents the conflict between the steadfast female protagonists and equally resolute male protagonists in *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*. The heroines in the plays try to go against the irrational and unjust laws of tyrannical men like Creon in *Antigone*, whereas in other two plays the major women characters raise their voices against male domination. This rebellious nature of women in these plays is the result of their growing consciousness of their situation in patriarchal society at the time of Sophocles. Their consciousness is on the rise. Antigone is more conscious than Jocasta, and Electra is the most conscious of all in the three plays. So, Sophocles very artistically exposes emerging feminist consciousness gradually dominant from his earlier plays to later ones with the rise of some rebellious ladies in Athenian society.

Oedipus Rex

Sophocles presents Jokasta as the main female character in the play, *Oedipus Rex*. She is the queen of Thebes and wife of Oedipus. She is also Oedipus's mother, but due to her ignorance of this fact she marries him and bears him four children. In the play, she is portrayed as courageous, strong female character.

Jocasta's character is introduced in the play when there is a confrontation between Oedipus and Kreon in the second episode. She

rebukes both men for fighting in public and persuades them to act rationally. She says:

Poor foolish men, what a wicked din is this? With Thebes's sick to death, is it not shameful.

That you should rake some private quarrel up?

(To Oedipus) Come into the house.

– And you Kreon, go now:

Let us have no more of this tumult over nothing. (55)

These lines refer to her consciousness to mediate a powerful role of a woman in a family. She reminds them to keep the secrecy within the family and not to go public by quarreling with each other. Thus, from the beginning she comes across as a strong woman. She is a woman who is ready to speak out her mind and attempts to pacify conflict.

Her character is presented as that of person who does not hesitate to shake off the hold of traditional beliefs. She very openly expresses her disbelief in prophecies and divine oracles that represent the male power. She says that "she has not seen any of them fulfilled; therefore she does not trust them"(59).

When Oedipus worries about the prophecy of Teiresias concerning the murder of Laios (Oedipus's own father) at a place where three roads meet, she reminds Oedipus not be worried about such false prophecies. She further says to him:

Set your mind at rest. It is a question of sooth Sayers; I tell you that you will find no man whose craft gives knowledge to

prove the prophecies to be false of the unknowable. She further tries she says: Here is my proof: An oracle was reported to Laios once that his doom would be death at the hands of his own son his son born of this flesh and of mine. Now, you remember the story: Laios was killed by marauding strangers where three high ways meet; but his child had not been three days in this world. Before the king and pierced the body's ankles and left to die on a lonely mountainside. Thus, Apollo never caused that child to kill his father, and it was not Laios' fate. To die at the hands of his son, as he had feared, this is what prophecies and prophets are worth! Have no dread of them (57).

In order to remove the tension of Oedipus, who worries about the prophecy of Teiresias, Jokasta mentions this proof. According to her, an oracle was reported once to Laios that his own son would kill him. But, the strangers killed him where three highways meet. She further clarifies that their son (born of Laios and Jokaste) has been in existence after three days as she is unknown about the very incident which occurs in her own life. Anyway, she is able to give logic against prophecies and prophets.

She further says, "Why should anyone in this world be afraid, since fate rule us and nothing can be foreseen? A man should live only for the present day" (60). She does not believe in fate and foreseen of the prophets. She only believes in present day. She says, "Live only for present day." As a conscious woman, she does not believe in imagination

and oracles. Rather, she believes in reality of life. So, she suggests all the people not to be afraid of fate which does not rule the man. She means to say that fate does not determine the man but the man with his present deeds determines the fate.

Due to her consciousness, Jokaste questions the male practices. She is the skeptic who brings in a sense of suspicious of the divine oracles. She shows her skeptic nature when Oedipus tells her that Teiresias prophesises the killing of the king, Laios. As she says, "Has he some knowledge? Or does he speak from hear say? (56). This shows that she does not believe in hear say. She only believes the things which are proved. So, she questions – "or does he speak from hearsay" (61). It clarifies her skeptic nature not believing in hearsay. Jocaste poses herself as a conscious woman. So, she emphasizes upon "knowledge," Without knowledge consciousness is not possible. So, she questions, "Has he some knowledge?" (64). It proves that she is the conscious female who only emphasizes on the knowledge.

She reminds Oedipus not to be worried about the hearsay of the herdsman who tells Oedipus that he is the same child whom he had reared up and Polybas, the king of Corinth is Oedipus' foster father and Oedipus had killed his own father Laois and married his own mother, Jocaste. Jocaste says to Oedipus, "Forget this herdsman forget it all. This talk is a waste of time" (61). She does not believe in the hearsay of the herdsman and reminds Oedipus to forget it all. As a conscious woman, she tells him to utilize his present time. She again adds, "For God's love, let us have no more questioning! Is your life nothing to you? (61). She reminds Oedipus

of the value of life. She makes him conscious of utilizing the value of life. So, she says, "Everything that I say is for your own good!" (61). She tells him that it is useless to seek his own identity and fate. As she says to Oedipus, "you are fatally wrong! May you never learn who you are!" (69).

Sophocles presents the play *Oedipus Rex* in 409 B.C. when females were not completely aware of their struggle against patriarchal values and norms. They were under strict rules and regulation of patriarchal society. So, Jocaste is not able to protest directly against Oedipus. But, her intention can be analyzed through her remarks. She offers Oedipus to stop his tension about the prophecy. She says, "Ah believe it, Oedipus! In the name of the gods, respect this oath of his for my sake, for the sake of these people here!" (822). Here for my sake "refers to herself and it symbolizes the role of a mother in each family how she is able to guide the family. Indirectly she wants to show her representation in the family. Her inner intention is to rescue Oedipus from his unnecessary burden of prophecy which troubles him, and that may cause destruction in their family. At the same time she stresses "for the sake of these people" (71). Here, 'People' refers to the country. So, she reminds him of the duty of a king towards his people. When a king himself is in trouble, he cannot perform his duty well. So, Jokaste is able to show her awareness not only for sake but also for the sake of whole country. Thus, she represents the role of a conscious woman during that period.

When Oedipus is angry, he does not explain the cause of anger to Jokaste. This is because of gender discrimination. He thinks he is superior

and she is inferior. However she dares to ask the cause of his anger. She asks, "Why are you so set in this hard anger?" (56). This shows her courage to ask Oedipus about the cause of his anger. She wants to show herself that not only the males but also the females are able to solve the problems of a family, society or country.

Her consciousness is also revealed when Oedipus does not inform her of the cause of his quarrel with Creon. This also proves the hierarchy between males and females creating a gap by the males from females. Then also she becomes so inquisitive and asks indirectly with Choragos, "First tell me what has happened?" (823). Her interest in finding out the cause of quarrel depicts herself as a conscious woman. Without interest, consciousness is not possible. So, Jokaste shows her indirect role to revolt against patriarchal norms with her consciousness.

Carol Michele Kaplan comments on *Oedipus Rex*, that by suppressing the feminine, by allowing the male version of the myth to dominate, world history had been subjected to an endless succession of wars and exploitation, not only in Ancient Thebes, but also in present day Cape Town (123).

Jokaste denies the rule of gods; she also rejects human irresponsibility towards her and thinks to live in random. By exalting luck Jokaste defies the gods and denies the prophecy of future. She says that "providence or foresight is impossible and that is best to live at random" (34). She is deprived of order and security in her life. She stands against religion, morality and common prudence. This reparation between males

and females reveals deep-rooted gender discrimination that males are the bearer of culture and females are destroyers of culture. To follow the culture is to follow the traditional norms. So, males want to follow the tradition creating patriarchal norms. But, women are against of it. So, they want to destroy religion, culture and norms and want to live randomly without order. This shows their rebel against patriarchal society. So, Jocaste does not believe in prophecy, prophet and God's rule.

She wants to keep Oedipus in ignorance so that she will never be alone and will be able to lead a happy life with her husband. She entreats him not to question and find the truth. She persuades him that if he loves his life, he should not argue about the murder of Laios, She says, "O be persuaded by me I entreat you; I do not do this thing!" (57). But, Oedipus pursues his inquires without flinching. He gets angry with her but Jocaste adores him and says that he does not believe that she is right. He is bad tempered and says, "My own good/ snap my patience, then; I want none of it" (833).

When Jokaste repeatedly asks him to stop asking the whole thing, he behaves with her as if she is his enemy or a wretched being. He acts as a man who has no courage, reasoning and good nature. He thinks that she is a doll or a plaything. He says, "Go one of you and bring the shepherd here/ let us leave this woman to brag of her royal name"(833). These lines refer to the supremacy of males over females how they want to keep them under their strict rules and regulations. Oedipus does not like the participation of Jokaste in his problems and wants to be isolated from her.

He thinks her inferior and feels himself that she is not able to solve his problems. So, he rebukes her to leave him alone.

When Oedipus comes to the stage, he calls her 'mother' and an evil woman. He further adds: 'Go hang yourself, mother.' This shows his over aggressiveness towards Jokaste by not allowing her to come with him. She frequently reminds him not to be worried about the prophecy. But, he does not like to be reminded by her. It shows the domination of male who do not want female participating in male's sufferings. Therefore, Oedipus does not want to be interrupted by Jokaste in his isolation.

Kreon also views her as a shameless woman because he is also the representative of males. So, he also hates as a woman. But, Jokaste cannot tolerate it. As a conscious woman, she shows her position as a queen. She gradually strengthens her resistance and she cries out: "I will not die – I can do whatever I can imagine. I can do anything. I am queen Jokaste" (74). To show her position as a queen is to show her equal right as Oedipus or king. This indicates to her indirect revolt against of patriarchal norms which create a gap between males and females. So, she further insists that "this is the story of a mother, a story of the womb not the phallus" (89). Thus, Jokaste is the representative of a conscious female during ancient period.

Antigone

Sophocles, as a playwright, has included the name of play, "Antigone" in a symbolic way. 'Anti' refers to opposite and 'gone' refers to moved. The very female protagonist stands in an opposite side of Kreon,

the king, a male character who represents patriarchal values norms. As a female character, Antigone is able to revolt against the king, Kreon who announces a decree denying Polynices' burial. She wants to initiate her action from the first episode of drama when she informs her sister, Ismene about the decree of the king, Kreon. As she says to Ismene, "Have they told you of the new decree of our king Kreon?" (72). This line refers to her intention to generate her sister's consciousness about the decree of Kreon. She wants Ismene's participation in her revolt against Kreon who shows his tyrannical decision against the dead body of Polynices. He says, "No one shall bury him no one mourns for his, but his body must lie in the fields" (72). Kreon shows his cruel intention towards Polynices because he is not been in favor of him. His cruel intention is depicted in the phrases "No one shall bury him" and "no one mourn for him." These words clarify his cruelty against those people who raise voices against him. Antigone is the representative of those females who are dominated by the males in patriarchal society. So, she tries to convince all the females to protest against Kreon, who is the representative of patriarchal norms. When Ismene shows her fear to protest against Kreon, Antigone reminds her of the miserable death of Polynices, caused by the cruel king, Kreon. She says to Ismene, "And now you can prove what you are: a true sister or a traitor to your family" (72). Antigone wants to take revenge on Kreon who causes the miserable death of her brother. She wants to involve Ismene in her revolt against the king, Kreon. So she says to Ismene that she will be true sister if she participates in the revolt of Antigone against Kreon and if

she does not participate she will be the traitor of her family. This shows Antigone as a conscious woman who encourages her sister to rebel against the cruelty of Kreon. Therefore she says, "You must decide whether you will help me or not" (72). She does not force Ismene to help her in the revolt. But, she wants her (Ismene's) response as soon as possible whether she will help her or not.

Antigone seems confident of herself to rebel against Kreon's decision. She says, "I am going to bury him, Ismene. Will you come?" (72). This line refers to her consciousness to revolt against the decree of king, Kreon. Though, Kreon does not allow anyone to bury the dead body of Polynices but Antigone does not hesitate with the decree of Kreon and she is fully confident to bury the dead body of polynices. So, she asks her sister Ismene whether she will come to help her or not. She wants to make her sister, Ismene participate in her revolt against Kreon, so she reminds her duty towards her family. As she says, "He is my brother. And he is your brother, too" (73). This line indicates to her intention that it is not only her duty to protest against the decree of Kreon but also the duty of Ismene to revolt against it. So, she reminds her that Polynices is not only her brother but he is also the brother of her own. This line indirectly refers to her intention to make conscious all the women reminding their duties which will help them to revolt against patriarchal rules and regulations. When Ismene fears with the cruelty of Kreon, she reminds Antigone to think of the danger what he will do. But, as a strong willed female, Antigone does not frighten with him. Therefore, she says, "Kreon is not

strong enough to stand in my way" (73). This line clarifies that she is strong enough in her mission to protest against the king, Kreon. She even challenges to defeat Kreon so she says "Kreon is not strong enough to stand in my way." This line also depicts Antigone as bold, courageous girl, who exhibits her extraordinary strength which makes audience feel that she is stronger than Kreon she is fully confident within herself to protest against Kreon. So, she says, "I am afraid of the danger; if it means death" (72). She even challenges the death that she will not be afraid of it.

Sophocles has projected Antigone as masculine and rebellious female who is so confident that she is right, so determined to her duty and to despise anyone who does not go the whole way with her. C.M. Brown says that Sophocles makes her for a moment remarkably far from Greek ideals of womanhood.

But, Ismene being a timid and demure girl does not join Antigone to overthrow the law of the male. She feels herself as a traditional female and shows her inability to protest against male laws. So she says, "we cannot fight with men, Antigone. The law is strong; we must give in to the law. In this thing, and in worse. I bet the dead to forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield to these in authority. And I think it is dangerous business" (73). Though, she accepts the position of women as helpless, but she does not dare to participate in the rebellious act of Antigone against males' authority. Rather she tries to convince Antigone to yield over the males' law and order. She views this as a dangerous act to protest or revolt against males' authority.

Antigone commits herself to defy the law or what is at least believed to be the law. She challenges the man made laws and wants to eliminate them. In this context C.M. Brown says, "Antigone, defiance of all this established sentiment, sets herself above Creon's law and claims to know better what is right. This is dangerous in anyone and especially in woman" (83).

When Ismene hesitates to get herself involved with Antigone in her rebellious act, she repeats her determination that she will any how bury Polynices dead body. So, she says, "But I will bury him; and if I must die, I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down with him in death, and I shall be as dear to him as he to me" (73). Against Kreon's announcement, Antigone takes a courageous decision to bury the dead body of her brother, Polynices. She even decides to die with the dead body of her brother. This also shows her love towards her brother. So, she says, "I shall be as dear to him as he to me" she is fed up with her life in patriarchal society which has made her life miserable. She says, "Doing this; it's good to die. Beloved I shall abide with him I love" (91). She finds comfort in her thought that her death will be noble. She tells Kreon that her life is a misery and that she counts death again for her death will being comfortable life because her present life is full of misery. She says, "For who lives in many miseries/as I do" (86).

In patriarchal society, the males think that women should be passive and demure because they are subordinate beings who have no courage, strength and they are physically weak that is why they need protection

from the male and they get protection till they are under patriarchal ideology. In *Antigone*, Ismene gets love and protection from Kreon till she is silent. As soon as she appears bold and rebellious to help Antigone bury her brother's dead body Kreon says she is mad. He says. "Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls: one has just now lost her mind; the other, it seems, has never had a mind at all (82). Kreon says that Ismene has just lost her mind because she is ready to share punishment and Antigone never had a mind for showing masculine protest. He accuses them of not having a mind being mad only because they want to fight against established law. These established patriarchal laws are made for the benefit of the male and for the exploitation of the females. This way of dealing between the male and the female is the cause of gender discrimination. Kate Millette points out that gender discrimination should be wiped out so as to have equal justice between the males and females. There is domination on the female by the male counterparts in *Antigone*.

As a male representative, King Kreon comes slowly and dangerously, and asks Antigone if she is ready to bear punishment by hanging her head for her rebellious act. She even accepts this capital punishment and says, "I do, I deny nothing (79). He again reminds her of his proclamation about the same punishment but she again shows this punishment as a trivial matter. She debates with him that his law is nothing in front of the divine law. As she says, "Your edict, king, was strong. But all your strength is weakness itself against the immortal unrecorded laws of God" (79). She mentions about the unseen power of

God. Though it doesn't seem, it is an immortal. No one can deny the verdict of God, ignoring the inevitability of death. So, says, "I knew I must die, even without your decree: I am only mortal and it I must die. Now, before it is my time to die, surely this is a hardship: can anyone living, as I live, with evil all about me, thin Death less than a friend? This death of mine" (79). She accepts death as an inevitable process and mentions human being as a mortal being. She says "I must die." These lines also refer to the philosophical remark of Sophocles exposing through the narrator, Antigone who points out the uncertainty of life. She does not hesitate to embrace death protesting against the decision of Kreon. So she asks Kreon, "What more do you want than my death?" (79). She also begs Kreon to kill her and show his cruelty as a king who can do whatever he likes.

Kreon tells her that she is alone in her opinion revolting against him and no one is following her. In his reply Antigone says, "No, They are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash" (79). This line proves that she is the representative of all females. Though all females are against of his cruelty but they are dominated holding their tongue due to his power as a king.

He again describes Polynices as a traitor because of making war on his country. Therefore, he shows his hatred towards him even after his death. He says, "An enemy is enemy, even dead" (81). This line clarifies his cruelty showing the feelings of hatred even after the death of a person.

As the cruelty of king, Kreon reaches the climax, Ismene also become aware of it, and participates in the revolting act of Antigone against Kreon. She says to Antigone, " But now I know what you mean; and I am here, to join you, to take my share of punishment" (82). These lines prove the participation of females against patriarchal norms. Cruelty causes revolution. Thus, the cruelty of Kreon brings consciousness in the females, ultimately leading them towards revolution. So, Ismene at last decides to participate in the revolt and says, "I am here, to join you, to take my share of punishment." She even does not hesitate to take punishment of the king, Kreon.

When Antigone and her sister protest against him, Kreon fears them and says, "I never knew that these two sisters were aiming at my throne!" (81). This line indicates the losing position of males. Here, "throne" symbolizes patriarchy which is going to be overthrown by females.

At last, Kreon surrenders himself before the revolt of females. As he says, "Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish; I have killed my son and my wife. I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead. Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing. Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust" (91). Thus, he confesses his guilt of being a foolish which causes the death of his own wife and son. The words "my comfort lies here dead" refer the loosen power of males dominancy as the king, Kreon's power is overthrown by the females' revolts which indirectly indicates to the victory of the females in their protest against patriarchal norms.

Consequently, both sisters are able to bury the dead body of their brother, Polynices. So, the unity of the females succeeds in protesting against, the decree of the king, Kreon who does not allow to bury the dead body of Polynices.

When Antigone succeeds in revolting against the decree of Kreon, burying the dead body of Polynices, she is arrested by the polices and taken to the prison. But, she does not frighten with them. She says, "Your kings, led away to death. You will remember what thing I suffer and at what men's hands, because I would not transgress the laws of heaven" (86). She clarifies her death is going to be caused by Kreon. Again, she mentions that all the females will know the cause for her death. She means to say that sooner or later all females will follow her participating in the revolt of Kreon's cruelty. At last she can not tolerate the barbarism of Kreon and meets her own death at her suicidal act. Here suicide does not symbolize cowardice act but leaves a message to the females rather to die than to tolerate the patriarchal values and norms.

Electra

Electra is a dominant female character in the play, *Electra*. She is the most conscious of the two female characters, Jocasta and Antigone in the earlier plays, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. Her consciousness directs her towards a rebellious that includes slaughtering of her uncle and mother, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra respectively, who get married by killing her father Agamemnon. Electra's rebellious as well as violent nature establishes herself as a feminist who succeeds in her revolt for getting her

own right. So, she performs not a womanly but a masculine role presenting herself as a strong heiress to her father, Agamemnon.

Electra saves her brother, Orestes from being murdered by her mother by sending him to Strophious of Phocis. The play begins a year later when Orestes has returned with his friends, Paidagogus and Pylades as a grown up man with a plot for revenge. As he says to his friend, Paidagogus, "When I resorted to the Pythian seer to learn how I might best avenge my father upon his killers" (64). This line refers to his plan for revenge against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus who have killed his father, Agamemnon. He waits for Electra with his friends in front of the palace. He wants to follow his sister as he says, "shall we wait to hear what she is wailing?" (65). This shows Orestes' intention to involve in a rebellious act of Electra as she plans to avenge her father. This is because of her consciousness that Orestes is convinced.

Electra commits herself to the fact that she will continue planning against her father's killers. She clarifies that her own mother and uncle killed her father. As she mentions:

An, it is with shame I lie
In that house, mourning all night
My father's wretched death
No far off wargon killed him,
My mother with her killed him,
My mother with her lover, with
Cruel Aegisthus, axe to oak

But mine, father,

For such perishing. (68)

As a conscious female, she cannot forget her father's death caused by her own mother, Clytemenstra and uncle, Aegisthus who have killed him in a barbaric way. Her consciousness awakes her all the night in the palace, so she says, "I lie in that house mourning all the night" (71). She again insists on her father's death and mourns on him. But, she does not feel discouraged by this incident and shows her conviction in avenging her father's death. So, she says, "But I will not stop wailing, while I can see the stars glittering, or this day" (65). "Stars glittering," "day" symbolizes her firmness and determination in revolting against her father's killers. Due to her consciousness, she makes aware of all earthly things and people about murders and adulteries and requests all of them to help her in avenging her father's murder. As she says, "O earthly Hermes and you grave furies you are aware of murders and adulteries come help avenge my father's murder!" (65). She even decides to make her brother participate, Orestes in her rebellious act. So she says, "Send my brothers! I begin to sink under my trouble" (66). These lines clarify her leadership involving her own brother, Orestes in her rebellious act in order to show the active role of a female.

She also shows her consciousness appealing all the women to help her in the revolting act. She says, "Come to comfort me. This I know but I can never but I will never stop mourning my father dead. You, in your love, abandon me to grief only this I crave" (66). She affirms to mourn on

her father's death which proves her confidence and resolution in avenging her father's murder. Because of her consciousness, she hates to be sympathized. So, she appeals to all women to stop grieving. Her inner intention is to make all women courageous and bold rather than taking sympathy from others. As a bold female, Electra hates cowardice nature of females who perform their submissive role in the society. Electra shows her strength in her revolting act and reminds the duty of the women to rebel against the criminal activities. Therefore, she says:

Those heads are weak that cannot hold
The death of parents
But I have set my heart
With that bewildered bird who tells the god,
Crying Itgn, Itgn all night. Ah Niobe,
Unfortunate you are yet blessed
To weep in stone. (66)

She indicates to those cowardice, women who cannot revolt against the murder of their parents. So, she encourages them to be bold and courageous. She compares herself with a tiny bird which symbolizes a courageous female crying against the murderous and violent situations of the society. Here, 'stone' is the symbol of 'harshness'. She wants to show her harshness towards the murderers of her father.

She develops courage within herself to continue her revolting act. Therefore, she says, "But I will not hold back so long as I live" (68). She is determined not to stop her revolt throughout her life. This statement

proves herself as a revolutionary female in the Athenian society. As a conscious lady, she lays emphasis upon revolution or change in order to bring peace and prosperity in the society. She wants to proceed ahead in her mission to revenge against the murders of her father, Agamemnon. So, she assures all the women that she is confident in her rebellious act. She states, "My friends, bear with me, since I have no choice; what alternative for one who sees the evil and I see it, night and day I see it not diminishing, growing. My own mother hates me; I live my father's death. She even does not frighten with her mother who hates her. Rather, Electra protests against her mother's murderous act living with her.

Electra's sister Chrysothemis shows the helpless situation of women in the society. She even suggests her sister not to show her submissive nature which makes women weak. But, Electra does not agree with her and says, "Horrible: the own child of such a father and you forget him for that mother! Your moralizing of course if from her, none of it yours. Well, choose: either be foolish, or else be prudent, and forget those who have been dear to you" (71). Electra reminds the duty of a child towards her father. She objects Chrysothemis' suppressed nature and encourages her to avenge her father's death; she gives an option to her either to be a foolish or a prudent. Here 'foolish' refers to a person who accepts somebody even in his cruel act. So, she encourages her sister to be a prudent participating in her rebellious act against their mother and uncle who are the murderers of their father, Agamemnon.

Electra wants to take help from her sister to avenge her father. She is deeply attached in her father's love. She does not want to be a fool supporting her mother and uncle who are the murderers of her father. So, she is rebellious and violent because she is a conscious lady who wants to take revenge with her mother and uncle. She says, "And yet when I do all I can to avenge our father do you help me? No: you try to thwart me, adding cowardice on top of misery" (71).

She wants Chrysothemis to be bold and courageous to help her avenge her father. She thinks that Chrysothemis is cowardly girl, does not want cowardice to be added on her attempt to avenge her father. She hates Chrysothemis weak and submissive nature. Chrysothemis requests Electra to be like her and behave as an Athenian woman and not to be rebellious but to be demure otherwise the law declared by Aegisthus will punish her. But, Electra, a courageous female with confidence and determination, is against Chrysothemis' ideas and for her to envy is a marvelous existence. She says, "A marvelous existence one to envy!" (72). She tells Chrysothemis not to tell her to abandon her father and brother whom she loves and discards those who rule her Electra is so much confident and rebellious that she does not agree with Chrysothemis and says "Never I hope my judgment will not fall as low as the" (73).

When Chrysothemis requests Electra not to force her to participate in her rebellious act Electra reminds her murderous act of her mother, Clytemnestra. Chrysothemis is not able to recognize her mother as a cruel

woman rather accepts her as a mother. So, Electra encourages her to contempt their mother. As she says,

Sister, let none of these things touch his tomb.

It is against piety, against wisdom,

To offer our father gifts from that woman.

Give them to the wind, or busy them deep in the dust

When she is dead, there let her find them, and only a woman

for brass, an iron woman, would offer her murder – victim

gifts. (74)

She even does not want Clytemnestra to offer flowers at Agamemnon's grave. She thinks that the tomb of her father will be impure if she touches this so, she wants the flowers offered by her must deep in the dust. She even claims that the tomb of her body after her death will not cover with flowers. This shows her growing hatred towards her mother. Clytemnestra suggests Electra not to revolt against her own old mother. She adds that Electra will be greatly shocked by this act. But, Electra does not surrender before her mother and says, "I have not lost all sense of shame, though you think so. I understand that I am lost, that I am beyond the pale. But it is your heartless that forces me; crime is quickly learned from crime" (78). She does not hesitate to state her mother that she wants to kill her. So she says crime is quickly learned from crime. Due to her mother's crime by killing her husband she will be killed by her own daughter. This shows Electra's confidence in avenge her father's murder.

When Electra finds her brother, Orestes alive in front of her, she becomes happy. She says, "O dearest friends, women of the city, look at the Orestes, who through her trickery was dead, and now through trickery is saved!" (96). These lines depict a conscious plan of Electra who saves her brother from plotting to kill him by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. So, she tells all of her friends that she has succeeded to save her brother through her trickery. Orestes is motivated by his sister Electra to involve in her rebellious act against their father's murders.

He says, "I know, I know but now that the chance invites us, we must remember the work we have to do" (96). He reminds his sister about their duty to avenge of their father's death. He further says to his sister:

Say nothing needless do not tell me
How evil our mother is nor how
Aegisthus in the house of our Fathers
And do not let our mother recognize
In your shining face, that we are in the house
When we shall have won, then we shall rejoice,
Then we shall laugh freely. (98)

The lines clarify how Electra succeeds in making her brother, Orestes participate in her revolting act. So, Orestes claims his own mother as an evil woman and wants to kill his mother and uncle, and hopes the day will come when they will rejoice.

Electra accepts her brother's remark and says, "What you wish me brother, I wish also; all the pleasure I have I owe to you, and I should not

let you suffer a moment, to gain much for myself; that would never be the way to serve the beneficent spirit" (98). She is so conscious about her brother that she answers him that he won't suffer at any cost.

The consciousness of Electra leads her brother, Orestes and his friend Pylades, Paidagogus towards the palace. At last, they slaughter their mother, Clytemnestra and their uncle Aegisthus with the weapons.

IV. CONCLUSION

Every piece of literature demands various interpretations.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra* have greatly been discussed by many critics who have come up with a number of interpretations: traditional and conventionally moral, related to human nature, protagonists offences as first and foremost against society, tragedy of fate, confrontation of man and of woman. Moreover, his attachment to the socio-cultural elements, religion and mythology is significant. Mythology, which has a close relationship with psychology, presents a picture of man woman relationship. This relationship shows an ideological picture of superiority and inferiority on the basis of gender. As language was developed under father's reign, masculinity could rule over feminine literature.

In spite of various interpretations of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*, women role in these plays reveals a vivid image of hierarchy created by a patriarchal society. This hierarchy depends on the domination of one sex group over the other, gives rise to certain ideology for both the male and the female, consequently this ideology defines the male as the human norms, creative, ruler, independent and protector; whereas, the females are defined by negative reference as other, subordinate, imperfect man, submissive because of her lack of the identifying male organ. In the process of being socialized, the females are exposed to the reigning patriarchal ideology about the male superiority and the female inferiority. This hierarchy between the male and the female

is inherent in the literary works written by the male authors. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra* women have well understood the discrimination and prejudice against them, as they are conscious of their position in the male dominated society. In Sophoclean tragedies, especially in *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Electra*, women have dominant and rebellious role, which results from their high level of consciousness of man women relationship in ancient Athenian society.

Jocasta is the queen who is conscious, courageous and strong willed female character. Although she cannot revolt against the males as Antigone and Electra do, she tries to maintain sound relationship by convincing her husband, Oedipus. She dares to ask her husband the cause of his unhappiness and conflict with Kreon. And thus roles of Jocasta reveal that she is conscious and resolute character who shows her prudence and discretion in times of crises.

In *Antigone*, Antigone, who is a dominant female character, has masculine and rebellious role. Antigone is dead against the male constructed laws of the society. Her consciousness leads her to defy the decree of the king. She is not timid and coward. However, Ismene is subordinate, cowardly who wants to live under established law of the patriarchal society. But Antigone succeeds in convincing Ismene in her rebellion act against the king, which is possible only through consciousness.

In *Electra*, Electra and Clytemnestra are dominant and rebellious female characters who involve themselves in conflict for happiness, peace

and harmony in society. Electra is the most conscious of all the female characters in the Sophoclean plays. She is well aware of the conspiracy, crime and evil perpetrated by males. So she dares take revenge of her father's death. She acts as a male heir to the late king. In this way, she is in favor of fair, just and equal society. This becomes possible only due to her consciousness.

All these women are portrayed as dominant and rebellious characters. In the three consecutive plays, the growing sense of consciousness about their situation and place in patriarchal society can be seen. Each woman character in the three tragedies emerges stronger than her previous counterpart. Their consciousness is certainly a step towards the creation of equal society.

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