

I. The World of Paula Vogel

Vogel as a Playwright

Paula Vogel (b. 1951), a modern American feminist playwright who, with an incisive eye, very clearly exposes the contemporary social issues. This contemporaneity is combined with a unique voice for exposing both the ridiculous and tragic elements within her characters and society. Her plays are famous for scatological humour, jokes about the body, and extremely plain talk. Her early years were marred by her parents divorce and the loss of her father whom she came to know only in later years when her closest sibling, Carl, was dying of AIDS. Her earliest efforts in plays writing also met with rejection. After losing her scholarship to Bryn Mawr College and when she devoted herself to dramatic literature, she graduated from Catholic University in Washington and then was turned down by the Yale school of Drama.

Her earliest plays were also turned down by the Eugene O'Neill National Playwright's Conference. In retrospect, she feels that these were good things because they made her learn her craft in a difficult—and original—way, which led eventually to her winning the Pulitzer Prize for *How I Learned to Drive*. The emphasis upon the tragicomic elements of modern American existence is clear in *How I Learned to Drive*. Here, sexual abuse and pedophilia are refracted through the testimony of the victim, Li't Bit, and the corrupter, her uncle Peck. In Vogel's play these characters are never stereotypical; rather, they are nuanced, humorous, and vulnerable. Li'l Bit is not the prototype of the youthful victim of unwanted amorous advances but is instead a flirtatious, tacitly complicit partner in the sexual exchange. And while Vogel never attempts to defend Peck's predatory action, her depiction of him is entirely believable, even-handed, and strangely sympathetic. As a result, his tragic fall at the play's

conclusion is presented as the inevitable self-destruction of a charming, yet entirely weak, individual.

Paula Vogel in her interview to David Savran says “Writing is a very conscious craft. The only way you can do that is by playing games with yourself” (10). She usually starts writing by trying to escape, closing herself away from people, going and finding a place that’s remote, where she can’t be reached. She starts writing by spending a week doing nothing but staring at the ceiling and getting bored out of her mind. She says “I do lot of reading and research. For example, I read a lot about the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘80s when writing *The Mineola Twins*. I did a lot of reading about automobiles for *How I Learned to Drive*, I really enjoyed” (15). Vogel’s plays are perhaps unique in the way that they locate memory in the body. For it is far more than her punning sensibility that inspires her to title her most recent collection *The Mammary Plays* (1998). Summoning up “Full-figured gal” of TV–commercial fame, both *Drive* and *The Mineola Twins* simultaneously exploit and critique the cliché of this “Stacked” femme fatale. Both tacitly acknowledge that female bodies are steeped in history, that “sometimes the body”, as Uncle Peck puts it, “knows things that the mind isn’t listening to” (9). And like her other plays, they are intent on listening to and reclaiming that lost, forgotten history. For as a feminist writer, Vogel not only attends to the deeply contradictory representations of women in our culture, but also delineates female characters who are prepared to use their physical charms (if need be) to wrest control of their lives.

Vogel’s earliest exposure to theater was in Washington, D.C. She talks about having “stumbled into drama class” when she was a sophomore in high school and beginning to find her way in theater. Her high school drama teacher was gay and she feels he must have realized that she was herself a lesbian. As a young playwright she

found other friends who were trying to write and they gathered together to read each other's work. Vogel was excellent on using the images in her plays from the beginning of her writing. Some of her play have startling images, such as a bizarre Groucho-Marx-like doctor treating a dying AIDS patient in *The Baltimore Waltz* (Obie Award for best play 1992), a play about the death of her beloved brother Carl, who had begun a professional career as an English professor but switched to being a librarian. Vogel says “My writing isn’t guided by issue. I only write about things that directly impact my life. People see *The Baltimore Waltz* as a play about AIDS, I see it as a way of talking to my dead brother” (12).

The Baltimore Waltz (1991) is an imaginary memory play, a funny yet deeply moving travelogue of a journey with her brother. Vogel has said, “My plays are reflecting at a deeper level a [...] sense of yearning and mourning” (25), and *The Baltimore Waltz* is the clearest example of these emotions in Vogel’s oeuvre. This play is about the death of her beloved brother Carl who was gay and homophobia, according to Vogel, hurt him more than the disease that killed him. *The Baltimore Waltz* pays homage to grief, while also emphasizing the realization that with loss comes redemption.

In her more comic and ribald plays, Vogel continues her exploration of life’s confusions, contradictions, and near-tragic absurdities. In *The Mineola Twins* (1997) she creates a comic book-like milieu for a satirical examination of the American suburban landscape since the Eisenhower years. Through the characters of twin sisters from Mineola, long Island-Myrna (described in Vogel’s text as “the ‘good’ twin stacked”) and Myra (“the ‘evil’ twin. Identical to Myrna, except in the chestal area.”) – Vogel confronts issues of the masculine gaze, the suburban mentality, political activism, Christian fundamentalism, and abortion rights, all in a tone that the

playwright advises her performers should be perceived as ‘a constant state of hormonal excitement’ (9).

In *Desdemona: A play About a Handkerchief* (1979) Vogel populates her stage exclusively with the female characters from Shakespeare’s *Othello*—Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca—in order to fashion a broad, farcical examination of female sexuality. Vogel writes the play in a manner reminiscent of Bertold Brecht’s intercalary scenes, those acting exercises Brecht created to provide imaginary given circumstances before such Shakespearean moments on the *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene or Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” soliloquy. In this play, the bawdy and farcical events conclude just as Shakespeare’s play turns tragic as Desdemona prepares herself for bed, awaiting Othello’s fateful arrival. Yet the most significant difference between Vogel’s play and Shakespeare’s is that Vogel’s Desdemona is in fact exactly what the imagination of Shakespeare’s *Othello* most fears. Vogel’s Desdemona is a sensuous young libertine, one who takes advantage of her husband’s trust in order to escape from the malaise of her May-December marriage and indulge in clandestine liaisons of pleasure and passion. Her murder by her husband will thus be the result of the young women’s audacity in defying society’s norms by openly flouting her sexuality. This is a repeated emphasis in Vogel’s work: the subversion of that theatrical and literary tradition in which women are penalized for not behaving according to the role that society has dictated for them.

Among her early plays is one about lesbians who parent several little boys: *And Baby Makes Seven* (1984), a daring excursion into territory that few playwrights have explored. Another early play, *The Oldest Profession* (1988), treats older prostitutes. *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing* (1994) examines the effect of theater on its characters. Vogel has acknowledged the impact upon her work of three contemporary

playwrights: John Guare, Maria Irene Fornes, and Caryl Churchill. Like those seminal dramatists, Vogel has achieved her success by uncovering a darker, more sinister world just below the surface of reality, in which confusion and hysteria are liable to reign but in which characters and themes are mocked, celebrated exploited, and occasionally liberated.

Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*

Vogel's Pulitzer Prize winning play *How I Learned to Drive* was first produced in New York Off-Broadway in 1997. Vogel explains that large-busted woman remained an emblem for her in the construction of this play. As a feminist, Vogel is interested in fetishization of women's bodies and this play moves towards revealing the way the culture, both men and women, regard women's bodies, even while praising their minds. This play is about sexual molestation, but about many other things too. It is about families, about growing up, about becoming independent, and most of all being a survivor. In an interview with Arthur Holmberg, Vogel has said, "My play dramatizes the gifts we receive from people who hurt us" (4). When asked about the gift received by the protagonist, Li'l Bit, she responded, "she received the gift of how to survive" (5). Vogel here uses learning to drive as a complex metaphor for sexual initiation. At the same time, the metaphor examines what a man expects from a close relationship with a woman and what a woman expects from a close relationship with man. Uncle Peck is careful never to hurt Li'l Bit and always reminds her that he doesn't want her to do anything she doesn't wish to do. But at the same time, uncle Peck "has a way" with adolescent girls, as his wife tells us. He listens to Li'l Bit and becomes her confidant, patiently waiting for her to accept him on his own term.

The protagonist Li'l Bit in her innocent stage of life accepts uncle Peck. In this phase, she has different way of looking at him. This is the pre-awakened state of her life where she cannot differentiate right and wrong. In this stage, she happens to come in the grip of uncle Peck and allows him to have relation with her. She is dragged by a certain force towards him and easily accepts that incestuous relationship. Laurie Stone in his performance review comparative writes, "Li'l Bit owns the libidinous charge she felt in being desired by an adult male and also controlling him from age 13 on she forms a pact, granting him permission to touch her one night a week" (35).

Jill Dolan in her review of *How I Learned to Drive* says that sexuality itself is a matter of exploration for Li'l Bit. Li'l Bit in the beginning takes this relation as an obvious thing. But gradually she explores herself after the relation with her uncle and starts taking the relation differently. The incestuous relationship itself becomes the sources of consciousness for her which leads her to the ending of their immoral relationship:

Dolan sees sexuality as unstable and a matter of exploration in the drama, especially on Li'l Bit part. Li'l Bit tries to understand her relationship with her uncle Peck, whose driving lessons taught her relationship with her uncle as much about gender relation and her own sexuality as they did about the proper use of rearview mirrors, gearshifts and turn Signals. (5)

Vogel's female characters are themselves playwrights who attempt to write their way out of difficult situations and script more creative, bountiful lives. Like Vogel herself, they are committed to redressing a history of oppression by rewriting the scenes they have been handed. By turning her female characters (and her students!) into playwrights of no mean accomplishment, she suggests that although a

triumphal feminist theater seems a impossibility in our time, one may nonetheless attempt to stage that impossibility along with the glittering promises it holds. Vogel is self-conscious and an awakened lady who is very much critical of the things going around. Her wakened feelings about the world including female's position in our society is reflected in David Savran's interview in his book *The Playwright's Voice*:

They defy traditional theater Logic, subtly calling conventions into question or, in some cases, pushing them well past their limits. What other playwrights would dare memorialize her brother in a play fitted with fart, jokes and riotous sex, whose medical authority, a cross between Dr. Strangelove and Groucho Marx, ends up drinking his own piss? What other feminist would dare writes to so many jokes about tits? (9)

Stefan Kanfer, a critic doesn't take uncle Peck in total negative way and Li'l Bit blameless. He thinks that Peck's love was not only lust but affection mixed. Li'l Bit herself accepted uncle Peck without any force and had mutual relationship for many years. She never went against uncle Peck's behaviour towards her, instead of that she gave company to him. He never made relation with her without her will. Even though she accepted him in her innocent stage of life, she is not totally blameless.

Stefan Kanfer in his performance review writes:

He does indeed love the girl and not just carnally. His is an affection mixed with lust and insecurity and as things progress, a fatal self-loathing. Alternately terrified and intrigued by his advances, Li'l Bit is a mixture of victim and unwitting temptress, not quite complicit in the affair but not entirely blameless either. (22)

Matt Wolf takes this play in a very different way. He thinks that this play is about the birth of a writer as well as about the scars we always carry with us. As a human being we are always entangled in a certain thing, which can be either our bitter past or unforgettable events. Li'l Bit, the protagonist memorizes all the events happened in her life like a writer writes remembering all the events. She also carries the memories of her uncle like scars we always carry with us. So in his review, Matt Wolf writes: "on one level, this is the play about the birth of a writer: a woman who as Li'l Bit reports, lives "inside the 'fire' in my head." But, it's also about the scars we carry even when most proud, as borne out by a heroine who can forgive but will never forget" (3).

Some critics have compared Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* with Vladimir Nabokov's highly controversial novel *Lolita*. Nabokov's *Lolita* is also something more than a journey into the heart of a monster. Dick Scanlan in his article on *How I Learned to Drive*, opines.

A tale about incest, *How I Learned to Drive* walks a fine line between pop psychology a La Oprah Winfrey and Vladimir Nabokov's classic novel *Lolita*, creating a story steeped in nostalgia-and forgiveness-for the man who abused the play's central character Li'l Bit throughout her teens. (1)

Scanlan at the same time points out the flaw of Peck that he is unexpectedly attracted to Li'l Bit and even ready to divorce his wife for her. In this context Scanlan writes: "He is uncontrollably attracted to ... and eventually in love with ... Li'l Bit. By the time she becomes legal, Peck is ready to leave his wife and marry her, but Li'l Bit who is flunking out of college because of drinking problem rejects him" (1).

Even Li'l Bit is abused by Peck, she is not that weak and pitiable character. She is a bold character whose rejection drove Peck to drink himself to death. Mark Land Taylor says "Li'l Bit wasn't all victim, that she apparently enjoyed at least part of her sexual relationship with her uncle, and she wasn't above flirting with him and, in effect, seducing him at times" (2).

Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* is entangled within a family where there is a dark secret and immoral activities. Robert L. Daniels writes: "*How I learned to Drive*, Paula Vogel's family album of a play, holds some dark secrets that are revealed with progressively vivid flashbacks and acted with a disturbing sense of keyhole intimacy" (1).

In *How I Learn to Drive* Vogel presents Peck as a sympathetic character through he is an abuser. She also depicts Li'l Bit unnervingly complicit. So Vogel embraces them both with love, tenderness and ultimately forgiveness. Stephanie Coen in his Performance Review-Favorable writes:

Uncle Peck teaches Li'l Bit more than how to shift gears in Vogel's hopscotch evocations of the young girl at various ages between 11 and 18 the playwright evokes her burgeoning sensuality, dramatizing the conflicting, palpitating emotions of fear and desire, sexuality and shame. (29)

All of these major critics of *How I Learned to Drive* seem to be focused more, on something else than its poignant theme of 'perception shift of the protagonist, Li'l Bit' what the story is seriously marked by. Critics are mainly concentrated on the incestuous relationship between Li'l Bit and uncle Peck. But the play focuses more on female awareness and the change that occurs within herself.

Paula Vogel creates a rebellious character Li'l Bit who shifts her perception and accepts her freedom when she progresses from adolescence to adulthood. She enters to the conscious stages of her life. She in a no second breaks her long relationship with uncle Peck and leaves him to die the death of dog. Li'l Bit in her awakened phase of life cannot bear the incestuous relationship with uncle and totally neglects him which becomes the cause of his death.

II. The Feminist Thinking

Introduction

Feminism in literature refers to a body of theoretical discourses advocating belief in the equality of the sexes. It is a doctrine redefining women's activities and goals from a women-centered point of view and refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority in literary critical writing that reduces women to a sex objects, second sex and a submissive other.

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

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

Virginia Woolf, by writing *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949), contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. Woolf focuses on the situation of women authors throughout the history and their cultural, economic and educational

disabilities within the patriarchal society which had prevented them from realizing their creative possibilities. “The feminist trend of her time was concerned for ‘absolute equality’ and the ‘erasure of difference’ between the sexes” (Adams 817). Woolf voiced for radical change as women’s freedom and for their suppressed values affecting the concept of power, family and social life that had shaped by men in the past.

Simone de Beauvoir insists against the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or ‘other’, to man as the defining and dominating ‘subject’ who is assumed to represent humanity in general. She argues that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which is described as feminine. She also attacks the patriarchal myths of women presuming the female essence prior to individual existence in the work of many male writers. Hazard Adams in his book *Critical Foundation Since Plato to Postmodernism* writes: “Beauvoir insists, against the myth of woman, that woman is ‘a being rooted in nature’ but not therefore assimilable as other in nature” (993).

Feminism was established in the form of theoretical discourse in the late 1960s as a part of the international women’s movement going through the different cross-currents like Suffrage Movement, Civil Right Movement and Liberation Movement from the very early part of the twentieth century. Establishing gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis it tried, then, to present women reader and critics with different perceptions to their literary experience insisting that experiences of women in and with literature are difference from those of men. Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women* (1968) is the first book involved exposing the sexual and literary criticism and demonstrating the inadequacy of established critical school and methods to deal fairly or sensitively with works written by women. Feminist criticism,

then, very quickly moved beyond merely exposing sexism in one work of literature after another promising to begin to record new choices in a new literary history.

Kate Millett's analysis of sexual politics of literature in her *Sexual Politics* (1969) added a note of urgency to the Ellmann's scornful anger. Defining 'politics' as the operation of power relations in society, Millett argues that western institutions have manipulated power to establish the dominance of men and subordination of women in society. She also criticizes Freud's psychoanalytical theory for its bias and analyses the fiction of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet uncovering how they dignify their aggressive 'phallic' selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects in their works.

Patricia Meyer Spack's *The Female Imagination* (1975) and Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1976), according to Elaine Showalter, first began to define women's writing in feminist term. Dealing with English and American novels of the three hundred years, Spack in her book:

... placed her consideration of a female imagination within social and historical frames, to conclude that 'for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns' and she attributed to this fact an inevitable difference in the literary emphasis and subject matters of female and male writers. (146)

Similarly, Moer in her *Literary Women*, discusses the history of women's writing and argues that 'Literary Women' are forced to identify with male and female standards of writing, and yet they are, at the same time, constantly reminded of being female writers. So, deprived the power of discourse that is given universal parameters in hands of male writers, the female writers must fight against being the 'other' and

the 'outsider' in literary tradition.

Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) is a prominent masterpiece of the theoretical work of feminism. It describes the female literary tradition in the English novel from the Brontes onward as a development of subculture by arguing that since women in general constitute a kind of subculture within the framework of a larger society, their work would demonstrate a unity of values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors encroaching on each individual. Showalter divides feminist criticism into two distinct modes. The first mode is concerned as women as a reader, and it offers feminist reading of texts. Showalter in her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" writes: "Its subjects include the images of women in literature. It is also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience especially in popular culture and film; and with the analysis of woman-as-sign in semiotic systems" (1226). The second mode of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is the study of women as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' and writes:

The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer, with woman as producer of textual meaning, with the history, styles, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women. It's the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; literary history; and of course studies of particular writers and works. (Feminist Criticism 248)

Showalter, likewise, in her analysis of historical development of feminism presents three important stages of women writing: Feminine, Feminist and Female. First is the female imitation of mainstream (male) literary tradition dated from 1840 to

1880 and includes the writers like George Eliot and Bronte Sisters. The second is the protest against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights. It is dated from 1880 to 1920 and it includes the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope and Oliver Schveiner. The third stage is self-discovery which aims at search for independent identity. It is dated from 1920 onward and it includes the writers like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is another brilliantly written massive book on historical study of feminism which stresses especially the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar's book according to Hazard Adams,

Traces a female literary tradition and their combats what they term women's "anxiety of authorship." ... This shift from Blooms "anxiety of influence" reflects the deeper problems of women writers in the culture, for such anxiety is necessarily prior to that of influence.

Gilbert and Gubar offer a litany of the results of women's socialized anxieties: a variety of physical and mental illness including anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia. (1234)

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

oppressive reading of women” (1234). But they further argue that the women can begin such struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible.

According to the above held discussion, we can divide the development of whole feminist literary criticism into three distinct phases. The first phase was centered on “the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history” (Showalter, *The Feminist* 5). The second phase of it was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate the culture. Hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered, and the territory of the female imagination and the structures of the female plot were constructed in this phase. And, the third phase of feminist criticism demanded a radical rethinking of the conceptual ground of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences.

The three women who utilized the three development of feminist theory are Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. They presented particularly the feminist views on language, fantasy and desire. Helene Cixous posits the existence of an incipient “feminine writing” (*écriture féminine*) which has its source in the mother, in that stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centered verbal language. Therefore in her view, this prelinguistic potentiality in the unconscious manifests itself in those written texts, which abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the “closure” of our phallogentric, language, and open out into a joyous free play of meanings.

Alternatively, Luce Irigaray posits a “woman’s writing” which evades the male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into existing system by establishing as its generative principle, in place of the monolithic phallus, the diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and in the distinctive nature of female sexual experiences. Julia Kristeva posits, “a ‘chora’, or prelinguistics, pre-Oedipal and unsystematized signifying process centered on the mother, that she labels semiotic” (1163). This process is repressed as we acquire the father-controlled, syntactically ordered, and logical language that she calls ‘symbolic.’ These three feminist critics talk of the loss of the linearity, logicity and abstraction, the gaps, vacancies and looseness of feminine writing as distinguished from male writing.

Influenced by a great variety of theoretical emergences, the feminism presently has been a broad concept which covers a broader scope and includes different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women. It is now no more remained a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of psychoanalysis, Marxist, and diverse poststructuralist theories. According to its affiliation to certain theoretical backgrounds the umbrella concept ‘feminism’ can be briefly studied by dividing it into the following dimensions:

Socio-Political Feminism

This dimension of feminism, which is equally known as English model of feminism, has a closer link with Socialism and Marxism. It analyses the connection between gender and class, emphasizes on popular culture, and provides a feminist critique of Marxist literary theory. Deriving their impetus from the changing socio-economic conditions and changing balances of power between the sexes. The leading

Marxist and Socialist feminists such as Mary Jacobus, Rosalind Loward, Michele Barsette, Juliet Mitchell and Cora Kaplan combine Marxist theoretical interest in the production and ideology of literature with feminist concerns for women's writing.

Marxist and Socialist feminists believe that the text is a part of process of the social construction of meanings and subjectivities. And, the literature is one of the ways in which gender relations and gender ideology are produced and reproduced. Simply masculinist thought does not produce gender, in their opinion, but rather it is the product of that thought as it related to the particular ways in which women's productive, reproductive and domestic life is organized. They consider the notion of femininity and masculinity as myths of ideologies. Such beliefs, for them, are the values that are not detached from social life but rather are lived or embodied in what we say and do, and have no other existence.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism therefore, often takes an explicitly and aggressively ideological stances, stressing the important contribution of literature and literary criticism to a radical, even revolutionary reformation of culture.

Socio-Historico Feminism

The socio-historic dimension of feminism, which is more popularly known as American school of feminism, tries to recover woman's historical experiences as readers and writers. It focuses on exploring the awakening feminine consciousness reflected in literature by and about women. By close textual, analysis, it often stress a psychological maturation not only through recognition of gender difference but also through a growing sense of 'sisterhood' with other women. They tend to recover the patriarchal remains in the male-author texts through reading and replace them with their own. The socio-historical feminism has its two groups practicing two different ways of feminist criticism.

One group practiced 'feminist critique' examining how women characters are portrayed, exposing the patriarchal ideology implicit in the so-called classic and demonstrating that attitudes and traditions reinforcing systematic masculine dominance are inscribed in the literary canon. Another group practiced 'gynocriticism' (in Showalter's term) studying writings by woman and examining the female literary tradition to find out how women writers across the ages have perceived themselves and imagined reality Showalter identifies Thomas Hardy in the first group and Elizabeth Barrett, Browning and Muriel Spark in the second.

Patricia Meyer Spacks, Ellen Moers, Ellen Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are the prominent socio-historic feminists who have by their diachronic investigations and studies of the social and historical position of the female writer, paved the path for a coherent narrative of female literary history describing the evolutionary stages of women's writing during the last 250 years.

Psychoanalytic and Deconstructive Feminism

The French school of feminism is called the psychoanalytic and deconstructive feminism since its base in Jacques Lacan's Neo-Freudian psychoanalysis, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Ronald Barth's structuralism. Using the concept of structuralism and post-structuralism, the psychoanalytic and deconstructive feminists stress the subtle but essential participation of language in the patriarchal forces of society, looking at the ways that 'the feminine' has been defined represented, or repressed in the symbolic system of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis and art, they claim all western language in all their features, being male-engendered, male constituted, and male dominated discourse.

Discourse, according to them is 'phallogocentric', centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the 'phallus'. So, advocating for a revolutionary

linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech, they try to establish the possibility of a female language which has its source in the mother, in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centered verbal language and which will not automatically be appropriated into the 'phallogocentric' language they have described such language as *Lecriture feminine*; a practice of writing 'in the feminine' which undermines the linguistic, syntactical and metaphorical conventions of western narrative such language, in the belief of the most radical French feminists, is connected to the rhythms of the female body and to sexual pleasure through in common understanding it is only avant-grade writing style like that of Jioce, Bataile, Artaud, Mallarme, or Lautreamont, and even is not necessarily writing by women.

Julia Kristeva's "From one Identify to Another" (1975) and Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1980) are the two imported essays of psychoanalytic and deconstructive feminism both of which emphasize women discourse with female morphology speaking their specific experiences. For Kristeva, female discourses that breaks with tradition is political act of dissidence, a from of feminist action, and for Helene Cixous, women's writing has genuinely revolutionary force. As she argues, "When the repressed of their culture and their society return, it is an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed"(Showalter, The Feminist 9).

Beside these major dimensions, feminism includes other many aspects such as radical and liberal feminism, black feminist criticism, lesbianism, bio-feminism, post-colonial feminism, existentialist feminism and feminist myth criticism.

Liberal feminism concerns the issues of equal rights between the sexes and freedom of women for their participation in public world beyond household. It

emphasizes not for the revolutionary changes but for reformation and development of a liberal society supporting equal opportunity between sexes. Radical feminism, on the other hand, is an almost revolutionary stream appearing as hostile to patriarchy. It emphasizes for a radical change and rejection of tradition, and it recommends putting women first making the primary concern. It considers the men as a group are the main enemy and advocates for the sisterhood of women. Redefining and reestablishing the position of women in society as a respectable and powerful member. Radical feminism aims for creating historically clear-cut differences between men and women.

Black feminist criticism protests the ‘massive silence’ of feminist criticism about women writers and calls for a black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual issues. Elizabeth Janeway in her essay “Women’s Literature” writes: “Black women writers have produced some of the most intense and revealing studies of the strains that a madness-including society puts on its member. History is always present in these books” (40). The major black feminist like Alice Walker, Tony Morrison and Maya Angelou celebrate the black female literary consciousness and believe that they possess rich culture and sexual properties as black and as female. They try to situate the study of black women’s writing in context of black history and culture, and stylistic correspondence with the literature of black men as well as investigate its special use of language and imagery.

Lesbian feminists devote their attention especially to literature written by lesbian writer or that deals with lesbian relationship in a heterosexual culture. They emphasize powerful bonds between women as significant aspect of all woman’s writing and prefer the women spending time together and sharing the most aspects of their lives with each other. Andrine Rich defines the term lesbian as a female energy

that gravitates towards strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that women must be sexually independent to establish the independency of their bodies because they locate the emergence of domination by men.

The bio-feminism which raises the issues of women's body as an essential part of women's writing because women have more biological experiences than men do. Experiences like menstruation, gestation, ovulation and childbirth are the mere women's and there lies several important things 'terra incognita' (unexplored subject) for men.

The bio-feminists generally stress the importance of the body as a source of imagery. They consider their physicality as a resource rather than destiny. They believe that patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specification, and they urge for the frank exposition of their body in their writing.

The branch of feminism that studies the existence of women in the patriarchal society is called existentialist feminism. It has its base on Sartrean notion of existentialism: 'existence precedes the essence', Simone de Beauvoir, the pioneer of the existentialist feminism, strongly refuses the notion of a female essence prior to individual existence and attacks the patriarchal myths of woman that presume the false essence. She argues that women are projected as 'other' subordinate being which mystifies their qualities and pushes them into isolation.

Feminist myth critics oppose the patriarchal myths in literary text that, as they believe, associate men with humanity and relegate women to an inferior position in the society. Rejecting the Greco-Roman myths as male constructed, they turn back to the study of pre-Greek myth which have abundant examples of matriarchal norms and values in the societies. They center their discussion on the Great Mother and other female goddesses like Medusa, Cassandra, Aracne and Isis.

Post-colonial feminists are concerned with the 'double colonization' of third-world women under the imperial conditions. They argue that the third-world women are become victims of the both imperial ideology and native and foreign patriarchies. They are ghettoized and secluded from the mainstream culture and suffered with their western sibling as well. Because the western feminists create an inseparable division between them, the non-western women suffer from a sense of isolation and have a hard time to express their identity. They are stuck between two trends of dominations: patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation. The post-colonial feminists accuse of the mainstream feminists 'Eurocentric' in their attitudes towards women in the countries of third world, trying to impose western model of feminism that is not always appropriate to the particular condition of third world countries. They hardly approve them speaking in favor of women of all ranks and races. They blame them being more imperialist than feminist and claim that true feminist spirit and sentiment lies in the marginalized non-western society. Gyatri Spivak, Trinh T. Manha-ha and Talapde Mohanty are some of the important post-colonial feminists who raise their voice in favor of third-world women criticizing to the mainstream western feminist trend.

But, because of its nature of 'playful pluralism', feminism appeared as Annette Kolodny argues, "more like a set of interchangeable strategies than any coherent school or shared goal orientation" (qtd. in Showalter, *Feminist Criticism* 244). Elaine Showalter also agrees Kolodny's idea saying, "until very recently, feminist criticism has not had a theoretical basis; it has been an empirical orphan in the theoretical storm" (244). On the other hand, all feminist criticism is in some sense revisionist, questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures. It, according to Sandra Gilbert, "wants to decode and demystify all the distinguished questions and

answer that have always shadowed the connection between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority” (What Do Feminist 36). Realizing that such feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps itself dependent upon it and delays its progress in solving its own theoretical problems. Many contemporary feminist critics appeal for the unity and shared goal, and for its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice.

Feminism, developed in different ages with different emphasis shares the common spirits like freedom, equality and independence of women. The patriarchal values, which have shattered the desires, feelings and as a whole the 'existence' of women never allow them to rise up their suffocated and suppressed state. So, feminism has developed as a weapon to break open the boundaries made by traditional patriarchal society. Thus, the feminist thinking, developed in different ages with different names have brought great changes in the thinking of women, which is obviously 'perception shift' in women. And therefore in literature too, the literary feminism developed.

Perception Shift in Female

The changes that occur in the perception of things around after being conscious and self aware is perception shift. Gyorgy Kepes in his essay “Perception” writes: “Perception is a process comparable with discriminating, differentiating, and observing. It is a process that underlies our awareness of the world and ourselves. The awareness is referred to as perception” (156). The change on looking, thinking, listening, perceiving and taking the same thing in a quite different way is perception shift. This is an obvious human psychology. We keep on changing according to the time, environment and circumstances. The same type of shift has come to the females

in the human history. Women were calm, docile, passive and backward due to the social construct as well as the society. They were always looked down upon by the patriarchal society. To enjoy their freedom was a far dream. They actually were dolls for the enjoyment of men. They could not express their feelings and other abilities in front of men. But gradually a type of feeling came to women which helped them to think of themselves. They started being a bit conscious of themselves and thinking of their own 'choice' and 'condition'.

By the rise of feminism in eighteenth century certain changes had appeared in a bit educated women. For the first time in history Mary Wollstonecraft in her writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) advocated for the political and social rights for women. Wollstonecraft's writing became fuel for the growing up of women's consciousness. They started being more and more conscious of their rights, duties, individuality and existence. Though radical changes could not occur in the condition of women at that time, things were totally changed after the publication of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) in twentieth century. These books highly contributed for the worldwide emergence of feminism. Women all over the world were energized by the upcoming theory. They were in a sense awakened from their innocent state and faced the world. Gradually their way of thinking, looking and taking things changed. They started thinking the same thing in a different way. This growing up of female consciousness shifted the perception of women. The new territory of women's world is explored by this perception shift on women.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, perception is "Ability to see, hear or understand. Quality of understanding, insight or way of seeing or understanding something" (917). But perception shift is the 'psychology of human

development'. Human being, on the way of development gain certain psychological changes and women also cannot be free of it. When there comes a bit psychological changes, definitely we start thinking and perceiving the same thing in a different manner. We become critical as well as analytical. In the course of time women also shifted their perception on the things around them. This perception shift is energized by the 'consciousness' that has come to them. Conscious feeling is without doubt different from the normal feeling. So this consciousness made women aware of their 'self' 'liberty' and many other things. Women are in a sense caged in the rules and regulations of the society of which they cannot come out easily. The conscious women try to break the cage and fly in the sky of freedom.

Many female writers advocated for the rights of women in twentieth century following the path of Mary Wollstonecraft. Simone de Beauvoir, presented her strong point on women's existence in her book, *The Second Sex* (1949). She says, "An existence is nothing other than what he does; the possible does not extend beyond the real, essence does not precede existence: in pure subjectivity, the human being is not anything" (998). Her emphasis on women's existence brought great change on the perception of women. Women also gradually started thinking and giving priority to their existence which was always ignored in past.

Perception shift in women has not come in a short period, but it is the outcome of long struggle. Many female writers have played vital role for this change in women's thinking. Elaine Showalter is one of them who emphasized for the development of 'female model' as well as 'female subculture'. She in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" writes: "In contrast to this angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female

experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (1227). Showalter’s deep thinking for the establishment of female culture based on female experiences helped women to perceive the on going things differently.

Writing is one of the best ways to bring changes in society has proved by the writings of female writers Kate Chopin is also one of the prominent writers who focused on the female issues. Her controversial novel, *The Awakening* (1899) is successful to depict the rebellious character, Edna Pontellier who happily embraces death for her individuality and complete liberation. Chopin in *The Awakening* writes: “Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer; than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life” (292). Such feminist writings always fueled for the growing up of female consciousness, made them critical and analytical.

The feminist writers from different ages have brought great changes on the thinking of women. Now, the women think not only for their family, but for themselves as well. They are now conscious of their ‘self’, ‘individuality’ and ‘existence’ which is obviously perception shift.

‘Consciousness’ has played a vital role for the overall change on women . When people become conscious, firstly they think of ‘oneself’ and of own ‘feelings’ and ‘desires’. Women also became highly interested on own ‘feelings’ and ‘desires’ and found all suppressed. They started looking the same thing in a new way. Their perception is shifted and found themselves a passive creature moulded by society.

In the course of time, women also became able to shout for their liberty and freedom from the unnecessary boundaries. These changes are the outcome of perception shift. Their perception has changed, so they are doubtful to the love of their husband as well. This is the fact that husband shows his love to his wife because she takes care of his house and children. Wife is his need who serves him and his

family free of cost. In this context Judy Syfers writes clearly why man needs a wife in her essay "I Want A Wife":

I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who makes love passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that I am satisfied. And, of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it. I want a wife who assumes the complete responsibility for birth control, because I do not want more children. I want a wife who will remain sexually faithful to me. (166)

Women cannot and should not be always used as a need of men as they have their own existence. Now women are more conscious of their rights, responsibility and individuality. They are awakened from a long slumber, and are running towards the path of self development. Women's consciousness and self awakened feeling are emphasized by the much of feminist theory developed in the later half of twentieth century which brought perception shift in female. So, 'awareness' 'consciousness' and 'perception shift' go simultaneously. This focus on perception shift in feminist theories echoes with some of the literary text written in the contemporary world. Paula Vogel's play *How I learned to Drive*, published in 1997, where she explains and shows the areas of perception shift in female which this research paper tries to make explicit in the following chapter.

III. Perception Shift in *How I Learned to Drive*

The World of Li'l Bit

Li'l Bit, the protagonist of the play, *How I learned to Drive* has a limited space where she has no friends except her uncle, Peck. She has no father but has got father's love from her mother's sister's husband, Peck. She has a quite different family where the family members have odd names. Li'l Bit says, "In most families, relatives get names like "Junior", or "Brother", or "Bubba". In my family, if we call someone "Big Papa", it's not because he is tall. In my family, folks tend to get nicknamed for their genitalia" (Vogel 1752).

Li'l Bit looks physically mature even in her early teen, which is the center of discussion in her family. She has got big breasts, and her grandfather most of the time teases her raising this issue. Her grandfather even doesn't hesitate to say, "Yup, If Li'l Bit gets any bigger, we're gonna haveta buy her a wheel barrow to carry in front of her" (1753). Li'l Bit cannot tolerate such thing and becomes very sad. In her serious mood she gets relief only by uncle Peck. She feels that only uncle Peck understands her in the world. Uncle Peck also starts giving driving lesson to Li'l Bit when she is only eleven years old. Along with the driving lesson, he also teaches her of sexuality. She is very small to stir the steering, so, Peck keeps her in his lap and starts teaching. He teaches her not only driving but also many other thing. It is clear through his own words as he says, "And that's why you can't tell anyone I'm letting you do this" (1772). She enjoys new things which she is learning, so, she does everything what he instructs as well as accepts the things what he does to her. On the course of teaching, he puts his hands on Li'l Bit's breasts which she accepts silently.

Li'l Bit has a very positive thinking of Peck that she doesn't reject any proposal made by him. He does everything winning the heart of Li'l Bit. He every

time says, “I won’t, I am not gonna do anything you don’t want me to do” (1752). He is clever enough to attract Li’l Bit towards him. He, time and again repeats the words, “It’s just that I thought you ... understand me, Li’l Bit. I think you’re the only one who does” (1757). Peck, emotionally blackmails Li’l Bit using the sweet words and showing excess care for her. Li’l Bit cannot stop melting herself in front of his love and care towards her and she easily accepts to meet him once a week. She says to Peck, “We could meet and talk – once a week. You could just store up whatever’s bothering you during the week – and then we could talk” (1768). In this stage, Li’l Bit is totally swept away by the sugary words used by Peck and shows her submission to him.

Li’l Bit’s attraction to uncle Peck shows her search for father’s love. She gets lot of care and supports from Peck which is the main point of her attachment to him. She sometime unknowingly, expresses her search for father’s love to her mother. She happens to say to her mother, “Just because you lost your husband – I still deserve a chance at having a father! Someone! A man who will look out for me! Don’t I get a chance?” (1772). There is no one in front of Li’l Bit who can fully understand her, care her and speak in favor of her except Peck. So, reluctantly and unknowingly she becomes close to Peck each day. Peck gets pleasure by the company of innocent girl and obviously he does not want to be deprived of this enjoyment. He either one way or other, tries to grab the opportunity to have maximum pleasure with Li’l Bit. Once, he encourages Li’l Bit for photo shoot in his basement photo studio where he takes many photos in different poses. She first rejects for this photo session but clever Peck makes her ready by his alluring words. He does not hesitate to unbutton her blouse to the midpoint and run his hands over the flesh of her exposed sternum. He time and again persuades her saying, “you’re a very beautiful young woman. Do you know

that?" (1765). He equally blackmails her using the weapon of words like "I love you" (1766).

Li'l Bit is so innocent in her early teen age that she cannot differentiate between joke and serious thing. She takes everything in a single straight way. Her friends also make fun of her big breasts which she cannot understand. This following example shows her actual situation among friends:

Female Greek Chorus: Jerome? Jerome? Are you all right?

Male Greek Chorus: I – don't – know. I can't breath – get Li'l Bit –

Teenage Greek Chorus: – He needs oxygen!

Female Greek Chorus: – Can you help us here?

Li'l Bit: What's wrong? Do you want me to get the school nurse –

(The male Greek chorus member wheezes, grabs his throat and sniffs at Li'l Bit, chest, which is beeping away.)

Male Greek Chorus: No – it's okay – I only get this way when I'm around an allergy trigger –

Li'l Bit: Golly. What are you allergic to?

Male Greek Chorus: (With a sudden grab of her breast): Foam rubber.

(1763)

She is not even able to understand the fun made by her friends. Her area of thinking is not broadened till this moment.

Li'l Bit, from the beginning of her relation with uncle Peck feels uncomfortable as he is her aunt Mary's husband. She time and again reminds Peck that what they are doing is not good. She clearly says him, "That isn't right, uncle Peck. What we're doing. It's wrong. It's very wrong" (1757). But Peck doesn't care anything as he gets extreme pleasure from innocent Li'l Bit. He just says, "You let me

be the judge of what's nice and not nice to my wife. We are just enjoying each other's company" (1757). Li'l Bit has the capacity to understand other's feeling from her young age. She doesn't like to hurt other. So she gives her company to uncle Peck. At the same time she feels the pain of aunt Mary as her husband has become outsider and running after her. Even in her photo shoot, she many times talks of aunt Mary. She says to Peck, "Aunt Mary is?" (1765). But Peck has no feelings for other, even for his wife. He really doesn't care of other's pain and easily answers, "And so what if they return? I told them you and I were going to be working with camera. They won't come down" (1765).

We, human beings, change ourselves according to the circumstances as well as growing ages. Li'l Bit also cannot help herself being static. Along with her growing age, her thinking also changes. Her changed feelings burst out when she abruptly rejects the marriage proposal made by her uncle Peck in her eighteenth birthday. He without hesitation tells her, "I want you to be my wife" (1770). But Li'l Bit at the same time rejects his proposal saying, "This isn't happening" (1770). Li'l Bit all of a sudden rejects Peck though she was happy and satisfied with him for many years. So, this rejection can be taken as a sign of maturity and consciousness developing within her of which she is unaware.

Li'l Bit like an ordinary girl becomes so much worried of her fast growing breasts. She cannot take it easily and finds it as a burden. She sometime becomes so worried and thinks that she will be collapsed under the weight of that. She sometime expresses her bitter feeling in front of her friends and thus:

I feel like these two mounds of flesh have grafted themselves onto my chest, and they're using me until they can "propagate" and take over the world and they'll just keep growing, with a mind of their own until

I collapse under their weight and they suck all the nourishment out of my body and I finally just waste away while they get bigger and bigger and -(Li'l Bit's classmates are just starting at her in disbelief) (1764)

Li'l Bit is so sensitive girl who is touched by every small things in her life. She is bothered by the teasing of her grandfather and her friends. So, she finds solace only in the arms of her uncle, Peck.

Li'l Bit is totally bounded in a little space between herself and uncle Peck, and she cannot easily free herself of it. She perceives each and everything in a single straight way. Therefore, she happily accepts everything told by Peck as a faithful child. These things are the outcome of her innocent phase where she is unaware of the consequences of their incestuous relationship. She is really immature, so, takes Peck as a loving and caring person but lacks to judge his internal desire towards her.

Perception of Other Female Characters

Grandmother, mother and aunt Mary are the other female characters in *How I Learned to Drive*. These characters possess the quality of traditional women who are limited in a certain boundary of society. Grandmother is more traditional among them who truly follows the patriarchal values about women. She has certain frame in her mind for women and wants women to be limited in that frame. She takes 'sex' as something bad and tries to pass negative feelings about sex to her granddaughter, Li'l Bit. She even scolds her daughter, who tries to tell the truth about sex to Li'l Bit. She says, "Tell her it hurts! It's agony! You think you're going to die! Especially if you do it before marriage!" (Vogel 1760).

We can clearly see the generation gap among the female characters.

Grandmother is more conservative, but Li'l Bit's mother is a bit liberal, who wants to tell her daughter the reality about 'sex'. Li'l Bit is a teen age girl, and by nature she is

curious to know many things. She is very eager to know about ‘sex’ in women’s life. She sometime asks her mother about first experience of sexual relation. “When you do it – you know, theoretically when I do it – and I haven’t done it before – I – mean – does it hurt?” (1760), she does not hesitate to ask her mother. Though her mother is not free of traditional ideas, she is at the same time a bit liberal and wants to tell the reality to her daughter about sexual relation. She says, “Well, just a little bit. Like a pinch. And there’s a little blood. Don’t be scared. It won’t hurt you – if the man you go to bed with really loves you. It’s important that he loves you” (1760).

She is of the belief that her daughter must know from early age about this reality. She, in this sense, is more modern and of free thinking. She herself is not satisfied with her mother as she was told many bad things about ‘sex’ when she was in her teens. She complains her mother saying, “Mama! I’m going to tell her the truth! Unlike you, you left me and Mary completely in the dark with fairy tales and told us to go to the priest! What does an eighty-year-old priest know about lovemaking with girls!” (1760).

Li’l Bit’s mother possesses certain quality which in a sense is against traditional thinking, but her little liberal thinking is overshadowed by the wide spreaded patriarchal values. As a result she also happens to make many rules for her daughter. She has a list of rules for Li’l Bit related to drinking. She guides her daughter in this way:

A lady never get sloppy – she may however , get tipsy and a little gay. Never drink on an empty stomach. Avail yourself of the bread basket and generous portion of butter. Sip your drink your drink slowly, let the beverage linger in your mouth – interspersed with interesting, fascination conversation. Oh, yes. And never mix your drink. Stay with

one all night long, like the man you came in with: bourbon, gin, or tequila till dawn, damn the torpe does, full speed ahead! (1755).

These rules are the outcome of social construct. Li'l Bit is of a bit free thinking but her mother is guided by old beliefs. Females have to stay in a certain rules either for drinking or for other things they want to do.

Li'l Bit's mother has tips for each and everything for her. She is unaware of the fast growing world and just limits herself and wants her daughter as well in a certain thing. She even has tips for Li'l Bit to save her virtue. She says, "When going out for an evening on the town, be sure to wear a skin-tight-gridle so tight that only a surgical knife or acetylene torch can get it off you. So that if you do pass out in arms of your escort, he'll end up with rubber burns on his fingers before he can steal your virtue" (1756). Li'l Bit's mother has no idea on the thing that life cannot be always confined in certain rules and regulation. In some moments, we cannot be in our own control and things happen automatically. So rules are just barrier for the progress in our life.

Aunt Mary is an example of a traditional wife who is so much true to her husband and always waits him thinking one day he will return back and stay with her forever. She praises her husband even she knows the relationship between him and Li'l Bit. She says, "My husband was such a good man – is. Is such a good man. Every night, he does the dishes. Second he comes home, he's taking out the garbage, or doing yard work, lifting the heavy thing I can't. I know I'm lucky" (1767). She is also like other women who does not see anything wrong with her husband, but blames Li'l Bit. She thinks that Li'l Bit has twisted her husband. Mary doesn't feel uneasy when she says:

And I want to say this about my niece. She is a sly one, that one is. She knows exactly what she's doing; she's twisted Peck around her little finger and thinks it's all a big secret. Yet another one who's borrowing my husband until it doesn't suit her anymore. I'm counting the days until she goes away to school. And then he'll come back again, and sit in the kitchen while I bake, or beside me on the sofa when I sew in the evenings. I'm a very patient woman. But I'd like my husband back. I am counting the days. (1767)

Aunt Mary is the representative of all the traditional wives. In patriarchal society, wives have no existence and they get their identity from their husbands. They do not get respect and support from society if they do not have husband. So, they are compelled to see the way of their husband patiently, hiding every pain in their heart.

In patriarchal society, women are always taken as 'sex objects', who must be always ready to fulfill the sexual desire of their husbands. They should be like machines which can work continuously without rest. But the tragedy is that, husbands never think of the desires of their wives. And in most of the cases, wives do not get the extreme pleasure in their sexual relation. Most of the women are unaware of 'orgasm', so, they do not believe on it like Li'l Bit's grandmother: "Orgasm! That's just something you and Mary have made up! I don't believe you" (1758). Li'l Bit's mother is a bit aware of such things and tries to convince her mother saying, "Mother, it happens to women all the time" (1758).

There are many unnecessary boundaries for women which have become the obstacle for their expression of the desires and feelings. Patriarchal society always supports men and ignores women. There is always a limitation for women which they cannot cross. Lady must be always careful for each and every activities she does. She

should be very careful when she is in dating and drinking. Li'l Bit's mother has many tips for dating and drinking. She says, "Don't leave your drink unattended when you visit the ladies room. If you feel you have had more than your sufficiency in liquor, do go on the ladies' room – often. Pop your head out of door for a refreshing breath of the night air" (1756).

There is a great gap in thinking among all the female characters in this play. Every character carries values of the society they are grown up. So grandmother is more conservative in comparison to other ladies as she is grown up in the same environment. She accepts that saying, "I told you what my mother told me! A girl with her skirt up can outrun a man with his pants down!" (1761). Li'l Bit's mother has a bit different thinking than her mother as she is grown up in a different society. She wants her daughter to know the fact about 'sex' and other realities of life of which she was misguided in her young age. Now Li'l Bit has no resemblance in ideas with her grandmother and mother. She is a lady of free thinking who wants to go far from these boundaries of society. She, in her early age also doesn't hesitate ask about 'sex' with her mother. More than this, the notable thing is her developing relationship with her uncle. She does not feel uncomfortable to develop close relationship with Peck who is not in a single way match her.

These female characters in this play represent three generations who have different feelings and quite different perceptions. They are the outcome of their contemporary society, and truly carry the spirit of their time. It is clear through the characters that along with the time everything changes, even the 'perception'. Grandmother is the representation of a woman who is overshadowed by the patriarchal value whereas Li'l Bit carries the spirit of twenty first century mixed up with female consciousness.

Li'l Bit's Perception Shift

Perception shift is not a short term process but an outcome of long struggle with our own ideas, thinkings and perceptions. Perception shift in the protagonist, Li'l Bit has come only after crossing almost seventeen years of her life. It is difficult to bring changes in our ideas and views of which we are accustomed to. And this shift comes only after deep thinking and great struggle with our own self. Li'l Bit, basically shifts her perception on looking her uncle Peck and rejects him, who was very near to her before.

Li'l Bit from the time of her birth is so much taken care by uncle Peck. So, she thinks that Peck is the only person who fully understands her. She believes him even more than her mother and convinces her when she doubts their relation. Li'l Bit says, "Mother! It's in your head! Nothing will happen! I can take care of myself. And I can certainly handle uncle Peck" (Vogel 1772). Li'l Bit, from her early teen age starts being close with Peck. This closeness is strengthened when he starts giving driving lesson to her. When she was only eleven years old, Peck encourages her for driving. He says, "There's no traffic here. Do you want to drive? It's easy. I'll show you how I started driving when I was your age. Don't you want to?" (1772). Driving was new thing for her, so, like other curious children, she is also dragged towards this new thing. Here, for the first time in her life, Li'l Bit starts driving as well as accepts Peck when he puts his hands on her breasts.

Peck and Li'l Bit starts mutual relationship which continues for many years. She accepts him by heart and even gives him time once a week. She also feels great satisfaction when Peck is with her. She does not say even a single word to Peck when he kisses her, but instead she closes her eyes in satisfaction. Peck is so crazy of Li'l Bit that he waits whole the week to see and touch her. Peck, very emotionally tells

Li'l Bit, how much he waits for her. "I live all week long for these few minutes with you – you know that?" (1752). Li'l Bit forgets the world in the arms of Peck and goes to the different places where he takes her.

It is said that unconsciousness leads us to slavery which is totally reflected in Li'l Bit's life. She accepts uncle Peck and becomes like a doll for his pleasure when she is unconscious of the facts. She saw only love in Peck's eyes which actually were full of desires. In the course of time, certain changes come to Li'l Bit which is a common human nature. Her, a bit changed and rebellious feelings can be felt when she says, "It's not fair! Why does everything have to hurt for girls? Why is there always blood?" (1760). Along with her physical growth, she gains psychological growth which leads to her changed attitude towards everything. Once, Peck uses "she" for car because he thinks that car also responds to our touch and gives us what we ask for like a lady. But Li'l Bit does not agree with him and says, "I closed my eyes – and decided not to change the gender" (1762). Li'l Bit's disagreement with her uncle is an example of her changing attitudes as well as growing up her consciousness.

Every change in the world is an outcome of gradual process which is obviously natural. But the changes which come all of a sudden definitely shock us. The same thing has happened in the case of Li'l Bit. Li'l Bit, who was very close to Peck suddenly rejects him. Peck is very eagerly waiting her in a hotel for the celebration of her eighteenth birthday. She enters to his room being a different Li'l Bit and scolding her dear uncle for the gifts he sent for her. She shouts, "Are you crazy? You scared the holy crap out of me – sending me that stuff in the mail. I am not a child, uncle Peck. You were counting down my eighteenth birthday" (1769).

Li'l Bit, who has no father gets love and care from Peck, which is the reason of her attachment with him. They both are attracted towards each other by certain force of which they are also unaware. But by the impression of changing human psychology as well as changing environment, Li'l Bit wakes up from her unconscious state and realizes her mistake. After realization, she says to uncle, "Uncle Peck – I've been thinking a lot about this – and I came here tonight to tell you that – I'm not doing very well. I'm getting very confused – I can't concentrate on my work – and now that I'm away – I've been going over it in my mind – and I don't want us to "see" each other anymore" (1770). This is the first time in her life she rejects Peck and her rejection points towards her changing attitude. Peck does not like to break up their long relationship, so, he tries to convince her and requests her to lie down on the bed with him to make her feel something. Peck filled up with emotion speaks:

Li'l Bit. Listen. Listen. Open your eyes and look at me. Come on. Just open your eyes, honey. (Li'l Bit , eyes squeezed shut, refuses.) All right then. I just want you to listen. Li'l Bit I am going to ask you just this once. Of your own free will. Just lie down with me, a man and a woman ... and let's ... hold one another. Nothing else. Before you say anything else. I want the chance to ... hold you. Because sometime the body knows things that the mind isn't listening to ... and after I've held you, then I want you to tell me what you feel. (1770)

Peck is so much in love with Li'l Bit that he cannot think of his life without her. He wants to make herself feel something for him. Sometime we cannot express our feelings but our body shows it. So Peck requests Li'l Bit to lie on a bed with him. But now she is not the same innocent Li'l Bit. She has already gone through different psychological changes. She reluctantly accepts his request and lies on the bed with

him. Peck holds his arms out to her and Li'l Bit lies beside him, putting her head on his chest. He strokes her hair, and she lies very still. Now he becomes so hopeful that she will accept him, but Li'l Bit gives negative answer which almost kills him. Peck asks Li'l Bit, "Did you ... feel nothing?" Li'l Bit replies, "No. Nothing". He again asks, "Do you – do you think of me?" She again replies, "No" (1770).

Li'l Bit breaks up her relation with Peck for no good reasons. For many years she enjoys that relation but all of a sudden ignores him. She was so much satisfied with their relation before. Peck never forced her to do anything and he always used to say, "I won't. I'm not gonna do anything you don't want me to do" (1752). They had mutual relationship and both were happy to get each other in a time of need. Her sudden rejection of this relation is obviously guided by her awakened feelings. Her views towards Peck is now not positive like before. Peck used to be the best person in the world for her. But the same person does not impress and touch her heart now. She says to Peck, "I'm leaving. Now. I am not seeing you. Again. Uncle Peck? – I'm sorry but I have to go" (1771).

Li'l Bit's earlier perception of Peck is shifted which compels her to avoid him from her life. Peck is totally spoiled when he is left alone by her. He fails to control himself and roams around in frustration. His down fall starts when he starts drinking. He doesn't take care of his family and only confines himself to his own world of drinking. So, slowly he is also ignored by his wife, kicked away of his job and becomes totally out of control. He indulges himself to alcohol which leads him to his death. Li'l Bit tells us, "I never saw him again. I stayed away from Christmas and Thanksgiving for years after. It took my uncle seven years to drink himself to death. First he lost his job, then his wife, and finally his driver's license. One day they found him at the bottom of the stairs" (1771).

Changes and progress do not come in a blink of our eyes, but it takes long time, hard work and struggle. It takes more than six years for Li'l Bit to be changed and run away from the clutch of Peck. We accept the things around us blindly as long as we do not have conscious feeling, but when the certain consciousness comes to us, we cannot easily accept that. We day by day start analyzing the things and the consequences of it. Same thing has happened to our protagonist, Li'l Bit. She blindly supports Peck when she was fully unaware of the things. But, by the passing of time, she happens to understand everything. She in a sense becomes self awakened. Her awakened feelings bring changes in her perception. And when 'perception' itself changes, the same world appears in a strange way to her. She does not feel the same heart beat for Peck which used to beat faster in his presence. Now his touch is just cold and emotionless which lacks love and warmth for each other. She expresses her emotionless feeling in such a way, though they both were in a same bed. "That day was the last day I lived in my body. I retreated above the neck, and I've lived inside the "fire" in my head ever since" (1772). Every relation grows up in the base of feelings. If there lacks feelings for each other then definitely that relation breaks up. Li'l Bit's growing consciousness along with passing time drags her to the new world of her own. Now the untrodden world challenges and excites her than as usual life with Peck. So, she detaches herself from the world of Peck to enter inside her own new world.

Perception shift has appeared in Li'l Bit in her very critical phase when she is entering to adulthood from adolescence. Most of the adolescent boys and girls think only by heart, but our heart sometime cheats us. When we listen to our heart, sometime we happen to drag ourself in a wrong track. But adults think by mind which keeps everything in balance. Our mind encourages us to be practical and always

guides us to differentiate between wrong and right. When we cross our adolescent and enter to adulthood, we get different physical as well as psychological changes. Along with other changes, change in perception also occurs. Li'l Bit also in her adolescence thinks by heart and happily accepts her relation with Peck. But when she enters adulthood, her thinking totally changes. She feels her relationship with Peck is immoral and that feeling leads to the break up of their relations.

Li'l Bit frees herself from the grip of her uncle, Peck and enjoys her freedom. She seems to be conscious of her own identity, existence and independent life which was not possible as long as she was with Peck. 'Consciousness' always drags us within ourself and we start thinking of our own 'self'. Li'l Bit also thinks of own self and finds somewhere entangled with old Peck, so, she runs far away from him. She does not feel pain in his death, instead of that she smiles at uncle Peck's ghost which appears in her rearview mirror and drives her car in its full speed.

In such a way, Li'l Bit shifts her perception on the things as well as to her loving uncle, Peck. She suddenly ends up her long relationship with Peck for no reasons. Perception shift, which has brought great change in Li'l Bit is fully a psychological process. Her awakened feelings make her aware of her own 'self', 'identity', and 'existence'. She wants to end up their incestuous relationship for her individuality and existence. Consciousness which has come to her, fueled for the materialization of her hidden desire for freedom and individuality. Her consciousness leads her towards freedom from all the boundaries. She even wants to be free from her loving and caring uncle, Peck. Her shifted feelings give her power even to reject the proposal of marriage made by Peck. So, it is clear that Li'l Bit's perception shift and awakened feelings point towards her desire for 'freedom' forever.

Li'l Bit, a rebellious character, who ultimately cannot get solace in the arms of uncle Peck, obviously leads free life of her own choice. She is an ambitious girl, who wants to do something new in her life is clear by her saying, "Maybe I want to learn things. Read. Raise, above my cracker background" (Vogel 1753). An innocent girl changes to be a lady of different thinking and perception of the world. She gets satisfaction to carry her single life free of unnecessary boundaries. She becomes happy to live her life having own identity, existence and individuality. In future also, without doubt, she lives happy life enjoying her own world of independence and complete freedom. Ultimately, Li'l Bit drives her life in her own way and she is very happy in her decision. Her happiness can be seen when the narrator says, "As Li'l Bit adjusts the rearview mirror, faint light strikes the spirit of uncle Peck who is sitting in the back seat of the car. She sees him in the mirror and smiles at him" (1773). This smile carries the spirit of Li'l Bit's satisfied life on the one hand and hatred towards Peck on the other. So, in my thinking, Li'l Bit carries the life of independence, freedom and great satisfaction in future.

IV. Female's Perception Shift

While reading Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize winning play, *How I Learned to Drive*, we are shocked of Li'l Bit's sudden rejection of her uncle, Peck's proposal of marriage, though they had mutual relationship for many years. Her sudden rejection is directly related to her perception shift, which is an outcome of her growing consciousness towards her own freedom, identity and existence.

Liberation, in general understanding is an individual's freedom of action within the social group and in relation to other individuals. Different social, cultural, authoritative and many other man made factors may hinder the freedom of an individual. Even more, women may be double exploited: first by the common hindrances and second by men's perspective and behaviors of 'second sex' – a submissive and complementary to them, towards women. Women, therefore, have to battle with more obstacles for their perfect individuality. Their first effort should be in equating themselves to the males eliminating all kind of gender inequalities and discriminations in society and establishing their own sphere analogous to that of men. Then only comes the concern of a complete liberation of their 'selves'.

Li'l Bit, who represents women, dares to reject the patriarchal values and ideas represented by uncle Peck, seeks for her own world far from the boundaries of society where she enjoys her free life. Her awakened feelings brought great change in her perception of the world. She, even starts thinking deeply about her relationship with Peck, which ultimately proves to be immoral in her view. Her growing consciousness makes her so critical that she very easily breaks her relation with Peck and kicks him out of her life forever. Awakened to the new consciousness, Li'l Bit realizes the importance of liberty, individuality, identity and existence. So, swept away by the

waves of freedom, she reaches very far from the reach of Peck, where she enjoys eternal satisfaction of her life.

Thus, Paula Vogel, in her one of the best plays, *How I Learned to Drive*, depicts a different character, Li'l Bit, who develops physically as well as mentally in the course of time and who could not adjust herself to the existing patriarchal values. So, she challenges the world, rejecting her long term relationship with Peck, and takes herself in the world where she can fully realize her existence. Vogel, develops such character in her play to show the world and make people realize that women consciousness is occurring in the world, which will ultimately bring radical changes in our society.

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