

CONCEPT OF CONFESSIONAL WRITING: AN ARTICLE ON SYLVIA PLATH AND KAMALA DAS

Sumon Acharjee

Teacher in English

Department of English

Army Public School, Ranchi, (Jharkhand), India

ABSTRACT

The present article is attempting to re-identify a very short history on feminism and the style of confessional in English Literature. This paper is also scrutinizing the problems of women writing, how 'they' are transformed into 'other' as well as their emotion and reaction go against the present discourse. I am also, trying to find here the present condition of continental writing around the South-East Asian women writers. It continues through highlighting particularly the two female poets and one of the most controversial feminist writers, an activist from Bangladesh Taslima Nasrin. Throughout, a combination and contradiction of same problem between 'Orient' and 'Occident' female writers, where their three different poles are mystically connected with each other. The myth of 'post-modern' and the pattern of 'post-structuralism' in their writing did not allow them to be free from their writing. Sylvia Plath from America and Kamala Das from Kerala, India. Their works were concerned with the same issues, their anxiety and displacement from the academic or literary arena. In this short presentation I am, here, trying to cover the major issues of their similarity and differences. Contextually, there are also the writers whose 'confessional' style in their writing re-establishes the new theme of 'womanism' beyond the established genre.

Index Terms – Feminism, Confessional Writing, Psychology, Structuralism, Post Modernism Objectives

- To understand 'confessional' in poetry
- To read text beyond the author
- How to scan the poetry and to bring out the personality of a poet.
- Comparative study with oriental approach to new English poetry

INTRODUCTION

Feminism really began as a term in France (feminism) around the end of the 1800s. But as the time passed it is changed, modified, criticized, shaped and re-shaped and took a dynamic body in most of the literary and non-literary spheres of the world. Femininity in feminism is controversial, demands a critical intercourse with the its own textual body. Feminism is directly or indirectly opposed the 'androcentrism' (Gr. word – 'patriarchy'). 'Feminist Criticism' then a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theatrical practice committed to the struggle against 'patriarchy' and 'sexism'. Women writers' and women readers have always hard to work 'against grain'. Aristotle declared that "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (Chapter 12; *Politics*). Feminism in literature took an influential activity in France, from 1830 with the introduction of First Wave Feminist writers, organized around Women's Liberation. But the multiplicities that are included in feminism are basically opposing the male counterpart with the male discourses. In *The Second Sex*, Simon De Beauvoir, stated critically that "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*" and it left a long lasting influence over the next scholars. Her work produces an existential quest why women should be inferior to men throughout the 'conspiracy of history' and across the culture, women are always considered an 'second-class citizen'. She hinted that the biological differences do not provide a casual explanation for women's oppression, however, their reproductive function has placed women at disadvantage by trying them to domestic sphere and associating them with just 'body', and thus with animal and the nature. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), Marry Wollstonecraft, philosophized on the women education and right in politics. In the second wave feminist writers like, Virginia Woolf's general contribution to feminism, then, is her recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and is changeable and can be transformed. She was deeply influenced by Marx's 'trans-cultural' and 'trans-historical' theory. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf's conceptualizes that, 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. Her semi-autobiography *Orlando* deeply concerned with the same theme of the history of women's writing, gender studies, and transgender studies. "*Woolf has broken with tradition and convention and has set out to explore still another fourth dimension of writing.*" ("New York Times" on The Web). In United States, the Second Wave feminists includes the civil rights movement, peace and other protest movements and Kate Millet's radical feminism talks about it. Millet's *Sexual Politics* shows the relationship between men and women must be understood as a deeply embedded power structure with political implementations. She tried to focus the "Phallogocentrism in Literature" (in Derrida's Deconstruction). Millet's argument- ranging over history, literature, psychoanalyses, sociology and other area enquiry the thinking about their attachment or the engagement with literary writings. *Sexual Politics* was the pioneering analytical survey of masculinist social, historical and literary images of women. French Feminist critic Julia Kristeva with her introduction of 'semiotics' and 'inter-textuality' had attempted to break that a literary text must not be considered according to its gender, rather, its own one, its history, its author's momentary psychology. French Feminism is highly concerned with the psycho analytical reading from Freudian theory. The post structuralist and post modern critic Roland Barthes in his essay '*Death of the Author*' states that "Writing is 'neutral', 'oblique' where indirectly

Barthes tried to break the tradition by introducing a female reader. Feminism thus apart from a movement it established its function as a form of literary theory and literary science.

Comparative reading between the occidental and oriental from the specified perspectives:

Though confessional poetry took its significant shape and took its flight to the women writing from United States but the 'voice of oppressed' was struggling hard for its identity everywhere, even in Indian. Indian Literature in English took a long struggling period for its development. Under the British rule we find hardly the specimen of their writing. In 1951, a professor in one of the Scottish university told one of literary Indian academics, that there are five or six women writers who usually made the most significant contribution in Indian women writing with the same qualities of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, the Bronte's as well as with Gaskell. But women in here were just mere story tells even they were not allowed to publish. The destroyer of this 'pedagogic structure' was Toru Dutt wrote both French and English novel.

Poems of kamala Das were highly psychological, structurally fragmented and bear an approach towards the poetics of feminism. The voice in her poems are like the struggling bushes against its growth and definite identity. *The Old play house* is a significant work where the poetess is an Indian revolutionary woman increased the volume for the women. The concept of revolution for kamala das is more implicit than that surface. In *A Silence Desire*, the most ambitious novel by Kamala Markandaya dares the invisible and the writings is competent enough to forge here and there coils of intricate suggestion that almost seem to bridge the chasm between matter and spirit, doubt and faith. Truly such style unveils the long suppressed reality with the woman and almost the close echo while a reader thinks of Sylvia Plath's reading crossing the textual bars. Like, Kamala Das, in Sylvia Plath's poetry focuses on 'confessional method'. Plath took the narrative style from her most influential American poet Robert Lowell. Anne Sexton converted her personality into her works and shaped it as 'confessional'. *Live or Die* (1966) won her the Pulitzer Prize. *Possession* establishes the theme, the scene shifts from India to England and America and again back to India. Plath's protagonist in her *Bell Jar* examines "quest to forge her own identity, to be herself rather than what others expect her to be". Esther is expected to become a housewife, and a self-sufficient woman, without the options to achieve independence. Esther feels she is a prisoner to domestic duties and she fears the loss of her inner self. *The Bell Jar* sets out to highlight the problems with oppressive patriarchal society in mid-20th Century America. The men in Esther's life are all oppressive, whether it is in a physical manner or an emotional one. Both the writers are trying to establish their identity through their own fragmented style. Sylvia Plath was more emotional activist rather than Kamala Das. Both of the two writers were subjugated by the patriarchal domination. But the most and continuation of Kamala Das's writing flows in her autobiographical work *My Story*. Here Das, tried to show how the women writing is de-centered, looked down upon, shaped and their voices are choked in reading of their text. This lady poet recounts the miseries and misfortunes that she faced being a lady poet. Significantly in Plath's writing, Bell Jar exposes her own heart in the confessional manner which she received from the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell. Esther, the protagonist turned into a prisoner by the domestic duties, in a broader sense this the victim of western social masculine oppression. In Plath's own life the appearance of her husband, Ted Hughes, reminds her the replica of her own father. In Daddy, she said that "Daddy, I have had to kill you. You died before I had time" and the appearance of her husband, Plath established in her poem by saying this "I made a model of you, A man in black with a Meinkampf look / But no less a devil for that, no not Any less the black man who Bit my pretty red heart in two." In twentieth century oriental feminists are the active participant across the poetic body. Their waves spreads themselves across the conventional criticism. Like the western 'womenism', their creations are reconfiguring the continental woman literature. Regarding this context, the most controversial, individual from Bangladesh, is Taslima Nasrin whose ground breaking attack on social domination, oppressing of religion moves her reader with her personal experience. Though, the style of 'confession' is not totally different from the tradition, still the enigma is omnipresence in her controversial work, named, "*Lajja* (Shame)" and "*Ami Valo nai, Tumi valo theko prio Desh* (I am not well, you stay well my favorite country)". These novels are carrying the inner most fury of the women writers, how her work was banned not only, the state forced her to leave her own country. Margaret Lawrence in her *A Jest of God* telescoped the relation of language and society and how they operate in a life of woman, develops the ways of thinking. Rachael's attempts to locate several discourses, her confession dramatizes to attain the institution and self-understanding. The alienated voice in here continually searches an identity and subjectivity of its own.

Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath is a the psychological interpretation of a poet's poetic inner documentation. The dramatic narration of Esther, reconnects the readers with Plath's own life, her desire to be the poet, the obscurities from the patriarchal domination. In *My Story* of Kamala Das, she is talking how the women became the puppet within the bounds of domestic life and caring activities. Both of these two writers showed a common approach in their novel, in a confessional way. Das, in her story says, "Dress in saris, be girl. Be wife, they said. Be Embroiderer, Be cook, be a marveller with servants. Fit in, Belong, cried the categorizers." (*My Story*). The prototype of Indian wife who are sometimes forcefully made engaged within the households to make them detach from the literary territory which is actively dominated by the androcentrism. Plath had a obscure life with Ted Hughes, the well know English poet, with his ego, the cold mental war between two poles. Plath was destined to the world of homely atmosphere, looking after the children. Even her volume was not published; Ted did not want to publish. In Bell Jar, Plath's feminine speaking persona Esther, consider her life with a creature within a bell jar, attempted suicide so many times. The comparative study between Plath and Kamala Das, analyzed how the literature of the 'other' becomes continuously marginalized by the central men writing. The psychological problem of the oppressed female is inter mingled with the literature of their own. Perhaps the most prominent examiner of blending literature and psychology of female writing is Virginia Woolfe. Das once said, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home, you stray a little"(Warrior interview). Though some might label Das as "a feminist" for her candor in dealing with women's needs and desires, Das "has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of feminist activism" (Raveendran 52). Das' views can be characterized as "a gut response," a reaction that, like her poetry, is unfettered by other's notions of right and wrong. Das has ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a

point of reference for her colleagues. She has transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. Moreover, apart from the feminist perspective both of these two writers followed the confessional mood, popularized their individual career. Their soul attacks were not against those materialistic society neither only the patriarchal social discrimination, both of their protest moved more furtherer, against the social discourse. The *hegemony* which made them different against the pedagogy. Their performativity is absolutely a break in the linear style of so called 'womanism'.

Feminism in literature, today is very vast and bearing the multipurpose activities to the reader. In present time the literary theory critically applied this '-ism' as a science of language, a tool. Feminism, through which a reader can understand the problems of woman writing, cultural domination, discrimination of 'sex', within a text and how the women are thinking and creating the feminine world for their own sake. Being alienated from the male-centric world, very often today's feminism lacks the authenticity of its own ideologies, some critics criticized than they become biased. In the writings of Anglo-Indian feminist writers, the confessional style is not even so rare in our time. But what Plath and Kamala Das had contributed is absolutely was a break through against the stagnancy of patriarchal domination. The hegemony was bitterly satirized as well as the new confessional mode empowered the female writers to bring the criticisms into their own performances.

Sylvia Plath in her entire literary life had followed that style, so we might be categorized in the group 'radical feminist'. In India where the society was more rigid and the orthodoxies with the south Indian family tradition was always the primary and principle obstruction in the upbringings to a female poet. So, the protest became similar to both of them, as well as it scans the problems regarding with feminism and the protest within literary tradition. The 'other-ness' in literature speaks through its own body(literary work) and characters (the voice of feminism).

CONCLUSION: The theme of confession is a part of feminism which was rather popularized particularly with these two poets. Kamala Das represents the condition of woman, womanhood in the same way Sylvia Plath established the problem of woman character in America. The condition was here and there was the same; there was crisis of their identity in literary works. The epistemic violence of the male writing became a threatening discourse for the writing of the 'other' (here the female). These poets took the form of life and applied to express in their poetry. Plath was highly indebted to Robert Lowell who was the most vital influential person in her poetic career.

However, this analytical discussion on a particular ground of feminism focuses on a different style of writing, a special mood of expressing the subordinate voices of the society. These two discussed poets though occupy a larger portion in English Literature but their works polish the literature and brightens its glow to the different age's readers. Their dynamic approach in literary works is not only a break through to the stagnancy of traditionalism rather literature becomes like 'heteroglosic'. Today Sylvia Plath is read under so many theories and critics are seeing her from different point of view. From the psychoanalytical perspective she is widely read under the Electra Complex. 'Daddy' is then the prominent example for that. However, this short analytical survey is trying to critically establish the basic troubles, obscurities of women writing and their struggle for their literature, like their own private room. People, across, the world are interpreting 'feminism' in different way. But the crisis that they were within, perhaps in present time the phantom of 'androcentrism' is still working physically or psychologically.

References

1. Bell Jar The by Plath Sylvia
2. Second Sex The by de Beauvoir, Simon
3. Studies Life by Lowell Robert