



Elements of The Marginalization in The Works of Sylvia Plath

M.Bijish

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Karpagam University, Coimbatore -21

Dr.S,Selvalakshmi

Asst.Professor, Department of English, Karpagam University, Coimbatore -21

ABSTRACT

An objective analysis on the predicament of women in any societies shows that they were made to suffer the evils of marginalization by the male-dominated world. Even the oldest religious testaments proclaim women to be subordinate to men. "Man is the crown of creation and woman his partner"- says The Holy Bible. The depiction of the lives of the women has been of great concern for many writers during the centuries.

Sylvia Plath, often associated with the Confessional mode of poetry, reflects her concerns over the patriarchal society in which she lived. The personal traumas of her life can also be seen as an outcome of the social attitude of the Mid Twentieth Century British and American patriarchal society. She had to face marginalization from both her family and society. The social turmoil of the age, coupled with personal traumas, created an outburst of vivid imaginative poems towards the end of her literary career.

KEYWORDS

Confessional poet, Patriarchal society, Mannequins

Sylvia Plath, the eminent American poet, is often associated with Confessional poetry. Apart from that, she is regarded as a poet of great social ethics and commitments. Plath felt like a victim to the men in her life, including her father, her husband, and the great male-dominated literary world. Being a confessional poet, her works reflect her sensitive poetic persona. At the same time, the fact that she was well-aware of the society in which she lived cannot be neglected.

Plath lived in a social era that was characterised by very strict gender norms. The mid twentieth century British and American societies were very much patriarchal in nature. Motherhood is considered to be the ultimate joy of women and they were not allowed to go out of her domestic environment. They were silent and withdrawn, without having a major role or decisive powers in a family. In the history of literature, a large number of writers were using pseudonym to publish their literary works. The marginalisation was stunningly replied with her vivid language and imagination. It is the unique feature of Plath as a poet.

Some of her major poems from the Collection "*Ariel*" have been discussed to justify the argument.

The poem "*Applicant*" (1962) is about a marriage in the Contemporary Western Culture. It portrays men as a junk heap of miscellaneous parts given shape by a suit of clothes. Woman is depicted as a wind-up toy, a puppet of that black suit. Puppet is the perfect image of the women in that era, who are destined to live as mere objects, without any opinion of their own. It also highlights the superior nature of men in marriage and the subordination of women. The Applicant is marketed as a bride, who is introduced to different ideas about the role the bride will play.

Throughout the poem, the poet speaks directly to the reader, addresses as "you" throughout. The poet implicates the readers as the applicants. People are described as crippled and dismembered pieces of bodies. They are represented as mere collections of wheels and cogs, replicas of a smoothly functioning social machine. The man in the poem is defined by the black suit he puts on. He is a junk heap of miscellaneous parts given shape by a suit of clothes; the woman is a wind-up toy, a puppet of that black suit. She is referred as "it" with no individuality.

"To bring teacups and roll away headaches And do whatever you tell it." (The Applicant, 12)

Thus, the element of neglect by the patriarchal society is perceived in the poem. Her poems are the depiction of the social scenario of the mid-twentieth century. During a period of social turmoil of the Second World War and Holocaust, there existed severe male domination in the society. It is reflected in the poem, which can be read as a personal trauma of the poet. On close analysis, her own unsuccessful married life with Ted Hughes and the elements of victimization in her poems are identified.

"The Munich Mannequins" depicts the artificial perfection of the modern world. Man has finally transformed woman into a puppet, which shows the way in which they are treated. In 1960s fashion models were termed as Mannequins. The term also has the connotation with how other people perceive women.

"Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.

Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb" (The Munich Mannequins, 1)

Plath sees perfection as anti-life and non-reproductive as the Mannequins. Women are nothing but brainless objects of fashion and beauty without any individuality and voice of their own. She ends the poem like,

"Voicelessness. The snow has no voice."

In many of her poems the male figure can be seen as referring to the male forces in her life. In the case of her father, Sylvia Plath realized that she could never escape his terrible hold over her. She expressed her sense of victimhood in "*The Colossus*" and "*Daddy*," using the powerful metaphors and comparisons.

"Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time——"

Her husband also victimized her through the power he exerted as both a man and husband. Through his infidelity as a husband, he dominated her personal and literary career together. This subordination was felt by Plath and she was forced to take up the position of a subordinate feminine entity without the autonomy of power. Her frustrations are evident in the poems like "*Colossus*". Towards the end of her literary career, we can see that she was able to transcend the status of a marginalized through her creative faculties. She metaphorically kills her father in "*Daddy*" and kills herself in "*Lady Lazarus*".

Conclusion

Sylvia Plath, in most of her poems, depicted the desolation of the domestic scenario, the distress of pregnancy, the despondency over her husband's infidelity, her tormented relationship with her father, and her attempts to find her own creative voice amidst the crushing weight of patriarchies. Sylvia Plath remains a true voice of the marginalized Mid-Twentieth Century British and American society.

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