



ANALYSING SYLVIA PLATH IN THE CONTEXT OF HER CULTURE

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ABSTRACT :

In the storyline of American literature, Sylvia Plath(1932-1963)is a giant female genius. In her lifetime, she has tried to be responsive to the immense social and cultural changes that have occurred over years in American society even unto death. Plath is most often judged as psychotic and obsessive in writing about herself. But contrary to the dominant opinion she is an iconic product of history and a vehement women's voice of misery. She can be better understood through the use of figurative language and symbolic analysis of her works. She historicizes women's lives through the narratives of her own experiences.Devoid of her literary legacy, the horizon of social consciousness and women's assent would not have been so complete as it is today: which is why, quite naturally, there is an increase in the study of her life and works. Therefore, in this seminar paper, I intend to study Plath in the context of her times and cultures with respect to her society.

Keywords: *Modernist author, Contemporary issues, Symbol, Representation, Gender, Patriarchal.*

I. Introduction:

Unparallel to many modernist authors,SylviaPlath'sliterary output with broad Poetic sensibility in the context of her times, with respect to contemporary issues is worth a legacy.Plath(1932 – 1963) was born and brought up in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S but She addresses people from across all social and cultural spectrums through the magnanimous appeal of her womanly grace. Be it gender bias for women caught in conflicting social codeswho cared about social injustice, who becomes the representative voice of every woman of every age, ora depressive psycho-maniac in conventional cross-currents of society, Plath becomes a symbol of a suitable theme to the living of all times.From different angles, her works reflect the complex and conflicting contemporary discourses on gender within the cultural context where she lived and wrote; while also exploring societal expectations of women in the 1950s.Amidst multiplicity of anxieties and concerns,she embraced the cultural profile of the Age until the present and still promises to go miles ahead even in the future.

Plath lived in the 20th century America where class, gender, and nationality intermingled with psychic processes and concerns of the individuals.“To discover whether she is the product of a culture in which she has no part or her true identity is smothered by the patriarchal culture. To find out who she is and what she has lost, it becomes imperative that she should redeem and



reinstate her experience as a woman, within which alone she can acquire autonomy over her being.” [1].She outlives as an icon-generativepresence in Americaamong the few American poets whose poems have reached the nook and remote corners of human presence. When Plath was growing up in the east of America, she gave up the rigidity and prejudicethat cameto her from her supposedbetter-half conventional Ted Hughes. Ted was unfaithful not only to his first spouse Plath but went on to live with other women. But Plath finds her creative power to counter-respond through literary creation as a way to work out therapy ofhealing herself, in order to overcome psychic paralysis thought she had to succumb to death by suicide.

The sad detail narrationof herunnatural demise all through her literary compilation has become as much a major part of her cultural legacy as her poetic genius. By allusion to the Nazis, the Concentration Camps,the Dachau,and to Auschwitz,she touches on the universal subject of depression and madness, life and death, and love and war. Such were soreal unlike the kind of 20th century British Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* where the theme of war and love becomes romantic andcomedy at the end of the play.She writes;

“I am interested in the battles, in wars, in Gallipoli, the First World War and so on and I think as I age, I am becoming more and more historical” [5].

Plath says to Peter Orr in 1962 interview, just a couple of months before her death. When she was young and life was better like any youth of her age, she enjoyed the pleasures and joys of growing up as told by her in her early poems. However, there is a marked twist to everything she experienced.Anne Stevenson would say that she may be called as, “a martyr mainly to the recurrent psychodrama that staged itself within *The Bell Jar* of her tragically wounded personality” [5].a tragic hero who expresses herself as:

“Dying

Is an art, like everything else?

I do it exceptionally we.” (Debata, 2013)

The two sides of the history and culture echo in her works as she moved across the countries like America and England. When Plath went and lived in England, she comes in contact with the English poet Ted Hughes, and his culture. Their romance, marriage, then becoming a mother, struggle between motherhood and unfulfilled married life turning to night mare, and Ted’s garrulous treatment towards wife Plath come as the darker side of England.The burden of the past caused by the premature demise of her father comes alive in Plath as if it was fate or an inheritance from her marriage to Ted Hughes. Born in a strong academic family environment in Winthrop, Sylvia Plath’s importance in American history is derived from the literary excellence of her writing. They invite the readers to pause and use ellipsis, thetechniques of Harold Pinter in order to read between the lines of Plath’sgroanings before taking her own life, “Please call Dr. Horder” (Atlas, 2017)— along with-itthe doctor’s phone number.Such was the plight of mid-twentieth-century intellectual women in America.



The nation entered World War II in December 7, 1941. Plath witnessed too much of political and media output like the increase of war films in the 1940s. It brought long-standing effects on Sylvia's "The Thin People" where Plath describes war-torn scenes bringing to light the turmoil and chaos inside her. Her depression intensifies in the dead winter of 1963. The far-sighted vision of the Smith College in the 50s where Plath graduated in 1955, was a place where women education was given importance so that there would be educated children in the place but such a shift in the initial stage led to an awkward juncture between women re-entering the labour force during war and men returning from war to occupy the workplaces of women. This time in Plath's life was marked by the disillusionment of transition in a changing society.

Plath did not live in the Berlin Plantation Generation of old because she lived in the modern age. However, her justification for her first suicide attempt with thoughts that she would be locked in a mental hospital for the rest of her life is almost similar to the historical plantation in the southern US in the late 17th to early 19th century where the notorious culprits were thrown there till the demanded requirement was fulfilled. During her suffering from mental torment, when she needed the support of a strong man-power by her side like her father and husband Ted, ironically, it was her only family, especially her who supported her financially and emotionally. With the use of extreme groaning phrases such as "We have come so far, it is over," and words like "dead," "Stiffens," and "empty," the entire poem feels like it had been written by a no more living dead author.

Dennis Walder writes that Hughes (1930– 1998) was a 'war poet at one remove, writing out of the impact of memory – the individual memory of his father, and the collective memory of English culture'[6] As an innocent infant growing up in the 1930s, Ted Hughes's childhood was overwhelmed by the tragedy of two wars. His poems from *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and to *Wolf watching* (1989) [7] reflect upon these conflicts and their impact. While the influence of the First World War was heart-rending and hard to recover from fear and uncertainties, the Second World War strikes the young Hughes, with the inconsolable loss of his much-loved brother, Gerald. The subject of Hughes and war is less explored area of the poet's work. Nevertheless, the war had a major impact on Hughes's life and work all through his literary career. Hughes wrote: "Three beautiful women - all in love, and a separate life of joy visible with each, all possessed but own soul lost." [3]. Such attitude of Ted resounds in the current contemporary vogue in regard to male-female and much more husband-wife relationships in the civilized world of America.

The heart-aching agony is felt by the victims like no other. Positivists tell, that suffering transforms, and becomes salvific and not crushed by the side of a good friend's shoulder to cry on. The two affluent couples could have had a long-lasting successful family life if not for the circumstances and influence of time and culture in their social circle. In spite of her misery



Plath's work paved way for the exploration of a feminist martyr to the male-dominant world, and the treatment of psychiatric patients.

II. Conclusion:

By analysing the works of Sylvia Plath alongside the tragic events in her life, one has no doubt regarding author Plath's importance to the American world. Her poems became as large as the world, reaching out to numerous cultures and races in her 20th century up till today in the 21st century. Her poetic vision was a visualization dictated by her brilliant mind, which knew no boundaries. Her novel and poems roar womenfolk's woes at the backdrop of patriarchal society not because a woman is writing but by the reason that she is a transcendentalist who asserts women's identity in a possible headstrong gender-biased world. How is it that friends who knew her in her hometown, during her studentship, and the like, did not find a place much in her literary piece? Or could it be that she was so obsessed to seek love and attention from a male counterpart like her dad and Ted? A fair-weather friend who did not bother to care and consider the vulnerable Plath invites several critics to critique Plath's condition in the developed nation of America at her age and today. Hence, she continues to inspire, fascinate and resonate through all borders and generations even after death.

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