

Breaking the Chains of Male Chauvinism and Celebrating Feminism in Sylvia Plath's and Kamala Das' Poetry

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Abstract: The present research examines masculine chauvinism, feminism, and how they are portrayed in Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das' poetry. It explores the idea of male supremacy and its negative implications, contrasting them with the feminist movement's support for the autonomy and rights of women. The study reveals the poets' experiences living under the shadow of male domination as it dissects the themes of love, identity, and death in their works. The different reactions of the poets to male chauvinism are studied via a comparative analysis of poems like "Mushroom" and "An Introduction," illustrating their transitions from resistance to final revolt against social conventions. In the setting of male-dominated society, as shown in Plath and Das' poetry, this research illuminates the changing narratives of empowerment and resistance.

Keywords: Chauvinism, Feminism, Love, Identity, empowerment and Resistance.

I. Introduction

I.1 Feminism

The Latin term "femina," which means woman, is the root of the English word "femism," which was initially used to refer to the concerns about the equality of women's rights. Although the word "feminism" is used in a variety of ways by various authors, it first gained popularity in the 20th century to describe organised movements for women's liberation from patriarchal tyranny and the fight for women's suffrage or voting rights in western nations.

The purpose of feminism is to identify, create, and realise political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. Feminism is a collection of political movements, ideas, and social movements. Feminist groups have fought and still fight for women's rights, including the right to vote, equal pay, property ownership, access to education, equality in marriage, and protection from violence and sexual harassment.

1.2 Theory of Feminism

Feminism is expanded into theoretical and philosophical disciplines by theory of feminism. It includes writings from a range of academic fields, such as anthropology, sociology, economics, art, history, literary criticism, etc. Feminist theory focuses on gender politics, power dynamics, and sexuality with the goal of understanding gender inequalities. Its principal objective is to advance women's rights. Discrimination, stereotypes, objectification (particularly sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy are all topics covered by feminist philosophy.

1.3 Defining Feminism

According to Oxford dictionary (2017) feminism is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes”.

According to Jane Freedman (2001) Feminism is not unitary concept, but a diverse and multifaceted grouping of ideas, and indeed actions:

Any attempt to provide a baseline definition of a common basis of all feminisms may start with the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women’s inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. Furthermore, one could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, Political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. (p.1)

The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism.

Chaman Nahal (1991) a noted critic observes the basic concept of feminism as:

A mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religious group. When women will free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (p.17)

1.4 Male-Chauvinism

Male-Chauvinism is the belief that men are inherently superior over women. It is the attitude of men superiority towards women. Men are frequently considered as dominant and women are inferior not from recently but from ancient time. Women’s marginalization is an old story. Even great thinkers and philosophers have regarded women as inferior to men. Aristotle, the great philosopher believed that femininity is an incomplete version of masculinity. He believed that a woman lacks qualities that are essential to men. He believed that women are defective by nature and incomplete in comparison to men. They are mentally and physically weaker than men and should passively allow men to dominate.

In Greek and Roman cultures the head of the family (i.e. male) was entitled to authority and allowed to dominate over the women of the family. Similar authority was installed in the form of Pater Familia (the father) in Roman family institution. In Indian context the same authority of Karta (the head of the family) has been taken for granted. Certain submissive and slavish tendencies were defined as essential features of womanhood. Hence, women have been confined to the domestic spaces and forced to adhere to duties as docile mothers, sisters and wives primitively.

Simone De Beauvoir has done a lot of research on women and her thesis was found in The second Sex. She notes in this works that women are considered secondary in relation to men from the ancient time. It is not necessity of feminine feature but it is the result of education and social tradition under the

control of men. Her famous assertion "one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman" argues that women's inferior position is not a natural or biological but one that is created by society and civilization. And the roles and social construction assigned to women by civilization made them inferior to that of men. And this social construction of woman has meant continued oppression for women.

1.5 Male-Chauvinism projected in English Literature

The feminist ideologies and the concept of Male-chauvinism also influenced the English literature. The majority of the Novels and Poetry depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated housewives and oppressed lives of women. Men and especially women novelists have played a crucial and momentous role in depicting women as oppressed and domination of men over them. They have added the women's perspective and feministic dimensions to the novels. These writers mean putting an end to the silent sufferings of women.

Thomas Hardy in his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* portrays a poor innocent country girl who is victimized by the combined forces of Victorian patriarchal society, the injustice of social law, the hypocrisy of social prejudice and the inequality of male dominance the protagonist, Tess, symbolic of rural women who were mercilessly ravaged in male-dominated world. Alec's act of raping is the cruelest event Tess experienced in the novel is clearly shows male dominance over a female. The male dominated world sacrifices Tess, for she violates the conventions which are in favor of male superiority and dominance over women. Her unbearable pressures come from male dominance personified in Alec and Angel in the male-centered society where everything complies with male will and man-favored principles.

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* characters struggle to preserve their soul. Clarissa's soul has been injured because of her marriage with Richard. By marriage Clarissa became Mrs. Dalloway. Change of the name can be considered as change of one's identity. So marriage depicts her dependence to a male sex.

Shakespeare shows in *Hamlet* female character, Ophelia, who is victimized by the male ego. She is victimized by Hamlet's unmanageable ego which causes him to kill. Hamlet kills Ophelia's father and causes her to fall in a state of depression. Shakespeare begins to show Ophelia's depression which is caused by her father's death and Hamlet's madness. As a result, Ophelia becomes mad. This madness can be seen as Ophelia's active rejection of patriarchal restraint. However the depression and madness that caused Ophelia's death is the product of hamlet's machinations and male dominance.

Robert Browning in his poem *My Last Duchess* showed the cruelty of Victorian men against women through the use of dramatic monologue that indirectly criticized the treatment of women as slaves and inferior. The dead "duchess", a symbol of the persecuted Victorian women, as the victim of the Duke's arrogance and egoism who symbolizes men superiority and authoritative over women. Here the speaker is duke Ferrara who addresses a portrait his dead wife. The duke complains to the envoy about his last wife with whom he was discontented because she was kind to the people and poor. And the kinder to others she is, the more furious the husband becomes. The poem ends with the duke's insistence on having the envoy's master's daughter as the inevitable wife. He accepts to get married to a lady, whom he hasn't been familiar with, only for her richness and nobility. The Victorian Age lacks assured by the fact that half-a-million Victorian women were unmarried due to the Victorian greed.

1.6 Themes in Sylvia Plath's poetry

Sylvia Plath is a feminist writer. Most of her poetry is mainly about 20th century feminism and women's social injustices. Her poems criticize the male aggression and depict men being responsible for the social injustices. Her poetry reflects variety of themes but most of them are love, death and search for identity and women liberation in patriarchal system.

1.6.1 Love and Sex

Both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have portrayed the themes of Love and Sex in their poetry. The contrast, which is glaring between these poets, is 'the restraint' Sylvia Plath has maintained towards these themes. All the poems written by Sylvia Plath, including the posthumous collection, *Ariel* can be grouped under love poems. She is in love with nature, in love with sea, in love with her dead-father or in love with death itself. The normal erotic love, which she ought to have experienced as a young girl does not make an impression on her as poetic themes. She was utterly disillusioned with the concept and as a result love in the normal sense of the term is conspicuously absent in her poetry.

1.6.2 Thirst for Death

Sylvia Plath has made a sincere quest in search of Love and Death. In her poem *Lady Lazarus* Plath confirms her strong faith in rebirth and resurrection: Out of the ash she rises with her red hair and she eats men like air. "Out of the ashes rise with my red hair and I eat men like air" (*Lady Lazarus*, 82-84). It further makes obvious her repulsion on men. She believes that Suicide, Death and Resurrection may fetch her eternal happiness. That is why, it seems, she loves death.

1.6.3 Struggle for Identity and Women Liberation

The symbols that Plath use in her poems, practically all of which are concerning dying, refer to women's position in a patriarchal cultural system and their struggle to become independent individuals. Through death women in the poems transform themselves into ashes, red-haired demons, evaporating dew, sparkling stars, and pure acetylene. These are symbols of the embodiment of women new identities as the free, powerful, beautiful, pure, and independent human beings. But whatever their forms are, the women major source of endeavor in achieving their identity is their discontent resulting from the attributes of womanhood that ensnare them. The female characters of the poems are made inferior, depersonalized, and oppressed but struggle until they eventually achieve freedom and sense of self. In the poem *Daddy*, the woman has succeeded in killing the men that dominate her life; while after dying, the woman in *Lady Lazarus* transfigures into a killing agent and eats the man who has treated her as a thing. In *Fever 103°* and in *Ariel* the women have transformed themselves into untouchable and unseen matters so that they become superior over men; and the woman in *Death & Co.* in her powerlessness and surrender to death still has a hope for a new self-rebirth.

Kukuh Prayitno Subagyo (2009) in his Article said that the messages of Plath's poems are very meaningful for the feminists because they refer to women's constant and anguished search for identity, a typical feminists theme. The women of the poems implicitly declare war against men. Plath's poems do speak about this.

1.6.4 Themes in Kamala Das's poetry

Being a feminist writer her poetry reflects her restlessness as a sensitive woman moving in the male-dominated society. Her poetical collections in English are: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse and other poems* (1973). Most of them are autobiographical in which she expresses her true self that is characterized by extreme sincerity and

integrity. Her Poetry revolves around themes of love, sex, death and quest for identity.

1.6.4.1 Love and Frustration

Theme of love and sex occupies a very important place in kamala Das's poetry. She is a poet who explores themes of love and of sexual relationship. In her poem Substitute loses all her hope and faith in male dominated society and discovers that love is all blackmail and full of sorrows and frustration. Her poems can be seen questing for true love ended in frustration and discontentment.

Davendra cohli (1974) comment in this context in Kamala Das:

Almost, all the critics of Kamala Das have been quick to notice that part of the strength of poetry emanates from her powerful personality. But while the vigor of her personality seems to operate rather transparently, and on the surface as it were, it does not detract from the complexity of the women's ambivalence which is the certitude and the precariousness of sexual love (p.15)

1.6.4.2 Depiction of Death

Death is a prevalent theme in the poetry of Kamla Das. She has depicted death in her many poems. She examined death from varied angles. Death is not horrifying in her poems. In some of her poems she regarded death as a reliever from pain and sorrows of the world. For her death doesn't make her sad instead it would relieve the poetess of the sufferings. . At various occasions, death seems an easy escape for her from the loneliness of life. There is submissiveness as well as revolt against a man-dominated world. She wants real love but despairs when she does not get it. She wants to be dead if there is no love for her as in The Suicide she writes "love is not to be had I want to be dead". (The Suicide, 53-54)

1.6.4.3 Quest for Self

Quest for Self is also one the major theme of Kamala Das's poetry. As a poet, she is conscious of her creative faculties and tries to break chains and restraints. She indulges in self-awareness, self-exploration and self-introspection in order to define herself poetically. She crossed all the boundaries made culturally by Indian Orthodox Society. Her cravings for identity, in the form of poetry, pave a path for other women. She gives a direction to them to struggle, to fight for their rights and to establish their own identity. That identity which is not culturally imposed upon, but it should be established by females themselves.

1.6.5 The Two Poems: Mushroom and An Introduction

1.6.5.1 Mushroom

The poem Mushrooms represent an oppressed population most likely women who are mounting a quiet revolution. Plath speaks in the voice of one of the mushrooms that they seemingly appear overnight, growing or expanding quietly. They are bound to the same place and take air and nobody sees them. Their struggles and strives for finding right place are unnoticed and unappreciated 'earless' and 'eyeless'. They are unassuming and undemanding "Bland-mannered, asking little or nothing". We are further told that they are treated like common things shelves and table.

In the end she says that despite all obstacles these mushrooms moves on ,their kind multiplies and they will come into power by morning through long nightly struggles and will inherit the earth.

1.6.5.2 An Introduction

The poet says that she is not interested in politics but claims that she can name all the people who

have been in power right from the time of Nehru and can repeat them as days of week, or names of the month. She says about herself that she is Indian brown in color speaks three languages. She likes English for writing but does not like any opposition in this regard because this language is authentic and humane and useful to her as cawing to crow and roaring to lion.

She moves on telling her story when she was a child but later people told her that she had grown up she did not know what ask from her soul mate except love. He took her to bedroom. She did feel beaten although not beaten. She was ashamed of her femininity and then wore brother's clothing to hide her femininity. She was enforced by guardian with warning to fit into socially determined attributes to become wife, mother and remain within four walls.

She says further about her encounter with a man. She calls him not by proper name but a common name "every man" to show his universality. He calls himself everywhere 'I'. It is this "I" who drinks at night ,free to laugh at his own will, succumb to a woman only out of lust and later feels ashamed of his own weakness that lets himself loss to a woman. Towards the end of the poem of the poem, a role-reversal occurs as this "I" gradually transitions to the poet herself. She pronounces how this "I" is also a sinner and saint", beloved and betrayed. There are joys and pains that she has not gone through. Thus she is "I" too.

I.7 Statement of the Problem

Male-chauvinism has predominantly been the focus of Sylvia Plath's and Kamala Das's poetry. Mushroom and An Introduction raise the same issue to depict male-chauvinism through the eye of Feminism.

I.8 Research Questions

Q1. How is the concept of Male-chauvinism highlighted in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das?

Q2. How/what are the responses of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das to male-chauvinism in their poems?

Q3. How much are Plath and Das successful / unsuccessful in depicting male- chauvinism through the eye of feminism in Mushroom and An Introduction?

I.9 Rationale of the Study

Male-chauvinism although present in practical and in realm of literature but as a concept it's not been widely discussed in feminism. What is meant is that its area is still scanty in literature because of its recentness of concept. In the present study various attempts have been made to delineate male-chauvinism through the eye of feminism in the poems, Mushroom and An Introduction.

I.10 Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited to the two poems Mushroom & An Introduction by Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. Moreover this study has been carried from the Point of view of male-chauvinism through the eye of feminism. Respectively both the poems have been analyzed from the point of view of Simon De Beauvoir's work The Second Sex (1952).

I.11 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the present study has been taken from Simon De Beauvoir's work The Second Sex (1952) where she states that:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that

produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.
(p.301)

1.12 Significance of the Study

The present study brings awareness about ignored and trampled creature (Women) in male-dominant society that has been highlighted by both the poems. It provides analysis of male-chauvinism by application of feminism. This study is done for voice of women folk because they are exploited day by day and trampled under men's feet. Moreover this study adds a new angle to the universal challenge and will prove advantageous in the field of feminism.

2 Literature Review

There has been extensive study conducted on the works of both the poets. Tanu Gupta and Anju Bala Sharma in their article titled as Portrayal of Gender Roles in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath (2014) state that Plath wrote in a time when women were still dominated by men. Within the patriarchal society women had to play set roles, they were to remain in the kitchen and were never to speak an unwanted opinion. The showed that gender roles are portrayed in most of the poems of Sylvia Plath. The image of moon which Plath uses in the poem Edge is a traditional image of female passivity and dependency on male. Plath's poem Daddy expresses her feeling of oppression from her childhood and the conflict of this poem is male authority versus the right of a female to control her own life and be free from male domination. In the poem The Applicant, the marriage system, where all the conditions are applied only on wife. She has to obey her husband and do whatever her husband tells her. Like a sensitive artist, Plath tries to communicate her suffering as a matter of human experience in her poetry. Kukuh Prayitno Subagy in his article Confronted Patriarchy in Sylvia Plath's poems (2009) states that the American literary realm, especially those of the 1950s and 1960s had consistently portrayed women as secondary citizens. They had been put under men domination and thus lost their identity and been unable to determine their own fate. They played roles what men prescribed for them, both in the home and in their social milieu. This article showed that a number of Sylvia Plath's poems also depicted confrontation against this phenomenon of patriarchy in which women have been inferior to and abused by men. Moreover, further analysis took place on Plath's poems i-e Lady Lazarus, Daddy, Death & Co, Fever 103° and Ariel that the symbols and the female characters of the poems the poet used in the poems not only described women inferior, depersonalized, and oppressed but their struggle until they eventually achieve freedom and sense of self.

Another research done by Maher A. Mahdi (2014) titled as From a Victim of the Feminine Mystique to a Heroine of Feminist Deconstruction: Revisiting Selected poems of Sylvia Plath states that a large number of Plath's poems deals with the feeling of women, treated as an object, a commodity, not allowed to be an independent person. Furthermore this study investigated some selected poems by Sylvia Plath and showed that these poems represent Plath as a relentless feminist writer and activist until her death. The study follows the development of the poet's identity from a helpless poor object into a fighter who tried to win all her wars against the male sex.

Dr. Supriya and Sweta Singh (2015) in their research paper The image of Indian Womanhood in the poems of Kamala Das evaluate Kamala Das from feminist perspective that she is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence who gives expression to it more clearly than any other Indian woman poet and show strong sense of consciousness towards the feminine psyche. Through her poetry

she revolt against the restraints in the patriarchal society and express the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role and asserting her individuality, identity and freedom. She adopts an unconventional and innovative manner to give voice to the mute longings of the suppressed woman to free herself from the secondary status, her search for an identity and individuality as well as her need of love and emotional fulfillment.

Abhishek Sarkar and Dr. Amit Bhowmick (2015) in their combined research *Traces of Feminist Approaches in the poems of Kamala Das* argued that a note of a feminist tenor is an unmistakable presence in Kamala Das works and her conscious attempt to give a rejection to patriarchal setup makes her much criticized and sensational but authentic figure. In this research they concluded that Kamala Das through her works turn out to be an iconoclast in shattering the patriarchal social marginalizing and stimulates Indian women to identify the room of their own and realize that they should not suppress their sensation for the sake of patriarchal domination. They should, on the contrary, give voice to their latent emotion and thus establish their own individuality, beyond the shadows of masculine hegemony.

Dr. Aradhana Vaidya (2016) in his research *Kamala Das: A Fiery Feminist and Confessional Voice of the Post-independence Era* stated that Kamala Das poems are highly feminist in tone and confessional in nature. She dared the society which was male-centric. Although she argued that she was not a feminist and confessional but bundle of her poetry proved her as fiery feminist. In many of the poems she rebelled against patriarchal society e.g. in *An Introduction* she states:

*I wore a shirt and my Brother's trousers,
cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness (33-35)*

Such naked confessional and fiery feministic poems have made her stand illustrious in the realm of Indian poetry in English.

The present research discusses the poems *Mushroom* and *An Introduction* in the light of Male-chauvinism through the eye of Feminism with the help of framework taken from Simon De Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1952) where she states that:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch which is described as feminine. (p.301)

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

According to the nature of the study, qualitative method is followed that involves data exploration for investigating the Research Questions I, 2 and 3. The study is based on information provided by the close analysis of the text of the poems from Male-chauvinism's perspective through the eye of feminism. The present research paradigm based on the framework taken from Simon De Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1952), provided guidance to the researcher throughout the research.

3.2 Design of the Study

The design of this research is based on the concept of male-chauvinism, the exploitative attitudes of men towards women and the voice of the poets for their rights. It is discussed through the eye of

feminism in the framework provided by Simon De Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1952).

3.3 Data Collection

The primary sources of this study are the texts of Sylvia Plath's and Kamala Das's poems, *Mushroom* and *An Introduction*. The secondary sources are taken from the existing works of different critics and writers on feminism and also research articles and journals related to the area of this research.

3.4 Data Analysis

The present Research is qualitative in nature. The poems have been analyzed through close reading of text on the basis of male-chauvinism through the eye of feminism with the help of selected framework Simon De Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1952) for both the poems where she states that:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this

creature intermediate between male and eunuch which is described as feminine (p.301)

4 Analysis and Discussion

Male-chauvinism is the belief of men's superiority over women. Women are considered worthless, imperfect and domestic objects, while men are considered powerful, perfect and master in the realm of it.

Women are deprived of basic rights. They are treated like slaves who are exploited from past to the present time. They are considered inferior both biologically and psychologically in male-dominant society. While men enjoy free life in every walk of life unlike women who are enclosed in home walls. It is this man made society and civilization which make them inferior and consider them as burden on society.

In different times, women through their writing voices their tender feelings. This is one of the major tools for them to show how they are being treated unequally and exploited in male-dominant society. Women adore men while men take opportunity of their weakness and oppress them. The poems of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das depict the same feelings.

4.1 Metaphorical Weakness

The title of the poem *Mushroom* is use as a metaphor for women. Who are ignored and considered weak like mushrooms. They live under the dark shadow of trees (men). They live on what is left from men, as in the first two stanzas the speaker says:

Very quietly

Our toes, our noses Take hold on the loam, Acquire the air.

(Mushroom 3-6)

Women are held down and suffocated by men. They are so suppressed that they cannot breath and walk darelly but "very quietly" in the presence of men. What they do, they are unappreciated and unseen to the society. Their activities and works are unnoticed, as:

Nobody sees us,

The small grains make room.

(Mushroom, 7, 9)

Nobody sees them what they are doing. No one is giving a room of appreciation for them. They are ignored. No one is giving a shelter of bravo for them. Ironically, only men are appreciated in man-dominant society because they are considered the masters while women are unnoticed because they are considered weak and inferior.

Women's voices are not listened and their works are not seen by anybody. They have to work extremely hard to find their place in man-dominant society. In the poem the poet says the same that:

Earless and eyeless, Perfectly voiceless,

Widen the crannies,

Shoulder through holes.

(Mushroom, 15-18)

Nobody listens to women's voices and feelings. It also makes us think how women are 'earless and eyeless' before men and are expected not to think of their own but only think of what men tell them. They have to stand mute and "perfectly voiceless" before men while the men talk. Moreover, women have to work extremely hard as compared to men if they want to find their place.

4.2 Shadow of Men

Women are forced to live under the shadow of men where they have to ask little or nothing from men. In the poem these feelings are highlighted by the poet where she says that:

Diet on water,

On crumbs of Shadow, Bland-mannered, asking Little or nothing.

(Mushroom, 19-22)

Women have to live under men's dominance in their lives. They are supposed to do just a sort of node, smile and have no other opinion of their own. They are made stereotype as "Bland-mannered" emotionless and weak. It is not by nature but a man-made culture which makes them so. They are expected to have no other role instead of domestic chores. As they are made stereotype as weak and inferior they have to live in four walls of house and have to carry the burden of house. In the same poem the poet says in the feeling the following way that:

We are shelves, we are Tables, we are meek,

We are edible (Mushroom, 25-27)

Just like shelves and tables they are unnoticed and are just expected to be there to support and carry the burden of household. They are totally consumed by men. They are completely dominated by men and use them for everything what men want them to do.

4.3 Man is Authority

This poem voices the longing and complaint of a woman that is related not only to herself but to every woman as she says:

He is every man who wants a woman, just as I am every Woman who seeks love.

(An Introduction, 46-48)

There is domination of man over woman not in terms of social existence but also in terms of sexual relationship. Man considers himself as an owner of woman's body and mind whereas woman is forced to live a marginalized class. They have to worship men and keep himself mute before them. The poet

says at start of the poem that:

I don't know politics but I know the names Of those in power, and can repeat them like

Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru

(An Introduction, 1-3)

Here the poet ironically exposes the politics of male-chauvinism that women are not aware of politics. They are supposed only to abide the commands of powerful politics. Political leaders have power to do what they want subordinates to do men also have power over women in society. And women have to obey their male authority. They are just victim of politics and their knowledge has no impact on their lives. They are not free in their choices:

Don't write in English they said, English is Not your mother-tongue.

(An Introduction, 7-8)

Even in marriage system women are treated with bias. They are considered only a child bearer. They are married at very early ages and are not able to win true love from their husbands. In the poem the poet expresses the same feelings that:

I was child, and later they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs Swelled and one or two place sprouted hair. When I ask for love, not knowing what else to ask For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

(An Introduction, 24-30)

Women completely suffer in male-dominant society. They are not able to win love from their husbands but only sexual assault and loveless relation from them. They are being married at early age and considered only child bearers. There is no one to give them true live and listen to their feelings. The same feelings are there in other place of the poem as:

I met a man, loved him. Call

Him not by any name, he is every man Who wants a woman, just as I am every

Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste Of rivers, in me . . . the ocean's tireless

Waiting.

(An Introduction, 45-50)

4.4 Woman as Domestic Animal

Here the poet explores the relationship of women and men on issue of love whereas men seek women for lust and women seek men for love. Men make her an object for sexual pleasure. While women want them for love and wait them to get the same love but in vain. In traditional society they are to adjust themselves to home walls and domestic chores. They are instructed by society to do different roles:

Dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, Be quarreler with servants.

(An Introduction, 35-37)

Men allow them only for domestic chores and they are instructed to put on sarees, to play role of cooking, washing, handicrafts, etc. Here women are shown as passive and submissive. Even their

gestures, postures and movements inside home are controlled and directed by male members. They have to stay inside home walls and follow the commands of men. In the following lines the poet says the same way:

Don't sit

*On walls or peep in through our laced-draped windows. Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutt. It is time to*

*Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games Don't play schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when Jilted in love.*

(An Introduction, 38-45)

Women are cut out from center of society and are forced to live a life of inferior class under men domination. Although they have feelings, dreams, desires and demands as like men but they are being ignored. They are always confined in the four walls with domestic fencing. The poet in the above lines clearly shows in a simple and candid language the minds set of male-dominant society where men not only define domestic roles of women and what they should do, how should they behave what kind of profession should they adopt, but also what they should not do. Here the repeated use of “don'ts” show male- chauvinism and act as power of men over women in male-dominant society and women have to follow them. They are made inferior by society, and it is this society and man- made civilization which imposes a name and role on woman and she has to carry it. So in using the line “it is time to choose a name, a role” the poet ironically exposes the power of male-chauvinism.

4.5 Reflection of Protest

When the freedom of one stays strengthened and the oppression of other grows increasing. And if one is being made superior and other is made inferior that person is exploited day by day in the same society. Then they compel to start a reaction against it. Same is the case with women; they are made peripheral, marginalized and oppressed by male with the established and conventionalized role of male-chauvinism. Man is considered superior and given any sort of freedom, while woman is inferior here and deprived of freedom. They are exploited and limited to the domestic life only. Writers in any era started a reaction against this to shatter these man-made traditions and raised voice for women. Both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das passed through the same experiences. In many of their poems we find woman trying different ways of protest against male-chauvinism and wishes to throw away this. Mushroom and An Introduction raise the same issue of protest.

The very title of the poem used as metaphor for women. Persistent struggle of women is shown overall in this poem. The growths of mushrooms, their growing symbolize the fight of women's for independence and rights. At the start of the poem the poet describe women's silent way of struggle:

Overnight, very Whitely, discreetly Very quietly

Our toes, our noses Take hold on the loam Acquire air.

(Mushroom, 1-6)

Here the poet shows a silent way of growing woman, although they are suffocated. But still are moving forward very wisely for their rights. Because they suffer. They are deprived of the basic necessity (even acquiring air). They are not able to endure it further. Although in their revolution they are to endure

greater pain but still are moving stronger in their protest as in the coming lines:

*Soft fist insist on Heaving the needles, The leafy bedding, Even the paving.
Our hammers, our rams, Earless and eyeless Perfectly voiceless, Widen the crannies.
Shoulder through the holes.*

(Mushroom, 7-18)

Their revolution is not violent but “soft fist”. Even though they are weaker still they are growing. The imagery of hammers and rams making us know about their protest but by using it to mushroom it makes the protest quiet. They wisely grow. They are persistent in their struggle. Their persistence is their greatest weapon. Woman has little decision in society that impacts every one. But their painstaking efforts expanding their status and forcing themselves forward can give them acceptance. Despite their weakness which is stereotyped, they are strong in their movements and increasing in strengths day by day. The poet says the same that:

Nudgers and shovers In spite of ourselves

Our kind multiplies (Mushroom, 28-30)

Women are strong and steadfast in their protest against male-chauvinism despite all things come in their way; they are moving. Their steadfastness will break their barrier of male-chauvinism and allow them freedom. They still have hope for their independence. They are not hopeless in their struggle. One day they will have the freedom as it is expressed in the last lines of the poem:

We shall by morning Inherit the earth.

Our foot's in the door.

(Mushroom, 31-33)

It is evidently shown that after attaining the first step i.e. preparing for independence, the second step in gaining independence and breaking away male-chauvinism is being made satisfactory. They will achieve what they deserve.

4.6 Rebellion at Last

Male-chauvinism is not only limited to Plath's society, Indian society also suffers from it where women are beaten, exploited and conventionalized as inferior objects. Indian society made different values which are imposed only on women. These discriminations, these prejudices against women make them motivated and impel to start a protest against this male-chauvinism in order to throw away these rigid restrictions. Kamala Das is not a simple woman who accepts this male-chauvinism without protesting it. Like many poems in *An Introduction* she clearly shows rebellion against it:

Don't write in English, they said, English is Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave Me alone, critics, friends, visitings cousins, Every one of you? Why not let me speak in Any language I like? The language I speak,

Becomes mines, its distortions, its queernesses All mine, mine alone.

(An Introduction, 7-13)

The poet shows a little rebellion against male domination. She prefers to English despite the objections of society. The male-chauvinism made her crippled her growth and made her paralyzed. She wants to

come out of restrictions of conventionalized system where women are bounded and men are free player. She is compelled to change her identity of womanliness so that she may have the same freedom like men:

Then...I wore a shirt and my

Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness.

(An Introduction, 33-35)

It shows a clear signs of protest to cope with the established system. The changing identity in wearing a brother's dress raise questions here whether women are born women or being made as woman; or if they should change their identity to gain the same freedom as men. The same questions has been challenged by many feminist writers, Simon De Beauvoir is one of them "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman".

5 Conclusion

Male-chauvinism is belief of innate superiority of men over women. It means that men are powerful masters while women are weaker and inferior. It is actually a prejudice of men against women. It is this belief which makes women oppressed and deprived. Feminism on the other hand a movements and ideologies which raise a voice for the rights of women and want them out of the clutches of patriarchy. Various themes reflected in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das include thirst for love, search for identity and death, etc. showing their sufferings from male dominancy. It also shows how women are being deprived of love and rights.

Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das in their poems show different responses toward male- dominance. Women want to throw away oppression and get rid of male-chauvinism. Sometimes they change their identities and sometimes through their struggle show a protest against male dominancy. Mushroom and An Introduction show the same ideology. Despite the surrounding authority of men. They keep on struggling for their rights with a reflection of protest against the established system of exploitation in male-dominant society, transforming into a rebellion at last.

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