CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO SUICIDE AND SUICIDAL LITERATURES

This thesis attempts to explore the concept of suicide, and the literature associated with it. Suicide, as a fact and in fiction, is a most debatable topic, and as with other issues of life, it is steeped in controversies that have riddled through history, stubbornly resisting any kind of closure to the riddle itself. Suicide is as old as humankind, and it has its origins in the creation of the Homo Sapiens. Its kind, methods and approaches may differ, but humans started resorting to this practice as they realized it could provide an ultimate solution that life itself is unable to resolve. This chapters, seeks to introduce suicide as fact and the fictional aspects of suicide, the subsequent chapters attempts to analyze the lives of three women suicides writers Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Virginia Woolf, brilliant in their literary output but who succumbed to the forces of varying pressure and stress, and four women suicide characters from four literatures French, Russian, American, and Indian besides exploring suicide characters from a gender perspective. The rational for the choice of texts suicidal literatures, and the analysis of women writers suicides is based on the popularity and prominence of these suicidal texts and the authors suicides.

Broadly, the thesis will use qualitative methods to study the issues at hand. The specific methods that will be used in thesis are a combination of hermeneutical textual analysis and discourse analysis. Discourse analysis approaches a text from the understanding that it is a communication act. Every text, in that sense, is attempting to communicate the author's intentions to his or her audience. Therefore, there is meaning in
the text. Discourse analysis will also enable the researcher to reveal the sometimes concealed and hidden agendas or motivations behind the text(s) and the subtexts (literature written on it such as those in books, articles in journals and newspapers). In other words a discursive, deconstructive reading and interpretation of the texts and the subtexts will facilitate a comprehensive overview of the problem and the conditions behind that problem. More importantly, the method provides a scope to raise some fundamental ontological and epistemological questions about the problem that is dealt with. The major(dis)advantage of this method is the fact that it is not a 'hard science' that can lead to tangible answers but only an insight based on continuous debate and argumentation. The thesis follows the guidelines of the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* for documentation.

The act of suicide has been a constant factor in human history. Right from the very beginning to this time, the events of suicide have been a distressing phenomenon. Suicide has existed in all human societies with the subject of suicide emerging as one of the storm centers of the intellectual climate. However the understanding and laws concerning it have changed to reflect the values of particular societies. Suicide has always been one of the most important philosophical, moral, ethical, and religious problems throughout history. Debates about the permissibility of suicide have their own history, beginning with the Ancient Greece to our own age. Almost in every age philosophers or thinkers have asked the question whether one could present a morally acceptable norm for the decision to end one's life.

The word “suicide” was first introduced in 17th century. It is said to be derived from the Latin words *sui*(of oneself) and *caedere*(to Kill). Sir Thomas Browene a
physician and a philosopher is known to be the first to coin the term suicide in his *Religio Medici* (1642). According to several Western Sociologists the word 'Suicidium' was used for the first time by Desfontaines in the 18th century (Thakur).


Some cultures, regard suicide as an honorable act given the conditions, in others it is blamed as an impious act against providence or as an illegal act against the laws of the State. In some States, forms of suicide are socially approved and honored in public with ceremony. Beliefs about suicide varied considerably in ancient Greece. Although the objection to suicide was not as strong as it was in the Middle Ages, suicide was accepted as a crime in the cities of Greece. The hands of the corpses of suicides victims were cut off and were buried separately outside the city (Alvarez 58). One of the most important reasons for the taboos against suicide was the linguistic similarity between self-murder and murder of a kindred. *Homo Sapiens* were the first to think of suicide, although different cultures have varied notions for the act of self-inflicted death. Most of these deaths, like those of the ancient Greeks portrayed by Homer, were seen as matters of honor, actions taken to avoid falling into the hands of a military enemy, to atone for a
wrongdoing, or to uphold a religious or philosophical principle (Jamison 13). Hannibal, for example, took poison rather than being captured or dishonored, as did Demosthenes, Cassius, Brutus, Cato, and scores of others. Socrates, who refused to renounce his teachings and beliefs, drank hemlock. In Thebes and Athens, suicide was not against the law, but those who killed themselves were denied funeral rites and the hand that had been used for the act was severed from the arm. The Greek philosophers' view of suicide ran the gamut from mild consideration to praise. The Greeks believed that life was given and taken away by the gods; however there was also a belief that life was not sacred in all its forms. Many Greek philosophers opined that life was not so sacred when lived in sickness, mental suffering or dishonor—the better option would be to gracefully eliminate oneself via suicide.

Plato and Aristotle, considered suicide generally as an act of betrayal that bereft the society of its members to function well. Their views, however, were based not on the inherent evilness of the act of suicide but on the inherent good of contributing to one's community. Plato prohibited suicide because he held that Gods were our guardians and even though he held that death is better than life for him, one should wait for his time patiently. Life is a gift from Gods and we should not reject it, for otherwise one will be punished (Henderson 215) Pythagoreans also generally condemned suicide, not because the act was inherently evil, but because they believed that the body and soul were governed by numerical sequences whose harmony would be disrupted if one killed oneself.

The Epicureans and Stoic schools of philosophy taught that life and death were equally unimportant in the vast universe to the Epicureans, the principle was pleasure
and suicide was an act that produced pain which was evil. Members of these school believed that people should not permit their emotions to rule their decisions when considering whether to quit life. The Stoics saw fate as a powerful force controlling human destinies. They sought to escape the inevitability of death through the illusion of gaining control over death through suicide. For the stoics, suicide was even the most reasonable and desirable way out. Aristotle regarded suicide as an act of cowardice, as well as an act against the State. The Roman law prohibited suicide and further stayed the legal possession of suicide’s wealth. The Romans were more tolerant of suicide than the Greeks. The act was completely accepted as part of life for the Romans. Romans did not accept the notion that life was given by gods, nor did they view it as sacred, therefore there was no moral conflict in disposing of oneself at will. The Roman philosopher Seneca also endorsed this view knowing that he could bring death by slashing his wrist giving Seneca the "feeling of freedom in every view"(Alvarez 81).

However, when the issue of honor or the loss of it was involved, suicide was preferable to the disgrace. The rape of Lucretia very well illustrates this attitude. She is a mythic Roman figure who was raped by a fellow aristocrat. She gathered her family around her informing them of what had happened to her, she kills herself-a highly honorable way of behaving in Roman society.

According to both Christian and Islamic thought, the real punishment for crime of suicides would give by divine judgment and the suicides would be judged for committing an impious crime against providence. This attitude towards suicide has continued for centuries until the Renaissance. During this period, with the upheaval of the static social organization of the Middle Ages and the availability of the writings of
Roman philosophers, thinkers could discuss the issue in a relatively free sphere. After Renaissance, there was a relatively liberal attitude toward suicide and the rates of suicide increased, but it was still considered as a sin and a crime by authorities. The Catholic church from its earliest days opposed suicide and, during the sixth and seventh centuries codified its opposition by excommunicating and denying funeral rites to those who died by their own hand. Suicide was never justifiable, wrote St. Augustine in an authoritative argument for the church, because it violated the sixth commandment of God, "Thou shall not kill", (Redfield 14).

Dante was writing The Divine Comedy at the start of the fourteenth century and during the Middle Ages, suicide was considered a moral sin, a horror and an object of total moral revulsion. While never questioning the orthodox judgment of the crime, he sustained it by devoting one of the ‘grimiest cantos of the inferno’ to the suicides. In the seventh circle, below the burning heretics and the murderers stewing in their river of hot blood, there is a dark, pathless wood, where the souls of suicide victim grow for eternity is the shape of warped poisonous thorns. The harpies, with their great wings and feathered bellies, human faces and clawed feet, nest in these stunted trees and pick at their leaves. The whole wood, full of darkness is also a place of haunting and stomach churning laments and howls (Alvarez, 167).

What distinguished the renaissance attitude to suicide from that of the middle ages was the growth of individualism and its confrontation with the moral problems of life, death and responsibility which had become multiple and complex. It was at this time John Donne wrote the first English defense of suicide, Biathanatos: and his declaration of that paradox, or thesis, that self-homicide is not so naturally sin that it
may never be otherwise”. Although the book was his way of showing off his pedantic wit and learning, the subject of the book was close to his heart. He admitted he had written about suicide because he himself was constantly tempted to it. As Alvarez points out for Donne “Suicide seems not to have been a question of choice or action but of mood, something indistinct but pervasive, like rain” (179). *Biathanatos* centers on the clash between the tradition and the modern. Donne towed the modern line in justifying suicides as he himself was tempted to it, just as he was summing up all the tortured medieval arguments against the act.

One of Donne's greatest and most baffling lyrics, "A Nocturnal upon S.Lucies day, Being the shortest day”, reflects the darkest hour of his life. Written in the middle of the longest night, and in the winter midnight of the year the poem forces itself towards his favorite theme, negation and emptiness, the poem carries an echo "an emptiness beyond emptiness, a deprivation which is also a paralysis of the will and soul" (187). It further depicts a state of mind so sterile as to be beyond even suicide.

When Shakespeare was writing his great tragedies there was a transitional period in Renaissance theatre. Rowland Wymer, in his book *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama* notes it is a time when "Suicide was reacquiring the dignity and honor of its Roman past, but had not lost its medieval connotation of shame and despair" (2) Shakespeare is known to have used suicide in his plays more than any other of his contemporaries. There are thirteen suicides in all, two in *Romeo and Juliet*, one in *Julius Creaser*, one in *Othello*, one in *Hamlet*, one in *Macbeth* and five in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be (3.1.55), soliloquy can be interpreted as his musings on suicide. The speech revolves around the human ethos and humanistic
concerns away from the language of religious despair, which is often associated with Christian suicide. In *King Lear* Gloucester steeped in despair, goes through a simulated 'fall' and is miraculously saved. He views his suicide as a stoic gesture. Shakespeare himself remains ambiguous, between the traditional and modern stance on suicide.

Ophelia's suicide is exempted from the fate of domination on the grounds of her madness. In Othello's suicide, Shakespeare combines both honor and despair to blur the two opposing attitudes. As Wyner says while other "despair at his actions of killing Desdemona, he also makes the decision as on honorable solider to fall on his sword in order to rescue his reputation"(5). The characters in the Roman plays to protect their reputation or to avoid a disgraceful life resort to suicide? Antony's suicide in *Antony and Cleopatra* appears to be a hatched affair and the dignity associated with the act of suicide is reduced. In contrast, Cleopatra's desire to follow “the high Roman fashion”(4.5.9), sees her decked up for the occasion, and her death draws praise even from Augustus Ceaser who states, 'Bravest at the last./she leveled at one purposes and - being royal,/Took her own way'(5.2. 334.6)

Shakespeare's tragedies do not adhere strictly to the Christian doctrine of suicide which was one of it being viewed as a moral transgression and a mortal sin and treated with abhorrence. The Renaissance and the subsequent re-discovery of the ancients along with increasing education of the middle classes would perhaps have paved the way for an aesthetic appreciation of the classical ideas of suicide. This trend continued to be used as a counter balance to the mortal sin of suicide.
Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* first published in 1621, “is a vast, rambling compendium of a book, repetitive, discursive and idiosyncratic to breaking-point, crammed with quotations, anecdotes and impossible references” (190). However distracting the book may be when read, its debate on the theme of suicide is single and simple and sympathetic. Unlike the book *Biathanatos*, which was a posthumous publication and published against Donne’s wishes, Burton’s book was a best-seller. The first three editions as the author himself claimed ‘were suddenly gone, eagerly read’, there were two more editions before his death in 1639, and three more in that century. One commentator pointed out “If one may judge by the frequency of publication, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was three times as popular as Shakespeare’s plays” (quoted in Alvarez, 191). To Burton suicide was neither rational, nor dignified nor measured; people simply kill themselves because their lives have become intolerable: “These unhappy men are born to misery, past all hope of recovery, incurably sick. (quoted in Alvarez 190).

In the eighteenth century, melancholy became ‘spleen’ a mere rationally anatomical term. Montesquieu, Voltaire and Hume as well as lesser figures like Alberto Radicati, Count of Passerano, began a rational approach to the subject. Most writers considered suicide as an extra-literary topic as they felt it was absurd to inflate a trivial private act into a monstrous crime. Hume’s essay “on suicide” was written at least twenty years before his death but was not published officially until 1777, the year after his death. For the young Romantics, death was the great inspire ‘event great consoler’, they made suicide fashionable, “we live in an age of suicide”, was the mood and for the young poets, novelists, dramatists, painters, great lovers and members of countless suicide clubs, to die by one’s own hand is a short and sure way to fame.
As the nineteenth century wore on, Romanticism degenerated, as the ideal of death also collapsed. Suicide and thoughts about it were replaced by more sexually associated activities like homosexuality, incest and sado-masochism. The twentieth century was an age steeped in symptoms of despair and depression. For Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, and most of the important artists it was the common quality that defined their whole creative effort. The central theme that dominated half of literature was death. In the middle ages, the obsession with death was with an eye on the after-life, in the face of it, life itself appeared unimportant and devalued. The modern preoccupation has still to do with death but without the element of an after-life. In Camus’ The Outsider, the priest helps the outsider to overcome his bleak and thankless view of the world, for as the power of religion weakened the power of suicide grew. Confirmed in his belief that ‘no God exists for me’; Kirilov in The Possessed, shoots himself. He commits what Dostoievsky calls a ‘logical suicide’ (quoted in Alvarez 238). Five years after he wrote The Possessed, he returned to the theme of logical suicide in his writing, in a monthly document, The Diary of a Writer. He wrote in the Diary: "It is clear then that suicide- when the idea of immortality has been lost- becomes an utter and inevitable necessity for any man, who by his mental development has even slightly lifted himself above the level of cattle" (241).

St. Augustine absolutely opposed suicide and declared it as the worst of all sins like Plato, he felt that life is the gift of God and rejecting life and shortening the decided time of suffering is a violation against God, it is not accepting the divine will. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas' Aquinas's teaching sealed up the whole question about suicide. He developed St. Augustine's arguments and declared that suicide is not
permissible because it is a mortal sin against God, justice and charity. Thomas Aquinas developed his anti-suicide arguments. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas gives three arguments against suicide. For him, every sin is a sin against God, self and the neighbor; and suicide is a sin against the three of them at the same time. Collecting from the non-Christian sources arguments for anti-suicide, he showed that suicide should not be allowed. One of the influential thirteenth-century theologian Alexander of Hales declared "In no case, under no pretext, is it legitimate to kill oneself" (Quoted in George Minois, 45). The tolerance that the Greeks and Romans had exhibited was shorn away with the declaration that suicide was a sure path to eternal damnation. Jewish custom forbade orations for anyone who committed suicide; mourners’ clothes were not encouraged, and burial was generally limited to an isolated section of the cemetery. The writers of the Renaissance and enlightenment differed in their thinking on suicide- as with their Greco-Roman predecessors-swaying between absolute condemnation and sympathy for those by suicidal thoughts.

During the nineteenth century, new perspectives on the act of suicide came into existence, following a shift from the rigid religious central to a stacking of ideas based entirely on a religious foundation. A major development of the era was naturalist Charles Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The theory of evolution set in motion the idea that every being on the earth had evolved from an earlier form, and that if life was not given by God, then it would not be a crime to give it up. This rationalistic view of the university was hacked by modern psychiatry at the end of the nineteenth century by Sigmund Freud through his invention of psychoanalysis. His theory that suicide was the result of unconscious aggression haunted against oneself moved suicide
from the realm of religion to that of medicine, formulating the belief that suicidal persons were 'sick' rather than being involved with demonic forces.

As Freud was presenting his innovative ideas, another writer was making an essential contribution to the study of suicide in France. In 1897, Emile Durkheim published *The Suicide*, a path breaking study on self-killing… (Newspaper). Durkheim felt that modern industrialization contributed to the first and third categories of suicides with the communities fragmenting and the support systems disintegrating, contributing to feelings of alienation in potential suicide victims.

Through the twentieth century and the twenty first, perceptions of suicide have fragmented much as society itself has gained in complexity and diversity. The reason associated with suicides was no longer singular or monolithic but plural, diverse, and heterogeneous. Suicide has become different things to different people a sin, a fundamental, human right, a disease, or a social ill. (21) The debate on suicide has further intensified with the human rights organization stating that suicide is not only permissible, it is a fundamental human right that should be protected by law. In his 1999 book, *Fatal Freedom: The Ethics and Politics of Suicide*, psychiatrist Thomas Szasz emphasized on the individuals complete liberty over his or her body and that the right of suicide should not be infringed upon by the State or the medical establishment. He writers, "The evidence that suicide is not a medical matter is all around us. We are proud that suicide is no longer a crime, yet it is plainly not legal" (Szasz 67).

Dostoevsky was criticized in justifying suicide. He decided to write an article to clarify his own ideas about suicide in his own voice. With this aim, in December 1876, he
wrote an essay called “Unsubstantiated Statements” in his Diary. In this text mainly, he tried to show suicide as the disbelief in immortality. Dostoevsky was always impressed with the news of someone killing himself without any obvious reason. He found such suicides mysterious and created several stories about the protagonists who take their life without any reason.

As a concept and as a form of human behavior, therefore, suicide provides a unique space in the life of human beings. We need to explore the meaning as well as the reasons for it, both occur on a cultural and social background as much as it does on an individual level. Suicide was viewed as a fluid, conflicted notion rather than a stable concept or easily definable event, as it extremely strange behavior, for its incompatibility with the natural drive of life. Like every other conceptual phenomenon, the concept of suicide too has undergone tremendous changes. While suicide is still suspect, one small shift it has undergone is that it has become 'respectable', provoking intense scientific research on the subject. Instead of being totally condemned and denunciated, efforts are on to find specific reasons for the cause. The change was actually initiated in 1897 with the publication of Emily Durkheim's classic *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Since the 1920s, there has been a plethora of scientific studies, and theoretical perceptions from psycho-analysts, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists, sociologists, social workers, statisticians and medical men. Contribution to this aspect has increased manifold, and as a research subject, suicide has become a crucial site for debates and discussions, it even has its own name 'suicidology'. There are medical health units, forums, magazines, emergency
centers, prevention centers and intentional conferences to cater to specific area of suicidology.

One of the fallacies associated with suicide is that it is inextricably mixed with young love, the paradigm being Romeo and Juliet-youthful, idealistic and passionate. However, statistics prove that suicide is also associated with the aged between the ages of fifty five and sixty five. Agreeably the young are also great attempters, between the ages of twenty five and forty four. Whatever be the notional age, it is as professor Erwin believes that attempted suicide is a cry for help (quoted Alvarez 101). Another notion is that suicide is produced by bad weather. It is pointed out that the suicide of Sylvia Plath trapped in her flat with two little children, in one of the worst winters in 150 years, and the monstrous weather coupled with illness, loneliness, depression and cold, drove her to suicide. Suicide is usually connected with winter, perhaps, the result of the darkness of the deed and the weather of the soul meeting its kind in the skies.

Suicide or self-murder is prevalent in every society, and despite the factors held responsible for its prevalence, no exact cause can be given for its occurrence, as suicide is after all, the result of a choice. Suicide sans all categories of race, class, colour, gender location for it is almost "an act of ambition that can be committed only when one has passed beyond ambition"(107).

To select women writers and their works from nineteenth and twentieth centuries is not to claim that the impulse of suicide is the invention of modern literature, but-first, it is to specify the matter of study so as to achieve more specification. These female characters exhibit complicated and fragmented life histories and re-envision their
subjectivity and resistance by challenging the structure created by the patriarchal society. For them suicide was also a way to escape the patriarchy and finally be free. Obviously, there are some reasons that could lead a person to make the choice of taking one’s own life such as suffering from an incurable illness or exorbitant amount of debt and so on. In brief, suicide among women writers could also have been an ethic-political choice due to a fascination towards freedom and a dream to escape from the patriarchy. Moreover, the presence of women’s dreams are often presented in their writing as being ways to access liberty, something they did not get without fighting for a long time. Since actions sometimes speak louder than words, and that women were silenced subjects through generations, suicide was also used as a tool, a weapon to express anger, their fear, and disagreement.

The factors that lead to suicide arise from the individual’s psychological tension from the break-up of family bonds, the conflict between internal and external life, infidelity in marriage, hypocrisy in human relations, nostalgic recreations of the past, jealousies and petty rivalries in inter-personal relationships, the distance between the dream world and the real, psychological traumas and the alienation.

This research is a an analytical study that aims to discover the actual motivations of the female protagonists in committing suicide in four fictions Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, The Awakening and Voices in the City and in the life of Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf and Anne Sexton. The researcher has used the theories on suicide to analyze the selected texts and to study the events that have led to suicide by famous women writers who chose to take their own life.
It is a human tendency either to live well, or to die, as the numerous events of suicide suggest and unfold the mysterious to go either way. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are still well known for their extreme pessimism, but they influenced the emergence of the philosophy of existentialism based on man’s subjectivity, individuality and atheism. The philosophy of existentialism believes that though man is free, yet he is condemned and thrown into this world to live without any aim and meaning. That is why man is what he makes of himself. This way Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were the precursors of the movement of existentialism in the realm of philosophy, which found the human world as an absurdity, full of absurd situations grounded in jealousy, fear and anxieties.

The French philosopher and writer, and representative of atheistic existentialism was Albert Camus (1913-1960), who said that “the outside world, the universe, is the state of the subject” and for him, the only philosophical problem is the problem of suicide. He was an extremely pessimistic philosopher who thought, man is always in an absurd state. He encounters absurd situations and is doomed for meaningless and aimless activity, constantly facing the fear of death. Camus was a thinker who supported extreme individualism and irrationalism, and he suggested that the only solution to man’s anxieties, fears and ambitions, is suicide. This way the fundamental concept of existentialism culminated in irrationalism, pessimism and a philosophy of suicide.

The discipline of sociology and psychology produced prominent theories on suicide. The study of women writers’ suicide and literature is done within the frameworks of theories propounded by Freud, Emil Durkheim, Jack Douglas, and Melvin Seaman. These theorists have contributed to the formulation of theories on suicide.
An Australian physician, neuropathologist and psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud (1856-1936), while studying the causes of pathological mental process, resolutely rejected vulgar materialistic attempts to explain changes in mental acts or human relations by physiological causes. He did not agree with the materialist world outlook, and denied objective methods of studying mental activity; but Freud created a subjectivist theory for “the distorted human relations”. In the opinion of Freud, mental activist is considered to be “something independent, existing side by side with material processes and it is governed by special unknowable, eternal psychic forces lying beyond consciousness.

Sigmund Freud also employed negative judgment in his thinking. For him, suicides are victims of abnormal psychological processes and therefore commit aberrant acts. Freud did not write much on the subject, but most psychoanalytic theories of suicide derive from his work, particularly *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), in which he contended that such people are victims of aggressive impulses initially directed outward but turned inward and aimed against the self. For suicide to occur, the ego, after wishing to kill an object of love that has been abandoned or rejected, has to create but failed to integrate fully into itself an image of the object. Incomplete integration causes the ego to split into two portions, and the part not associated with the lost love object condemns and torments the part that is. Such torment may lead to suicide, which is a way for the ego to murder the loved one, by killing its internalized image.

According to Freud, dominating the spirit of man, like fate, are immutable mental conflicts between the unconscious striving for pleasure, mainly the sexual aggression and the principle of reality to which the mind adopts itself. Freud maintains that all mental conditions, all actions of man, and also historical events or social phenomena, including
suicides are subjective to psycho-analysis, and he has interpreted them as manifestations of unconscious, above all sexual, impulses. Thus, the ideal- the psychic is considered to be the cause of the history of mankind, morality, art, science, religion, state, law, wars, murders, morality, suicides, etc. to be brief, in Freud’s view, along with the phenomenal factors, sexual undercurrent are the cause of all events, human relations or of all suicidal happenings. This way Freud clearly found that sexual impulses, if not properly satisfied become the main cause of suicide.

Freud, in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* put forward a pair of concepts “Eros” and “Thanatos. Thanatos is ‘an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things’ (Freud 36). Death instinct drives people to death so that they can have real peace, and only death can get rid a person of tensions and struggles. Freud’s theory of Thanatos, stated that the death instinct exists in almost everyone’s subconscious. It is an irresistible instinctive power in human beings’ consciousness. Many people may not agree that there is a death instinct in their consciousness. Of course a person’s instinct to live, is stronger than the death instinct. However, if they examine their flashes of idea in their consciousness, they can find that just like the life instinct, their desire for death is also sometimes very strong.

Death-drive, as defined by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is the co-existence of opposing feelings in one’s mind that is of Eros and Thanatos: and it “is the ‘true result’ and to that extent, the purpose of all life” (322). As Malcolm notes, in some secret ways, Thanatos nourishes Eros as well as opposes it. The two principles work in concert; though in most of us Eros dominates, in none of us Thanatos is completely subdued. However -- and this is the paradox of suicide -- to take one’s life is
to behave in a more active, assertive 'erotic' way than to helplessly watch as one's life is taken away from one by inevitable mortality (58).

The renowned French sociologist, Emil Durkheim attempted to identify the social factors relating to suicide in his classical study of suicide in 1897. After analyzing suicides in Europe, he arrived at the conclusion that suicide was a social phenomenon. Durkheim distinguishes three basic types of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, and anomic. (Durkheim 152). The first two are based on the notion of integration. Insufficient integration with the society and an excess of individualism lead to egoistic suicide. As the name suggests, it is the individual who detaches oneself from the framework or concern for the society in which one lives. As society has ceased to have any significance for him, the person withdraws into his own system of values.

The altruistic suicide, on the other hand, takes place because of over-integration of the individual where he takes on the goals and identity of the society and is willing to die for them. He gives up his life for the sake of some sense of duty to society. It includes those who give up their lives for others, the elderly who die for the sake of younger people, wives who follow their husbands to the grave, subordinates who die with their master, and the ritual hara-kiri of Japanese soldiers.

Anomic suicide is based on the notion of regulation. The anomic suicide kills him because of a change of position so sudden (especially in economic crisis) and unregulated (anomic) that he is unable to cope with it. Clearly at a time like ours when there is unprecedented social, moral, religious and family upheaval with increasing emphasis on individualism, this form has a marked relevance one century after the inception of this
theory. Durkheim also tries to answer why people don’t commit suicide. The balance between opposing forces of anomie and fatalism, and egoism and altruism keep the individual on an even keel in a state of psychological well-being. When the equilibrium between the forces is upset, one of the forces becomes dominant and “suicidogenic”, making the individual prone to suicide. Durkheim’s and Freud’s explanations, or variants of them, held sway throughout much of the twentieth century, and in recent years, biological and bio-chemical explanations for suicide have complemented if not overshadowed sociological and psychological accounts; depression is currently the main culprit, turning suicide into a mental health issue.

Jack D. Douglas, in his aptly titled classic book, *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (1967), was the first modern researcher to dispense with the scientific assumption that suicide can be known objectively. He argued that it is socially imputed category dependant, for its characteristics and recognition, on culturally and historically specific human judgment. It does not have any agreed meaning, within a particular society, nor, will everyone assume that self-killing has occurred. Sociologists had much trouble in defining suicide (Douglas 350). For Douglas, a study on suicide is not to uncover its causes and define it morally as well as conceptually, but to study the multiplicity of meanings that any given society accords to it.

According to Jack Douglas, suicides generally have a number of patterns and social meanings which they have constructed for themselves and in relation to others (284). The real meaning of suicide is not necessarily known to friends or family. Outsiders may regard suicide as “senseless” and “irrational,” because one was “distraught,” “lost,” or “depressed.” In actuality, studies on suicide notes and diaries, as
well as interviews with those who have attempted suicide, indicate suicidal actions were a means of transforming the essential “substantial” self of the actor in many ways. First of all, suicide is a means of transforming the soul from this world to another. Such individuals are motivated to die in order to live. Suicide notes indicate that these individuals were conceived of the notion of returning to God, to a new world.

Secondly, suicidal actions may serve as a means of achieving fellow-feeling. In such suicidal actions individuals seek to gain some sort of sympathy or pity for themselves and in doing so they come to share others feelings. Thirdly, suicidal actions may have the social meaning of blaming others for one’s death. Fourthly, suicides also may take place to avoid the responsibilities in persevering in life. In such cases there is a high degree of restlessness, although the nature of this dissatisfaction is often not specified. The persons feel “disgusted with life,” or “useless”. Fifthly, another suicide pattern is exemplified by those persons who, after killing another person, for example, commit suicide.

Melvin Seeman found alienation, as one of the major factors leading suicide. The modern society which is going through change has created a situation of alienation that means detachment or estrangement. Melvin offers an ordered analysis of its varied meanings which can summarized as follows:

I. Powerlessness-the individual feels that one cannot control the events which fall upon them.

II. Meaninglessness- the individual feels the inability, or is confused, in choosing varied alternatives available to them.
III. Normlessness- the individual realizes that one cannot follow the approved rules of social governances.

IV. Isolation – the individual feels detached from or uncommitted to the goals or beliefs which are highly valued by the society.

In her article “On Suicide” Georgia Noon claims that self-destruction appeared to be an extremely private act, it had far reaching consequences. Georgia Noon argues that “In previous times, those committing suicide were responsible to the Church and to society; in the nineteenth century, he was responsible to the family” (12). A lot can be written about the reasons that predispose an individual to kill himself; such as hereditary, severe mental illness, an impulsive or violent temperament, suppression from the patriarchal and male dominated society, romantic failures or upheavals; terminal or debilitating illness; situations that cause great shame, or are perceived as such and the injudicious use of alcohol or drugs.

One of the chief contributing factors to women suicide is identified as the patriarchic rule. Women were treated as an oppressed class and their lives have been circumcised by male domination from olden days. The relationship between a man and a woman has been one of dominance and sub–ordinance. It has become the “birthright priority” of men to be ruling over women, and this has become institutionalized in our social order (Millett 33). The masculine birthright of super ordination has pervaded into culture, literature, arts, humanities, education, law, folklore, anthropology and all other realms of life.
Feminine society is ruled by patriarchs with its male oriented principles that subjugate women socially, economically and politically. This oppressive power-structured system-patriarchy-has become the most pervasive ideology of our culture and it dictates the fate of women. Adrienne Rich describes patriarchy as follows:

Patriarchy is the power of fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or thought ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male (57).

Women too are made to accept the patriarchal vision of the feminine as their own. “Women” says the Beauvoir, “still dream through the dreams of men” (74). Culture is so saturated with male bias that women almost have no chance to perceive life from a feminine point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate, a feminine system of values. Women look at society through the logocentric, male-oriented version that has been accepted as the cosmopolitan and democratic view of mankind.

According to arguments by patriarchy, the subjection of women has stemmed from the supposed biological inferiority of women which is conveniently termed as biological essentialism. Simone de Beauvoir challenges this with her bold statement “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (301). What actually makes a woman to be inferior to man is not her biological make up, but the socializing process of culture which influences a woman or rather forces a woman to become subordinate to man. “It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her
own account…” (42). Women are not inferior by nature, but are interiorized by culture. They are acculturated into any inferiority. A woman hence becomes a construct in the domain of patriarchal culture, a socially feminized “site on which masculine meanings get spoken and masculine desires get enacted” (Ruthven 45). Beauvoir points out that societies are organized on the assumption that man is Self and woman, the Other. Consequence of this assumption is always detrimental to women. Because of this assumption, the self-treats the other as either a supplement or a threat. K. K. Ruthven describes how a woman is victimized by male supremacy:

The “supplementary” woman may find herself set on a pedestal as the object of chivalric attention; ‘worshiped’, in return for which she is expected to surrender her autonomy and see it as her distending to serve the man’s interest (as mistress, muse, wife power-behind-the thrown). If however, the other cannot be cajoled into supplementary she is credited with the same status….and becomes the victim of self (42).

Another reason for the secondary position of a woman in the family is her economic dependence. In the family the husband owns both the person and the service of his wife. The husband becomes the “legal keeper” and the wife becomes “the legal property” of the husband.

Throughout history, women have been confined to the level of an animal, in providing a sexual outlet for man and in exercising the animal function of reproduction and caring for the young. A woman is not expected to please herself through her womanliness in any other sphere other than marriage and motherhood. She is not
permitted to gratify her sexual needs or desires and cater to her carnal instincts. Woman is destined only to dedicate her sexuality for satisfying man and so she is not encouraged to appease her bodily appetites. Because of this, the sexuality of a woman is a curse for her, rather than a pleasure. For a woman, apart from maternity, patriarchy does not encourage her to derive pleasure in sex and limits her to an existence of menial labor and domestic service. A woman should only be a toy in the hands of man, following his instructions and expectations in all her activities. The patriarchal system robs woman of her will. She is made to obey man and comply with his sexual needs irrespective of her own wishes. For a woman, under the demands of patriarchy and the exploitative sexuality it has established that, sexual activity implies submitting to male will.

Woman has been defined primarily as sexual object—either one of lust or one of chastity. Qualities like purity and chastity are extolled only to harness woman to the commands of man and make her live in an abject obedience to his authority. Subjected to patriarchal pressure into being an object, the self of the woman gets oppressed by the norms and the taboos of the society. Passivity is a trait always attributed to woman in all their activities, including sexual expression. A woman is expected to be timid and passive in her approach and her dealing with men. Any hint of a woman being agile is considered “unfeminine” and any hint of a woman being interested in sexual activities is condemned as “immoral”. Any average woman preoccupied all her life with the sole interest of pleasing a man, soon gets exhausted. The sensitive self of a woman often clamors for her rights politically, socially and culturally, evaluating how much she has been trapped and victimized by patriarchy. Jacqueline Rose expresses the agitation that takes place in a self-account of the secondary position dictated to it by patriarchy.
In a male oriented culture, marriage becomes purely a business contract – a man giving security for a woman and a woman being a mate to man. In the social set up constructed by patriarchy, man – woman relationship turns to be of dominance subservience, as that of a master and servant, where the master is undoubtedly the man. Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) observes: The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed slavery of the wife… Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat. (Quoted in Germaine Greer; The Female Eunuch, 233).

As a result, women are left to wallow in drudgery, whereas men are made for the world- to actively participate in worldly activities. Patriarchy states that the highest value and the only commitment for a woman is the fulfillment of her own femininity and that only domesticity can honor her with such a fulfillment. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* gives an account of the daily life of a woman:

She is trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, and chauffeur, expert on interior decoration, childcare, appliance repair, furniture finishing, nutrition and education. Her day is fragmented as she rushes from dishwasher to washing machine, to telephone to dryer to station wagon to supermarket and delivers Johnny to the little league field, takes fancy to dancing class, gets the lawnmower fixed… she has no time to read books,… Even if she had time, has lost the power to concentrate (30).
Psychiatric illnesses are identified as the main cause for suicide. Roy Porter’s *The Anatomy of Madness* is a historical study of Psychiatry in Britain and Europe and it shows that the development on the treatment of mental illness was closely linked to social reform. Nineteenth century studies in ‘Hysteric’ and Freudian theories of sexuality placed women at the center of psychiatric pathologies. The 'nervous woman' in late Victorian society in Britain, for example, was a synonymous embodiment of 'women' and 'madness.' Elaine Showalter pointed out that women and madness were inextricably linked to the late nineteenth century literature. Madness is perceived as a "female malady because it is considered to be "one of the wrongs of woman ... the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality" (Showalter: 1987, p.3). Showalter pointed out that the records between seventeenth and nineteenth century showed that women were the majority of mental patients in asylums and among psychiatric outpatients (1).The notion that madness is both a construct designed to control the population and a manifestation of the deconstruction of societal modes of control is fully explored in Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1967).

It is natural to perceive in madness a fall into determinism where all forms of liberty are gradually suppressed; madness shows us nothing more than the natural constants of a determinism, with the sequences of its causes, and the discursive movement of its forms; for madness threatens modern man only with that return to the bleak world of beasts and things, to their fettered freedom. It is not on this horizon of nature that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recognized madness, but against a background of unreason; madness did not disclose a mechanism, but revealed a liberty
raging in the monstrous forms of animality. We no longer understand unreason today, except in its epithetic form:

The unreasonable, a sign attached to conduct or speech, and betraying to the layman's eyes the presence of madness and all its pathological train; for us the unreasonable is only one of madness's modes of appearance. On the contrary, unreason, for classicism, had a nominal value; it constituted a kind of substantial function. It was in relation to unreason and to it alone that madness could be understood (Foucault 83).

Loneliness appears to be a large contributing factor to depression and suicide among writers. Writers spend hours of time alone, with no company but their own thoughts, and even when among others they tend to think more to themselves than they do aloud. Their field of work requires them to spend all time thinking and writing alone, but this lifestyle can have a lot of negative effects (MacIntyre 30). Another curious trait that is common among writers is an uncanny fixation with death. Bipolar disorder, one of the common traits among writers linked to depression, is associated with a high suicide risk (Forgeard 34). In a 2010 article from "The Scientific Mind", writers Paul Andrews and J. Thomson found that depressed people often think intensely about their problems, and these thoughts are called ruminations. These ruminations are persistent and the depressed person has extreme difficulty thinking about anything else (56-61).

In The Female Malady (1987) Showalter tried to give a historical account of psychiatry from a feminist perspective and to expose the construction of madness as a specifically female problem. She has not romanticized madness in her text because it is a
painful result of determinist notions relating to femininity. Also, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness are inextricably linked to notions of gender (Showalter 5). Ruskin's influential lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" (1985) and Freud's essay "Female Sexuality" (1931) reveal that 'reasonable' female behavior is entirely determined by sexual function. The epistemological fabrications of Victorian ideology states that it is man's role to act, create, discover and progress. A woman is to be protected, confined, must be kept healthy, happy and educated only to the degree that she can be an adequate helpmate, fulfilling her function as wife and mother.

According to Freud's essay “Female Sexuality” women must accept their physical inferiority. The only way to deal with penis envy is to adjust to their social role, have a baby (preferably male) and so gain a substitute penis. Female neurosis is due to jealousy, a result of disappointment. Rejection of feminine role in society is pictured as unfeminine, abnormal, guilty, and unreasonable. Women were defined, diagnosed and treated by a wholly male profession is an issue which has been throughout raised and explored by women who have suffered under the regimes of psychiatric and psychoanalytic practice.

Women were persuaded to find the cause for their unhappiness within themselves rather than to recognize how external forces were affecting their mental well-being. The psychologist saw his role as one which could change the person rather than society. The female artist is in a nerve-wracking situation because she is moving beyond the prescribed territory of acceptable feminine action/function/behavior. As Gilbert and Gubar explained in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), for women, literary creativity is at odds with their expected roles:
For all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I AM" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is. But for the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself (Gilbert and Gubar 17).

Many feminist critics who attempt to find links between being female and suicidal were attracted by the notion of artistic creativity being a kind of suicide. According to some feminist critics, suicide often works as a literary device for examining other issues, including the affirmation of a woman's power over her body and psyche. Writers like Plath, Virginia Woolf and Anne Sexton extensively wrote about their depression, their neuroses, and their long-term fascination with death. These writers celebrated death, welcomed it, longed for it, and embraced it by committing suicide. Female poets considered death as an act through which they could achieve a place and a voice of their own within the phallocentric domain of language. As English poet and critic A. Alvarez has put it, that suicide is not only a “desperately sensitive and confused subject” it is also a problem “to be felt in the nerves and the senses”(45).

Runco (1998) conducted a study entitled *Suicide and Creativity: The Case of Sylvia Plath*. This study explores the idea that although much can be learned by viewing Sylvia Plath's poetry as an expression of her thinking, additional insights are afforded by reversing the typical direction of effect and by viewing Plath's situation, and in particular, her writing, which is the outcome of her depression. Consistent with this interpretation is Plath's huge investment in writing. This may have contributed to the sensitivity that predisposed her to stress and depression.
A. Alvarez in his famous book *The Savage God* (1971) makes an intense study of suicide. The study surveyed the ways in which suicide was regarded in literature through the ages. As tangents of this focus, it also outlines how culture in general has viewed suicide, besides considering the effect of suicide on the arts and of the arts on suicide. It explores the cultural attitudes, theories, truths and fallacies surroundings suicide and refracts them through the windows of philosophy.

Beth Ann Bassein's *Women and Death (Linkages in Western Thought and Literature)* (1984), deals with the image, aura and actuality of death as they relate to women’s lives both in literature and life. This book seeks to go beyond and presenting an abundance of evidence exhibiting a prevailing obsession with the death of woman. It explores women’s experiences with death or suicide on a cultural basis and how death plays a major role in all literature, but women and men are depicted quite differently when they are subjected to death, producing experiences or to death itself. Deborrah (2007) conducted a study entitled *The Art of Dying: Suicide in the Works of Kate Chopin and Sylvia Plath*. This study aims to discuss how Plath’s poetry reflects many aspects of her personality and this study is an endeavor to interpret this complex ambivalent personality of Plath in light of her poems, her journals and her letters where she clearly confesses all her neurotic obsessed activities directly, honestly and sincerely without any hesitation. It also explores how Kate Chopin, the author of *The Awakening*, uses suicide as the key to freedom. Kay Redfied Jamison conducted a study entitled *Night Falls Fast-Understanding Suicide* (1999). It finds a way to maintain an individual perspective through an emphasis on the psychology of suicide, extraordinary scientific and medical advances of recent years.
It also reveals psychological conflicts and social determinants of suicide. The book’s focus is on suicide in those younger than forty and the terrible problem of suicide in those who are older.

Suicide attempts are disproportionately high in mood disorders. At least one person in five with major depression will attempt suicide, and nearly one-half of those with bipolar disorder will try to kill themselves at least once (110). Suicide is the third major killer of young people in the Western world, and in the closing decades of the twentieth century it reached epidemic proportions: around the world there has been a frightening surge in suicides committed by children, adolescents and young adults. Kay Redfield Jamison is herself a survivor of a nearly lethal suicide attempt which came after years of battling manic depression. Her survival marked the beginning of a life’s work to investigate mental illness and self-inflicted death, and she is now an internationally recognized authority on the depressive illnesses. In *Night Falls* Dr. Jamison dispels the silence and shame that surround the subject of suicide and provides a better understanding of the suicidal mind and a chance to recognize the person at risk. She brings to the book not only wide scientific knowledge and clinical experience but also great compassion. In tracing the network of reasons underlying the phenomenon, she gives us astonishing examples and a startling look at the journals, drawings and farewell notes of people who have chosen to kill themselves. She also provides vivid insights into the most recent findings from hospitals and laboratories across the world; the critical biological and psychological factors that interact to cause suicide; and the new strategies being evolved to combat them.
Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature (2001) by the novelist and essayist Elizabeth Hardwick who is one of contemporary America's most brilliant writers, considers the careers of women writers as well as the larger question of the presence of women in literature, in her most passionate and concentrated work of criticism. A gallery of unforgettable portraits--of Virginia Woolf and Zelda Fitzgerald, Dorothy Wordsworth and Jane Carlyle--as well as a provocative reading of such works as Wuthering Heights, Hedda Gabler, and the poems of Sylvia Plath, Seduction and Betrayal reveal the book as a major writer's reckoning with the relations between men and women, women and writing, writing and life. Jeffery Berman (1999) conducted a study entitled Surviving Literary Suicide. It makes an enquiry into college-taught literature, the creative-writing efforts of people in the throes of acute depression. Berman approaches his subject through the work of certain authors who killed themselves and the stories that evolved from their suicides, criticism, as newspaper accounts, as tales offered by distraught survivors, as copycat suicides. Besides discussions on Woolf, Hemingway, Sexton, and Plath the writers who took their own lives there is an added reflections on the writings of William Styron, an author still living whose fictional characters are often suicidal or actually kill themselves. Kate Chopin's The Awakening is included as the example of an author who created a suicidal protagonist but the author did not commit suicide herself. The works of these writers form the content of a course he has taught and Berman bases the rationale for the course on the prevalence of suicidal ideation among adolescents.
Kuo’s book on *Trauma and Paternal Loss in Sylvia Plath’s Poetry* (1996), mainly explores Plath’s relationship with her father and how her father’s death has influenced her in the development of her character. The study reveals that her father’s death affected her deeply and created an absence that she felt for the rest of her life. Sylvia knew quite well that her husband was the double of her lost father. Her divorce from Ted Hughes triggered the memory of being abandoned, and the old and new pain overwhelmed her. Sylvia Plath’s life represents the experience of an individual traumatized by her past and lives the repetition of her own trauma as it shapes her life. The poems are the traces of Sylvia's scars, old and new alike, crying out of pain and wound. In living, she is wounded to death. The intolerable trauma of paternal loss which Sylvia Plath has never worked through during her life leads her to find the replacement for her loss, which is her husband. When Ted Hughes ultimately disappoints and denounces her, death seems to be the only option for her.

Today's researches, however, are more case studies of authors, writers and dictation in different areas—including education, political science, sociology, and so on—which are based on early developments of the concept. Recent papers apply the theoretical studies of author’s biography, articles related to suicide on proper cases which is the purpose here. Suicide, as a theme, has been replete and pervasive in literatures of the world. Writers have frequently worked and reworked this theme into the fabric of their fiction. Viewing it as a dominant theme, critics and reviewers have not been far off in as ascribing and critiquing this theme leading to a plethora of research articles and sources that continues into the present.
Virginia Woolf's Novels and Literary Past by Jane de Gay traces Woolf's preoccupation with the literary past which had a profound impact on the content of her novels. It explores how Woolf continually engaged with the literary past in her fiction. Critics on Virginia Woolf by Jacqueline E.M. Latham discusses Woolf's work in general terms and personal factors related to writing. Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath: The Self at Stake by Solenne Lestienne in an article which has direct relevance to this topic of research, it explains a careful reading of their work shows that death was, for Plath and Woolf, more liberation than punishment or escape. "Meals and Mourning" in Woolf's "The Waves" by Janine U in this article which focuses exclusively on the themes of death and suicide. It anticipates the final encounter with death. A study of Mrs. Dalloway from the perspective of Freud's theory of Thanatos by Qiuxia L interprets it from a new perspective, in applying the theory of Thantos to Virginia's classic novel Mrs. Dalloway. Virginia Woolf: A Writers Life by Lyndall Gordon reveals an exploration of the infinite oddity of the human position and specifically, the more hidden problems and possibilities of women. Integrating new material, diary, memoirs, unpublished sketches, and drafts of novels this book brings out the experience that shaped Virginia Woolf's work. Virginia Woolf by Michael Rosenthal in this original critical study considers her non-fiction as well as fiction. Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective, edited by Eric Warner who used prose fiction as her medium. Virginia Woolf: A collection of critical essays by Claire Sprague has a direct relevance to Woolf's autobiographies. Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary past by Jane de Gay demonstrates that Woolf's preoccupation with the literary past had a profound impact on the content of her novels.
As in Virginia Woolf in Anne Sexton too, the theme of suicide is a predominate theme. Numerous research articles have appeared in books and in journals that highlight this aspect in Anne Sexton’s works. *Anne Sexton A Biography* by Diane Wood Middlebrook's portrays Anne Sexton for her suffering, wisdom, intensity and explain great distance from the life the poet practiced.

Annika J. in her article “Stasis in Darkness: Sylvia Plath as a Fictive Character” observes the different representations of suicide in Plath’s biographical fiction. These representations are connected to the different myths of Plath that have been repeated in and outside biographies, memoirs, critical studies, and other material pertaining to the author. Maria Farland’s “Sylvia Plath’s Anti-Psychiatry” investigates the social consequences of the anti-psychiatry movement through an examination of one the post-war period’s most well-known representations of psychiatric institutions, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*. Jennifer Yaros in “Sylvia Plath: Poetry and Suicide” analyses the Plath’s depiction of a bold, victimized persona compelled critics to consider how the details of her personal life explained the subject matter of her poems; since its undeniable that Plath herself embraced the idea of divulging the details of her personal life and feelings through her work.

In the article “‘The Autobiography of a Fever’: The poetry of Sylvia Plath” by A. N. Dwivedi warrants a consideration of Plath’s poetry in the light of the two terms singled out-‘autobiography’ and ‘fever’. Joyce Carol Oates' essay “The Death Throes of Romanticism: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath” attempts to analyze Plath in terms of her cultural significance, to diagnose, through Plath’s poetry, the pathological aspects of our era that make a death of the spirit inevitable –for that era and all who believe in its
assumptions. William Freedman in his essay entitled “The Monster in Plath’s Mirror”
evaluates Sylvia Plath’s frequent use of mirror as a symbol of female passivity and
subjugation, reflecting Plath’s own conflicted self-identity in its difficulty to reconcile the
competing obligations of her artistic life in contrast to her domestic life. N’oraS’ellei in
her essay titled “The Fig Tree and the Black Patent Leather Shoes: The Body and Its
Representation in Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar” says Plath’s The Bell Jar becomes a cult
book in a more tragic way: psychiatrists’ and psychologists’ vocabulary has been
enriched by the term “the bell jar syndrome”.

In “The Woman is Perfected. Her Dead Body Wears the Smile of
Accomplishment: Sylvia Plath and Mademoiselle Magazine” by Garry M. Leonard
evaluates in The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath makes a strong case that throw-away items such as
cosmetic accessories may exert more of an influence upon women than things that pose
as permanent, such as beliefs and self-worth. Heather Cam in ““Daddy”: Sylvia Plath’s
Debt to Anne Sexton” observes that “Daddy is Sylvia Plath’s most anthologized, most
quintessential yet, seemingly original and idiosyncratic work. Jack Folsom in “Death and
rebirth in Sylvia Plath’s “BerckPlage” observes “BerckPlage” as seemingly unmitigated
malaise and funeral gloom, stands in many readers’ estimation as one of her heaviest and
least appealing works, even considering its autobiographical significance. Linda W.
Wanger in her book Sylvia Plath: A Biography says that Sylvia Plath is widely
recognized as one of America’s foremost poets of the twentieth century. Although
plagued by fears and tormented by insecurities, Plath possessed a remarkable ability to
transform her suffering into art.
Anne Stevenson in her book *Bitter Time: A Life of Sylvia Plath* analyses that Sylvia Plath was conditioned by her German-American background and by the social and cultural climate of her time, that she was an ambitious woman and mother in the decade just preceding the feminist revolution of the late 1960s, that her identity until the last years of her life always remained to be proved, that she was at the age of eight psychologically injured by the death of her father- all these facts naturally have to be taken into account when consider how her life affected her poetry. Warren French in the book *Sylvia Plath* observes that Sylvia Plath’s work invites a chronological reading in terms of the gradual change in her perception of essentially a single subject. Through all of her writing, poetry, fiction, her attention remains fixed on death and disintegration with occasional explorations of their alternatives.

Jane Hedley in the article titled “I made you to find me”: Sexton, Lowell, and the Gender of Poet hood, observes, in the poems Sexton created her reputation as a confessional poet as she is almost always confessing to someone. She has an interlocutor within the poem itself. In the article “Anne Sexton’s “The Little Peasant”” Jonathan Colson says that Sexton does not “spoil the stories” but rather reinvents the characters and language for a new world. Diana Hume George in the article “How we danced: Anne Sexton on fathers and daughters” analyses “To Bedlam and Part Way Back” as a composition of mythopoeic music of the father-daughter dance, which echoes as a swan song for her poetic and personal live. Melanie Waters’ article “I think it would be better to be a Jew: Anne Sexton and the Holocaust” analyses the different poem and finds that her poems not only engage with the subject matter of the Holocaust at the level of content, but also at the level of form. He further observes these poems display a range of
formal eccentricities that register the difficulties of converting the Holocaust into poetry and which, might be usefully reconsidered alongside recent theoretical discourses on aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and trauma. Angela Reich in the article “Anne Sexton: Discipline Forced upon Madness” says that Anne Sexton cultivated controversy as a disobedient daughter and an unruly student; she captured the attention of the people around her.

Roy Chandler Caldwell, Jr. in his article on Madam Bovary entitled “Madam Bovary’s Last Laugh” says that Emma’s last laugh was mad, bitter, and nihilistic. In the article “The Realism of Madam Bovary” by Jonathan Culler observes that the problem of realism in the novel is hard to ignore. It was a problem from the outset. Madam Bovary originates in opposition to the fantasmagorie of Saint Antoine. Jacqueline Merriam Paskow in the article “Rethinking Madam Bovary’s Motives for Committing Suicide” observes that Flaubert’s novel differs in a striking way from the other canonical, male authored realist novels of female adultery of the nineteenth century. She also says that unlike other novels, Madam Bovary is not a cautionary tale warning women of the painful consequences of domestic infidelity. Jacqueline finds that love is Emma’s life pursuit, and ‘amour’ is a major thematic word in the novel. Robert Wooster Stallman in the article “Flaubert’s ‘Madam Bovary’” finds irony is a fundamental in the architectonics of Madam Bovary. Emma Bovary is Flaubert’s name for the ironic chain of contradictory feelings and moods, the conflicting attitudes that he has imposed upon her. Jonathan Culler in his article “The Uses of Madam Bovary” says that Emma can also be read in terms of what Freud calls “the difficult development to femininity”. He also says that Madam Bovary is used to define a psychological type, a cultural essence and a basic
stereotype. In “Madam Bovary: Beauty out of Place” by R.P. Blackmur observes that *Madam Bovary* is a novel which is the shape of a life which is the shape of a woman which is the shape of a desire. He further says that it is one of those structures of the imagination where one can count on sexual force to fill up all the hollow places, and it is such a structure seen in one of those situations where one may expect the force to be taken as a sentiment and where, at critical junctures, the sentiment will be taken for a force. Martin Turnell in the article “Madam Bovary” reads *Madam Bovary* as the story of a young woman with romantic ideas that begins with her school days, goes on to her marriage to a dull country doctor, and ends with her death. Boyd G. Carter in the article “Madam Bovary” observes that the interest of *Madam Bovary* does not lie in the theme, itself, which is trivial and commonplace. It lies in the artistic and methodical manner in which Flaubert presents the theme; he further says that the form of the novel offers an obstacle to the playwright than does the lack of dramatic action.

In “Gender and Literary Valorization: The Awakening of a Canonical Novel”, Sarah M. Corse and Saundra Davis Westervelt observe *The Awakening* as a compelling and socially resonant narrative of the search for the female self and patriarchal limits to women’s lives that resonated powerfully with contemporary social concerns and provided rich material for critical and pedagogical investigation. “The Awakening: A Refusal to Compromise”, the essay by Carley Rees Bogard valuates *The Awakening* as a novel that presents the basic conflict in the Bildungsroman of the twentieth century, the heroine experiences sexual initiation in a struggle for self-assertion and identity. Erik Margraf in the article “Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as a Naturalist Novel” demonstrates that Chopin’s novel contains virtually all relevant thematic and stylistic features of the
naturalist novel, albeit in a treatment far from formulaic. He further states that it is through combining the naturalistic approach with the feminine perspective that Chopin’s presentation of Edna’s development and demise communicates very effectively the near futility of her protagonist’s aspirations.

David H. Stewart in the article “Anna Karenina: The Dialectic of Prophecy” observes one of the most impressive features of Anna Karenina, is the way in which Tolstoy draws the reader’s imagination beyond the literal level of the narrative into generalizations that seem mythical in a manner difficult to articulate. He further argues that Anna Karenina’s power resides precisely in the postponement of the generalized vision, in the broad gap which Tolstoy forces our imaginations to cross between things and their meanings—the physical and metaphysical. The article entitled “Peasant Dreams in Anna Karenina” by Gray Browning valuates that Anna’s loss of her unobtainable ideal and an accompanying despair at perceived coarse and even violent sexual relations with her men finally impel her to self-destruction. Ian Hamilton in his article: “Anna Karenina: an operatic version” expresses his view in the novel as with a woman in the central role, the drama is more domestic, something unimaginable in the previous works in which situations are presented more symbolically. It is not easy to find a love-story suitable for operatic treatment which has not already been used. Michael Pursglove in his article “The Smiles of Anna Karenina” observes that in Anna Karenina the use of smile as an individualizing physical trait is not common. It is common is the use of the smile as a spontaneous physical manifestation of inner emotions. In “The Unity of Anna Karenina” Gary R. Jahn observes Anna’s extraordinary harsh fate is often explained in moral terms.
Desai's Voices in the city is analyzed by Madhavi Latha Agarwal in Anita Desai in Voices in the City, and Images of alienation - A study of Anita Desai's novels by Dr. S. P Swain. "The Alienated self in the novels of Anita Desai by R. S. Pathak," Anita Desai and the wounded self, by V. V. N Rengachari Prasad, Anita Desai. The Novelist by Madhusudan Prasad, The Ailing Aliens by Kalpana Wadrekar, "From Self- Alienation to self-identification: A study of Anita Desai's novels by S. P. Swain and P. M. Nayak," Alienation in Indian Novel in English by L. Manjula Davidson are a few articles which focus on themes of alienation and suicide from differing perceptions. The comparative aspects is dealt with S Indira in "Exploration of inner space: Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee".

All civilization has witnessed countless shifts of methods and attitudes towards suicide throughout history. A search through the libraries, have lent only substantial material on the topic, testifying to the scope and range of research carried out on the topic of literary suicides in life and literature. The review of literature on the topic yielded just half a dozen secondary sources relating to the specific area of literary suicides, though there was a huge material on suicide as a socio-psychological phenomenon. This study will definitely bridge the gap between the two of suicide as a socio-psychological, and as a literary factor.

This study has its limitation in the sense that it adheres to the lives of only select women suicide writers and to an analysis of select-prominent novels dealing with suicidal themes and characters. The woman writers form the most famous case suicide in history. Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, are writers who caused a literary upheaval and a tremendous impact with their writings. Their personal lives, was the same
stuff of fascination and attraction, that their novels were made of, while their novels were an open book, their personal lives was a close fist one, with readers trying to prise open to know the facts which drove these famous women to suicide. Likewise the famous women characters, built on a magnum opus scale, larger than the life size characters are suddenly driven to taking their own lives. A study of these novels also reveal the 'insides', of these women and to what extent they authentically the real life experiences. This study naturally demands a chapter on the general perspectives of suicide.

The thesis is structured into five chapters. The first chapter –Introduction- deals with the conceptual definition of suicide from the beginning of its origin to the present. It reviews the opinion and has been described in the light and references of Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Psychological, Social and Biochemical factors. It also covers the views of different religions in this regard, and discussing on theories of suicide is related to psychology, sociology, feminism and philosophy. It also highlights literary suicides from different centuries and different literatures.

The second chapter titled "women writers suicide in life". A significant number of writers have struggled with depression and seductions of suicide. From Virginia Woolf to Sylvia Path and Anne Sexton, artists have identified with the downward pull of the creative unconscious toward suicide. The focus of this chapter therefore is to study the life and works of three authors who took their own lives. A number of creatively eminent individuals have taken their own lives, including Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath Anne Sexton, and many other writers. The large number of such cases suggests that there may be a functional relationship between creativity and psychological health. This relationship seems to vary across domains, with the rate of suicide especially high in certain groups of
artists, suggesting that there may be something unique to those domains that either draws suicide-prone persons into the domain or has an impact on the individual such that suicide is considered and often attempted. *Mrs Dalloway* is mainly about Virginia Woolf’s experience of mental illness and women’s concerns as women and social individuals. *Mrs. Dalloway* is more than any modernist novel in which suicide merely plays a prominent role. Durkheim’s, egoistic concept of suicide can apply in Woolf’s life. Insufficient integration with the society and an excess of individualism lead to egoistic suicide. It is the individual who detaches oneself from the framework or concern for the society in which one lives. As society has ceased to have any significance for him, the person withdraws into his own system of values. In Mrs. Dalloway’s novel, “death” can be seen as a ghost that cannot be expelled out of the consciousness of the hero and the heroine. For Woolf, Freud’s concept of "Thanatos" is closely related to her work and life. Sylvia Plath remains the most haunting twentieth-century literary suicide. Plath created in her poetry a world in which she could no longer find the possibility of survival. She imagines compulsive, ritualized suicide attempts as an effort to avoid an absence at the center of her being, a gap left by the father’s loss, by identifying with the father through death. His death becomes, ironically, her first suicide, to be repeated at ten year intervals. Anne Sexton has long flirtations with death. Sexton wrote at least twenty poems about suicide. Her famous poem, "The Double Image" has autobiographical and poetic significance, revealing many of the feelings towards suicide.

The third chapter is on “Suicides in Literature”. From the very beginning of Western Literature, from Greek Tragedy, women’s suicide has occupied a central place of significance. *Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, The Awakening,* and *Voices in*
the City are popular novels of the nineteenth century. Emma, Anna, Edna, and Monisha all die, like thousands of other women in fiction, because, in accordance with the well-worn stereotypes and morality of their times, their sexual lives dictate that they must; because they are wrenched into existence by authors who see death as the end best fitting the demands of their fiction. Emma's suicide was a very selfish act, not only did she leave 'loved' ones behind. But Emma had affairs with other men that go against the morality of society. As a result, she is punished for what she has done. Edna, in contrast, was likely to be satisfied with what she was doing. Suicide gave Edna the real freedom that she never had in her life. All she could see was only being grounded with her children, husband, and the society's expectation. Chopin used suicide as the way to freedom for woman at that time, which is quite strange, and it sounds unacceptable. Anna is under control, which isolates her from society. Anna's suicide is not entirely a self-motivated choice either. Anna commits an act of social suicide; her individualism in abandoning all social connections in order to pursue her own happiness is a bold act of self-determination and self-destruction. The Awakening, by Kate Chopin, the main character Edna Pontellier struggles vigorously to escape the shackles of society. With the final realization that she will never be entirely free, Edna takes her life. Anna Karenina abandons her husband. Emma, on the contrary, cannot persuade her lover to take her away and leave husband and country. He is not in love with her, and their relationship in his eyes is nothing but a casual love affair, like so many others he has had so far. Monisha in Voices in the City is a psychic case. She fears the aggressiveness of her in-laws. She undergoes a tremendous amount of psychological tussle. All four women are on the point of a nervous breakdown.
The fourth Chapter is "Suicide writers and Literature: A Gender Perspective". Gender is much debated issue today, referring to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex difference. While sex is a biological category, gender is a sociological and cultural category influenced by stereotypes 'female and male' behavior that exists in our attitudes and beliefs. In general the gender patterns for suicide are that rates in males considerably exceed that of females. It outlines a series of male and female writer suicides and strives to probe into the differential aspects of the two. This chapter has two parts, one is, it attempts to discuss writers in life, and the second part discusses suicides in literature, particularly in fiction. It also gives a historical perspective of literary suicides from ancient literature to the present.

The fifth chapter is summation which deals with the summary of the thesis and major reasons for writers and fictional suicide. And it deals with the concerned summation and comparison of fictional writers and the three important literary figures.