It is generally believed that the confessional wave in poetry was ushered in with the publication of Life Studies by Robert Lowell in 1959. The outpouring of human emotions which was hitherto considered objectionable acquired a new dignity and acceptance. Among the poets who adopted this new style of self-expression are Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. In his/her own individual manner each poet tries to express the innermost feelings of the heart, for example, those of failure, guilt, disappointment and experiences in mental asylums. The object of such candid verse seems to be to shock the reading public into an awareness of changed circumstances in which nothing should be considered taboo or too base to be brought into public view.

Sylvia Plath shot into prominence soon after her suicide in 1963 and has remained an important focus of attention in the literary world. Her life history is as fascinating as her poetry, specially the morbid interest she took in death and suicide and the attachment that she displays towards her dead father. As there is a lot of autobiographical element contained in her work, it is very tempting to read her poems as purely "confessional" speaking of little beyond her own experience, distorting them out of proportion. This is what E. Butscher does in Method and Madness. At the same time, it is also tempting
to read her poems from the psychoanalytical point of view
and interpret them as expressions of a schizoid personality
----- as David Holbrook does in his *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and
Existence.* However, if one takes such a limited view of
her poetry, one tends to overlook a lot that is important
-- in fact more important than the autobiography contained
in the work or the psychological compulsions underlying it.

This point has, no doubt, come to the notice of
critics who have made an effort to set right the image of
Sylvia Plath by interpreting her poems not as purely personal
or confessional or as the expression of a psychic personality
but as containing a theme that transcends the world of
subjective speculation. Judith Kroll is of the view that
"Transcendence" is to be found in *Plath's* work. In her
book, *Chapters in a Mythology,* Kroll traces the mythic
patterns contained in it. Similarly, Jon Rosenblatt calls
Sylvia Plath's poetry "the poetry of imitation" in his
famous book *Sylvia Plath: The Poetry of Imitation* and
feels that the poems dramatise the moment of choice in one's
life. Viewpoints such as these which tackle a particular
idea or theme in the work of a poet, are no doubt more
valuable than those which dwell only on the personal element
in the work. However, an over-zealous attempt has its own
pitfalls: it can make the criticism unconvincing giving the
impression that the critic in trying to read his own meanings
into the poetry, superimposing ideas that are not applicable.
It also takes the reader away from the poetry "itself and makes him focus on extraneous matters." While studying the work of a writer, one has to read it as a totality that includes all the compulsions underlying the work, the thought contained in it and the manner in which the thought is expressed.

The object of this study is to highlight the main aspects of Sylvia Plath's work, study the influences on her, place her in the perspective of the poetry of the sixties, and point out why it would be gross injustice to dismiss her mere as a "Confessional" poet as her work contains much more than what is called "Confession". An attempt has also been made to reason why in spite of the gloomy darkness of her poems, she has managed to capture the attention of the literary world.

Chapter ONE is an attempt to highlight the nature and meaning of confessional poetry and distinguish it from mere confession. The contention is that confessional poetry is not a fad confined to the sixties of the present century: poetry has always contained an element of confession. The confessions of Rousseau, St. Augustine and De. Quincey are referred to in this connection, and compared with confession as it is found in the works of Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and John Berryman.
Chapter TWO deals with the influences that shaped the personality of Sylvia Plath and led her to express herself in the confessional vein. Her life and background are studied as her work is based on autobiography. An attempt is also made to study the temperament of Sylvia Plath, her ability to convert private fears into public horrors.

Chapter THREE highlights the confessional element in the themes of Sylvia Plath. The underlying theme is that of conflict: man is placed in a world of struggles and his life is a series of battles against odds.

Chapter FOUR analyses Sylvia Plath's poems and their contents in relation to her stylistic devices. The highly individualised use of syntactical and technical devices is scrutinised. Plath manipulates style with confidence and makes it a tool with which she depicts states of consciousness.

Chapter FIVE compares Sylvia Plath with the other confessional poets—Lowell, Roethke, Sexton and Berryman. Their themes may be similar but there are differences in the approach to style and expression.

The concluding chapter highlights the elements of universality in the work of Sylvia Plath. This Chapter emphasizes that Plath does not stop at mere confession: she goes beyond confession so that her work, despite its tragic overtones, acquires universality and appeals to the reader.