CHAPTER-I

ANXIETY SYNDROME

AND

PLATH’S PREDICAMENT
Sylvia Plath, as a poet, has the rare distinction of developing a consistent poetic theory and practice out of her personal experiences of angst, fear and nausea. Like the Biblical Job who considered ‘Wilt’ and ‘Pain’ as propelling forces of salvation, Plath, in her own self-styled manner, comprehends the existential counters of ‘fear’, ‘nausea’ and ‘dread’ as the proper authentic modes of experiencing the world of anxiety and turning the same into a profound aesthetic property. Emotions, fears, feelings, artistic feelings, day dreams and hallucinations are such exclusive properties of her personal experiences that they disturb the very personality that creates them, particularly when the poet is an active creative agent who launches an arduous and adventurous expedition of withdrawing herself into her own interior world of feminist imagination through introspection and self-search. All these emotional states of mind cumulatively contribute to a rare authentic poetic phenomenon which can be called Anxiety Syndrome.

This collusion of the world of her imagination with the practical world of experience envisions a hallucinatory dramatic picture of life wherein the experiencing self of the poet undergoes an unwithstandably painful process of being-in-the world with a real understanding of the false and false foundations of the world view that people go to make for themselves in order to seek a comfort.

According to the modern psychologists and psychiatrists ‘Anxiety’ is a pathological complexity which contributes for utter shattering and paralysing of the incumbent’s personality by way of rendering it into a non-entity as a being-in-the world. As a consequence the person encounters a psychological breakdown and the patient receives a shock which ultimately loosens the very roots of existence and he/she starts suffering
from bouts of anxiety, weakening one's will to survive. As a result, a strange unfounded negativism onsets, wherewith the essential courage-to-be-in the world of existence gets shattered. Then, emerges a negative polarization of a world view, and the resultant root passion is a keen desire and in extreme circumstances, it leads to self-destruction. Both Plath's life and poetry are standing testimonials of all such moods and moments. To render such extrinsities of existence into a creative process, and that too of a great artistic distinction, is in itself a miracle and a mystery of nature. Sylvia Plath is an outstanding mystery and her poetry is a miracle of rare devise. To give an example-

Where the yew trees blow like hydias,
The tree of life and the tree of life
Unloosing their moons, month after month, to no purpose,
(Ariel, p.47)

The above lines speak of the despondency of Plath's life as that of an unfertile woman whose ova are released to no purpose but then out of this despondency Plath creates consistent unified poetry- poetry that flows out of her anxieties, tensions and contradictions.

Anxiety Syndrome is a collection of symptoms that manifest themselves in such life situations where the persona is intricately webbed between his unrealistic expectations and the here-and-now. The anxiety thus experienced tends to be on the rise where a person is not able to accept the unpalatable events that are one's lot. Sylvia Plath went through such unfavourable, distasteful and painful experiences in the short span of life which paved path to a series of bouts of anxiety. Many critics observe that her writings poignantly reflect her struggle with despair and mental illness, and her efforts to assert a strong female identity and to balance
familial, marital and career aspirations. That Sylvia Plath made two desperate attempts of suicide bears witness to her inability to reconcile with what goes against her wishes or that she finds solution in death.

Plath’s work evidences the increasing frustrations of her desires. Her ambitions of finding happiness through work, marriage, and family were thwarted by such events as hospital stays for a miscarriage, and which she felt vulnerable to male domination and threatening natural forces, particularly death.

Being somebody, always eluded Sylvia Plath, and to her as a poet it seems to have mattered. To achieve one’s identity in this way, that is in one’s poetry is a matter of talent. From the flow of poetry, particularly in the last years of her life, one could notice her determination to achieve this. Steiner says, “Her efficiency in creating the story of herself both conceals and reveals the desperation of nothingness, the sense of not being anyone.” ‘The Bell Jar’ is the only novel she wrote is an example which is under a pseudonym, Esther Greenwood. As Lady Lazarus she achieves her individuality by the power to die and revive. This is her feminine counterpart of the Biblical Lazarus, who visited the hell and imported the same on earth after his return to earth. The cryptic suggestion is quite vibrant of Plath’s neurotic bouts of anxiety. The impact of Robert Lowell is obvious here:

O mother, I implore
Your scorched blue thunderbreasts of love to pour
Buckets of blessings on my burning head
Until I rise like Lazarus from the dead.
Reference to “The Love Song” of J.Alfred Prufrock is quite obvious. Life in the modern times compels one with a keen desire to personally experience the afterlife through violent and grotesque imagery. The metaphysical desire for the experiences of afterlife in Plath are born of her intense fear and anxiety of living in the here and now. Death wish in the romantic poets is a nostalgic melancholic passion. In Plath it is born of literally felt fear and dread. A psychotherapist could easily detect the neurosis that goes with it. One can convincingly conclude the pervasiveness of anxiety in the poet.

Another way of understanding is that Sylvia Plath’s poems are, as Broe puts it, “verbal games of attention and observation, beautifully controlled, concealing the urgency and desperation for establishing one’s identity.”

One wouldn’t be totally wrong to assert that in one sense the only subject of her poetry is its own anxiety to become poetry. Paradoxically she had been a neurotic of the comfortably self-absorbed, self communing kind. As a pretty girl, bright student and teacher, wife and mother, and then as poet, professional author, and trauma maker as well, she had to battle with a series of bouts of anxiety in her attempts to add herself up to an incontestable personality. Practically, at every step, after the death of her father, save for a couple of years at Smith College, her attempts have been entirely on the discovery of her own self; her identity, her individuality driving her into a phase of what can be called Anxiety Syndrome.

Sylvia Plath is caught up in her predicament of reactions of life and hence she feels she is “condemned to live and wishes to die,” as Holbrook put it.
The predicament that leads Sylvia Plath to Anxiety Syndrome is a conflict between her Past and the Present, Isolation and Engagement, Entrapment and Potentiality, Stasis and Movement. She is torn between what she is and what she wants to be. All her life, she went through a tension between her experiences and her imagination of what the world should be and how life should be lived.

I wish to analyze the above concepts of Sylvia's predicament under the psychological basis of Anxiety Syndrome in the succeeding pages of this chapter.

**PAST VS PRESENT**

Sylvia Plath lived a happy, normal life as a child. She grew in joy and love under the care and guidance of her parents. The death of her father when Sylvia was hardly nine years was like an axe that cut her life and put an end to those few happy years.

Sylvia reflects with heart rending nostalgia her memorable childhood days and thinks of the countless blessings. Sylvia felt that she missed many elements of her old life, particularly the freeman, the ocean, the seaside frivolities, to quote her own words.

The longing for the happy, fulfilling days is deeply impressed upon her, so much so that she shortly desired to go back to those childhood days under the love and affection of her father. She reflects:

"And this is how it stiffens. My vision of that seaside childhood. My father died. We moved inland; where upon these nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like
a ship in a bottle- beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, white flying myth.”

(Ocean 1212-w, pg.272)

Psychiatrically, anxiety is used to designate those fears whose source is within the psychic make up of the individual. Anxiety is considered pathologic when it is intense enough to interfere with effective and satisfying living. The meticulous manner in which she remembers these moments and the way she remembers them into poetic forms is really puzzling. Those fervent, miserable moments of anxiety allude to the right sense of feeling. It appears that Plath is that Holdorlin’s poet possessed by inspiration as an irrepressible urge to create.

When her father died, an embittered and abandoned nine-year old Sylvia informed her mother “I will never speak to God any more”. Her mother was required to sign an agreement drawn up by Sylvia in which she agreed never to marry again. This gives us an indication of Sylvia’s attachment to her father. In another letter she insisted with false bravado...

...in the cycle of joy and sorrow, there will always be outlet for me. I can lose everything-all at once.

(Letters Home, pg.59)

It is obvious to note how she was losing her forward movement and got stuck with the loss of her father and tends to look back frequently. In this backward movement, she lost her here-and-now-reality to what she longed for-a wistful thinking giving rise to anxiety. This anxiety filled thinking flowed in poetry. She says in The Hanging man: “A world of bald white days in a shadeless socket” (Ariel, pg.70). She writes these lines to express her deep anguish about the absence of those
glorious days of her childhood. She felt as if the gods pulled her out of those cozy comforts of her childhood when it meant a paradise to live with her parents. She always conceived it as another of those numerous disintegrating factors which threatened her, and incomparably, as Steiner says, "the most potent and terrifying."  

She has had great difficulty in keeping hold on to daddy’s memory, both for purposes of identifying, and also for mourning; she cannot let him go, and yet she cannot hold on to his memory. She keeps turning up as the man with ‘asbestos hands,’ or as a ‘bee-keeper.’ It seems at times as if someone—‘A malignant animus, a Nazi, or devil’ (April, p55) has taken over the good daddy. Daddy is bad because he left her down by dying. She wants to get back to find a living relationship in love, that could give her substance, and help her see the world in a real way, not in fear of total neutrality. Yet she cries, “I simply cannot see where there is to get to.”  

From Freud’s theories, we come to know that the subject suffers from a psychic impact (trauma) that cannot be worked out or diverted. This resistance to integration into the psychic life is what causes anxiety or even neurotic anxiety. The trauma disturbs the normal flow of psychic life.  

Finding it hard to accept the dead end of her childhood days in the parental care, she longs for a world that is childlike, saccharine, benign and alluring.

I woke one day to see you, mother  
Flowers and blue birds that never were  
Never, never, found anywhere,
But the little planet bobbed away
Like a soap-bubble...  
(The Colossus, p. 11)

This land of the mother, her once dear person floats away never, to return. Her paradise of early life is only a memory and the present with her fond idealized mother figure missing from her life is a hard, cruel reality and an unacceptable pain.

She vacillates ambivalently between the Past and the Present through artistic imagination and longs desperately to go back to those cozy settings of acceptance and belongingness.

What I want back is what I was
before the bed, before the knife
before the brooch-pin and slave
fixed me in this parenthesis
(The Colossus, p. 23)

She is fixed in the ‘parenthesis’ is that she is robbed of the secure past. The expression ‘this parenthesis’ is very important. She considers her being-in-the-world as a mere parenthetical phase in the otherwise unified universe or cosmos. Hence, ‘being in the world’ is a mercilessly cut off phase; and to that extent it is pushed into irrelevance from the continuum and centrality of the essence of being. This kind of child-like logic of her mind puts her in the hot coals of anxiety, coupled with violence born of insecurity. ‘I am too big to go backward’ is not at all a romantic yearning for gaining back a state of childhood as in Blake
and Wordsworth. Plath archetypally cherishes to go back to secure responsibilitylessness embryonic state of existence to be near the cosmic contrality i.e. embryonic silence and stability.

One of 'de Chirico's' paintings which had great influence on Plath, describes an adult mind watching a little girl rolling a loop down in one of the vast diminishing spaces of 'Chirico City'. The viewer feels uneasy on her behalf—for the painting has that typical quality of unexplained omen— and also feels an intense nostalgia or the distant innocence and mystery of childhood.

Their shadows long in the setting sun
That never brightens or goes down
And this is the kingdom you bore me to
Mother, mother

(The Colossus, p. 50)

The above lines were taken from Disquieting Muses the result of De Chirico’s paintings. These thoughts of Sylvia indicate her imagined fate. Other details in the poem confirm that the speaker recognizes and accepts the Muses’ prophecy with a clear sense of her own past, present and future. The absoluteness with which the speaker announces and accepts the prophecy implies that her muses are the muses of tragic poetry, and they obliterate all others. Her special poetic vision, a result of the wound prophesied at birth and received in childhood, is connected with her destiny as a poet.

That these anxious moments became the base and content of her future poetry cannot be denied. On the level of autobiography, the muses
refer to her father's death, which she presents in her writing as a disaster after which as she says in 'The Bell Jar':

... in spite of the ... piano lessons and the water colour lessons. . . I had never been really happy again. (p.82)

Several years later, in her poem "A Life" the landscape finally seems to be a coherent whole, characterizing a vision broad enough to unify Plath's primary concerns in terms which seem very much her own. The 'life' is fixed and unalterable scene in a glass paper weight in which everything 'looks real' but lies beyond the possibility of change.

All through there is a movement in the present tense of the 'life', this too, with its quality of mechanical repetition, also seems frozen, eternal and fixed:

A woman is dragging her shadow in a circle.
About a bald hospital saucer.
It resembles the moon, or a sheet of blank paper
And appears to have suffered a sort of private blitz-krieg,
She lives quietly
With no attachments, like a foetus in a bottle...

(Crossing the water, p.53)

The inaccessibility of the past, the inability of the present to affect it, is emphasized by portraying it as an order of reality which is logically impossible to invade.
The 'moon muse' in the poetry of Sylvia Plath plays a very significant role. It is the deepest source of inspiration of the poet's vocation, the poet's vocation, her female biology, and her role and fate as protagonist in a tragic drama; and through the use of a lunar iconology, it gives concrete form to the particular spirit of the mythicized biography. Most of these meanings- and others as well-should be apparent as aspects of what Ted Hughes called

... a strange muse, bald, white and wild, in her 'hood bone' floating over a landscape like that of the primitive painters, a burningly luminous vision of a paradise which is at the same time eerily frightening, an unalterably spot-lit vision of death.14

A burningly...eerily frightening' confirms the fact that Plath is entrenched in the wilderness of thought which is at once sensuous and violent. It is 'luminous' and it is 'frightening' substantiate a creeping hallucinatory state, which is psychologically adopted from Catholic mysticism through Robert Lowell. That the luminous vision turning out to be 'eerily frightening', is a paranoid formula of personal experience coupled with anxiety. It is poetically convincing as an ingenious manner using antithesis.

From a psychoanalytic point of view the important thing is that the traumatising character comes not from the emotion but from the subject's inability to sustain it by coordinating and balancing sense and sensibility. This inability to integrate is called abnormal anxiety. And this incapacity is shown by the subject in the face of a pathological emotion of fear, boredom, vengeance or sadness. All these emotions have a common
structure, which consists in them the impossibility of being digested and in disruptions they cause on the flow of the psychic life.  

In anxiety the impossibility of absorbing the traumatized emotion becomes apparent, clinical experience has a special personal meaning to the individual and the emotional reactions are invariably abnormal. The traumatizing character comes, then, not from its violence but from its meaning.

On the one hand the happy memories of her childhood shut her off driving her into a state of disquietitude and on the other, the father's figure seems to come up confirming her instability, peacelessness and anxiety. This father figure of hers left her many a sleepless night. Referring to her father, Plath said,

"...He was an autocrat. I adored (past) and despised (present) him. And I probably wished many times that he were dead.

When he obliged me and died, I imagined that I had killed him."

This kind of brooding into morbid manners of taking sin inborn complex on oneself is again is born of Catholic traditions of Judas being oppressed with the anxiety filled introspection wherein he assumes upon himself the guilt for the death of Jesus. The father figure in Plath often metamorphises into mytho-maniacal dimensions, wherein her real father gets equated with the divine father, and the violence of the thought thus is an anxiety stricken manner of metaphysical rebellion let loose on the higher omniscient powers. Plath's abuse of her father is born of her metaphysical rebellion, as in Donne, Coleridge and Robert Lowell, her
poetic mentor.

She expressed her inability to accept her father’s death as normal. She blamed him for his death and this inability to forgive gives even new shape of her father that haunts her day after day. The only future she can imagine is that her father rises from the waters of her past:

The future is a grey sea gull
Tattling in its cat, voice of departure departur-
Age and terror, like nurses attend her
And a drowned man, complaining of the great cold,
Crawls up out of the sea

(A life, Crossing the water, p.54)

She sees no future; confirms her stance in the above lines that life isn’t worth living. Her father figure looms large over her life every moment, driving her to a blind ally from where there seems no further progress.

Even when she longs for death, the heaven looks black, her father’s colour, and it is a dark water, her father’s element, “fixed in this parenthesis” all she can do is-

... Walk dry on your kingdom’s border
Exiled to no good.
Your shelled bed I remember,
Father this thick air is murderous.
I would breathe water.

(The Colossus p.39)
The expression ‘I would breathe water’ is a rare confessional stroke of expressing a fond desire for suffocation as one needs to hold one’s breath and not breathe in the deep waters. The elemental antithetical logic-breathing water in the place of air-conforms to two implicated alternative suggestions:

1. seeking a watery burial
2. assuming the liquid embryonic state.

Whatever it be, it confirms her death wish. The immediate agent that forces her to this death wish is her father figure, in whose ‘kingdom’s border’ there is that ‘walk dry’ sans the comfort of life giving spiritual waters. It is biblically customary to speak of water as “sweet ablusions.”

The struggle that Plath experienced between her past and the present is clearly represented in the poem ‘The Disquieting Muses’. This poem has its roots in the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio De Chirico. It is apparent that De Chirico evoked her deepest concerns; only in his art did she find a sympathetic echo of her own history. De Chirico’s ‘prehistory’ is for Plath an image of the romantic yet disturbing, inaccessible past in which she locates her dead father, as well as of the true vision which she has lost. In his essay, De Chirico attempted to evoke poetically the phenomenology of prehistory with which he associated mystery and myth. The characteristic landscape and visual devices which have been called ‘Chirico City’ were designed to intensify these emotions of prehistory and both the visual images and the underlying meanings of this landscape deeply affected Plath.

For Sylvia Plath the landscape provided a visual setting for the fixed, super-real, ominous, inaccessible drama of psyche.
'The Disquieting Muses' became the presiding spirits of the drama. Onto such a stage she could easily project her autobiographical and psychological concerns.

Day now, night now, at head, side, feet
They stand their vigil in gowns of stone,
Faces blank as the day I was born.
(The Colossus, pg.50)

In his essay on the uncanny, Freud argued that the apparitions of a subconscious wish, as in a dream, say, or in hallucination or a work of art, are distorted by the disapproving super ego into malevolent and sinister shapes that thereafter with what they promise, that insinuate the desire beneath the fear.

The super ego turns into a source of revulsion what the subconscious finds attractive, says Steiner referring to the struggles of Plath.

She knows perfectly well that what her submerged self wants the super ego disapproves of, and she knows why, too. No matter how deep her self analysis, no matter how great her self analysis, no matter how great her knowledge, and it was very great, to quote the words of Steiner again. "the black, watery, malevolent, timeless world of raging, lustful, childish self remained the thesis of her poetry" and of the dialectic that shaped her life, as she understood it with all such poetic profundity. the antithesis is always kept in her innermost personal secret mind as a precious, personal fact, and the synthesis of the two is left over to the readers' comprehension. Different readers arrive at different impressions of the poetry. Therefore we have that ambiguity and uncleanness
all through her poetry. This variousness and inconsistency, however, en-
chanting it may be - as a poetic phenomenon, teases the reader's sense
of appreciation with all her anxiety filled moments reduced into poetry.

**ISOLATION VS ENGAGEMENT**

Among the many constrictions Plath confronts, the Sex-taboo is one
that was constantly splitting her mind apart. She had to cudgel her brains
from the day she observed the free practices in her peer group. As
"Esther" (in the Bell Jar) Plath clearly gains confidence and is allowed
periodic leaves from the asylum; she decides she should be sexually ac-
tive and with her doctor's blessing, buys a diaphragm. She chooses a
Harvard Mathematics professor to be her first life partner, but experi-
ences haemorrhaging during interpersonal movement and is rushed to the
hospital. Remaining composed, Esther simply sends her lover the bill for
emergency surgery. Finally, she seems free of the repressive attitudes that
have plagued her life, but the Bell Jar's conclusion is unresolved. Al-
though she is sexually liberated, the conflict of interests remains, and
Esther must decide to conform to an oppressive society preoccupied with
fake appearances. These fake appearances, whether they are of male chau-
vinism or male potentiality, are the contingent strengthening facts that
often send her into states of frustration, despondency and morbid anxi-
ety.

During the course of the novel, Esther compares her mental state
to living in a suffocating bell jar: "wherever I sat . . . I would be sitting
under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air." She later
equates the mental hospital patients to college co-eds, maintaining that
they too live constricted lives. Critics have noted that Esther's final men-
tion of the metaphor parallels Plath's own fears, and foreshadows her im-
minent suicide: "How did I know that someday... at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere... the Bell Jar, with its stifling distortions wouldn't descend again"? Esther battles to find true, whole self as reflected in the fragmented structure of the novel.

There is yet another series of incidents where Plath finds social norms unreal but for a moment seems satisfied with the laurels from the dignitaries and the position that was conferred upon her. She was chosen to serve as a guest editor for Madamoiselle in the summer of 1953. She was very anxious to comply with whatever she was asked to do. She recollects with great gusto about her achievements. She worked in Hat ed and Heeled in Mille's air-conditioned Madison Avenue offices, fantastic, fabulous, living in luxury at the Barbizon as she edited. To recount in her own words:

met celebrities, was feted and feasted by a galaxy of UN delegates, simultaneous interpreters and artists... This Smith Cinderella met idols: Vance Bourjailly, Paul Engle, Elizabeth Bowen, wrote articles via correspondence with five handsome male teachers.

(Letters Home)

Her success at editor and her mixing with big celebrities was looked upon as an unreality and emptiness. She failed to accept her success and merely compared it with the story of Cinderella which remains in the confines of fiction. She calls herself as 'Smith Cinderella' as she was a student of Smith College. The Bell Jar gives us a clear idea of the friction between the 'Self' and the 'Super ego' of freud. In the words of Broe "the self was emerging through the cracks that opened all over
of Broe "the self was emerging through the cracks that opened all over
the super ego" from the shock of its collision with the New York city
where she was feted.

In New York, Plath ran smack into the reality principle, as though
it had been burning so long and so relentlessly denied. Her new-found
world comes crashing down as she looks back into her chained self as
Esther GreenWood says in the Bell Jar:

"I felt terribly inadequate. The trouble was I had been in-
adequate all along. I simply hadn't thought about it. The
one thing I was good at was winning scholarships and
prizes and that era was coming to an end".

(The Bell Jar, p. 76)

Her assessment, this incident was one such occurrence in the
world of constricted, sad life that was always her world. She
carefully built up personality dissolved as, she says,

"All little successes I'd trotted up so happily fizzled
so nothing outside the slick marble and plate glass
fronts along Madison Avenue".

(The Bell Jar, p. 78)

She expresses in her "Letters Home", The fear of succeeding as
she feels towards the end that it may be someone else who is succeed-
ing. She has had time and again that gnawing fear that behind every
success there is that mute compliance to the practices and norms set by
someone else.
The desire to be her own self and the blown up picture of what the society demands of her is an insurmountable peak for Sylvia Plath which often throws her into intense moments of conflict and anxiety. She says in Letters Home:

"Even now I dread the big choices which loom up in my life.... What college! what career! I am afraid. I feel uncertain. What is best for me! What do I want! I do not know. I love freedom. I deplore constrictions and limitations."

(Letters Home 13, 1949, p.57)

The many personalities that Esther feels she must project—courteous daughter, dutiful student, naive virgin, cosmopolitan lover—battle within her, and are intertwined in the stories structure. Esther is vivacious and intelligent, and it becomes obvious that this separates her from other people as do her ironic views and melancholic attitude. Detached from others, as well as from herself Esther lives on the periphery, watching and judging others' lives while observing and contrasting her own. Esther's criticism of the society is astute, but she cannot assess herself in the same manner, and numerous critics contend that Esther's struggle to find a place for herself in this larger social situation is Plath's primary focus in 'The Bell Jar'. Throughout the novel there are subtle distinctions made between the distorted point of a woman and the actual distortions of the society in which she tries to cope.

In the strict psychological parlance Plath suffers acutely with the symptoms of alternating personalities in utter mutual hatred of each other. It is an abnormal psychological condition found in the paranoid so-
matic patients. Love leads to charity and ignorance to contempt. And yet she writes her poetry as a seasoned artist, making these very neurotic experiences as the basis, invigorating force, sustaining matter. It is again, these unique ghastly, terrorising experiences which gives direction to her poetic invasions of imagery and symbols.

We can clearly notice in her poem "Fever 1030" how she successfully objectivises her creative self as against herself without any creeping or agitating sensations disturbing her creative faculty.

I am too pure for you or anyone
Your body
Hurts me as the world hurts God.
I am a lantern.

(Ariel, p.59)

"I am too pure for you or anyone" suggests a teasingly shy humour. Some others too are tried imaginatively, of course, nothing is more horrifying for a lover than his beloved suggesting that others too are in her consideration. There is a way of interpreting these lines in a slyish manner of a beloved teasing her lover by way of complaining how his body hurts her. When the body physically hurts others needs no elucidation. There is an intoned antithetical suggestion here which implies exactly opposite of what is verbally presented. Its dramatic poignancy is comparable to that of the metaphysicals like Donne and Emily Dickenson.

This is a clear example of how she objectivises her sufferings from the evils of the society. Hence, the world hurts and it needs pur-
gation; people need to be purified of their sins—that 'the other' the society needs to be purged. She is always in intelligent control of her feelings even when they are neurotic stuffed particles of paranoid. Her work bears out her theories that any state of mind even when it is an unfeelable vacuum can be coherently formulated into acknowledgeable poetry. Thus she brings forth a coherent expression on to her incoherent thoughts and feelings. Here the very incoherence becomes the basic fabric of her poetic imagery. She conceives herself as 'a lantern' (lit one, of course) whose darkness cannot touch that 'lantern' is also a self-burning agent. Yet 'your (sinning) body hurts me as the (sinful) world hurts God.' Plath inherited some peevish Catholic notions of purity and piety through her teacher Robert Lowell. The Self-confounded manner of considering herself as unapproachable as God himself is born of such notions of purity and piety. Such notions do not go to give her the 'necessary-courage-to-be' in the world of existence but, she successfully transforms such lack of 'necessary-courage-to-be' into enviable poetic fire. All this is not the streak of self love converging into demanding prospection. Here, it is not ideas that go to make her poetry. It is all powerful feelings knit into assorted poetic images and forms. The connecting thread is the sincerity of her emotions. Her emotions are obstinately biased in favour of her feelingly apprehended failing anxiety filled psychic unbalance. The 'lantern' image here is quite arresting in its innocent child-like audacity in equating herself with God himself. It was her determination both to face her inward and terrifying experiences and to use her intelligence in doing so - so as not to be overwhelmed by them- that she managed to write her extraordinary "last poems." 26

"Lady Lazarus" is another of her poems, a step further which bears witness to her capacity as a poet who can intelligently convert her feel-
nings of suffering and anxiety into artistic verses. The death of Lady Lazarus correspond to her own crisis: The first after her father died; the second when she had her nervous break down, the third, a presentiment of death that was to come. What is amazing about the poem is the objectivity with which she handles such personal material. She is not just telling about her own private suffering. Instead, it is the very closeness of her pain which gives it a general meaning. Through it she assumes the suffering of all the modern victims of neurosis. The city, the machine and the centralised governance brought forth insurmountable tensions in the minds of the people. Added to the social scenario we have those family traditions, norms and ethics drastically changing. To get adjusted to these threatening situations one is required to be quite insensitive or forced to drunkenness and drugs. Plath, like all other intellectuals, is hypersensitive and extremely consentious to the social, cultural, ethical and moral challenges. She becomes awfully understandable. She considered suicide a number of times. This suicidal tendency is the basic reason for a sort of perennial anxiety oppressing her person. Her poetry is a testimony for this oppression filled anxiety:

... “I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it.”

(Ariel, p. 16)

The poem “Lady Lazarus” begins with the above lines referring to her attempts of suicide. It builds up in a rocking movement that becomes more powerful as the poem proceeds describing her sufferings. She talks about her hatred of the whole matrix of the family, cannibal-
istic, erotic love and society that she is destroying symbolically by de-
stroying herself. However she promises to come back in the following
verse:

"Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air."

(Ariel p.19)

In these lines she promises herself rebirth. The speaker is a woman
who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. She has to die first.
She is the phoenix, the liberation spirit, the saviour. Thus the poem ends
with a final, defensive, desperate assertion of omnipotence. 'Red hair'
indicates her passing through red hot fire into the ash. What is the way
that 'air' eats men? The element 'air' ultimately withdrawing its sup-
port to the living beings is the declaration of death. Here 'air' is given
that omnipotential capacity over the lives. Plath invokes for herself such
mano-maniacal potentialities to bring revenge upon men who brought
feminine nicipitics to wreck. Her revenge is insatiable just as her de-
sire to live happily. Plath's glorification of mortio (death instinct) is di-
rectly born of her failure of libido (birth instinct). Critics have abundantly
spoken of her sexual frigidity. Her sexual frigidity invariably throws her
into a state of anxiety coupled with morbid imagination. She resorts to
ghastly imagination as a poetic formula of arresting escape. This is more
or less true of all the confessional poets. In an age where miracles never
happen they fall into innumerable delusions through introspection. These
delusions are as much real for that poetic creative moment as all kinds
of instinctive operations are real in the day to day life.

Thus, we realise that her hatred of men, her hatred of the society
and her changing personalities from moment to moment were all portrayed in poems that expressed her deep anguish and anxiety. These conflicts and sufferings did not suppress her spirit, rather these feelings became a substratum for her poetry.

Anxiety is an ambiguous experience where sensibility eludes the very sense of being ridden with it by way of shattering and enervating the being. To grasp such moments and to invent for them apt poetic images for that slipping and sliding experience from the grip of imagination-the very dramatic of this process becomes her poetry.

Speaking at length of the poem "Fever 103" one comes to understand her deep desire to be oneself— a total freedom from the shackles and hazzles of life as imposed and dictated by the society. This can be possible only through complete purification i.e. through death. Her real creation was that inner transformation and eventual birth of a new self, conquering self, to which her journal bears witness; and which proved itself so overwhelmingly in ‘Ariel’ poems.

The poem is about two kinds of fire. One merely gives pain while the other of heaven purifies. During the poem the first kind of fire merges into the second. Illness and pain are intolerable and agonizing but if they go on long enough, they cancel each other and the purity of death takes over. This process goes on systematically as Death is present right from the beginning. This process of purification continues until everything is purified of all the extraneous elements leading to bodylessness pure spirit - free from pain or agony. Thus, Plath goes through a process of pain and anguish to shed all that is distasteful, as she calls ‘sin’, to the pure and acceptable state of poetic imagination. It is again a strong antithetical manner of seeking imagined sublimation,
and her changing personalities from moment to moment were all portrayed in poems that expressed her deep anguish and anxiety. These conflicts and sufferings did not suppress her spirit, rather these feelings became a substratum for her poetry.

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just like a Cinderella falling into the adventures of life without knowing the hazards involved.

"Devilish Leopard
Radiation turned it while
And killed it in an hour
Greasing the bodies of adulterers
Like Hiroshima ash and eating in
The sin the sin".

(Fever 1030, Ariel p.58)

This 'Devilish Leopard' her imagined version of a death fire that shapes everything including the raging 'fever 1030'. 'Hiroshima ash' is symbolic of total distinction, for obvious reasons. But 'the bodies of adulterers' being 'Greased' is vague. Probably it is her version of numification, of the 'adulterers' bodies to be preserved for her future through her poetry. 'Hiroshima ash' and 'eating in the sin' are contradictory. After the Hiroshima 'ash' that is, the ultimate atomic fire, the story of original sin comes to an abrupt close. Therefore, it is eating 'the sin' in the sin, itself, that is, purging the human by eating and finishing by ultimate fire that is, atomic fire.

In some way, this poem indicates her feelings of guilt and a desire for expiation and purification. The tendency to come out of her intricacies of mind to pureness of mind in freedom is strongly observed in her poem. This anti-intellectualism can only cause depression, since every enduring reality is thereby interpreted as participation in the nature of death.
Mary Lynn Broe, quoting Plath, says, "When I was nineteen, purity was the great issue," says Esther Greenwood, the self answers, "pure? what does it mean?" Caught for the time, between opposing forces of equal poetry, Esther Greenwood can move neither way:

"I wondered why I couldn’t go the whole way any more. This made me sad and tired. Then I wondered why I couldn’t go the whole way doing what I shouldn’t... and this made me even sadder and more tired.

(Bell Jar, p.35)

Plath trying to be free takes charge, decides to seduce a simultaneous interpreter from the U.N., fails and according to the logic of such things, suffers in return a beating and attempted rape, in a patch of black mud, by a South American playboy, later, who sets as though he knew what secretly she was after. "See," he says, "Your dress is black and the dirt is black as well" (Bell Jar, p.36). She leaves New York to return to her home and her mother, but that whole life now seems vacuous. She goes, for the first time, to her father’s grave: "I laid my face to the smooth face of the marble and howled my loss into the cold salt rain" (Bell Jar, p.37). The next morning she squeezes into the crawl space beneath her house, where "A dim under sea light filtered through the slits of the cellar windows." (The Bell Jar, p. 39) She wraps her black rain coat around her "like my own sweet shadow," (The Bell Jar, p. 40) and swallows one by one, a bottle of sleeping pills.

Analyzing the above thought pattern and behaviour pattern of Sylvia Plath, the theories of Freud could enlighten us: Anxiety interferes
with effective and satisfying living. Psychoanalysis answers that it is those traumas that occurred in infancy that have disturbed the development of the libido. Being repressed or pushed into the unconscious memory, they occur again and again fabricating painful memories shaking the very personality. They are repressed or forgotten precisely because they could not be willingly accepted or agreeably retained. The inability to accept the trauma sets off a defuse mechanism that may extend much further than that which caused the organism to summon it. The organism does not care that in defending itself against a disease it uses a mechanism that at times constitutes a second illness. In a certain sense, all neurosis becomes a second illness. The biologists assert that, the impact of sickly matter that cannot be fitted into the organism disorganizes it. The same thing occurs in psychology and psychopathology. And the experience of psychological stress depending on its intensity is called Anxiety. Anxiety's most important meaning is in relation to life itself, i.e., the meaning of life. It is concerned not with what life contains, but what life is precisely because a specific experience tears away the veil hiding what life is not. It is a veiled threat of death or of personal disintegration, of lunacy or of emptiness, the phantasm of nothingness that appears materialized, that constitutes anxiety. Before it, the individual can be nothing. The phantasm does no more than appear, but the threat forces one to feel the unwithstandability of his person.

In her poem "Daddy", we notice the desperate attempts Sylvia makes in exorcizing her childish view of her father. It is all a type of archetypal resurfacing of the premitivist religious experiences wherein the ultimately good and the ultimately evil are wound together in the same divinities, often experienced in a delusory state as a neurotic conception of parental figures. It is in accordance with the Catholic mystical tradi-
tions of sensuous and violent being plaited and coalesced as a unified awe inspiring presence. Here, father is desired and denounced simultaneously. It is all as though he is desired to be denounced in order to give vent to the inordinate tensions of existing meaninglessly.

The neurotic dimensions of the involuntary use of language stretches into a state of paranoid are obvious here. She suffers from what the psychotherapists call abject persecution nausea, and her father becomes the largest of her rebellion. Gradually the person’s theme metamorphises into the theme of metaphysical rebellion addressed to the universal father - God. Looking to the personal, emotional charge in the poem she had never excused them for having given her this painful and unwithstandable life both physical and spiritual.

“You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe,
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years...”

(Ariel, p. 54)

Significantly, she refers to the thirty year old person as a “girl”, for the psychological restrictions of an infantile love and fear of the father have retarded the possibility of autonomy. In the above lines of “Daddy” the speaker recognizes the dominating aspect of Daddy; and the poem depicts her attempts to free herself from an image which she created of the father as deity and demon. The process of doing away with Daddy in the poem represents the persona’s attempts at psychic purgation of the image, “the model” of a father she has constructed.
What is amazing is the way Sylvia Plath converts these insufferable haunting memories of Daddy into poetic imaginations. Her irrepressible involuntariness of morbid thoughts are transformed into poetic images.

"........................
Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time-"

........................

(Ariel, p. 54)

"Daddy" is a poem that reveals the extent of possession that the persona was in and describes the attempts of her freedom from such an intricate web that lasted from the childhood to the adulthood. This image is a mixture of her real experience and the archetypal memories wherein the speaker's own psychic operation is represented in the more general symbol of the Nazi oppression of the Jews.

We notice in the poem a parallel drawn and neatly blended in the terror of her father; the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Nazi's. It is a matter of extrication in either case. The 'Father' figure looms large either way because he was also of German origin. As a child she says "I never could talk to you. The tongue stuck in my..." (Daddy) and with the next line referring to the Jewish persecution, "It stuck in a barb wire snare". (Daddy, Ariel, p.54)

What Plath accomplishes by the more or less chronological sequencing of these recollections of childhood, and on through the twenty years of attempted suicide to the point at thirty where the woman tries to extricate herself from the image of Daddy, is a dramatization of the
process of psychic purgation in the speaker which takes the shape of poetic imaginations—a tool to withstand her unwithstandability.

In Psychoanalytic therapies the patient is led through the past by way of recollection in order that it is in some way owned so that the patient finally becomes free of that. Similarly, Plath adopts methods through her poetry—a artistic recollection of all the mental projections of her father which amounts to an attempt at dispossession through direct confrontation with a demon produced in her imagination and thereby complacent by establishing her superiority in seeking revenge. To grapple with such bouts of anxiety that arose out of her morbid imaginations and chronic broodings, she invented an anxiety immunity system that consisted of poetic imaginations.

Sylvia Plath reveals the dilemma of individuals in a civilization in which identity has become ostentatiously linked with sexual prowess and in which it can only be expressed in terms of macho or machismo.

Sylvia was often troubled by the limitless freedom, she thought, men had. She compared herself with them and wonders why she couldn’t be free like them. According to Paul Alexander in his book, Biography of Sylvia Plath (p.118), Sylvia was dating Dick regularly and on the day when she joined him at Boston, she was shocked to realize about the virginity of Dick. While they were witnessing the birth of a baby in the hospital, Dick, who had implied he was innocent about sexual matters, told her that he had lost his virginity. The revelation disgusted her. It also infuriated her. Sylvia was jealous of men. She wrote to Anne,

"...because they did not have to worry about society stigmatizing them if they had sex indiscrimi-
nately, something for which woman suffered ridicule.

How could society tell boys to act on their sexual urges at the same time it denounced women for doing the same?"^{30}

It is not a question of mere feminist exactions for equality and equal freedoms. It concerns with the society indiscriminately 'stigmatizing' woman for the same freedoms preferred by women at par with men. In fact she nurtures a grievance against nature itself which implanted the seeds of imbalance. The loss of virginity problem of Dick in the above context grossly vexes her. As for her general apprehensions men have nothing to lose as they are not harshly stigmatized for the loss of their celibacy. That she speaks of celibacy, virginity speaks for the childlike confused manner of her thoughts. Both the events of loss of celibacy in men and virginity in women are destined prospects in youth. The initial personal reactions for their losses are equally disturbing for both men and women. Dick's confession shows the same. Even then, society stigmatizing women particularly challenging her notions for equal justice for men and women. That she expresses the same with a great emotional heat and fervor speaks for the anxiety born of ignorance of facts which is excusable. It is pitiable also.

However what Sylvia Plath mentions above is not her problem alone. This reaction is expressed by several feminist supporters. This is a self pity expressed by Plath and it is in exaggerated terms, probably to conceal her own anxiety about her frigidity that Plath verified in her journals, Letters Home and The Bell Jar. Normally, men and women, boys and girls find their own ways of sublimating their sexual desires without making much noise about it. We notice in Plath a psy-
chological fight between imaginative fears prompted by frigidity and by the imagined heroism of the childlike omnipotence.

We could relate George Mandler's enunciating the psychoanalytic theories of Anxiety Syndrome with the behavior pattern of Sylvia Plath who complained constantly about the loss of the freedom and how the social taboos and customs entrapped her. George Mandler says that the most important pathological manifestation of the anxiety reaction is seen in the syndrome commonly called anxiety Neurosis. While anxiety presumably plays a role in all neurotic disorders, this syndrome has both the overt and the subjective aspects of anxiety as its primary characteristics.

What perspires out of all such immature confessions is Plath's unwthstandably disturbed psychic balance, and this very unwthstandability takes the form of serious thought and reflection. The inconveniences of growth and development in youth formulate an excessive imbalance in women for obvious natural reasons of perceivable physiological alterations that take place in women at puberty. Such an event does not take place in men. The fact need not become a great point of anxiety in women if they are guided by their elders. They need to be assumed of such natural occurrences as common and usual. But, Plath did not have any such guidance and this led to certain psychological blocks in her personality. She speaks about these blocks like a seasoned artist which automatically becomes a confused confession becomes a confused confession of immaturity of thought. But these confessions are profound in the sense that they are positively touching revelations that go to reveal faithfully the inner happenings of her interior self.

The anxiety neurotic is a patient who is incapacitated by continu-
ous and often non specific feelings of anxiety. The patient typically displays signs of apprehensiveness and fear in a variety of different situations, none of which can necessarily be objectively described as threatening or aversive. Thus, while he may name a long list of thoughts or events of which he is afraid of or apprehensive, he will just as frequently describe the general phenomenon of free wheeling anxiety, a feeling of distress or apprehensiveness with no specific content. The tone and the titillating vibrations, with their folk rhetorical nuances, of the following stanza expresses the release of the pent-up anger and grouse of a vanquished self. The imagery with its catabolic ogres is startling, and speaks for the submerged anxieties and fear.

"If I've killed one man, I've killed two—
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years,....."

(Ariel, p. 56)

The father figure represented in 'one man' symbolically stands for all men who are capable of exploiting women to the hilt for their pleasure and happiness, having their partners to cold neglect. At the same time a schizophrenic suffers from persecution mania, born out of his/her excessive self love and exclusive introspective concerns. They often target their nears and dears- quite irrationally charge and rave at them with all their vehemence of language, with all verbal irrationality and violence. The vampire is not a mere vague ghost. Its oppressive presence also reveals its identity when he said 'he was you' meaning the father or the husband or any man.
It is a psychological fact that you tend to run away from or attack the real or imagined threatened object. In the above lines, Plath speaks of the two persons: her husband and her father, who she claims as the cause of her suffering, the cause of the loss of her freedom. For a normal person, that could hardly be the cause of his/her unhappiness. Plath drags the buried and the separated persons behind her making them the cause of her anxiety. This helps her maintain a note of hard and sardonic anger, as though she were almost amused that her own suffering should be so extreme, so grotesque. The technical psychoanalytic term for this kind of insistent gaiety to protect you from what, if faced nakedly, would be insufferable, is “manic defence”. But what, in a neurotic, is a means of avoiding reality can become, for an artist, a source of creative strength, a way of handling the unhandlable, and presenting the situation in all its fulness.

**IMAGINATION VS EXPERIENCE**

To recognize our predicament is a first step towards asserting and claiming our autonomy and freedom as beings-in-the world, however, it is here that the schizoid individual finds such difficulty, because of his lack of confidence in his own being-in-the world. The existential philosophers discussed at length. Referring to Heidegger’s concept of Dasein. Rollo May says:

Composed of Sein (Being) plus Da (there), Dasein indicates that man is the Being who is there and implies also that he is there and in the sense that he can know he is there and can take a stand with reference to that fact. The ‘there’ is moreover not just any place, but the particular ‘there’ that is mine, the particular point in time as well as
space of my existence at this given moment. Man is the Being who can be conscious of, and therefore responsible for his existence. The expression 'his existence' means and includes all the projects and actions in a given situation. If the 'given situation' itself is an artistic facet of one's own solopsistic imagination, the metaphors and images thus coined elude rational comprehensions and reasonable deductions. But Sylvia Plath, in order to attribute a generality of understanding to her exclusive dasein borrows the parallels from mythology and folklore. Her personal experiences, inspite of their patent obscurity and vagueness, expressionistically conform themselves to the archetypal hallucinatory contours, as in S.T.Coleridge, Emily Dickenson and Robert Lowell. In this context the emotions directly address themselves to the intensity of images as metaphors, having the rational aspects of the poetic presences, however unwithstandable the poetic presences may be.

The most rudimentary manner of the authentic self confirming for itself is by way of intentionality. Comprehending a solid place for itself is always through distinguishing the spacio-temporal continuum into 'here's' and 'there's'. This is the only way of objectively comprehending one's being. It places itself in the 'here' by way of relatively transposing itself into 'there'. Dasein is inclusive of 'here' and 'there' simultaneously or rather 'here' through 'there'. This kind of automatic relativisation is a particular phenomenon of being-in-the world, which is the essence of intentionality. If supposing the "thereness" is relegated into conscious suspension or doubt, "hereness" too gets suspended or felt as doubt and the contingent felt experience is unwithstandability or anxiety. This unwithstandability or anxiety as an initial spur of experience must project the authentic self into unconsciously accepted myth of
interspreading itself into 'here' through 'there' and vice versa. Therefore, the conscious assertion of 'me' is itself a myth that substantially serves the purpose of being-in-the world. Love for me being countered with love for the other as 'here' and 'there' of Dasein, the contrary of it i.e. hate for me countered with hate for the other, when 'love' and 'hate' are forms of the same authentic needs of possession and dispossession as emotions, or say possession through dispossession and vice versa. If the demands of possession are irrationally extended, the fears of dispossession too are aggravated resulting in anxiety.

“You are the one
Solid the spaces lean on, envious
You are the baby in the barn”.

(Ariel, p. 41)

Sylvia Plath finds her intentionality as given in the above lines of ‘Dick and Candlestick” among all the symbols of nothingness. She solves her own unwithstandability of nothingness in her baby as 'the one solid spaces lean on' and thus asserts her 'hereness'. Her love for the baby is an assertion of her here and now.

“A smile fell in the grass
Irretrievable
And how will your night dances
Lose themselves”.

(Ariel, p.27)

From the above lines in ‘The Night Dances,’ we can infer that
all the love's blessings finally confront the void. In the succeeding lines of the above poem too, the life's blessings are enumerated but lead finally to nothingness. She depicts in her lines the nature of the world as mechanical and meaningless and this leads to the accusation that our world is loveless and meaningless. In her poems, and from her continual images of yearning for tender care, she virtually tells us that true rebirth can only be achieved in terms of being, the individual finding himself, and accepting dependends on others and the need for love and meaning.

"Warm and human, then their pink light
  seeding and peeling".

(Ariel, p.27)

The feeling of guilt for self seeking life is so strong that it sometimes involves the notion of children. Thus in the above lines, she seems to oppose and withstand the dissolving power of infinite space and eternity by taking the help of the obvious humanness and warmth of children. This is a desperate attempt to counter the slipping identity of one's own self. Therefore, her love for her baby too is coupled with anxiety. The tonal vibrations of the expression indicate that. Because, immediately, after expressing some hope of intentionality through the medium of children, Plath seems to plunge into her void by saying that the children are only a worthless extension of the 'self'.

The thingness of a thing is held in the conscious self as a concrete 'this' or 'that' quite instinctively and instantaneously in a fleeting moment of experience in the personal experience. Plath seems to come in touch with reality through these various observations, and her chil-
dren; but then she seems to lose grip over them due to her unassured and unauthenticated self-defeating apprehended patterns. For example, while Plath admits the joyful days of her childhood in the care of her father, she is not able to accept the unhappy events of her father’s death and the events that occurred after that. In the introspective poetic moments into herself and into her biographical past, both the antithetical particulars of experience form themselves into a vague imperceptable cluster. In such moments the very nature of experience becomes obscure for want of clarity in authenticity. The given images and metaphors in such clusters lack specific clarity. As a result of her confused nature of experience, Plath gives altogether a different poetic turn to the matter on hand. Life becomes worthless to such persons and such withstandability leads the person to void and nothingness.

An overview of ‘Neurosis’ can give us the basis for such self-defeating behavioral patterns: A ‘neurosis’ is unwittingly evolved and represents a disturbance in emotional adaptation due to unresolved internal conflicts. In general, a neurosis represents the attempted resolution of unconscious emotional conflicts in ways that handicap in varying degrees the effectiveness of the person in living. It may be regarded as an unconsciously elaborated psychic mode of response which is defensively intended. Neurotic reactions are often characterized by their self-defeating consequences.

Plath seemed to be virtually astride two worlds: she has one foot on the ground while the other foot was above the ground indicating her unfounded unreasonable aspirations. On the one hand Plath’s goals seemed conventional: fulfillment in family life, success in writing in all the publications, a satisfying career; and, on the other hand, her goals
seemed unconventional too: her refusal to compromise on anything, wanted everything at once, no matter how incompatible her desires.

"... with one foot
Caught (as it were) in the muck-trap
of skin and bone (she)
Dithers with the other way of the mad cap
cloud cuckoo
Agway at the impeccable moon."

(Collected Poems, p. 240)

If the muck trap is the sinful state of physical being 'one foot' refers to the whole being in the clutches of 'skin and bone' sinful frame (physical). But, 'dithering with the other way out' of purity and piety (unfounded provinces) is itself an impossible aspiration. This dream being initiated by the muck-trap is the mystical mystery of nature that traps and gives the dreams of untrappedness. But this is painfully untrue. It is as painful as the realisation that an 'Impeccable moon' is out of one’s reach, hence 'the moral cap'.

George Mandler, drawing both from psychoanalytic theory and Existentialistic theory explains about the arousal of anxiety in the escape mechanism of an organism from the reality. When either overstimulation threatens or no object(goal) is present, the organism has behavior available to him and cannot act; therefore he is anxious. As far as the existentialist position is concerned, the state of anxiety occurs, of course, whenever the individual has no way of overcoming the anxiety that goes with possibility and freedom. The noxious, painful, unconditioned stimulus of learning theory typically is an event that is unmanagable represents over stimulation and disrupts ongoing behaviour. When the organi-
ism does in fact find a way of coping with this situation by escape, this escape behavior is the way of overcoming helplessness.\textsuperscript{34}

Mary Lynn Broe says, “A legacy introduced Sylvia to the conflict between the poetic impulse and the world of compromise, if not diminished reality.”\textsuperscript{35} Mrs. Plath asserted the ‘Upstairs-Downstairs’ household during Sylvia’s childhood. Upstairs, Sylvia and her brother made up rhymes and lyrics in a fantasy playworld populated by Matthew Arnold’s forsaken Mermon and Mixie Blackshort, the Heroic Bear. Downstairs, in an alien world severed from warmth of family affection, Otto Plath died a slow, agonizing, and self imposed death of Diabetes Mellitus, refusing life saving surgery and choosing complete solitude. These two contradictory dimensions of existence were inextricably bound in Sylvia Plath’s youth. They required her comprehension, perhaps even encouraged the new, positive value she gave to ambivalence, which she clearly cultivated throughout the early poems. There was thus the interplay of possessive and dispossessive simultaneously in the conscious self. This kind of life situation contributes for what the psychotherapists call double personality and multiple personality. Plath’s case fits into co-conscious alternating personality, which forms a cleavage in the conscious authentic self of the incumbent.

What distinguishes Sylvia Plath’s display of youthful contradictions suggested by “Letters Home” is not “the variety of analogues that rehearse the same childhood theme, but the volubility with which Plath starts and restarts into this dilemma,”\textsuperscript{36} to quote Broe again.

One of the early poems “Cinderella” gives us the dilemma of Plath:

And gilded couples all in untruing trance follow holding
The choice running through these poems is frequently that of fact versus imagination. The early poems cover an expansive range of emotion. The poems boldly restate Plath’s concern to find a balance in the elements of choice in critical opposition. In fact, knowing that the choice is always to be made becomes a touchstone for the young poet against which she will measure her failure and improvised solutions:

Either way we choose, the angry witch will punish us for saying which is which in fatal equilibrium we poise on perilous poles that freeze us in a cross of contradiction, cracked between the fact of doubt, the faith of dream.

(Metamorphosis of the Moon, Collected Poems, p.308)

Brooding ‘doubt’ and ‘faith’ are opposite of each other, one is a ‘fact’ directly experimented and the other is ‘faith’, felt needful but unavailable - that too because of undrenched ‘doubt’. It is not a mere St. Thomas spiritual dilemma. For Plath it is a practical reality of everyday experience. This is so because the very object of experience is a ‘doubt’. Hence, the tone of absolute cynicism.

In her attempt to balance the major contradictions rooted deep in her sensibility, Plath engages in a dialectic in which oppositions are as clear-cut as they are effectively miscalculated. Brooding ‘doubt’ and
faith should have been in the order of rhetoric. But the inversion hurl is a master poetic stroke. The faith of dream is also expressive of the poetically effected seeming confession in a child-like speech.

In sum, the youthful Plath is unable to find a balance between ‘Muck’ and ‘Dream’, nor can she poetically resolve the dilemma of a life issuing from imagination to practical concerns.

The choice between the ‘mica mystery of moon light’ or the ‘pockmarked face’ we see through the scrupulous telescope is always to be made. One is for a heart’s desire and the other is a harsh reality. One is desired and the other is forced upon the unwritten sensibility. There is no real choice here. There is only the stupifying choicelessness. We are in a world not of our choosing but of inevitability thrust on our being. Moreover, when this inevitability is what it perspires as stark reality of knowledge, the very reality of knowledge becomes unw withstandable to the dreaming innocence leading to startled experience. In these moments of startled anxiety in experience she strategically makes some overstatements which in their turn become expressive of the perspective of her angle of looking at things, as well as the raging anxiety in the experiencing self.

Plath’s overstatement of disillusionment in love becomes accumulative and, at the same time, more specific. Just as she mocks the naiveté of romantic illusions recognizing their hazard, she debunks a singular life of the imagination (The Mica Mystery of the moonlight) and the cold realities of facts countenanced by the intellect (‘That Pockmarked faces’, ‘seen through the Telescope’). Plath finds that she cannot join the best of both worlds; ‘she is poised on perilous poles that freeze us in a cross contradiction.’ Still any reliance upon the imagination alone is
doomed, for it fails to compromise with the world of practical facts. The unbridgeable cleavage between imagination and reality is the very cause of her angst; and her poetry is a concerned mode of outpouring this angst.

The choice between the factual world and the imaginative impulse is unavoidable, but saying "which is which" is nevertheless a reckless enterprise and less than satisfactory according to the lesson of several poems. The eleven poems collected in the Sophia Smith archives most consistently present Plath’s poetic sensibility ‘Racked between / The fact of doubt, The faith of dream’. The Smith poems clearly state her ideological options in the face of her failure to find the balance in that ‘fatal equilibrium:’ “recognition of the world of stern fact or - knowing the relativity of all absolutes - ironic tolerance of the inscrutable physical world.” 37 to barrow the ideas of Mary Lynn Broe.

Mary Lynn Broe further says, “One explanation of the poet’s ambivalent attitude toward life’s paradoxes - imaginative versus factual concerns - is that she greedily tries to grasp a contradictory totality. Appearance and reality are willy askew for Plath”. 38

**STASIS & MOVEMENT**

Plath was thoroughly exhausted physically and emotionally in her vacillation between joys and sorrows. yet, this cycle of ups and downs offered Plath to streamline her predicaments and anxiety into poetic imaginations. She moved ahead defiantly in asserting herself by even getting at par with God, as a metaphysical rebel.

I am afraid of getting older. I am afraid of getting
married. Spare me from relentless cage of routine and rote. I want to be free... free to know people and their back-grounds. . .free to move to different parts of the world so I may learn that there are other morals and standards beside my own. I think, to be omniscient. . . . I think I would like to call myself the girl who wanted to be God.

(Letters Home, pg. 76)

An organism can be classified but not God. The omnipotent God is beyond classification because He is pure spirit.

Sylvia Plath yearns for Apollonian choice of rationality and order which implies separation between the self and the world and the control of the world by self. The fact is that she is more tilted towards Dynecian aspects of existence. She wants life in all its strong passions and sublimations.

The women in her poems eg. Tulips, Fever 1030 , desire to be free from the shackles and torments of men.

They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff
Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut
Stupid pupils, it has to take everything in.

(Ariel, p.20)

Attributing a hospital metaphor to life on earth Plath profoundly draws an inference that the talk of freedoms and choices has no meaning. The only meaning of life is the agony of being-in-the-world. Th
kind of poetic agreement suits her purpose of expressing her soul's predicament. While expressing her personal suffering Plath symbolically reveals the widest spread sense of melancholy in this unassuring world.

The above lines describe her helpless position in the hospital inferring indirectly the torture at the hands of men. Man seems to represent a kind of order and control. The women in these poems appear to be victims and centres of suffering. They are helpless and are unable and squirm in their helplessness.

They wait for their turn to take vengeance as they are driven to violence which is premeditated. The woman will have the final triumph and victory. They are to finally confront and vanquish their own fear, man's chaos, cruelty and disorder. Plath gives to women a roll of saviours to bring about the Apollonian system of order by winning victory over men.

g·stasis implies completion and perfection. Hence the social customs practices that fall short are vehemently opposed. Movement implies completion and imperfection. God is said to be unmoved mover according to Christian Theology. God is perfect and needs no change.

'I am I' are the words uttered by God of Moses on mount Siniai. When Moses the prophet of Israel went on top of Mount Siniai, he saw a burning bush which seemed burning but not consumed. On Moses' inquiry. God says 'I am I'.

But Moses said to God 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of ancestors has sent me to you' and they ask me 'What is his name?' What shall I say to
them? God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am’.

Plath is attracted to and repelled by both these choices of Stsis and Movement and in the process tension is worked out both light and profound.

Plath very often confronts and conflicts directly with the Christian traditions. It is not because she wanted to be an agnostic, but the exploiting world around her does not leave scope for faith. The whole world is a place of evil and pain. Adjustment is not possible. Rebellion is a mere sound and fury. The only thing possible for a sensitive poet like Plath is to speak out unendingly about her personal sense of unwishtstandability. That brings the momentary sympathy of her readers. One should not forget that she herself is the first reader of her poems.

Plath’s religious stands are always half-baked. This is so because they are simply borrowed from Robert Lowell. Lowell is well known for his contrary stands against Catholics, Puritans and Quakers. There is no logic or consistency in his religious stands. It is so with Sylvia Plath also. But, Plath liberally draws from all Christian traditions her imagery and metaphors.

Rollo May gives a clear explanation about the development of anxiety in an individual who grows with an incomplete support of his parents. At the point in development while self awareness emerges, there also emerges a measure of freedom and responsibility in each action. But, on the other hand, this individual develops at every moment as a member of a social nexus upon which he is dependent not only for the early meeting of his biological needs but also for his emotional security. The child’s existence consists of himself from his parents. Where he is viewed
from the individual aspect of the dialectical relationship, his growth consists of decreasing dependence on parents and increasing reliance upon and use of his own powers. When he is viewed from the social aspect the child's growth consists of his progressive relationship to the parent on new levels. Blockage of development at either pole in this dialectic engenders psychological conflict, and the result of which is anxiety. Where there is "freedom from" without corresponding interrelationship, there is the anxiety of the defiant and isolated individual. Where there is dependence without freedom, there is the anxiety of the clinging person who cannot live outside a symbiosis. To the extent the development is blocked at either pole, inner mechanisms will also be set in operation within the individual that increase the conflict and anxiety. In the individual who is characterized by independence without corresponding relatedness, there will develop hostility toward those, whom he believes to be the occasion of his isolation. In the individual who is symbiotically dependent, there will develop hostility toward those whom he regards as instrumental in the suppression of the capacities and freedom. In each case the hostility increases the conflict and hence the anxiety.

Another mechanism will also be present namely repression. The utilized capacities and the unfulfilled needs are not lost but repressed. The phenomenon is often observed chronically that the defiantly independent, isolated individual is repressing considerable need and desire to make affirmative relationships with other people and the symbiotically dependent person is repressing need and desire to act independently. It is well known that the mechanism of repression itself decreases autonomy and increases helplessness and conflict.

In the 'Bell Jar', Sylvia Plath is often preoccupied with air, wa-
ter, snow, flowing blood, vomiting, feelings of emptiness within the menacing black shadows. Approaches to relationships brings a fear of 'loss of inner contents'.

The conflict between illusion and fact, imagination and the physical always seem to nag at the poet's firm resolve to find some balance.

However, one must admit that Plath maintained a consistent poetic shape to her predicametal situations and anxious moments. Her sorrows, her conflicts, her laments and her desires were converted into artistic poetry.

Sylvia Plath was intensely aware of her biochemistry and strong temperament and constantly felt the impact of both. It is her constant awareness of her vulnerability, nature of things, contradictions in life that give her voice a prophetic tone in her lines and images. In her journey of expressing such audacious images in poetry and finding intense satisfaction and relief in her moments of anxiety, she may advance either to a terrifying descent or to an insurmountable peak. There are innumerable evidences to show that, all through her poetry Plath maintained a unique personal temper or temperament, which can be compared to that of the existential writers. This aspect is taken up for discussion in the next chapter.
NOTES


4. Letters Home p.72


7. “Asbestos hands”, referred to Plath’s father’s hands,

8. “Bee Keeper:” referred to her father, The Colossus p.66


10. Sigmund Freud, (1926). The Problem of Anxiety. (New York: Norton, 1936) First Published As Hemmung Symptom And Angst. The British Translation was published By Hogarth, London, in 1936 As Inhibitious Symptoms And Anxiety. pp 78-82

11. De Chirico CHIRICO, Giorgio de (1888- ), Italian painter, who founded pittura metafisica, or metaphysical painting, a movement that captured in paint the mysterious quality of dreams. During his metaphysical period Chirico painted deserted city squares that conveyed a unique mood of melancholy and foreboding, and disturbing still lifes of
oddly juxtaposed objects in distorted perspective. These early works deeply influenced the surrealist movement, with its emphasis on the psychological and irrational, and are Chirico's great contribution to the development of painting. He later repudiated the metaphysical style and returned to academic art.

12. Chirico City

... a vista of silent squares, peopled by shadows and statues, bounded by distant horizons and marked by an elegiac beauty and vast dignity ..., the world... is a dream world ... a romantic territory... All these devices are used to give an illusion of endless time - to the atmosphere of infinitude.


14. Ted Hughes, "Notes on the chronological order of Sylvia Plath's poems," Tri-Quarterly, no. 7 (Fall 1966), p.81


18. "Prehistory"

Prehistory: De Chirico's essay on "Prehistory" describes a world
in which myths appear as literal truths, and where a sense of mystery characterises an eternal present. It is a world of omens and forebodings. Similarly in Plath's late poems, objects frequently appear with brightened significance and carry a suggestion of doom, because everything in someway echoes the underlying structure of a timeless mythology. As in a primitive world, things are omens (Poppies are 'bloody skirts'; a bee box is a 'coffin'; smiles are "hooks").


22. Esther is the name of the heroine of the "The Bell Jar". Plath is understood to be Esther.


26. Ariel Poems

27. The Bell Jar P. 30
