

# Postmodern Feminist Voices in the Poems of Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir: A Comparative Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** The present study explores similar thought patterns implied in the selected poems of American English poet Sylvia Plath and Pakistani Urdu poet Parveen Shakir; who are known for being strong female voices of the twentieth century. The study addresses the social and cultural diversity as well as the similarities in their works within the constraints of patriarchal forces in each specific context. It also considers the biographies of both authors to highlight the poems' analogies and disparities.

**Methodology:** Poems from the collection Ariel by Sylvia Plath and Khushboo by Parveen Shakir are selected for analysis. The comparative study technique by Aldo Mesemio is applied to recognize the thought patterns reflected in the poetry of writers belonging to two completely different cultures.

**Findings & Conclusion:** The study is vital for literature students because it provides a critical insight into two different cultures and societies through the medium of poetry. It is helpful for those who have a keen interest in Parveen Shakir and Sylvia Plath's life and poetry and have a tendency to explore the works in future.

**Keywords:** Feminist Voices; Plath; Shakir; Patriarchy; Thought Patterns.

## Introduction

A thought pattern is recognized as a habit of thinking in a particular way or reflecting a specific postulation. The world has been affected much since the introduction of feminist theory in the early twentieth century. Several transformations underlined social, financial, psychological, and above all social relations structures in ways arising complexities in almost every field of life. Concepts of freedom and liberation remained the most dominant characteristics of postmodern feminism. However, feminism also demonstrated the effects of this wide array of transformations resulting into liberty and freedom from the patriarchal setup losing their meanings. It changed into identity, recognition, relations, social perspectives, upbringing, family identity, social and gender identity, and power of knowledge.

Postmodernism can be understood thus as an amalgamation giving birth to a new feminist theory. However, before getting a deeper insight into postmodern feminism, it is fair to have an idea of postmodernism itself, for it is far too different from postmodernity. Debating postmodernism in his phenomenal book, Woods argued that "knowledge can only be partial, fragmented and incomplete", rejecting the idea of "logically

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consistent, self-evidently 'true'" following results of philosophical dialectics (1999). He further argued and conceded it "as a radically new form of epistemological freedom, resisting the dominance of overarching patterns that seem to ignore the details and experiences of differences in their efforts to construct patterns, [making] sense to the world on a grand scale" (1999). Thus, a thought pattern in postmodernism is recognized as a habit of thinking in a particular way or reflecting a specific postulation.

The female writers used poetry as a medium which was essentially considered a men's instrument fashioned to serve their purposes. Language as 'masculine' (Spender, 1981) was considered a partial medium with many features reflecting its role as an 'instrument through which patriarchy finds expression' (Barry, 2009, p.121). Flax pointed out that issues of self, gender, power, and knowledge and related knowledge had become highly ambivalent in the contemporary world, developing new insights into these issues. Almost every other concept had some "insight into central social issues, the ambivalence of the present, and its own status within it" that sometimes human beings feel at loss to understand any mode of thought as true (Flax, 1990, p. 14). Therefore, postmodern feminism does not deal with the commonplace thoughts of the liberation of women, their equality with men, or their freedom from political constraints. Rather, postmodern feminism deals more with "how relations of domination" are woven "into the fabric of the self and how desire and domination become entwined" (Flax,1990, p. 16). This led to the ambiguity of what feminists of the postmodern era wanted to accomplish and what they desired to present to their audience. As a result, feminist sensitivity went through radical changes, giving birth to new social issues.

Postmodern feminism accepted the challenge from different directions, pointing at "the aspects of societies that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within male-dominant viewpoints", for even the sphere of feminism was dominated mostly by male writers, an approach which appeared contradictory to the very concept of feminism. Consequently, postmodern feminism explored puzzling questions about identity, gender, self, ego, sexuality, and the anatomy of sex. Social conditions and social relations have become new avenues to be explored. Even the meaning of the "difference" has become a new issue of controversy as to what difference constitutes when used to specify a gender among females or males (Flax, 1990, p. 24).

Among such concepts, psychodynamics is the most important, which underlines the concept of studying the psychological forces affecting women specifically their behavior, feelings, and emotions. Flax (1990) highlighted the object relations theory of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, stating that though both have some differences, their purpose is to go deeper into understanding the feminine psyche through child-rearing, social conditioning, social relations, and infancy. "Their account of the importance of mother-child relations in the development of self and the constitution of gender and other social relations extending the insight of" the proponents of the theories (Flax, 1990, p. 164).

Postmodern feminism avoids the analysis of woman's oppression. Contrarily, it highlights the historical and cultural manifestations to subdue women. It exchanges the idea of female identity with the plural and complex idea of identity given by society, considering gender as a weaving agent, adding the threads of class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. Postmodern feminism is like a tapestry made of different shades of threads rather than one single color.

The present study identifies postmodern feminist voices from two completely different cultures. American poetess Sylvia Plath and Pakistani poetess Perveen Shakir belonged to completely different worlds; however, the readers cannot ignore finding the similar themes, ideas, and thoughts of Postmodern Feminism reflected in the poetry of both poets.

The 'suicidal doll' (Gesellschaft fur, 2008), the most dynamic and admired American poet of the twentieth century, Sylvia Plath, was born in Massachusetts, United States October 27, 1932. Plath was married to Ted Hughes, an English poet. She had her successful suicide attempt, after being failed several times before. It is believed that depression was the cause of her unfortunate death (Cooper, 2006). Plath's poems are autobiographical and they carry her mental agonies, the complications in her marriage with Ted Hughes, and most of all her tangled relationship with her parents; nevertheless, her poetry is also a vision of herself, and also the testimony of her postmodern feminism.

The queen of Urdu ghazal, an intellectual asset of Pakistan who remained a civil servant, Shakir was born in 1952. She won many awards including Pride of Performance as an acknowledgment of her contributions to the field of arts and literature. Unfortunately, she lost her life in a car crash in 1994. Deeply in love with her husband, Syed Naseer Ali, Shakir held the same complicated emotions of deep love towards her husband as was reflected in the biography of Plath for her husband Ted Hughes. Shakir is considered the precursor of modern feminist poetry in Urdu because she is the first woman poet to give place to the postmodern feminist voice in her poetry as she boldly brings into context certain taboos which are considered obscenities in Pakistani conservative and patriarchal society. She becomes the voice for the physical needs of Pakistani women, which is considered profanity in the context of Pakistani society.

The poetry of Plath and Shakir challenges Patriarchal standards and underlined frequently mentioned taboos in their vigorous diction, which awards their works a transgressive attitude. Both the writers tend to reflect certain taboos associated with females in their respective societies, breaking the cover of the tyranny of men in a completely male-dominated world where women have been marginalized from time immemorial. The study has focused on the language used by both female poets since language has remained instrumental in endorsing domination (Barry, 2009). The study unravels the postmodern feminist voice in the selected poems of Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir and identifies similar thought patterns reflected in the themes and poetic styles of the two poets belonging to different cultures. The study is significant as it provides ample understanding of the life and poetic works of both poets. It also shows new features of social differences in the selected poems to demonstrate both the writers as active and strong voices of the century. The study is delimited to the poems of Plath and Shakir. Parveen Shakir's "Mahe Tamam, Sirf aik larki, A Selection of Ghazal Couplets, Tomato Ketchup, The Misfit, The Working Woman, Ecstasy, The Insight, Wasteland" and Sylvia Plath's "Widow, Daddy, Edge, Mushroom, Tulips, About me and Ariel" are taken for analysis using a comparative study method.

## Literature Review

Hamadan (2010) suggested that the function of male figures in Plath's life investigates that her suicide was caused by "marriage and then "her father and husband caused much grief and pain to Sylvia." Hamdan adds that, not only confessional, but Plath's poetry is also feminized, much like the work of Anne Sexton and W.D. Snodgrass. According to Hamadan (2010), Plath's literary work reflects her psychological side, lending it an autobiographical aspect. However, the study does not focus on the thought patterns implied in her poetry.

Devi (2010) illustrated that poets such as Robert Lowell, Randal Jarrel, Anne Saxton, John Berryman, and Sylvia Plath have close association with confessional writing (p.279). Devi (2010) compares two poems: 'Suicide' by Kamala Das, an Indian writer, and Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath to demonstrate how personal pain is the theme of confessional writing and how drug addiction, alcoholism, destructive family relationships, traumatic childhood, split marriages, and recurring mental breakdowns are elements of confessional writing. According to Devi (2010), Plath committed suicide at the age of thirty when she was young, whereas Das meant to commit suicide because she found life useless.

Naim (1993), an American scholar of Urdu language and literature, explores the development of self-consciousness in Urdu literature due to the advent of women poets, particularly from Pakistan. Shakir's poetry is the mode of creation and perception. He also criticizes some contemporary poets including Fehmida Riaz who criticized Shakir's love poetry as being void of profundity and labeled it as shallow. Shakir's writings are criticized for being open on sexuality and her satire on patriarchal culture. Rukhsana Ahmad excludes Shakir from the feminist category of poets. However, according to Naim (1993), Riaz, and Naheed, they "created the space" that was filled by Parveen Shakir's poetic voice.

Sit, Wai-Yew, and Agnes (2007) examined how Plath and Dickinson constructed themselves in their literary works via themes of love, nature, and death. They used poetry to speak out against their oppression and express their authority. The research disputed women's powerlessness and female authors' 'intellectual constraint' (Sit et.al., 2007). It cited Juhansz (1978), who described the "dormant situations" of women.

Women's restriction to domesticity limited their social influence, relegating them to the roles of spouses, mothers, and daughters. Both writers used love poetry to criticize wifedom and women. Marriage, for them, was a tool to entrap a woman's freedom and conscience.

Plath and Dickinson used nature imagery to disclose self-concealed images. The unfeminine self they derived through animal imagery or small insects like bees, spiders, etc. Through such imagery, they envisioned magnitude out of pettiness e.g. using the spinning spider as the metaphor not for males but for females. The creative energy of the poet personifies the spider's potential. The three stages of a woman's life are defined as "born, bridled, and veiled," and all three stages represent women's imprisonment and independence being cloaked by patriarchal convictions (Sit et.al., 2007).

Shakir's poetry, according to Hassani (2006), is introspective and subjective, reflecting just her unique experiences and sentiments. He emphasized that Shakir's 'Kushboo poetry' portray the confessions of a girl with great hopes and passionate desires in a mysterious and unpredictable world of reality. Hassani distinguishes the confessional approach of Praveen Shakir and Sylvia Plath in his paper. Shakir's environment is different, more restricted, repressive, and claustrophobic, yet she is neither as egotistic nor unhappy as Plath. According to Hassani, a few Shakir poems, such as 'Basheeray ki gharwali and Misfit,' indicated female ideas. Shakir "lived her life in a fast, nay breezy style, as if she were in a rush to reach a tangible deadline," he observed (2006).

Tajswani (2013) emphasized Shakir's personal ideas in her paper, which depicted her lyrics as a battle for women's rights. Her study is a minute examination of Shakir's rejection of personal troubles and acceptance of common problems despite the fact she was a member of an "orthodox and traditional culture". Shakir, as a revolutionary poet, "defied traditions" by sharing her particular experiences. Tajswani concentrates on Shakir's literary sensitivities, including her ghazals and Urdu love poetry. We may also observe her, as a free reasoning soul, raising concerns about relevant societal issues, such as a woman's position in a man's life, and the status of laborers in her nation and childhood. Her voice is not that of a repressed lady, and her poetry conveys her unconstrained, deepest emotions (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 672). The attractiveness of her poems is enhanced by feminist themes set against a subcontinental patriarchal context.

In her work, Peter (2013) investigates Shakir's notion of motherhood and discovers struggle and identity in her poems. She gives insights about parenting, homeland, identity, and conflict. The author examines the friction and tension that arises from a woman's several roles, including mother, daughter, workingwoman, wife, and daughter-in-law. Hassani distinguishes between Shakir's candid approach and Sylvia Plath's confessional approach. All of the Shakir's efforts were aimed at obtaining women's rights. The researcher draws a connection between T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland" and Shakir's wasteland. Many poets, like Mah Laqa Chanda, Rabia Pinhaan, Ada Jafri, and Parveen Shakir, saw their hardships as a challenge at a period when poets like Shabnam Shakeel were unable to get their work published for several years after their marriage (Khalique, 2017).

Shakir's poetry contained innovative stylistic choices. This feminine syntax has not before been employed (Khan, 2014). Shakir is the first female Urdu poet to utilise the term larki, which means "girl," in her poetry. Furthermore, while the use of feminine first-person pronouns was common in prose, Shakir's use in poetry is uncommon, even among prior female writers. "Parveen Shakir pioneered the use of feminism in poetry," (Khan, 2014). Shakir centers love on sensuous desire, connection, and reciprocity. She provides insight by combining many topics such as pregnancy, delivery, motherhood, divorce, and, most significantly, the life of a woman in a patriarchal society. Her poetry depicts the terrible end of her first love, which was imposed on her by familial pressure, as well as her failure in marriage owing to its demanding character. In the increasingly conformist rule of Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship, Shakir expressed her sorrow as a lonesome and forsaken lover in her poems.

Keeping in view the above discussion, the present study intends to fill the gap in existing literature by presenting a new insight. It explores postmodern feminist voices in the poetry of Plath and Shakir through a comparative analysis technique and finds similar thought patterns in two extremely different cultures.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses Jane Flax's model of 'Thinking Fragments'; strands of thought both reflected and contributed to the uncertainties of the contemporary West. Flax (1990) contends that questions of self, gender, knowledge, and power cannot be explored fully either by psychoanalysis or feminism. Postmodernism is also insufficient to address these issues alone. Each philosophy though illustrates certain aspects of these problems; however, each reflects a gap on its own. Flax reflected on the issues of self, gender, power, and knowledge, while knowledge has become highly ambivalent in the modern world, giving birth to new insights into these issues. Flax (1990) emphasizes " that sometimes human beings feel at loss to understand any mode of thought as true", which illustrate that postmodern feminism does not deal with the commonplace thoughts of women's liberation, equality, and freedom from political constraints. Rather, it agrees with the relations of domination. Flax argues further that 'a postmodernist voice' can be found in a rejection 'to avoid conflict and irresolvable differences' (1990, p. 10). However, it is not very easy to infer what the feminists of the postmodern era want to conclude and what they desire to present before their readers. The present study endeavors to identify the postmodern feminist voices by understanding the issues of fragmented rather paradoxical views of social life reflected in the selected poems. It also attempts to explore the speakers' identity as uncertain, and their intellectual state entwined in an oppressive 'knowledge/power' relationship within the context of patriarchy.

## **Research Method**

The comparative method of studying literature proposed by Aldo Nemesio (1999) has been used to analyze selected poems of Plath and Shakir. Contemporary literary research does not follow the same parameters as the other fields. Nemesio (1999) proposed that the objective of the study should not be limited to authors, regions, or national boundaries particularly when it is concerned with literary behaviour. Cross cultures can be understood only when these are compared and contrasted irrespective of boundaries to know and relate circumstances to what happens elsewhere. A comparative technique aims to recognize the operation of those human activities that are associated with writings and differ across civilizations as represented in literature. A comparative technique aims to recognize the operation of those human activities that are associated with writings and differ across civilizations as represented in literature. Literary studies have been dominated by old traditions and 'constrictions' (Nemesio, 1999), however, the tradition should be changed. If the study is based on some cultural models, it may attract the attention of that society, however, it shall only end up on the celebration or propagation of that culture and society. The present study focuses on the human behaviour reflected in literary genres; it is not limited to a single author rather it compares two authors from different international regions. Moreover, literature is not written or produced with the intention of being studied by the researcher. Therefore, the comparative method identifies the controversies or similarities of the feminist voices as it reads literature from within and outside of the international boundaries mainly America and Pakistan understanding the internal logic of both. The comparative method is often applied to identify 'patterns of similarities and differences, explaining continuity and change'.

## **Discussion/Exploring Feminist Thought Patterns**

Parveen Shakir and Sylvia Plath were born at a time when they were labeled as modern. The modern era spurred intellectual thought, which resulted in liberalism. Almost every poet of the day saw himself or herself free to choose subjects and write autonomously. Thus, "Parveen Shakir's verse belongs to another social world and literary traditions" (Gayer, 2014, p.22). Shakir and Plath's poetry is notable for its autobiographical journey as well as for portraying colors of love and desire.

### ***Desire for Liberation***

The poetry of Plath and Shakir reflects the urge for liberation. Plath's poem 'Daddy' reflects women's subjugation. It indicates the need for liberty. "You do not do, you do not do/ Anymore, black shoe/ In which I have lived like a foot/ For thirty years, poor and white/ Barely daring to breathe or Achoo" (Daddy, 1-5). In 'Lady Lazarus, Edge and Daddy', she further exposes her desire for death in different prospects.

“Dying/Is an art, like everything else” (Lady Lazarus, 43-45). “You died before I had time.” (Daddy, 7). ‘Tulips,’ by Sylvia Plath, explores the themes of nature and the body. It depicts the agony a human body experiences during surgery. Plath pertinently uses poetic diction and “words come to her as easily as the chosen tools come to an expert surgeon” (Debata-2013). In “Morning Song,” she paints a realistic image of a mother's increasing love and detachment from her kid. In “Edge,” personal wants and heavenly positions escape from worldly reality. Shakir poetry shares common mental structures. Though love is the major topic of her poems, other sub-themes relating to love include adultery, sacrifice, beauty, romance, separation, waiting, and so on. Nature, patriarchy, victimhood, and self-exploration are among the topics of both writers' poems. In her poem “Sirf aik larki”, She conveys a woman's incarceration and longing to be free of societal and cultural constraints. (Khushboo, p. 92). Shakir's poems encompass an alluring mystery, candid, seclusion, and eloquence poised with femininity as well as dissent. Her poetry is not just elegant, but also clear. She refers to herself as a "girl," not a "woman," implying a yearning for the peaceful life of grownups. (Ahmad, 2015). She had a far more personal, yet clear and direct feminine air, distinguishing herself from earlier generations of women. She epitomized the self-proclaimed moniker of a misfit, a forsaken lover who disclosed her deepest longings, disaster, and flaws (Ahmad, 2015): “Where am I in your life?” She used the idea of the first love, a love that gives hope and makes all trials and struggles tolerable (Hameed, 2015). Her work reflects transition and conflict, contradictions and strains, uncertainties and frustrations, concerns and upheaval, and instability. Rukhsana Ahmad, for example, criticises her poetry as 'conformist' since it embraces sexist beliefs and therefore is 'un-feminist' (Ahmad 1990, p. 6-7). Exploring themes such as physical love distinguishes Shakir's poems, but does not make her a "true feminist" (Bakht 1995, p. 5). Shakir, on the other hand, occupies a liminal space between patriarchy and feminism (Yaqin 2001, p. 8).

Sylvia Plath, on the other hand, explores death and despair in a good light, enhancing the notion of death. She acknowledges that death is her only option. "And I'll be helpful when I ultimately sleep". She worships death as a natural situation and a means of emancipation. She uses images such as "gleam" and notions such as "sucking up" to show her unhappiness and loathing in order to highlight the feminist dilemma. “I am not a tree with roots in the earth, nor am I the beauty of a garden bed”. The speaker in the poem argues that if the "I" is living, it is meaningless; likewise, if the "I" is vertical, it is meaningless. "But I'd rather be horizontal," she laments in the first sentence. She represents a lady whose social standing prohibits her from expressing herself fully. Feminists have made her the ideal martyr (Motos Teruel, 6).

### ***Culture as a Trap***

Religious ethics and morals, for example, are far more important in Pakistani society than in the Western culture or a secular American setting. Because culture and religion are two sides of the same coin in Pakistan, it is a taboo to talk openly about sex. Within the Pakistani Muslim context, where a woman is a symbol of modesty and shame. Many laws, such as Zia's Hudood Ordinance and Zina (adultery) Ordinance, confine her to her home. Shakir thus portrays the feelings of a woman grappling with her identity in a male-dominated world. She expresses the feelings of those who are unable to speak for themselves. 'Feminine' values are defined in the traditional Pakistani context as images of a woman's 'shame and modesty'; in Urdu, this is known as 'sharm-o haya ka mujasma' (Yaqin 2001, p. 48). women" (Yaqin, 2001, p. 54).

Her revolutionary thoughts are demonstrated in 'Only a Girl,' where she employs the imagery of a caged bird, and in 'Ecstasy,' where she discusses female sexuality more directly. Her shift from "nisvani" to "unconventional" is, however, slow. She expresses fresh ideas, challenges men's traditional ways of thinking, and finally complies and compromises. She should include the word "poise" in her poems (Shakir quoted in Ali 1994, p. 1). Her unconventional move bridges the gap between Pakistan's historic eastern traditions and Western feminism (Yaqin, 2001, p. 19). Her shifting status as a 'feminist' who does not adhere to feminism by Western definitions creates a feeling of conflicting tension. She depicts a patriarchal society in “Sad Barg” (1976-1980). She considers herself to be a woman of few words who lives in quiet. She addresses a powerful presence, indicated by the second person pronoun, who likes being the center of attention and laments her reluctance. “Have you seen me, seeing you?” (p. 41). She embodies the quiet,

reticent, and uncommunicative character of eastern ladies. Male counterparts in Urdu literature likely express their passionate desire for their lovers (Ali, 1994). Shakir describes the upbringing of girls in her society in "The Insight" (p. 48-49) as "Girls of raw years and tender minds have the virtue of water/Ready to take shape of the pan they are poured into! /And Brim or boil or evaporate/ If their master wishes so!" It implies that societal standards force girls to be subordinated, to cater to their master's demands, to adjust to conditions, and to be the virtuous one who obeys whatever he says.

Shakir builds a master-servant dichotomy in which his will is her order. She does, however, show opposition. She defies the traditional demeanour of the obedient servile. She reveals the hollowness of the patriarchal institution that limits women. Even though Shakir professes to be a rebel, she is always imprisoned in her master's empty bowl. Her spirit leads her to oppose the constraints placed on women.

Culture appears to be equally suppressive in Sylvia Plath's poetry. Disrespect as an extremely negative emotion appears in "I am Vertical". She characterizes women as the most ignored part of the American social pattern. "I am not the beauty of a garden bed"(Line 22). "I was unaware that I would soon un-petal". Furthermore, the onomatopoeia "Ahs" is employed to intensify the sensation of exasperation for accentuating the audience's reaction. She uses flowers and trees as symbols to describe how useless she feels trapped in a conventional setting; first under the command of her father and then under the dominance of her husband. She compares herself to nature, presenting her own image. The poem's brilliance is that she described herself and offered a profound insight into her inner sadness and depression. As a result of such representations, her poetry has been labelled as confessional. The "self-defining confessional style" illustrates how the force of nature is analogous to the power of women. It also indicates her dissatisfaction with the social and cultural barriers. This poem demonstrates Plath's purpose to change the way women were categorized in American society; generally scorned and disregarded; "I stroll among them, yet no one notices". Disrespect as a negative emotion appears frequently in the poem. She characterizes women as an unaware picture of the American social pattern. Reflecting a sense of disdain related to inferiority, the poem uses hyperbole while describing the tree to represent the poetic "I" as a lesser being; "A tree is immortal compared to me."

### ***Invoking Femininity***

A significant thought pattern is invoking femininity. Shakir's poem "The Insight" expresses her feminist voice claiming freedom from the oppression of societal hierarchy. However, she does not disassociate herself from femininity in her effort, "I've never disputed with the mirror / Yes, I too look nice in the jewellery" (48). Wearing jewellery is a symbol of healthy marriage life in the subcontinent. Since she is forced to stay inside the circle of her master's restrictions, the bracelets she wears are compared to scorpions and the anklets to chains. The poem emphasizes the frequent practice in Pakistan of raising girls with the purpose of marrying them off as soon as their families deem it appropriate. A girl's prospective in-laws and spouse have more control over her life than she does. Shakir conveys the anxiety of a young girl who is afraid to confide in people, such as her in-laws because they usually have 'poisonous' intents. The idea of being condemned to spend her whole life with such "congenital hypocrites" (Insight, p. 48) is terrifying. She depicts them as animals with their gaze concentrated on the bloodstains on her sheets, proof that she is a virgin on her wedding night because virginity and chastity are highly valued in patriarchal countries where women bear the weight of virtue. She ends the poem with a plea to God, "I want to tell His Lordship, Providence / Sir, I too have brains." (p. 49). Shakir opposes reducing women to a changeable material. When women suffer societal constraints, they console themselves in the same way as Shakir does (p. 36). She fantasizes about a small window still open in my name beyond the forbidding walls of the jail. But, as Shakir says in "Epitaph," freedom is a fantasy that a woman purchases via her sleep (p. 60). She passes the night awake, strangely anticipating her encounter with loneliness. Shakir condemns her predicament but also aspires to be free of oppression, reflecting her powerful postmodern feminist voice. In "The Working Woman," she depicts a heroine who emerges from adversity stronger than before. This poem depicts others labelling her as egotistical for cultivating her personality as if she were cultivating a garden with her blood (p. 44). She questions why a woman should be deemed selfish if she develops herself professionally and

becomes self-sufficient. Shakir does not give anybody credit for her hard work, and she does not owe anything to 'any rain,' which means that no one can take credit for the results she bears. The lines, "I can bloom whenever I wish/my beauty is my own discovery." (p. 44) reflect feminist ideas that urge women to be conscience and attractive on their own.

She is also happy to have developed herself to be as sturdy as a towering tree living with maximum potential, one that lifts her head high despite of the seasonal changes or fierce gusts. Sometimes the competing winds become too much for her, and she admits that she still longs to grasp something solid, like the trunk of a large tree. This shows her desire for a union or marriage in which she is grounded by a man's solidity and presence. Shakir conjures the harmony of men and women in society when she takes charge of her own narrative.

Plath, an American poet, favors women in all elements of life, including her poems, which is known as Sylvia Plath's feminism. She speaks out against male supremacy. She feels that society violates the legal and moral rights of women. However, she does not offer any solution to the problems acting thus, as a protester rather than a reformer. Her poetry is about women's issues and pains. She continues to address women's helplessness and the plight of womanhood. "Widow" is a poem in which she discusses the grief, sorrows, and sufferings of a widow following the death of her husband. Although autobiographical, the poem has universal appeal. She witnessed her mother in sorrow shortly after her father's death. Plath asserted that it is difficult for females to enjoy even a single calm day due to male supremacy. She portrays the difficulties that every widow faces; fighting her entire life. Her grief at her husband's death is not fleeting. It is permanent and may have an impact on her whole life and children.

Plath's writings are all about explaining "about me." Her literary work allows her to express her inner self, invoking femininity. Her poems "Ariel," "Daddy," and "Lady Lazarus" are reflective of her feminine voice as well as her depressed state of mind. "Daddy" is a confessional poem showing animosity and resentment toward her father (Gubar,1996). Rhyming words such as "You no longer do... you no longer do... shoe...achoo...goo...boo" convey a sense of suffocation Plath relates the atrocities of Nazis to the tragedies of her own life, using her father's death as a connecting shaft. "Daddy" delves deeply into Plath's conflicted emotions as it weaves reality and fiction together. It is also worth noting the use of foreign language, German terms like "Ach, du." (Line 15), and "Ich, ich, ich, ich" (Line 27), they are used to provide the text with a raw tone and greater rhythm, along with improving its artistic aspect. This is widely recognized to be among the most feminist and strong confessional poems ever written. It is clear that its central theme, disgust, and hate for patriarchy, made a lasting influence on the feminist movement. The poet uses an analogy to illustrate her relationship with her father to that of a Nazi and a Jew, portraying herself as the victim, the Jew. She sparks strong feminist feelings by depicting women as a victim of men. She also compares her father to Hitler's, "your clean mustache and bright blue Aryan eye/ Panzer-man, Panzer-Man, Panzer-Man"— Plath paints a bleak picture of her father and applies it to all men. "I constructed a model of you." Her vision of the person in black with a Minicamp look is projected on the spouse, providing her with two paradoxes to dismantle the prototypical father and the husband formed in his likeness. She presents her father as a vampire. The vampire, her father, had "sucked" the "I." Plath uses this metaphor to explain how toxic her relationship with her father was: "If I've killed one guy, I've killed two." For seven years, the vampire who claimed to be her father consumed her blood.

Many feminist supporters believe that Plath's poetry reflects images and ideas, which are a clear representation of feminist thoughts in literature.

### ***Patriarchal Sensibility***

Shakir's poetry exposes the hypocrisy of Pakistani society in "Nazms (1980-1985) in Talking to Oneself". She challenges the structure of patriarchal households in "The Misfit" (p. 64). Shakir writes the "entire household / enjoys my womanhood". With the advancement of time, the load simply rises becoming a visible "hunchback of good-for-nothingness Shakir claims that no matter how hard a woman works in society, her family and males in total would continue to take her for granted. Shakir desires to be regarded



as an independent working woman and a professional, yet the first condition of the assignment was to renounce self-respect. She tries to educate the 'barren minds' at work but it proves to be futile. She reveals that people around her are like wolves with bulging eyes and lolling tongues of a seasoned hunters waiting to pounce on the prey as soon as she commits a mistake. The poem "Tomato Ketchup" (p. 101) conveys the greatest message, in which Shakir narrates the narrative of Sarah, a reflection of Shakir. She delicately displays the male ego's frailty as males want to be the center and emphasis women's dialogue. In this regard, she states that she is intelligent enough not to irritate men, but she does not engage in explaining or justifying herself (p.101). Sara is dubbed "the gullible" because she likes the deception of those who force her to drink Kafka's sentences and devour Neruda's poetry.

In "Part 5: (1972-1990) A Selection of Ghazal Couplets", many love couplets convey profound feminist concepts. Her ghazals are about female empowerment, women's horrors, social restrictions, and love. It is a terrible and deadly cycle that is incredibly difficult to stop, as it causes agony to leave the house (p.121). Shakir's Urdu poetry expands the audience from a local to an international level. Despite societal constraints and personal obstacles, she produced and set a high standard for future female Urdu poets. Despite her romanticism, Shakir's work is not limited to love poetry. Her poetry reveals her skills as a scholarly, hardworking, and sensible lady who challenges accepted societal conventions and ideals. Her free spirit and tenacity shine through. She expresses her thoughts without hesitation, and her tone is everything from subservient. Shakir's poetry reclaims the thoughts, emotions, and expressions that women are entitled to. She expresses herself clearly and does not allow patriarchal stereotypes to stifle her right to an opinion. She does a wonderful job of describing and disputing predetermined and biased societal beliefs. Shakir effectively reclaims the feminine discourse and exposes the oppressive patriarchal systems' attempts to subjugate women.

Conversely, Plath's "Mushroom" illustrates a woman's resistance to gaining respect in society. Women, unlike men, must work more to establish a respectable name and fame. She uses a mushroom as a metaphor for women, and every line reflects the problems of women growing rapidly like mushrooms in a male-dominated society. Plath encourages her audience to consider women's independence and equality. Her poetry is autobiographical. Her literary works demonstrate her psychological troubles. Nonetheless, not merely autobiographical, she highlights issues of a general kind e.g., anxiety, loneliness, a lack of self-awareness, despondency, a lack of communication, insecurity, uncertainty, death, and the kind. Her poems exhibit a sense of hopelessness. Perhaps, like conventional writers, she wishes to demonstrate misery through her words through her life experiences. The poem "I am Vertical" displays Plath's commitment to and desire to change how women were perceived; scorned and ignored. "I stroll among them, yet no one notices". This expresses her sense of being disregarded. Plath's 'Daddy' also reflects a strong patriarchal sensibility. It is considered to be a controversial poem reflecting deep and complex thought patterns. It reveals the complexity of the relationship between a daughter and father. The memory of the father appears domineering and the father's control over her shows their struggle to liberate herself from his influence. The use of unconventional words for father such as 'Bastard' intensifies the poem's tone and gives a glimpse into the patriarchal social structures. Death thus becomes a recurring theme in Plath's poetry.

## **Conclusion**

The discussion above unravelled postmodern feminist voices reflected in the poetry of Plath and Shakir. A comparative study illustrated the urge for liberation, culture as a trap, invoking femininity, patriarchal sensibility, and confessional poetry as the strongest common thought patterns. Both the female poets through their personal life examples demonstrated the social injustices women of two different cultures faced. The female voices indicated that cultures around the world shared similar suppressing structures where women were undermined and deprived of expressing intellectual creativity. Both poets denounced the illegal and inhuman patriarchal practices, which tend to alleviate the intellectual cultivation of female writers. Their poetry reflects a desire to release frustration, anger, and anguish leading to the construction powerful edifice of poetry in perfection. Their canonical literary texts challenged patriarchy by frequently and forcefully addressing taboo ideas, which demonstrated their transgression from a conventional path.

Their thought patterns reproduced postmodern feminist philosophy that urged a dismantling of the patriarchal mindset in both the cultures. Their works showed a strong tendency of highlighting taboos of liberation, femininity, and confession of unheard voices associated with women in their respective societies. Their works can be considered as the icebreakers of the concealment of gender oppression in a male dominant world where women have been marginalized from time immemorial. In future, a study can be conducted to encompass a large number of female writers from America and South Asia for exploring similar thought patterns over a certain period of time.

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