

Sibilant Sounds in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

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Abstract

The Awakening by Kate Chopin ends with unpremeditated but exhausted embrace of Edna Pontellier with the sea precipitating her death. Patriarchal prism projects her preoccupied with pretension, presumptuousness and promiscuity as she casts aside "the unpleasant, pricking garment from her" (Chopin 109). This social misdemeanour of Edna implores every sagacious soul to lend an ear to the silent but sibilant sounds that resonate with rigid regimen of patriarchy and rigorously reverberate in Edna, ostracizing her from domestic allurements, telling her that "it is too late; the shore is far behind and her strength is gone" (Chopin 109). The sizzling cinder of Edna's adventure, is quenched by boundless sea. Its amniotic fluidity satiates her infantile yearning for seclusion in mother's womb, also silences sibilant sounds banging on her in its depth, its voice "speaks to the soul" (Chopin 14). The paper attempts to examine how Edna's peaceful piety to her persona pontificates a perusal of autonomy against appropriation. Her expression fades into incomprehensible babble but her daring demise dumbfounds the dogmatic discipline of society. Further, It will be analyzed as to how her oppression from silence to sibilant sounds which shriek within her, makes men reconsider the denial of expression to women.

Keywords: Domestic Allurement; Ostracize; Patriarchy; Peaceful Piety; Sibilant Sounds.

Introduction

Edna Pontellier, an unconventional rebel, in her relentless quest of an enterprising self, travels through turbulent waters fraught with wedges and ditches of conventional challenges. She enthusiastically moves on the errand of self-actualization but, collaterally, invites indignation of Patri-

archy. If any adventure leads to a desired destination, no matter what kind of upheavals or convulsions cross the way and with what colossal intensity; but in case, the effort ends in a tragic fate, the overhauling of the itinerary comes into practice. Since Edna treads more in imaginative corridors, she strides and stomps, significantly, from psychological channels, she deserves a review of her adventure, preferably, in psychological dimensions.

A minimal but meticulous effort of this paper is to unravel unconscious, unhinged underside of unusual Edna, her atypical psyche, her tortured self and serpentine speculations for subsistence and survival, shockingly, segregating her from society. The paper also tries to divulge the "state of insatiable desire and radical solitariness of (Edna) that, before her suicide or(surrender), is transformed into a full blown rage directed towards men but finally the world as such..." (Butler 132).

Elaborating on imposed silence on women, Luce Irigaray also observes that women are unrepresentable in main stream of society because of their linguistic absence and expressive opacity. Edna, in the entire course of *The Awakening*, fails to articulate her sentiments, resentment even with her most intimate relations of father and husband. Undoubtedly, motherless Edna is self-contained and " even as child lived her own small life all within herself" (Chopin 14), her husband's scolding to her, on any pretext, leaves her "crying, not caring to dry her face, her eyes, her arms" (Chopin 8) or " unusually pale and very quiet" (Chopin 51).

Edna enters matrimony for "sympathy of thought and taste"(Chopin 18) with her husband but discovers, to her dismay, her marriage as "purely an accident, decree of fate, ...a responsibility she blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (Chopin 18-19). Marital frustration and simmering pent-up emotions leave no recourse for a woman, here Edna, "save silence, or tears or violence" (Beauvoir 482). She is "hurled by marriage as by a frightful stroke of lightning creating confusion of soul..." (Beauvoir 476).

Consuming silence, tears in marriage collectively snatch clear expression from Edna. She blurt outs that she cannot be "forced into doing things ...nobody has the right ...her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly" (Chopin 105). Edna's disturbed mind is liable to be dissected, metaphorically, by psychoanalytic aspects and feministic glance for better interpretation. Conveniently, psychoanalytic theories, through feminists' perspectives, dismissing the repugnant

refrain of social panorama, overhaul the nurturing procedure of a female in general and Edna in particular, to get an estimate of what plethoric, coercive and corrosive forces prevail upon a woman in shaping up of her into a socially- desired mould.

Juliet Mitchell in her book, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* reveals that sex is a matter of biology but “gender is a construct, something learned or acquired rather than natural. Freud does not present the feminine as something simply given and natural... but is formed by early experience and adjustments” (qtd in Barry 130-131). In extension to Mitchell’s observation, Jane Gallop also, in her work, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* opines that “ what is implicit in Freud is explicit in Lacan’s system, ...phallus is a symbol of power” (qtd in Barry 131). Man dominates the stage and women are coerced into compulsory compliance.

In the same vein, Jacqueline Rose too, in her work, *The Haunting Of Sylvia Plath* combines the gems of insight of Feminism and Psychoanalysis to “show sexual identity to be a cultural construct” (qtd in Barry 132). Edna, too, in *The Awakening*, desires to know the configuration of her sex and gender. If “gender is culturally constructed...can be constructed differently” (Butler 10). All these opinions and expressions yield assistance to scale the trajectory of woman’s struggle and strangulation, casting a considerable reflection on acculturation of a woman to coalesce her to convenience and command of man to make her “accommodate to a situation from which she cannot escape” (Beauvoir 494).

The Research

Edna’s surrender to the sea, naked, an unsocial gesture requires to be analysed by Psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, in his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* asserts that disruption in normal behaviour is the precipitation of previous, problematic experiences –unresolved and illusive to imagination. He further adds that this bare burial of human impulse leads to desperate digression at a later stage. Lacan in his work, *The Insistence of the Letters in the Unconscious* clarifies that the gender consciousness is buried alive in the unutterable, unconscious mind of women to sprout in exasperated expressions, later on.

Women are, categorically, silenced into submission so that they should blindly follow stern social dictates with an animalistic feel of faithfulness, not with human instinct of inquiry and innovation. They are obligated to be obedient and willing slaves to their master, the man. Patricia Yaeger in

her essay "A Language which Nobody Understood", holds male hegemony responsible for enigmatic enforcements on a woman. Silence shrouds a woman in suffocation and slowly sublimates itself into shocking shrieks and the sibilant sounds. Patricia also feels that a woman, here, Edna lacks an adaptable, alternative register of expression and language to describe her tremendous and tumultuous feelings but she craves for one such of her own. In absence of her own narrative and ideology, she is confused by medley of distinct and disconnected voices which arrest her attention to her blurred edge of womanhood, Edna herself admits, "by all codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex" (Chopin 79).

The frequency and intensity of sounds of conventional commitments is so concentrated that she replaces her ego with infantile Id and surrenders to the sea taking it for mother's womb. Madame Ratignolle also cautions her about her childish and impulsive behaviour, "you seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in life" (Chopin 91). Edna harbours reticence even with herself, her mood swings, her unusual thinking, her tears and cries are also hissing, sibilant sounds, inarticulate but inflammable for her. She herself admits her chaotic mental state, "a thousand emotions have swept through me tonight, I don't comprehend half of them" (Chopin 28).

While Chopin maintains aesthetic distance from her readers, these sibilant sounds make the agony of Edna audible to them. The prattle of parrot in the opening scene of novel, the clanging spur of a cavalry officer and the hum of bees, the seductive voice of the sea, "moments of silence pregnant with first-felt throbbing of desire" (Chopin 30), the tumult of world, the sound of sweeping stroke of swimming, "father's voice, her sister's voice, barking of an old dog that was chained" (Chopin 109) in the last moments of Edna, sweep her off by her feet washing her off into infinite sea.

Chopin is not concerned with the themes of seduction or retribution but a woman's opportunity with self-expression. Edna asserts self-possession but its expression is not coherent or understandable to her kinsmen. Patricia Yaeger also points out that Edna experiences the world as one fraught with multitude of sounds. She also understands that Edna has bargained her right to speech in marriage under cultural compulsions. Edna's language is deficient for her vital needs, she has no proper articulation to help her integrate her feelings with the system or interrogate the impositions or the diversity of her own sentiments.

Edna surrenders to the sea because she is unduly burdened by the dross of contradictory desire of retaining self but at the expense of life. Dr Mandelet feels the pressing urgency of severe situation where he should counsel Edna to save her from her caprice and whim to take unsocial step as he notices weight of conflict and disruption in her conversation. Dr Mandelet senses suicidal confusion and aloofness and also escape from conversation in Edna, he offers to “talk of things you (Edna) never have dreamt of talking about before” (Chopin 105) but Edna makes her resolve to eternally rest in the fathoms of the sea. The sea appears to Edna a secular place free from community life, full with eternal choice and peaceful escape.

The sibilant sounds of domestic duty, social obligations and motherhood continuously hiss in the interior of Edna, they work in collaboration with her own sibilant sounds of craving for autonomy and self-assertion. This amalgamation raises such a storm in her mind that she prefers to give herself to the seductive, murmuring voice of the sea, again a sibilant sound inviting soul to drown every shame, bound and inhibition in its infinite intensity.

A woman’s voice and social voices prevailing upon her psyche with a hiss deserve some cognizance by man. It may be neglected as a prattle by man but probably powerful, potent enough to manage a mawkishness with mammoth momentum to blow off the curtain of smugness on society, bringing to the spotlight purely partial and prejudiced patriarchal practices towards women. The wilful burial of unpalatable curiosity of women by social agencies erupts in ugly manifestations, in their aberrant actions and deviant demeanor.

Chopin in her narrative, highlights that marriage is not fulfilling to a woman due to her suppression in expression, it entails no growth of a woman as an individual leaving her grumbling and simmering. Edna does not reason with her husband, he also never responds to her reason also, he either dictates the terms or leaves her company. Edna sadly, admits before her friend about her husband, “we would not have anything to say to each other...” (Chopin 66). Edna is happy to get rid of her father who violently protests her decision to abstain from the wedding of her younger sister. Edna fails to articulate properly her reason to stay aloof and only expresses her denial and insolence on this issue.

Chopin here observes that “she had not much of anything to say to her father” (Chopin 66). In fact, Edna’s husband also confesses, “ we meet in

the morning at the breakfast table" (Chopin 63). This sprawling silence without solution stifles the calmness of the couple. In this context, Cutter too opines that *The Awakening* is a "critique portraying patriarchal norms of silence and submission" (34).

In the entire course of the novel, Edna "inhabits a world of limited linguistic possibilities... therefore, of limited possibilities for action" (Yaeger 200). Her limited or poor articulation increases frequency of sibilant sounds in dangerous proportions. She is not familiar but "flushed with sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor" (Chopin 19). Her struggle throughout the novel is about the acquisition of her own articulation, however inchoate or abrasive or acerbic it is. She chooses to write her own script, in her own hand and in her "own way" (Chopin 105), with personal vernacular.

Generally, females are developed into such a value system that they are cultured and conditioned to conform to conventions, created to cajole men annihilating themselves. Incisive induction of incapability at infantile stage imbues their unripe mind with such unconditional consent to constraints that even if they venture to liberate themselves, the effect of this unconscious and hypnotic training is very obnoxious. The fear that erupts from utter disregard to dogmas axiomatically, leads them to socially digressive actions. Expanding this idea further, Carol Gilligan's theory, puts forward "the factors of culture, history, class and power that affect the constitution of such 'voices'...experience and thoughts folded up in such voices force us to listen to ourselves and indulge in a self-dialogue and thus forming the stories of our lives" (2). Gilligan describes how a girl "holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name and status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling the inner space..." (12). Thus the "female identity is awakened in relationship of identity with another person" (13).

Rejecting confusion, doubt, uncertainty in a woman, necessarily, as manifestation of timidity, she states, "Sensitivity to the need of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (Gilligan 16). The voices, silent but sibilant, in exterior or interior cast a corrosive effect on mental well-being of women. She reiterates that feminine morality is 'morality of responsibility', thus women get lesser chance that may intone "the celebration of separation, autonomy, individuation, and natural rights"(23); in this imposed litany of moral re-

sponsibility to household, they are to “repress the multiple nature of human personality” (Madsen 97).

Since ‘voices’ are recurrent and reverberant in the novel, Schweitzer also sets tone with Gilligan and opines, “ ‘Voicing’ and ‘Voices’, the media subjectivity (different perception of voices and commands), are intimately tied to Edna’s dawning awareness of her rights not as property but as an individual” (Schweitzer 167). Women, ungrudgingly, nestle away in their cozy, comfortable world practicing smugness and obedience along with unflinching fidelity to master, heedlessly, in exchange of all the received favours in terms of leisure and luxury. Animals don’t have evolved brain, they never object to disgrace, never try to preserve dignity, but humans have cognitive powers. Similarly, women evaluate their worth, contribution and concept of autonomous, dignified life.

Edna, in her marriage, feels her servile status and minds scratchy scolding too. She silently suffers incision on her individuality with no redressal or ventilation of smothered emotions. Male hegemony, appropriating her autonomy, raises tumult in her mind to unhinge her in her approach towards life and relations so much so that she denounces the institution of marriage as “one of the most deplorable spectacles on earth” (Chopin 63).

Psychoanalytic observations help us in tracing unprecedented glimpses of social facets for identity-formation affecting a tidal wave of aspiration for personal identity in a boy, that too, at the expense of a girl, neutralizing her unique potential, promulgating matrimony a sole career for her. It becomes customary that she should be defined by the rank and status of her husband, on her part, earned only with a sincere intimacy to him or with sufficient self-effacement over the years with consistent loyalty, gratitude, unflinching obedience tinged with exemplary devotion and productive procreation, too. She is hypnotised into docility by the colossal mass of moral responsibilities to serve man consistently.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir opines, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). Here, it is axiomatically assumed that this becoming is unnatural and a forced fate, a deliberate doctoring of, unconsciously, a girl to mentally etherise her in compliance to conventions.

Jane Flax, harps on the same idea and argues, “Both individual male development and patriarchy are partially rooted in a need to deny the power and autonomy to women. This need arises, in part, out of early infantile experience. The experience of maturing in a family in which only

woman-mother ensures that patriarchy will be reproduced”(218). Chopin in *The Awakening*, makes clear how creole women play an unsupportive role to Edna, for example Mrs Ratignolle pulls up Edna, “think of children, Oh, think of them!” (Chopin 106). This fearful admonition, more gesticulated than articulated acquires a great quantum of conventional force and barricades Edna’s entry to normal course of life in creole culture after her experiment of autonomy.

Chopin exposes the role of womenfolk to upbraid an unconventional woman just to ingratiate patriarchy. A woman’s identity is acknowledged only in her family, especially through her children. Edna’s fellow creole women “idolize their children, worship their husbands and esteem it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals”(Chopin 9). Conversely, Edna declares, “I would give up the unessential...I would give my life for my children; but wouldn’t give myself” (Chopin 46). She gradually understands that there are some gender-oriented but unacknowledged values that run underneath the edifice of a woman’s self, they are imperceptible, recondite and ephemeral and unavoidable in the mortal world.

Constraints of familial and social roles and responsibilities create such tumult in women’s psyche here, Edna, with reverberant voices of criticism and calls to duty that an eternal sleep alone can encapsulate everlasting peace. Surprisingly, the sensitivity attached to femininity, forces a woman to attend to such ‘voices’ that Edna finds banging on her vitals. The responsibility and care, self-guilt due to dereliction in duty lead woman to attend, seriously, to such voices, reluctantly, of course; she incorporates all such ‘voices’, their command, their judgments, opinions, point of views to frame her own. Edna, governed and driven by such definitive voices, unable to choose with responsibility and rectification, chooses to escape to the sea – a prenatal stage, recoiling to childhood seeking creativity in the novelty of life, in vigour of the next promising possibility.

Elaine Showalter opines, “As the female body is prone to wetness, blood, milk, tears and amniotic fluid, so in drowning, the woman is immersed in the feminine organic element” (81). Edna, here, oscillates between two cravings, one— inescapable masculine entities of father and husband, seeking their affection and admiration; other, feminine comfort, ease and solace of an absent mother. Her recoiling to childhood, to the sea and figuratively to amniotic fluid- the safest place in the womb of mother, somehow, substantiates the conjectures about her infantile deprivation of mother’s affection.

The tremendous trumpet of conventional voices weakens the resolve of women. Cultural agents like Edna's husband reminds her, "If it is not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth is it?" (Chopin7). This question mark appears to her like a hanging noose to strangulate her. Here, Nancy Chodorow also, suggests "Feminist theory is right that gender cannot be seen apart from culture" (518). She further adds that women with more porous precinct of ego or self-possession, dare not achieve autonomy out of fear and lack of confidence.

Edna harbours the same complex in her subconscious which divulges her handicap in making a choice for separate and individual identity. In fact, she has never been trained for a survival of her own. Honestly, right from the beginning of their lives, women are taught to be dependent on male members. Edna tries to achieve autonomy, liberation from male command but in absence of a suitable strategy, she escapes to the sea i.e. a feminine element "enfolding her body in its soft, close embrace" (Chopin 109).

An exhaustive study of the novel explores a kind of antagonism between maternity and creativity, Edna's "children appear before her like antagonist who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for rest of her days" (Chopin 108). Creativity tagged with solitude and self-preservation offers steep contrast to maternity which includes, exclusively, self-sacrifice of a mother. Edna knows a "way to elude them (children)" (Chopin 108) but in her final escape.

Here, making a departure from the hard line of conformity to the conventions, Chopin raises the issues of individuality. Edna, in her journey from adolescent to youth, is fascinated by certain people, as an individual, who have inspired her in variety of times, ways and shades; only the gender makes the mess; her friendship with Madame Reisz or Mrs Ratignolle is permissible even with Robert upto the extent of flirtation but serious, inter-gender, physical relation is beyond pardon. Her consternation about her cloistered condition, desexualisation of her body embeds in her mind a realization that she is incapable enough to extricate herself from the clutch of patriarchy and its patterns; in her death, she refuses to lead an abysmal life and equally denies an atrocious acquiescence to aegis of affectation under the apron of affection and amorousness.

Chopin reveals before us how everybody in first place, is an individual, well-occupied by sensible reason to make choices and priorities, Edna too, yearns for her identity as she is stirred to the idea of individual talent and hidden potential; she tries her best to discover her own self in a very

flexible, fluid, fecund, fertile way but beyond the bounds of a world—fraught with circumscription. Chopin's message here lies in the fact that the barrier of family and society cannot win over individual quest; Edna makes a choice for the exploration of self if not in the "world...vague, tangled, chaotic...many souls perish in its tumult!" (Chopin14) then in the sea, fathomless, boundless with unlimited possibilities, its "voice is seductive; never-ceasing, whispering...inviting the soul to wander...in mazes of inward contemplation" (Chopin 14).

In her striving for her soul, her spirituality, with a rebuttal to social and worldly ties, she puts her first step towards the journey of autonomy, erroneously, turning a blind eye to the culmination of events. She feels herself like "the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child who all of a sudden realizes its power and walks for the first time alone boldly with overconfidence" (Chopin 27). This experience introduces Edna to her inner strength to approach unapproachable things in case she possesses "the courageous soul that dares and defies" (Chopin 109).

Some palpitant forces work within to entice or energise her to do what she outwardly denies but her inward voice conforms to do. Ironically, she rejects the "dual life— that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 14), constantly and consistently taught to her. Unrealistic appraisal of her position leads to unexpected and unprecedented reversal of fortune. Edna ignites the spark of defiance to tradition but fails to control the fire of repercussions. Her escape to boundlessness of the sea incurs on her immense space of strokes and efforts but very soon, she realises the lack of destination. The reality unleashes weariness upon her, but the tickling taste of untouched, unfathomed arena makes her going back unsavoury and unbelievable.

Edna succumbs to the sea as she acts upon her impulse without any deliberation or reflection. She "blindly follows whatever impulse moves her as if...alien hands ...free her soul of responsibility" (Chopin 32). Her father never has taught her to weigh pros and cons of any act by inner calculation. He himself endorses and suggests to his son-in-law too that "authority and coercion are what is needed ...to manage a wife" (Chopin 68). Edna's husband also cannot see that she is "casting aside that fictitious self we assume...to appear before the world" (Chopin 55). A deaf ear and blind eye to Edna's cause and cravings cost the family an exorbitant price of her life.

Indisputably, Edna too is a mother-woman like Madame Ratignolle but,

in quest of autonomy, she chooses to be a career-woman like Madame Reisz, oblivious of the fact that, in bargain for career from conventions, the slightest trait of feminine sensibility is stripped off, snatched from Reisz who “wears a shabby lace, she eats in a rare old buffet dingy and battered” (Chopin 59). She is almost divorced from her community as “the most disagreeable and unpopular woman” (Chopin 56), a premium price, she pays for privacy.

Correspondingly, when Edna breaks away from her social role, she has no vision to follow, she takes a flight to uncharted terrains but in absence of accomplishment and expertise, she gravitates towards the sea with broken strength as “the bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is sad spectacle to see the weakling bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (Chopin79). Her emulation of Mademoiselle Reisz is futile as Reisz develops her strength, the talent for music in early life and sets her consistent goal, she takes flight with strength of self to counter social forces with her aloofness, peevish repartees and exercise of solitude and talent. She applies herself to ambition as an antidote to venomous stings of patriarchy.

Undeniably, Edna has no realization of her subscription to male hegemony. She also fails to gauge the social outcomes of her impulse and indulgence; she is clueless about fallouts of flouting features of social framework. Her greatest flaw is error of judgment or evaluation of impositions, imperfections, expectations and securities, this domestic and social framework proffers to her. Her imperfect knowledge, unrealistic appraisal of creole culture with all its sanctions and inhibitions lead her to nowhere. She designs her own standard, of course, with no agenda or delineation or layout, she rejects social standards as impositions and asserts, “I give myself where I choose” (Chopin102). Chopin, here, seems to suggest that Edna wants to reverse master and slave relationship between genders without reckoning the repercussions of reversal and finally, “abandons herself to Fate and awaits the consequence with indifference” (Chopin 98).

Edna’s awakening of autonomy gradually metamorphoses into her evolution as an individual. For the first time, she behaves not like a secondary gender but begins to “look with her own eyes to see and apprehend the deeper under-currents of life” (Chopin 89). Unfortunately, Edna’s underdeveloped talent for painting and sketching fails to equip her with staunch stamina and like “a bird with broken wings circling, disabled down...” (Chopin 108) she comes down to the sea.

As Lacan also proposes, Edna is in dilemma whether to accept symbolic and powerful masculine order related to father or embrace imaginary, dreamy and sensuous feminine order of mother. She tries to assume the authoritative masculine role during her grand dinner, presiding over guests, sitting in a throne like chair like “the regal woman, the one who looks on, stands alone” (Chopin 84) but she fails to adjust in this given role, sanctioned by masculine figure, her husband; she craves for her imaginary, sensual feminine element and offers herself to the watery grave.

Being a motherless child, Edna has, since infancy, been reserved and self-contained, she is not taught or trained by a female mentor-mother how to conduct the dual life of a woman, practicing precaution and prevarication. Her infantile growth was compromised and hindered as well, due to the demise of her mother in her childhood and unwarranted presence of a strict mentor in place of mother and guardian. In absence of a guiding spirit and presence of dictating authority, the circumscription is laid upon her but not explained to her; the imposition intensifies her confusion. Any judicious feminine paradigm could have guided her that before she enjoys independence and authority of man, she should earn it with responsibility and stability. An artist has to undertake a penance to earn an independent entity and to shun conventional roles. She requires ample time and training to master the skill of art but she gives up in frustration as she lacks in required patience, time span and devotion—a requisite to obtain it.

According to John Glending, “Her poor adjustment to the conditions of her life ensures that her distinctiveness and its expression will produce not only moments of joy but also suffering and confusion” (43). In absence of authentic, established feminine identity, she leads herself to a blind alley from where there is no scope of coming back. A kind of awakening—a sense of personal authenticity dawns at Edna; she struggles to articulate this missing element but is short of words.

Chopin endorses avenues and dispensations other than matrimony but she too is reluctant, skeptical about their exercise and consequences. Chopin attaches no greater importance to consequences, she prefers to restrict herself to trial of an idea—churned up from dichotomy, diversity of life. Despite a constant struggle; failure even if terrible and mammoth, gigantic, leaves behind an indelible impression, an idea about the frayed fabric of social conventions; uncomfortably receptive to women and a step towards unseen, new, wonderful but chaseable and changeable options. The collision between perceived and conceived image of oneself is atro-

cious but opens up two possibilities- one, encounter the crumbling forces head-on with approximation, semblance of desolation; the other, remain sculptured in the mandatory matrix.

Chopin covertly whispers a kind of liberation because curtailment of every widening gyre of human creativity will imprison anyone in fractal and perpetual infinity of ever-subdividing identities and women's exponentially multiplying self will be typed and stocked. Chopin illustrates how Edna's promise of personal priority is thwarted by masculine interposition. She exercises her individuality and admits no prescription of role budging not an inch from her resolve.

Edna never denies her obligation to her children; she acknowledges female identity with motherhood; but for her, motherhood should not impede creativity or self-awareness, self-actualization. This interference of domestic duties and childcare with growth of self become the genesis of an unresolved, enigmatic crisis between her prescribed role and the chosen role. She craves warmth and sensuousness of relation. In her husband, she finds "no trace of passion or... warmth coloured her affection" (Chopin19). In sheer shunning of social roles by Edna, Chopin makes a notable shift from mundane moralistic discourse to judicious, justifiable and less judgmental deliberations upon gender relations by exploring and elaborating on women's perspectives.

Conclusion

Chopin indulges the reader in Edna's journey from "dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish to the beginning to realise her position as a human being, and to recognise her relations as an individual to the world..." (Chopin 14). Chopin duly registers the "period of despondency and suffering which take possession" (Chopin 105) of her for her liberty with prevalent code of social conduct and also her temptation for "strange and awful...to stand naked under the sky! How delicious!...like some newborn creature...believing that it has no beginning and no end" (Chopin 108). Chopin makes the reader believe the unbelievable. She showcases with microscopic details how women are very much natural individuals with normal demands, dreams, digressions, deliriums, defiance and also death.

Here, Edna finds "regulation of gender relations and especially, control of feminine" (Madsen 113) by male hegemony. She succumbs to the soliciting sea, naked as it "imposes no boundaries upon

the ego that is a characteristic of feminine order” (Madsen 118) and bestows upon her the fecund , feminine suppleness with a caressing effect without completely snatching from her the symbolic, masculine order of exercising her freewill in making a choice of delicious but deadly diving into the sea . «Edna»s disrobing... is a heroic divestiture of all constraints and inhibitions that her society has imposed upon her”(Dawson 15).Embracing masculine order, she wants to manifest her utter disregard to the feminine shame that is compulsorily covered, but prefers to be covered by feminine fluidity, warmth and mellowness of the sea. She forsakes her shame, her gender and proclaims her pure intention to exhibit her individuality stripped of gender, like a naked baby and to enjoy masculine freedom from constraints. “Edna feels as if she is being borne away from some anchorage which has held her fast, whose chains have been loosening”(Chopin 33). She wants “to swim far out, where no woman had swum before” (Chopin 27). The sea here, is figuratively used as a device favouring her expansion and creative innovation, something boundless “unlimited in which she wants to lose herself”(Chopin 28) in a “fantastic, untroubled region...where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical” (Yaeger 201).

Edna’s obsession is obscure and oblivious. She is desperate to divulge her ideology, social hypocrisy and chinks of gender-bias in social fabric but without some coping course, exhaustion presses upon her and escape overpowers her. She firmly believes that it is “better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain dupe to illusions all one’s life” (Chopin 105). Her presence is felt only to assess such an idea that women are primarily humans to be recognised in their personal self-esteem and worth, they cannot be treated like Pomeranian dogs, fed and decked to some sweet will of their owner; they own themselves if not in physical world, then, at least, in their own estimation, shunning the bounds in boundless bounty of water.

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