

**CITING THE UNCITED: OBJECT BODIES IN THE SELECTED
FICTIONS OF FAY WELDON**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
English Language and Literature**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Remya V**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **CITING THE UNCITED: ABJECT BODIES IN THE SELECTED FICTIONS OF FAY WELDON** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bonafide research carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. K.P. Sudha, my Research Supervisor, Principal (Rtd.), Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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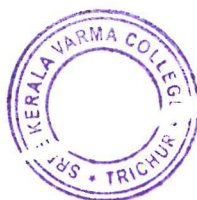
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **CITING THE UNCITED: ABJECT BODIES IN THE SELECTED FICTIONS OF FAY WELDON** submitted by **Remya V**, to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by her under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles

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A Note on Documentation

For the purpose of documentation, the Eighth edition of MLA Handbook is used.

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Introduction

Body is the central point from which all social life begins. Body is the medium of culture. It is the surface on which the society inscribes rules and regulations of culture. Cultural rules are propagated through the body and in turn the same rules also shape the ways in which the body performs and appears. It is through the body's actions and responses; the self is constructed and displayed to the social world. Though self is an individual possession it is highly a social construct. The self is enacted through the body. It is through the body that people enact gender, social class, ethnicity and all other differences. Body is a site of oppression as the system of social control can operate through it. The physicality of human body serves as a symbol of social difference.

Human body is no longer taken as a fixed, concrete, whole substance. Body acquires meaning through various societal discourses. In this way body becomes a text, where culture and the hegemonic hands can inscribe upon it and thus acquires meaning and sense. "The body becomes plastic, inscribed with gender and cultural standards" (Brush 2). Many literary theorists and philosophers agree and disagree on the matter of an existence of a pre inscriptive body. Discourses of the reigning system constructs and imparts meaning to the body. The discourses modify body with their own literal and figurative inscription. Thus discourses cater to the materiality of the body and the social contexts within which bodies are experienced and constructed.

Body is fundamental to the gender dichotomy and performance of masculinity and femininity. Physical attractiveness is more important for women than for men. This has become a strong impact on the physical and psychological level of women. Female body should be sexy, thin and by tradition an object of physical desire. Women who engage in body beautification are actually submitting to the phallic regulation and thus make their bodies physical manifestations of their own subordination. In this way they establish that they live under a system of gender oppression.

The inequality of the sexes of men and women justifies the biological capacity of women to give birth and nourish their infants. This biological capacity is the only genetic difference between men and women. This is the root cause for women to be driven out from certain fields. The capacity of women to give birth and provide nourishment has confined her role exclusively of the mother and the care taker for the socialization of the children. Women are thus interpellated as mother, wife and daughter. The fulfilment of her life solely depends on becoming and enacting these roles. In order to be a wife and mother she needs a man. Getting a proper man is not an easy task for women. She has to be good looking and also fulfil the criteria fixed by men for getting married.

Her personal appearance is the central point of her existence and it makes herself self-conscious throughout her life. Women are obsessed with the idea of pleasing and attracting men. Too much importance is given to the appearance of a woman in all walks of life. As a result of this self monitoring

tendency she depends heavily on the trends set by society. She changes herself like the woman appears in various media and print representation. Women are under the dominant patriarchal forces and thus pressured to objectify themselves with male desire and affirm their own subjugation.

Ideal image of female body changes from year to year and so the job of women in maintaining their body is never ending. In the early 1960's the trend was to be skinny, flat chested with long straight hair. They achieved this appearance through starvation, binding their breasts with heavy and tight bandages and ironing hair. Then again in the 1970's the trend for the texture of hair became curly and flat breasts were replaced with thrusting breasts. In accordance with the change in the style of dressing, women are expected to oppress their body to befit the changing trends. Thus women are obsessed with images of ideal womanhood. Women are forced to conform to the reigning trends and cater to the consumerist culture. These way women are caught in a societal standard that are externally defined and constantly changing. These patterns of femininity are actually unreal and difficult to attain.

With all the developments and accomplishments of contemporary woman there still exists a secret pressure infused with beauty ideals. They undergo physical obsessions, fear of ageing, self hatred and dread of having lost control. It is quite natural for women to think in this way. Many women are ashamed to admit the trivial concerns about their physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes etc. Older women's faces are seldom portrayed in magazines and if at all they appear, they are made to appear young. Women of

colour were seldom shown unless they had extra ordinary beauty ideals. In reality if a woman wants to be herself she should try to find a room of her own in terms of beauty ideals. The sexual imagery is so powerful and ideologically constructed when we see the pressure of beauty ideals thrust upon woman.

According to Sandra Lee Bartky :

A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought. Hair must be removed not only from the face but from large surfaces of the body as well, from legs and thighs, an operation accomplished by shaving, buffing with fine sand paper, or applying foul –smelling depilatories. With the new high leg bathing suits and leotards, a substantial amount of pubic hair must be removed too. The removal of facial hair can be more specialized. Eye brows are plucked out by roots with a tweezers. Hot wax is sometimes poured onto the moustache and cheeks and then ripped away when it cools. The woman who wants a more permanent result may try electrolysis: this involves the killing of a hair root by the passage of an electric current down a needle that has been inserted into its base. The procedure is painful and expensive (69).

Beauty upholds objectivity and is considered universal. Every woman has a strong desire to possess the beauty ideals in them and men want to

possess those women who embody it. Stories, myths, experiences and every day concerns celebrate the quality and goodness of beauty. Apart from this, beauty is a serious concern in the marriage market. Women's beauty is correlated to their fertility and assumes the notion that beautiful women are reproductively successful. The beauty ideals change faster than the evolution of species. Naomi Wolf demystifies the concern of beauty ideals: "The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power"(13).

Media plays a crucial role in rethinking the quality of beauty for women. They serve as a middle link of the ideology of creation of beauty. Women's magazines and advertisements inculcate a desire in them for a personal transformation in status and it is crucial for the well being of an individual. As a result of the practice of beauty maintenance, an unwanted pressure is built on them where they begin to bother the body size, aging factors, complexion etc. The transformation would never be complete but an on going process. This way woman's mind is forced to materialize its desires and self esteem is boosted into the discriminatory requirements. Thus media dictates how a woman has to be in a sexual context, within family and social circle.

Our understanding of the physical body is largely dependent on the visual and print media. Information, practices and trends are communicated to people effectively in a subtle way through media. Media has the power to magnify objects and create desire in our mind unconsciously. The way we

perceive our body is the outcome of this desire and magnification of objects. Media tries to homogenize a body type dictated by the style industry. Women from all over the world negate their own local body in their search for media communicated ideal body. In fact we lose our bodies in the same way as we lose our mother tongue in favour of a globalized medium.

A job is the criteria for definition of an individual in the contemporary capitalist society. In the matter of a job, a clear hierarchy is practiced that businessmen, academics, professionals are given higher status than to service and production labourers. Women belong to the service and production category. Her job as a home maker and mother is often looked down upon and dismissed as easy and god given. Women are conditioned to enact these roles as natural and essential. The same status and approach are given to her when she happens to work outside the home space. She is forced to obey the whims and fancies of male rule at the work place. They are seen as the other and also treated not like men workers. Despite the efforts and productivity that she delivers, her full identity is not supported by the phallic world.

The constant energy and effort that she spares for others are taken for granted by the patriarchal world. Her concerns merge with other members of her own family and are unaware of a space of her own. She is not conscious of her bodily needs. Food is a major concern of every woman in this world. A woman cooks and serves for others before she does it for herself. As she has no time and space for herself, she manages to store the energy in terms of food for

the day's encounters. The fat that deposited from the food thus consumed results in losing the shape she craves for.

A woman does both full-time paid work and the unpaid domestic work. In both the industrial and technological era, irrespective of the hardships, women worked harder to meet her family and personal expenses. There is a tendency to supplement skilled labours with woman labour, so that they are welcome to the labour pool and hence low paid. There are various unethical reasons in employing women for low-paid jobs as Naomi Wolf observes:

The qualities that best serve employers in such a labour pool's workers are: low self-esteem, a tolerance for dull repetitive tasks, lack of ambition, high conformity, more respect for men (who manage them) than women (who work beside them), and little sense of control over their lives. At a higher level, women middle managers are acceptable as long as they are male-identified and don't force too hard up against the glass ceiling; and taken women at the top, in whom the female tradition has been entirely extinguished, are useful. The beauty myth is the last, best training technique to create such a work force (26).

There are clearly defined class of woman workers who are explicitly paid for their "beauty". Workers in the display professions like dancers, actresses, high paid sex workers etc., maintain their beauty for their professional space. Even after the development, liberation and emancipation of

women, the aspects like fame, respect and money accorded to such profession seem higher. The professional beauty qualification is in fact thoroughly institutionalised as a pre –requisite for any work field. This professional beauty qualification is actually a type of sexual discrimination in which the category of beautiful women are compartmentalised and discriminated within their own community. Hence the quality of being beautiful becomes central to women’s lives.

Women are endowed with a low self esteem and high anxiety about their feminine appearance. This consciousness of women has been catering to the beauty industry. The beauty industry seems to be superficial of the cultural institutions. The impact of such industries on women seems destructive to their bodies and minds. The beauty industry amplifies the desire to alter the shape of their body and is unaware of the social pressure to fit in the universal standards. The beauty ideals of a woman are at the hegemonic hands of the society and her physique and appearance are domesticated and tamed. Woman belongs to a culture that barely recognizes the genetic and natural anatomical traits and forces them to battle with their own anatomy, which is so unnatural and meaningless. When the actual femininity is rendered deficient or inferior in the society, they opt for cosmetic surgery. “For them, the decisions to have cosmetic surgery is described as a way to become ‘ordinary, ‘normal’ ‘just like everyone else” (Kathy 161).

Professional beauty concept reinforces the double standards of the appearance of men and women in the workplace. Both genders are unequal in

their conformity to the dressing standards. In the matter of hiring and promotion, men's and women's appearances are judged differently. The parameters of beauty standards are beyond question. In the matter of monetary benefit the disparity in payment also exists between these two genders. Many economists agree to the fact that women do not expect promotion and hike in salary as they are conditioned by their work experience not to expect a better deal. Beauty ideology teaches women to have less control and few options and make them materially and psychologically worthless.

Body alteration is a contemporary phenomenon. There is satisfaction and fulfilment when a person conforms to the aesthetic parameters of the society. The unmodified or unimproved body is always looked down upon by the aesthetic society. The development of aesthetical surgical industry and the materialization of the imaginary figure invoke the desire and possibilities of the embodiment of the so called ideal body image. The unacceptable parts of the body are cut and refined with modern equipment and procedures. This practice of body alteration reinforces the existence of an ideal body concept and propounds the need of the body to be controlled in every manner to conform to the norms of the culture. One cannot blame the aesthetical surgical industry for the oppressive aesthetic values but they are part of the culture which reinforces the ideal body image. The practice and outcome of industry is to categorize the altered body into normal and maintains a cultural hegemony of the normal.

The advertisements and various representations reinforce a need for the normalized body. The advertisement and trade books of aesthetic surgical

industry show the before and after picture of alteration and opens the possibilities for it and thus create a desire in the psyche of the individual. The after figure, in fact, contains the ideological figure which is slimmed and adjusted with reigning beauty concept. In both the before and after pictures the focus is on the area of deviance and shows the possibilities of alteration. This innovation reveals that human body is reduced to a less complex entity that can be altered and renovated. The act of alteration caters to the psychological level of the being and the materialization brings satisfaction and fixity in their normalising process.

The ideal body is an aesthetic concept which is presented through various mediums in different ways. This medium makes the aestheticized body a universal desire. “The aestheticized body emerges through the identification of abject body parts and their amendment” (Covino 4). The desire to normalize one’s body is rooted in the culture and unconscious mind. This desire is actually a fantasized image of oneself free from all deviances. There is a cultural force behind the aesthetic surgical industry which prompts us to understand that the abject body is not founded on psychological bases but on complicated social structure and hierarchy.

Aesthetic surgery dehumanizes and denaturalise the proper body of a person and makes them mere objects. This works more consciously on female body that the efforts of self improvement in terms of physical alteration make her to be an object under the male gaze. The ancient philosophical tradition has devalued and established female body as inferior and unorganized. The concept

of ideal beauty prevailing in the society is materialized with the aesthetic surgical industry which at the same time creates an aversion to the proper body. In this way the new innovative techniques of the industry create a transcendental beauty body ideal with the erasure of the abject body.

It is fashion that defines the shape of a woman and sets the beauty trends. The mannequins or the dummy body that the fashion outlets use to display products has become the standard form of female body in the mind of most women. It is ridiculous that women follow the beauty standards of mannequins. Susan Faludi analyses femininity and the status of it in the beauty industry:

The dummies were coming to life, while the ladies were breathing anesthesia and going under knife. The beauty industry promoted a return to femininity as if it were a revival of natural woman hood- a flowering of all those innate female qualities supposedly suppressed in the feminist 70's. Yet the 'feminine' traits the industry celebrated most were grossly unnatural and achieved with increasingly harsh, unhealthy and punitive measures (238).

After the World War II, the beauty industry redefined the images of femininity and restored those images in fashion. They promoted women to inflate their breasts, to change the texture and colour of their hair with chemicals and dyes, whiten their face and skin, reduction and enlargement of various body

parts according to the ideals, liposuction, etc. Thus beauty industry paved way for a comprehensive metamorphosis carried out at every level of the beauty culture from the superficially used perfume to the massive alteration through body operation. This beauty rule is the outcome and by product of various capitalistic and consumerist sales strategy.

Faludi argues that beauty industry flourished in 1980's persuades women that they need good looks for their physical and mental well being. Mean time beauty became medicalized with several injections, ointments, chemical treatments, face lifts, liposuction and breast implants performed by physicians. Now beauty is promoted as a medicalized concept which is safe and healthy at the hands of physicians. The harmful side effects and dangers of one's life while implanting breast and doing liposuction are like the effects of carcinogen and immunopathics and these are less circulated as information by the knowledge providers. Cosmetic surgery should be regarded as an intercession on identity rather than an appeal on oneself.

Humanism asserts that human life is morally distinct from other forms of being. They hold the view that human beings are the only forms of being possessed with the quality of reasoning. It is in fact an exceptionalism exclusively for human beings. They believe in the autonomy and uniqueness of human beings who possess linguistic features and reasoning capacity. They consciously construct a belief in the inner truth of a being. They promote the ideals of organic wholeness and unity. Humanists adhere to natural fallacy and prefer originals to copies. They embrace wholeness and authenticity. No

philosophical stance could ever define and confine status of human being. Even then locus point of humanists is still humans. The inherent contradiction involves the treatment of non-whites, women and other historically marginalized population. So it is certain that the term 'human' belongs to a privileged category and they alone are recognized as fully human.

With an inherent contradiction within the humanism, certain section of human beings are treated distinctively and that itself destabilizes the movement's core assumptions. Humanists believe in dichotomies and practices, distinguish humans from non humans, believe in racial differences and sexual hierarchies and justify exploitation of environment for the sake of humanity. Humanist approach is to have a homogenized pattern for everything irrespective of the differences. They cannot resolve and tolerate with the contradictory impulses that co-exist in one's body whether it is human, animal, machine or social. This conception of homogeneity to gain a unity is to be abandoned first and should enable one to accept different affinities.

The status of being a human is destabilized by the scientific and technological advancements in the world. Trans-humanism and Post-humanism are the two major perspectives that dominate and question predominant doctrines concerning human beings. Both movements urge to rethink the organic wholeness behind the concept of humans and take us beyond the reality. It challenges the coherence of the human body as complete entity through which culture is processed and oriented. A post human condition has already taken over consciously and unconsciously with the advent of techno

space and the confusion regarding it is the echo of the battle of the evolving changes. A new bodily configuration and its discursive practices that displace human and humanities have evolved.

Post humanism, an umbrella term, has been defined in diversified ways. It is a theory and a perspective that succeeds post modernism. It is a way of reading and a critique of humanism. It is an effort to reach beyond the human and to explore the physical limitations of the human body and at the same time questions the inevitability of human future and reproductive capacities. A perspective of post humanism enables one to understand the limitations of social theory that assumes a return to an original identity. Traditional and modern philosophies presuppose a pure entity before society got in the way and tries to track the origin of the matter concerned. In the post-human era, human beings are replaced by the cybernetic organisms.

Donna Haraway defines cyborgs. “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”(5). Cybernetic organisms, in short called cyborgs have no origin, past and future, and make no anxiety about the society and its environment. Cyborgs complicate the notion of sex, gender and reproduction and question the binary construction of the traditional philosophy and culture. The feeling, experience and expression, the unique capacity of human beings are replaced by the artificial intelligence. Cyborgs blur the distinction between human and animal. Haraway distinguishes between the post-human organism and machine:

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism - in short, cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres, structuring any possibility of historical transformation (7).

The first-person experience of pure consciousness is replaced by the post- human advancements. They envision an artificial blend with the help of machines to capture the physical and mental aspects of human beings. This will eventually develop an effortless capacity to transcend the mind's content. Post human innovative techniques would rethink and reconceptualise the human conditions like morality, rationality, feelings and experience in terms of machines and artificial intelligence. This movement would definitely dismantle the unique status of consciousness in human beings. William S. Haney II argues about consciousness in human beings are not essential: "Post Humanists tend to define consciousness in terms of the mind's conscious content, arguing that whatever consciousness may be in – and – of itself, it is not a necessary entity for human existence" (8).

Post humanists contend that the existence of the self does not depend on consciousness. The capacity of invasive technological features to comprehend beyond the realm of consciousness would be revolutionizing. The movement to explore the seat of human identity will reduce human beings from their highly possessed concept of natural body and consciousness to bionic

humans. This will definitely interrogate the mystery of human body and life. The essential demarcation between bodily existence and cybernetic organisms will be removed and challenged. A post human subject will be a blend of different components, a technological system that will surpass the natural self and organic body of the human beings.

We live in a techno world and still we have categorized human beings in terms of gender dichotomies. Gender performance as it is taken for a granted phenomenon appears as a necessary performance, a performance of survival. Both male and female repeats and perform the general traits of the gender category to which they belong. The alternative gender performance are not allowed and acknowledged in this highly gender conscious society. It is the sex essentialism that naturalizes the gender role performances. Behaviour apart from these set standards created outcasts and were placed outside the social system. The roles and expressions that are considered exclusively masculine or feminine have varied over time and between places. The recent outcry of various marginalized communities other than male and female have questioned the grain of gender performance.

Our world is largely set on having two gender categories man and woman. However, many cultures around the world have more than two gender categories. There are studies and references of other categories in the history and academic fields. But the hegemonic hands endeavored to eradicate this minor group as they did not fit into a binary classification of male or female. Thus gender norms and ideals are socially constructed. They develop in society

and are performed through cultural practices. People's behaviours, attitudes and performance on tasks become more gender stereotyped when they are forced to be aware of gender.

Despite the progress and advancements in all walks of life in the contemporary society, there exist certain prejudices in terms of the concept of ideal human body. What is beautiful and slender is desired apart from being healthy and natural. Any aspect beyond the concept of normality is foregrounded and thus abjected. Human beings are thus on a constant struggle to negate the abject with the natural embodiment to showcase the so called normal. There are various situations and appearance in the life of each individual that may not conform with the existing standards of life dictated by the society. When the abject situations confront women category, they are twice marginalized and thrown apart. Obesity, ugly appearance, illegitimacy, prostitution, incest taboo, dismantling motherhood, menstrual body, same sex love and aged body are some of the abject situations that are present in the contemporary heterosexist world.

Obesity and overeating are two major issues as far as women are concerned in the world today. Physical appearance and body fitness and an eye for pulchritude are every woman's goals. It is true to say that diet clinics and fitness centre flourish in this decade when compared to the past decades. Every advertisement, be it in the visual or print media, about food and its related matters carry the concern of diet and health issues. Almost all magazines for women have a diet related discussion also. As a result an aversion to obesity

and certain food exists in the society. These are actually serious and painful experiences for the so called abnormal figures in terms of appearance which society dictates. “Being fat isolates and invalidates a woman. Almost inevitably, the explanation offered for fatness point a finger at the failure of men themselves to control their weight, control their appetites and control their impulses” (Orbach 201) .

Societal discourses restrict people from overweight and compulsive eating. In fact the number of women, who have obese appearance and compulsive eating habit, seems increasing day by day. The existing treatment and diagnosis have not worked well and there is an urgent need for a new psychotherapy to be evolved in the contemporary medical practice. A rethinking of the traditional psychoanalysis combined with a feminist approach is the need of the hour. As psychoanalysis approach can probe deeper into the realities concerning the issues of women by explaining their conscious or unconscious acts. A method of diagnosis and cure based on the phallogentric parameters without a feminist concern is quite inadequate. Feminists insist on the fact that the real problem with the victim arise from social context in which she lives.

Fatness is presented as a crucial marker of social status. Why fatness is so stigmatized is yet unknown. We have an extra ordinary fat aware culture and the cultural meanings associated with fatness or the fat person are little analysed. Fatness is seen by the regulating discourses as both a social and a physical problem. Fat denigration is intricately related to gender as well as

other hierarchies of the culture. Ours is a culture that is fixated on the significance of the normal slender body size.

It is equally relevant to hear the voices and activism of those who have resisted dominant ideas about fat stigma. From the late 1960 s onwards people have resisted and challenged fat stigma. National Association to Advance Fat acceptance (NAAFA) is a non profit, civil rights organization in the United States for obese people to improve their life and condition. The main objective of NAAFA is to eradicate discrimination based on body size and also helps the obese people with a method for self empowerment through group work and social activities. The organisations like NAAFA and the International Size Acceptance Association have tried to change the perception of body size and worked to re write the fat body and to claim their full rights as citizens. They resisted the connotation of fat body as ugly, lazy and unhealthy.

Fatness is taken as a discrediting attribute and people will find extraordinary solution to eliminate it. Our culture assigns many meanings to fatness beyond the actual physical size. Many are of the view that a fat person is gluttonous or is deeply disturbed by psychological need, irresponsible and has no control over his/ her urges. Hence fat people are treated as not quite human. The various forms of discrimination that fat people experience in the public domain are beyond our understanding.

Fatness is something that cannot be hidden. Marketers of clothing and medicines attempt to launch products that will make the person slimmer. For

many women, impulsive eating and being fat have become a strategy to avoid being marketed or taken to be the ideal figure. Fatness expresses a rebellion against the ideological construction of the ideal woman's image and also battles at the pressure thrust upon them to look and act in a certain way. Fat person refuse to be evaluated on their ability to create a marketable image on themselves.

We have progress and development in all walks of life of women in the contemporary society. But in the matter of menstruation, there exist a stigma, shame and silence. Menstruation is a monthly happening for woman from adolescent period to menopause. Women are made silent on the case and it is noticed that law and public policy rarely mentions about it. There is shame associated with it and it has its root in many religions. Whenever the matter of menstruation is communicated, the discourse adopts many euphemistic phrases. The menstrual products are termed differently and never refer to the blood to avoid embarrassment associated with it. This way the natural bodily function of woman is made invisible.

The onset of menstruation at puberty is a healthy state of body in welcoming the capacity for child bearing. It continues on all months, unless interrupted by pregnancy or menopause. The change should be taken on the positive note as normal as it brings transition from girlhood to womanhood which enables fertility. Women prefer menstruation to amenorrhea. Women are aware about the need and significance of menstruation. A negative attitude towards menstruation prevails in the discourse and any open talk concerning

the same is treated as taboo. Family, friends and media play an important role in imparting a negative attitude towards menstruation.

Motherhood is no longer a simple concept. The recent advancements in reproductive technologies have redefined the concept of motherhood. In vitro fertilization and surrogate motherhood have revolutionized the very concept of motherhood. The role of motherhood has been designed and manipulated by the patriarchal society to cater to the ideology behind it. The role of mother and her service is taken for granted. The message and the pattern have been internalized by women as they become mothers and pass it on the same to the next generation. Motherhood thus is a social construct and not a natural entity.

The discourse of motherhood and the ideology of new momism propounds that no woman is complete without a child. A mother is someone who completely devotes her time and energy on the infant's upbringing. Thus we have a celebration of motherhood in all category of the society. In fact the motherhood and its duties oppress all women by reducing their chance, becoming a super mom to their children by achieving impossible ideals of mothering. In this process women lose their self and identity with their selflessness and sacrifice. Thus the role of mother as a source of unconditional love and care has been deconstructed and re appropriated from the point of view of those woman who become mothers in the contemporary society.

Prostitution is a socially disapproved profession in the society. Throughout the history of any society, the practice and presence of prostitution

cannot be denied. There are various factors that force a female to indulge in such a profession. Lack of education, poor socio economic background, childhood abuse etc are associated with it. It is a highly unaccepted profession and people do not wish to be part of it openly. The nature of job is very secretive and hence unacknowledged by the user and the giver. Prostitutes take this profession and render services like any other job. They give their physical body for sexual intercourse for monetary benefits. With the later developments of technology, the pattern of prostitution seems to be changing and more rewarding. Despite the changing trends and existing attitude, they are negated from the mainstream realm.

Most narratives tend to focus on the morality attributed to sex workers. A thorough examination of those structural factors which forced them to choose this profession, the problems and exploitation in the field are rarely analyzed and studied. Prostitutes are viewed as immoral and ostracized because of many sexually transmitted diseases. The reigning discourse tends to abject the sex workers and their oppressive experiences. The double standards of society are obvious in the case of sex workers. It is the same society in which they live and offer service and at the same time exists and are made invisible with its own hypocritical hands.

Marriage is the very basis of society. It creates and names strangers as relatives. Children born out of wedlock and proper parentage tend to show stable relation, security and familial responsibility. The birth of the child outside of wedlock is called by different pejorative names like bastards and

foundlings. Illegitimacy is an unaccepted status in the society. They are likely to suffer numerous obstacles in their childhood, poverty, identity crisis and social acceptance. It is a noticeable fact that most of the illegitimates are attached to the maternal family. They suffer social and legal discrimination as compared with the legitimate children. The psychological impact and trauma associated with them are beyond imagination and comprehension. Yet they survive and lead an inferior life, social humiliation and end up in trouble in most of the case.

Incest in numerous cultures has been claimed as the universal taboo. Incestuous happenings are the consequence of patriarchal domination in which men use their power over female body. The incest prohibition has various functions like the avoidance and accumulation of recessive genes, a moral and peaceful upbringing among family members and promoting extra- familial social ties. Incest taboo is an aspect of human behavior. This aspect can and very likely exist depending upon certain social contexts and personal idiosyncrasies. The psychological consequence after undergoing an incestuous relationship for the oppressed class is traumatic and destructive.

Aged people are socially isolated and hence outside the main stream realm of the society. They suffer helplessness from their bodily and mind set due to old age. They are rendered invisible by the mainstream and public platform as they are categorized and represented as frail and passive. The old people are always represented in the discourse as lacking strength, ugly and senseless who need constant support and advice from the youth. It is the

representation that shifts them from active to passive space. We live in a world that is solely meant for the youth and their life. The institutions, market, business, relationships and human values are centered on youth and their space. Thus we have a youth obsessed culture where young lives are given more importance practically and socially.

The role of discourse is far reaching in this regard. We can see less positive approach in the discourse towards old people. Old people lack freedom as they depend on young people for their various matters concerning life. This lack of freedom renders them vulnerable to themselves and others. The constructed views of society make them lose confidence and prefer to live away or separate from the society. Thus they are forced to give up individuality and productivity even if they possess all these traits without failure.

The non normative sexual relationship is rarely acknowledged and is expressed distasteful on grounds of marital and cultural values. Same sex sexuality is treated as abnormal condition of an individual and thus a cultural taboo. The social institutions like religion and marriage largely prohibit homosexuality. The reigning discourse tactfully injects discrimination and shame which then tie into material practice by the people. The society depends on religious and cultural ideologies to marginalize and exclude same sex sexuality. Thus there is phobia towards same sex sexuality from the part of heterosexist category. This fear and discrimination of same sex sexuality is the outcome of representation by the mainstream culture.

Homosexuality has been part of the civilization from times immemorial. Religious and cultural texts ofcourse are loaded with non normative sex patterns. But the heterosexist hegemonic culture made the alternative sexuality invisible to cater the ideology of its own category. Sex is linked to biological reproduction and is related to married couple. Taking sex and its pleasure outside the reproduction was over looked and thus dismissed by the society. Those belonging to conservative tradition and lack of knowledge on sex and gender are the prominent factors that paved way for excluding the same sex sexuality.

A literature review helps to update the current knowledge of the topic concerned. It is a required step in a thesis which helps us to learn important aspects of the author, the topic selected for the study, and the ideas explored in the field. It provides a platform to get acquainted with other researchers of the same field. It offers an over view of a particular area from a practical and theoretical perspective. It provides a context for the research to progress and justifies it. It ensures the researchers that research hasn't been done before on the same topic. It also helps to get valuable insights from the existing body of knowledge. Thus review of related literature helps to refine and offer focus for the research.

Fay Weldon's different aspects of the novel have been explored by many in all parts of the world. It is essential to list and analyse those on which research is already conducted. *The Constructions of Fay Weldon, Woman of Letters* is a Ph.D. thesis carried out by Harriet Blymiller at University of South

Florida in the year 2007. The researcher analysed five novels of Fay Weldon: *Praxis*, *Puffball*, *The Cloaning of Joanna May*, *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* and *The Bulgari Connection*. This study explores the theme of mechanical reproduction and also analyses the aspects of human gestation, women's bodies, social identities, language and literature. Next research on Fay Weldon is by Kristen Majors Covington at MSSTATE for his master's degree thesis and the title is *Individual Change and The Feminist Movement in the Early Novels of Fay Weldon*. This is a study about motherhood and wifehood in 'Down Among the Women', 'friendship in *Female Friends*' and 'motherhood in *Remember Me*'.

Subversive Narrative and Thematic Strategies: A Critical Appraisal of Fay Weldon's Fiction, is a thesis of degree of D.Litt. et. Philosophy in the subject of English at the University of South Africa in the year 1995 by Finuala Rachel Dowling. The project is the analysis of her fiction and follows the chronological course of Weldon's writing career in five chapters. *Oh Mother, What You Taught Me: The mother/ daughter conflict* in the fictions of Fay Weldon is the title of a master's degree thesis of Williams C Owen at the University of Exeter in the year 1990. This thesis discusses the critical relationship of the mother- daughter within the fiction of Fay Weldon in order to understand the female identity and only through this relationship the formation and development of motherhood which is extremely complex and paradoxical in a heterosexual society is analysed.

Fay Weldon's Late Bloomers and Comedy, and, A Lawyer, a Vet, and a Couple of Dogs, One of them Dead, is a study on nature of comedy Weldon employs in her novel and is studied as part of Ph.D. thesis by Susan Rote Siferd in the year 2001 at Western Michigan University. This study critically analysis the nature of comedy Weldon uses in her novels. Traditionally comedy ends in marriage but Weldon's dark comedies end in self understanding as a necessary pre- requisite to growth and possible future relationship.

Mind You, They'll Say Anything: Fay Weldon and the Cultural History of Feminism, 1967-2002. This is a Ph.D. thesis of Mara E Reisman, carried out at the University of Connecticut in the year 2006. This study tracks the history of the critical reception of the novels of british author Fay Weldon. The study focuses on a cultural frame work in which to understand Weldon's fictions and to show how the larger literary public readers, reviewers and publishers received a feminist writer.

In the literary career, Fay Weldon has been largely ignored and quite unknown to the literary world for various reasons. This aspect has been analysed as part of a Ph. D. thesis by Victoria Pickett Kirby at the University of Rhode Island in the year 1997. This study of her novels makes the claim that she needs to be recognized as one of the important women writers of the late twentieth century and shows that her works offer an incisive critique of contemporary society. The title of the thesis is *Fay Weldon: A Contemporary Critical Voice*.

Fay Weldon's novels are compared with the other prominent female writers and studied. *The Ties that Bind: Breaking the Bonds of Victimization in the Novels of Barbara Pym, Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood* by Frances Margaret Rathburn at University of North Texas in the year 1994 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This study focuses on the ways in which female protagonists break out of their victimizations by individuals, institutions and cultural tradition and the ways in which each author uses a structural pattern in her novels to propel her characters to solve their dilemmas to the best of their abilities according to each woman's personality and strength. Another comparative study is carried out as part of a doctoral thesis by H.L Johnson at University of Edinburgh in the year 1996 is *Her Lion-Red Body, Her Wings Of Glass: Iconography of the Gothic Body in Carter, Tennant and Weldon*. This thesis examines the varied references to the gothic genre in the work of three contemporary British women writers: Angela Carter, Emma Tennant and Fay Weldon. The study analyses the use of gothic imagery in their fiction, concedes with the feminist revision of representations of the female body and the appearance of the gothic is more complex than the scope generally allowed by the critical term "Female Gothic".

Hate and Humour in Women's Writing : A Discussion of Twentieth Century Authors is the title of a Ph. D. thesis by Regina R Barreca carried out at the City University of New York in the year 1987. The anger and comedy in the works of Elizabeth Bowen, Muriel Spark and Fay Weldon are compared and analysed. This study is an argument that women write comedy in order to

intrude upon, to disturb and to disrupt expectations raised by traditional narrative forms and that comedy constructed by women is linked to aggression and the need to break free of socially and culturally imposed restraints. This humour reveals the implicit ideas and emotions which are expressed in a covert language and thus makes the writer's intention of subverting public authority and discusses the radical potentials of their texts. Laurie Ann Nardone as part of her Ph.D. thesis selected Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Anne Rice's *Interview with Vampire*, Katherine Dunn's *Greek Love*, Harry Crew's *Body*, Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of She Devil* and Angela Carters *The Passion of a New Eve*. This project investigates the concept of "body shop" both as a metaphorical and literal location in which consumers might achieve the ideal. It also discusses how women are inundated with images of perfect bodies through film, television, advertising and fashion. This research was carried out at the Emory University in the year 1997.

Making and Unmaking the Self in the Novels of Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison is a Ph. D. thesis of Miriam Hamilton Bellis at the University of Miami in the year 1996. This study focuses on the western thought associated woman with body and man with mind. Weldon, Atwood and Morrison offer in their novels a critique of this association of woman with physicality and address the complex relationship between the female body and subjectivity and also the violence directed towards the female body. Another comparative study in Fay Weldon, Roseanne Arnold and Camille Paglia is by Sian Elizabeth Williams Mile at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the

year 1994 as part of the Ph. D. thesis and the title of the study is *Warriors in Woolworth's SlamDancing in the Aisles: The Collision/ Collusion Between Feminism and Punk*. This study argues that once punk is understood as a particular kind of cultural intervention and it can also be used to rearticulate the ways in which specific feminist figures and texts work and to critique how feminism is done in the academy. This study explores the punk like strategy in these three writers.

Narrative and the Female Hero in Twentieth- Century Women's Novels is the title of a Ph. D. thesis of HonorMckitrick Wallace at Vanderbilt University in the year 1999. This study explores the dimensions of female hero. The female hero, insofar as a hero ventures out of the house, out of the community and into the world, has largely been refused a literary existence. This aspect is analysed in four contemporary writers: Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of She Devil* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

The Development of Female Consciousness in the Fiction of Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon is the title of Ph.D. Thesis by Chiung- Chu Chen at the University of South Carolina and the study explores how two writers, Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon focus on women's conditions, how they depict what is missing and repressed, female sexuality and subjectivity in a patriarchal society, how their female protagonists reach their potential in the quest for

survival and identity and how some of the female complete their journey to a state of self realization while others fail.

Queering the Pulpit: Fears and Pleasures in British Feminist Meta Fiction is the title of Ph.D. thesis of Lorena Love Russel carried out at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the year 2002. This study analyses intersections of post colonial, feminist and queer readings in the fictions of contemporary British writers Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Fay Weldon. This study explores how their texts negotiate the theoretical grounds of the materialist and the post structuralist moving between focussed attention to social and economic contexts and playful and exuberant expressions of desire and fantasy.

Straight talk: Theorizing Heterosexuality in Feminist Post Modern Fiction is a Ph.D. thesis of Ann Marrie Herbert carried out at Case Western Reserve University in the year 1995. This study looks in to how heterosexuality constituted in the patriarchal world and also articulates a theory of heterosexuality as scripted in the interplay between psychic structures and social structures. It reads the feminist postmodern fictions of Fay Weldon, Angela Carter and Kathy Acker as investigations into the relationship between signification and the gender specific solicitation of subjects into a coercive heterosexual script.

Patriarchal Myths in Post Modern Feminist Fiction: A Select Study, is the title of a Ph.D. thesis by Marie Josephine Aruna, carried out at the

Pondicherry University in the year 2010. In this study an attempt is made to compare the textual representations of gender and gender roles by the select postmodern women writers- Angela Carter, Arundhati Roy, Monique Wittig, Joanna Russ, Margaret Atwood, Fay Weldon, Ursula Le Guin and Kate Millet. It has been deduced from a cross textual analysis of their texts, that their writings, through the deliberate use of myth, tend to break the binaries of western thought system on which is found the base for women's oppression. Their method of indulging in gender subversion has been read from the French feminists (Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous) literary critical theory of *Ecriture Feminine*.

The Novels of Fay Weldon : A Critical Study, is the title of the research carried out by Satish R Ghatge as part of Ph.D. at the Shivaji University , Kolhapur and it is a thematic study of Fay Weldon's novels which are grouped into three phases in a chronological order. Different aspects of Fay Weldon and her works are analysed, her biography, novelistic visions, feminist concerns and also criticism of Weldon's fiction by eminent critics and historians and also her voice in the historical ,socio cultural and political aspects of feminist movement in Britain and Europe.

Another thesis as part of Ph.D. by Vidya Rajagopal at the University of Kerala in the year 2004 explores the female voices and characters characterized by a spirit of defiance and motivated by a thirst for revenge in Weldon novels are analysed. The title of the research is *Defiant Female Voices in Select Novels of Fay Weldon*. Defiance work differently in Weldon's women and it is

circumstances that thrust it upon them. But left to themselves, her women are gentle and lovable. This aspect in Weldon's women are analysed in the light of certain literary devices which Weldon weaves judiciously into the fabric of her fictional text.

The Political and Personal Facets of Motherhood in the Works of Fay Weldon is the title of the theses for Ph.D. by Koshy G, at Mahatma Gandhi University in the year 2007. This study is about motherhood and conformity to the patriarchal world and also the experience of motherhood as an enriching subjective experience. Motherhood has come a long way from private sphere to which it is relegated to the public platform. This unwanted conformity from the part of mothers is explored in the heterosexual world. It is obvious from the review of the related literature that Fay Weldon's novels and its different aspects are explored and analysed by many researchers from different parts of the world.

Fay Weldon, a contemporary British writer is an essayist, novelist, playwright, copy writer and a staunch advocate of feminism. Weldon was in Birmingham as Franklin Birkinshaw. Her father Frank Birkinshaw, was a doctor by profession and mother Margaret Jepson was a writer of fictions. The literary taste was from the maternal side, that her maternal grandfather, Edgar Jepson was a notable writer. When Weldon was at the age of six her parents divorced. Thus she had a short time period spent with her father. She lived with her mother, sister and grandmother. Fay Weldon's world was full of women. Weldon was educated at Girls High School, Christchurch and South

Hampstead High School. She achieved post graduation in Economics and Psychology from University of St Andrews, Scotland.

Weldon became an unmarried mother and at the same time she was reluctant to marry her son's father. After a brief episode in her life as a struggling single mother and copy writer, she married Ronald Bateman, a head master, 25 years senior to her. But the relationship lasted for only two years. Weldon again married a Jazz musician at the age of twenty nine, Ron Weldon and had three sons in the relationship. During the second pregnancy and life with Ron, Weldon's began writing to radio and television. When she was thirty, she faced a mid life crisis and had to take counselling and psychic treatments to overcome depression. The treatment however boosted her confidence and courage and the result was she gave up advertising and focussed on writing career.

Weldon wrote her first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke* in 1967 but it appeared as a television play with same title in the previous year. She wrote scripts of plays for both radio and television, the most popular being *Upstairs, Downstairs* and her adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The following thirty years witnessed the literary output of Fay Weldon as a successful writer, publishing over twenty novels, collection of short stories, scripts for television, stage and radio, articles etc. She became a popular figure and voice in the BBC. The relationship with Ron Weldon got strained and he refused to speak to her for two years. He believed in the new therapy of astrology and believed that they both were incompatible astrologically.

However he died of stroke, the next day after the divorce with Fay Weldon. Weldon married a poet who was fifteen years younger, Nick Fox.

Fay Weldon bagged a number awards in her career as a writer. She won the SFTA (The Slovak Film and Television Academy) Award for the Best series for Episode one of *Upstairs, Downstairs* in 1971. She had also coveted the Writers Guild Award for radio play in the year 1973. The radio play “Polaris” won Giles Cooper Award in 1978. *The Heart of the Country* won Los Angeles Times Fiction Award in the year 1989 and her collection of short stories *Wicked Woman* got the Silver Pen award. Her novel *Worst Fears* was nominated for the Whitbread Prize.

Fay Weldon is a former member of both Arts Council Literary Panel and the film and video panel of Greater London arts. She worked as a Chair woman of the Booker Prize in 1983. She was also a member of the Royal Society of Literature, Management Committee of Society of Authors and Writers Guild of Greater Britain. She had judged literary prizes like Whitbread Fiction Prize, the GPA Irish prize etc. Weldon received an honorary doctorate from the University of Andrews in 1990. She was awarded a CBE in 2001. She was appointed as a Professor of Creative Writing at Brunel University and Bath Spa University.

Fay Weldon wrote more than Forty Novels and *Death of a She Devil* being the latest was published in the year 2017. She has also published an autobiography *Auto da Fay* in the year 2002. Most of the themes in her novel

explores the issues of women and her surroundings, relationships with men, children, parents and society. Fay Weldon is a contemporary voice in the literary world of Britain who still writes fictions, stories and non fictions. Her writing is obviously revolutionary and reformatory. Her characters and situations suggest possibilities and alternatives and help to rethink and question the patriarchal standards.

The novels selected for the present study are *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967), *Life and Loves of a She Devil* (1983), *Praxis* (1978) and *Death of a She Devil* (2017). The objective of the thesis is to identify and analyse the abject bodies and gender performance of the characters selected for the study. The methodology adopted is Theory of Abjection by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) and Theory of Gender Performance by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990)

The thesis comprises of five sections. The first section is the introduction which includes a detailed analysis of human body in general and the status and problems of female body in the cultural context. It also discusses human body in the technological context. A short biographical note of Fay Weldon and her status in the society is added. A literature review on the studies of Fay Weldon and her works are included in the introductory section. The objectives, methodology and the plan of thesis is discussed in this part.

The next section of the thesis is Chapter One, titled as “Theoretical Frame Work”. The first objective of the thesis is to identify abject bodies and

situations in the novels selected for the study. For this analysis the methodology adopted is “Theory of Abjection” by Julia Kristeva from her book titled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The second objective of the thesis is to understand the gender performance of selected characters from the novels. The methodology adopted for understanding gender performance is “Theory of Performativity” by Judith Butler in her Book *Gender Trouble*. A detailed analysis of Theory of Abjection and Theory of Gender Performance is included in this chapter.

The next part of the thesis is named as Chapter Two. titled “Abject Bodies”. A complete understanding of the embodiment and situations of life on the basis of abjection is the focus of the section. Abject situations and bodies are identified, analysed and comprehended with the abjecting practice of the reigning signification system. The various situations are found in the life of each characters and a deeper understanding of those situations in which they identify and recognize the abject form the crux of the chapter.

The next part of the thesis is titled as “Gender Performance” and is the Chapter Three of the thesis. Gender Performance of various characters is the point of study in this section. It is interesting to note the repeated pattern of gender and its effect on the body of various characters in the study. Some characters in the novels selected for the study voice and conform gendered performance while some characters politicize and revolutionise the same with different strategies.

The last part of the Thesis is named as Conclusion. A general understanding of the human body in the cultural context is referred in the conclusion. The first objective of the study, identifying and analysing abject bodies is concluded with new insights after a thorough understanding of the situations and characters in the novels. The second objective, to understand the gender performance of selected characters is also analysed and concluded with fresh remarks.

Theorizing Abjection and Performance

Abjection means “the state of being cast off”. Abjection is a process by which the subject separates its self from those situations which are considered to be intolerable and threatens its state of being. The concept of abjection brings fear which is considered as violent and dark revolts of being. It involves a threat which seems to originate from an unknown realm of unconsciousness and is considered beyond the scope of what is unacceptable and unthinkable. Though it lies very close to our state of being, the symbolic order never accepts the presence of it. The very thought of it worries and confuses the desire of mind and hence it is rejected.

To Kristeva, the abject is not a definable object. “The abject is not an ob-ject facing me when I name or imagine ”(*Powers* 1). The abject is the “other” which endlessly flees from the symbolic order. “The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to I” (*Powers* 1). What is “I” in the patriarchal world is ideologically constructed and the abject is totally opposed to the constructed “I”. The abject is the jettisoned object which is excluded from the symbolic order where meaning collapses when it is taken outside of the former. The abject lies outside beyond the system and does not accord with rules and regulations of the reigning system. Though it is banished from the reigning system the abject does not stop challenging the system. The very thought of abject frightens and disrupts the system.

The abject is the outcome of the repression of certain basic instincts. Drawing insights from Freud, Kristeva makes use of the Oedipus complex to explain this process. At a certain age a boy is distanced from his maternal body and is aware of his self and body, but the desire for his mother's body continues and as he matures, this becomes lust. Out of fear of the father, the boy restrains himself and he can never have his mother's body. To this Kristeva introduces her own concept of the abject into it. The repressed desire for his mother's body still lingers and haunts the boy and this is the abject. With the acquisition of language, the boy learns to abject the lust. In the *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Kristeva identifies pivotal instances of abjection in "the earliest establishments of selfhood and in the deepest structures of cultures" (*Powers* 8)

The abject harkens back to the shadowy beginnings of our prehistory, individual and collective. But it can also occur at any time and does – all the more potently because it recalls those primal struggles. Pre-symbolic, abjection yet persists and returns in flashes, at places of strain or moments of crisis within the symbolic system. Like love and melancholy, abjection brings into relief by bringing into crisis the lines that distinguish self from other. In abjection, 'I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders (*Powers* 4).

The very sight of certain foods, filth, waste, dungs etc, brings repugnance, spasms, and retching and turns one away from the so-called waste matters. The mind diverts one from these as they are to be avoided and hence

separates one from them. The most archaic form of abjection according to Kristeva is food loathing. The very first drink of human beings, the mother's milk is considered an abject in the patriarchal system. After a certain age, we no longer consume our mother's milk. We are taught in the symbolic system how to abject the mother's milk at a certain stage.

The procedure of abjection of mother's milk separates one from the mother and the symbolic system welcomes it. The patriarchal system separates the being from the mother and his real self and engages the individual in the procedure of becoming an "other" according to the symbolic system. During the process of becoming the "other", the individual endures strong conflicts. As this procedure occurs in the stage where language is absent, the individual carries a mute protest which goes unnoticed. Human beings fear equally death and corpse. The sight of a corpse evokes terror in the mind. To Kristeva, in order to live, we thrust aside permanently the concept of death. When these thoughts are pushed aside permanently, they appear while confronting a corpse. Kristeva says "There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being: our body is forced to move away from the border. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (*Powers* 3). Similarly, not only death and corpse, certain fluids, defilement, excrement etc are taken as abject and pushed aside from the border.

The very concept of the border is the most sickening thought that has encroached upon everything. The real "I" is expelled beyond the border in the symbolic world. So the border has become an object. The real "I" cannot exist

without the border. The real “I” is beyond the present status and experiences a seemingly real perception of the real “I”. Hence the real “I” is abjected into the real world which is beyond the patriarchal world. There is no room for the real “I”. Kristeva remarks: "It is nowhere, jettied, abjected into 'my' world. Deprived of the world, therefore, *I fall in a faint*" (*Powers* 4) In the newly constructed world, the real I with its roots abjected finds no matches and no longer signifies anything. The real “I” experiences the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders.

For Kristeva, the utmost form of abjection is the corpse, which is taken as a thing without the involvement of God and is also outside the definition of science. The corpse is something that is rejected, something with which one does not identify and never taken as an accepted thing. So the abject is something which disturbs identity, system, and order. Abject does not respect borders, positions, and rules. The traitor, the liar, the criminal, the rapist, the killer are all abject conditions of being which disturbs the system. In the symbolic world, these conditions are perceived as abject situations. Kristeva makes a distinction between what is perceived in the symbolic system as abject and what is really abject thus:

He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law- rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses

the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you (*Powers* 4).

Since the subject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, it is experienced at the peak of its strength. At this point, the subject, tired of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside finds the impossible within. It realizes that the impossible constitutes its very being and that it is none other than the abject. It is revealed to the subject that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being. Thus abjection of self would be the final form of this experience. Any being, meaning, language or desire is founded on the concept of 'want'. Abjection of self is recognition of this fact. The experience of want is a logical preliminary to being an object and also to the being of the object. Thus abjection and more importantly, abjection of self-becomes its only signified. Then its signifier is none but literature.

To Kristeva abjection is different from and more violent than "uncanniness". It is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin. She conjures up a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon. He frightens himself on that account and to save himself rejects and throws up every gift or object given to him. According to Kristeva, he has a sense of the abject. He is dominated by the drive and constitutes his own territory bordered by the abject. Kristeva describes this as a sacred configuration. What he has internalized instead of maternal love is an emptiness, a maternal hatred without words for

the words of the father, which he tirelessly tries to cleanse himself off. The only solace can be offered by a father existing.

Without father, he would remain a blank subject, a discomfited figure at the dump for non-objects that are always forfeited. Drawing strength from abjection, he tries to extricate himself from it. He stands petrified before the untouchable, impossible absent body of the mother. It is like a daze that has cut off his impulses from their objects, that is, from their representation out of this daze. He causes fear to crop up along with loathing. Fear has no other object than the abject. Fear as soon as it has cropped up shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language with nonexistence. Discourse is tenable only if fear ceaselessly confronts otherness that is abject. Kristeva identifies how fear and abject are related thus:

The phobic has no other object than the abject. But that word, "fear"- a fluid haze, an elusive clamminess- no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language with no existence, with a hallucinatory, ghostly glimmer. Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject (*Powers 6*).

It becomes obvious that there are lives not sustained by desire. Since desire is always for objects, these lives are based on exclusion. They can be easily distinguished from those that are neurotic or psychotic. They are articulated by negation and its various manifestations like transgression, denial, and repudiation. Their working challenges the theory of the unconscious which operates on dialectic of negativity.

The theory of the unconsciousness presupposes a repression of contents. Since they are repressed they do not have to access to consciousness but coming to play within the subject modifications, either as parapraxes (speech) or symptoms (body) or hallucinations (involving both speech and body) Freud put forward the notion of denial as a means of figuring out neurosis and that of rejection (repudiation) as a means of situating psychosis. They were meant to constitute a correlative to the notion of repression.

Kristeva wonders whether these articulations of negativity have not become inoperative in the context of the abject and more specifically phobia and the splitting of the ego. She posits that the 'unconscious' contents remain here excluded in a peculiar fashion. The exclusion is not radical enough to allow for differentiation between subject and object but at the same time clear enough for the establishment of a defensive position.

It is something that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration. Because of the ambiguous opposition of I/Other, Inside/Outside there are contents normally unconscious in neurotics but become explicit or

even conscious in borderline speeches and behaviour. These are often openly manifested through symbolic practices, though they may not have been integrated into the judging consciousness of those particular subjects. Because they make the conscious/unconscious distinction irrelevant borderline subjects and their speech constitute fertile ground for a sublimating discourse often termed aesthetic or mystical.

According to Julia Kristeva, it is through the speaking being that one can understand both oral and written, literature, politics, sexuality, national identity, culture, and nature. "Kristeva shows that the speaking being is a "strange fold" between them all- a place where inner drives are discharged into language, where sexuality interplays with thought, where the body and culture meet" (Macafee 1). It is important to note that the border of all these domains stands touched by the forces on either side of it. So in the symbolic world, despite the variety of natural forces, one has to live under siege of certain symbolic significations. So subjectivity is a flimsy accomplishment with constant change and thus dynamic and incomplete.

The traditional understanding of subjectivity and self is quite different from Kristeva's. The conventional understanding of the self is that it is fully aware of its own intentions, an independent being with its own reason and intellect. In order to communicate ideas, it uses language and the self is the master of its own being. To Kristeva, the very notion of the self is misunderstood in traditional philosophy in it views first as subjects not as selves. Persons are subject to all kinds of factors like culture, history, context,

relationships, and language. All these factors shape human beings but the subjects are not fully aware of all the factors that shape them. A large dimension of their own being is inaccessible, ie the unconsciousness.

"The unconscious is the domain of desires, tensions, energy, and repressions that is not present in consciousness"(Macafee 2). So the experience of subjectivity is not the awareness about a self which is largely conscious but of having an identity that is unknown to the subject herself. The very notion of subjectivity explains people's relationship to language. Subjectivity does not use language as a tool, on the other hand, it is the language that constitutes subjects. The notion of subjectivity and its understanding by Kristeva can be traced back to German philosophers Nietzsche and Hegel. They both persuasively argued against the notion of an autonomous, self-conscious individual and the notion of the self as a unified and rational being as just an illusion.

Kristeva is concerned with how language produces the speaking being who is located in between language and culture. She offers her valuable insights and understanding of how subjectivity is produced and also looks into the operation of language while the subject speaks, writes or does any creative act using language. She is also concerned with the "other" within the signification and how it comes to terms with the accepted system. Kristeva celebrates the revolutionary potential of poetic language. Kristeva conjures up a new understanding of the maternal body and the space for possible

communication and its own signification which can essentially subvert the practicing symbolic order.

Subjectivity and language are the major concerns of Kristeva's theory. She focuses on the "speaking beings" who are produced by language and them at the same time uses language to convey ideas. The theory of her language is rooted in the concept of 'subject'. To her language is not a mere tool that we use only for communication purpose. But the speaking beings are constituted with the aid of language and their use of language. To be a speaking being is to use language in a particular way.

Theories of language considered language as a dead artefact which is a formal object of study. A strong element of this treatment is rooted in capitalism which treats people and language as static and isolated. In fact, this approach towards language does not consider the dynamic aspect of language. It is the symbolic signification that models our subjectivity. But in fact, language and subjectivity are inseparable from each other. "So we should not study language apart from the subject of enunciation, the subject who means or to put it more plainly, the person who is talking or writing and trying to express something. For this speaking beings own living energy infuses meaning into the language"(Macafee 15).

Kristeva throws light on the "excesses" of language. The excesses in language imply those ways which cross the boundaries of signifying practices conditioned for the subject. But these excesses are traced in arts, religion,

literature, and rituals which at times tend to subvert the social system. But in the living society, we are supposed to be according to the conditioning of the symbolic signification; that is to contain ourselves.

Language within the signifying process operates in two modes. One mode is the expression of meaning out of conditioning that which is a clear and orderly form of an utterance and the second one being the expression of subject's energy and drives. The two words Kristeva uses for these modes are respectively, Symbolic and Semiotic. The difference between Symbolic and Semiotic are like other dichotomies like nature and culture, body and mind, feeling and reason and consciousness and unconsciousness. In western philosophy, these dichotomies are opposites and one term privileges over the other in terms of the practicing signification. Instead of viewing these dichotomies as opposites Kristeva shows how the borders of these dichotomies are intertwined. The former pole Semiotic always makes itself felt and is traced into the latter that is symbolic. In reality, these two modes share a common space which is otherwise thrust aside for the reigning signification.

The semiotic mode of signification articulates our bodily drives and instincts. Semiotic signification is expressed in symbolic syntax but is not subject to regular rules of syntax. The Symbolic signification is the language of the reigning system which is complete with its grammar and syntactical rules. They are the expression of a logical and coherent system which follows the rules and regulations of the signification system. The origin of the Symbolic expression is rooted in the conscious mind where a person tries to express

according to the stable sign system. The root of semiotic signification is the unconscious mind which is channelized in art, dance, music and other signifying systems where the socially accepted order is challenged. However, Kristeva does not see the Symbolic and Semiotic signification as two entities but finds traces of the rejected mode in the accepted mode of signification.

Kristeva adapts the concept of Semiotic Chora from Plato's *Timaeus*, a dialogue between Socrates and *Timaeus* about the nature of material existence, where the concept of Chora is translated into English as "Receptacle". Plato gives his own explanation of how the universe was created. To him, Chora means both receptacle and nurse that is the container and the producer before anything exists in the universe. The Kristeva's concept of Chora is in fact a modification of Plato's concept. Chora is translated into English as a container or a womb and it is not taken simply as space. Chora is a phase in one's life with its own mode of signification characterized without symbolic language. The concept of Chora according to Plato and Kristeva is different:

Plato finds the Chora to be a kind of cipher, a receptacle whose only function is to contain being and beings source is simply the father. For Kristeva, the Chora is not characterless. Though it belongs to an arrangement that is prior to symbolic representation, it is nonetheless a place or space of significant activity, rather than an empty receptacle. The child's early intimacy with the mother's body is not only itself a kind of

language, defined as it is by patterns of sound and movement, but it is the ground of all symbolic or social language. It is what makes language acquisition possible (Covino 19).

For Kristeva, Chora is a space that belongs to each person in particular before he or she develops into a full identity. In this early realm, the infant is not conditioned to experience socially acceptable drives, but instead feels a wealth of drives and instincts with its relation to the maternal body. An infant feels and satisfies his or her drives very close to the maternal body. Kristeva thus uses the term "Semiotic Chora which means that the meaning produced in the space of Chora is Semiotic.

Chora is language before language when the subject is in the process of becoming and untouched by the language in the symbolic realm. It is unrepresentable in the symbolic language. But when a subject is forced to enter the symbolic stage, one has to push aside the whole semiotic space which is also another mode of communication. Chora is the place of drives but remains provisional. As drives are both creative and destructive chora is also a site of dynamic tension between drives.

To Kristeva, a material body becomes a meaningful self before and beyond symbolic language. The communication that takes place before the language is also another form of languages like touch, gesture, and laughter. The mother attends and responds to the need of the child's. The child feels hunger, sleep, and happiness all of which are catered to by the mother. It is the

mother who provides all of its needs and communicates in its own way with and without language. This is the new world for the baby and is largely dependent on the mother and her body. Kristeva explains the semiotic and also emphasizes the importance of maternal body thus:

Through frustrations and prohibitions, this authority shapes the body into a territory having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted. It is a 'binary logic,' a primal mapping of the body that I call semiotic to say that, while being the precondition of language, it is dependent upon meaning, but in a way that is not that of linguistic signs nor of the symbolic order they found. Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take place (*Powers 72*).

The semiotic realm is very close to the maternal body where we have a non-linguistic interaction of flesh, blood, milk, tears, laughter, and touch. This is also a type of language that takes place between the mother and the child. Though it is pre-linguistic it is also a process of meaning-making. Hence the subject is rooted in this semiotic realm which symbolic realm forcefully dismisses. The culture and language in the patriarchal world restrain the

presence of this space in a subject. So it is true that the subject position can never be whole and stable.

The child soon after the birth is situated in this Semiotic Chora. The body uses various sounds, gestures and is evident in the baby talk in terms of coos and babbles. It uses various sounds and movements to discharge energy. When the child begins to use the language of the Symbolic realm he realizes that language can be used to point out objects and events and understands its own difference from its surrounding. In the Symbolic realm, the child understands the difference between the other and also between the subject and the object. The child recognizes and uses the language to name things. Kristeva calls this phase the Thetic phase. In Thetic phase, it has the ability to use language or words use the sounds imitating the objects. So Thetic phase is the starting point for signification and thus the child begins to understand his own identity or difference.

Kristeva follows Lacan's model of psychosexual development. In Kristeva's model of subject's psychosexual development, she posits a central place for the maternal body. From 0-6 months of age Kristeva names this stage as the Chora. The infant is unable to distinguish the self from the maternal figure or the immediate environment around. The infant enjoys everything without any threatening from the borders. This is the stage when the subject is very close to the pure materiality of existence and Lacan terms the "Real". During this stage, the subject satisfies his or her drives, instincts and feelings along with the maternal body without any social restrictions.

From 4-8 months of age while comparing it to Lacan's mirror stage that is between the Chora and the mirror stage there takes place a Pre-linguistic stage that is associated with the abject. The subject begins to establish a separation between itself and the maternal body and thus clearly creates the border between the self and other before the entry into symbolic language. When the subject is forced to give up the experience of Chora and accept symbolic signification, the confrontation with the Pre-linguistic space of Chora threatens the subject with horror as with a possibility to destruct the linguistic structures and social order offers fear and horror.

From 6-18 months of age, this stage in Lacan's psychosexual development is called "Mirror stage". The "Mirror stage is characterized by a "Libidinal Dynamism" because of the young child's identification with his own image. And this is what Lacan termed as Ideal 'I' or ideal ego. The recognition of the self precedes the entrance into language and after the subject understands the place of that image self in a larger social context where the subject has to negotiate his or her relationship with other. There takes place a "Primordial Discord" that is the discord between the idealized image and one's real body between 6 -18months. The "Imaginary order" continues to assert influence on the subject even after the subject enters the next stage. Kristeva deviates from Lacan in this phase is preceded and confused by the connection of the subject with the abject.

From 18 months to four years of age a separation from the "Real" happens with the acquisition of language in the next stage. Kristeva opines that

language is a fetish, an effort to subside the lack in our symbolic life, materiality and the object: "It is perhaps unavoidable that when a subject confronts the factiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that found it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable, but is not exactly language our ultimate inseparable fetish"(Powers 37).

The subject is forced to accept the orderly communication that uses its own rules of syntax and semiotics to convey meaning and sense. First, the child is situated in Chora where it is free to discharge the drives and feelings and later with the entry into the symbolic signification it is forced to separate from its surrounding. But the trace of the Semiotic Chora does not leave the child. The presence of the Semiotic is felt and identified in the Symbolic realm. Thus Symbolic can never be devoid of the Semiotic. Thus when the subject matures into an adult, this semiotic trace will continue to remain itself.

Kristeva argues that primal repression takes place before the subject/object divisions. According to Freud primal repression is the first phase of repression in which the subject represses many drives, instincts, and ideas as they are too violent and fearful from the conscious mind to the unconscious mind. But these repressed things are at times returned in dreams, jokes, slips of tongue, literature or any other creative art.

Repression is usually seen as taking place after the formation of the ego. The ego is connected with the conscious mind and Id which has a fate to

be controlled and repressed is connected with unconsciousness. Kristeva following Freud argues that primal repression takes place before the formation of ego: "If on account of that other, a space becomes demarcated, separating the abject from what will be a subject and its objects, it is because a repression that one might call "primal" has been effected prior to the springing forth of the ego, of its objects and representations" (*Powers* 11).

Kristeva argues that our first divide is not from the mother but the divide of the self between the conscious and the unconscious. So this is the first binary upon which other binaries are to be built. This explains the inside/outside binary and the divide between them is destabilized by the abject. That the unconscious often enters into our conscious mind is the best explanation for the instability and impossibility of the divide that the abject symbolizes. If our first division is unstable so the later binaries also.

As the abject is the first thing repressed, it is the object of the primal repression, so even before the separation from the mother the subject can reject and form self. The child begins to practice separation through rejection. This will help further separation from the mother. "But what is primal repression? Let us call it the ability of the speaking, always already haunted by the other, to divide, reject, repeat" (*Powers*12).

The experience and influence of abject in the societies and individuals, in particular, are purely psychological. If one is faced with the abject he is likely to experience the perverse and anti-social behaviours. "The

abject is related to perversion. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the super ego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (*Powers* 15).

Of all the institutions, religion is very much concerned with dealing the abject. Religion propagates certain rituals and methods to repress the abject. Religion creates a barrier between a subject's mind and the abject. Like Freud's dictum what is repressed becomes manifest in certain forms later and the abject is never repressed and cast off fully. It appears in various creative works like art and literature. In art especially it can be traced and experienced because its non-linguistic nature prevents it from ever being directly expressed.

The art is the only channel through which abject existence become less controversial and stable. It is the only space against the repression of religion and political bodies. Abject is in certain sense outside the realm of language. So artist expresses the abject symbolically and often unconsciously. While religion and philosophy are trying to cast away the abject and its impurities, the artist chooses to represent them in his expression of creativity. According to Kristeva, many authors like Joyce, Borges, and Proust have expressed the abject through their output. Writers treat and represent abject with different concepts. Dostoevsky presents two different ways of relating to the abject in *The Possessed*. Joyce takes abjection to its logical conclusion and

realizes that it cannot be directly expressed with language and therefore imbues his language with the spirit of the abject.

Kristeva turns to the work of Louis-Ferdinand Celine as an almost ideal example of the cathartic, artistic expression of the abject. All of Celine's work is focused on revealing the abject to the reader, not by describing the abject directly, but by destroying the structures with which the reader protects himself from it—his own psychology and language. While reading Celine a subject becomes aware of his own borders of self and recognizes the boundary between accepted and unaccepted. Our ability to make judgments about objects in the symbolic world is suspended. Thus a reader of Celine experiences the abject through ambiguity.

Incest and murder are the two acts which are unacceptable and feared by all societies. It is noted that incest taboo is developed out of the abject, because of the repressed desire and lust towards one's mother. Thus incest taboo is the manifestation of one's own desires. Kristeva points out that the fear of impurity is a phobia that develops as a response to the abject of mother lust. The repressed desires are related to the notion of the proper use of one's body, the body becomes an object both of reflection and shame and, as such, certain elements, like excrement and menstrual blood, are determined to be dirty. This is a representation both of the symbolic and the social order.

The dirty parts of the human body are extended beyond the body's margin. Those like fluids and substances that the body produces and ejects are

considered abject. Whatever exists outside the boundaries are excluded from the societal life. Dirt disrupts categorization. The system of hygiene and convention internalize our concept of dirt, creates a consensus among and leads us to practice and condemn certain substance. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas describes dirt: “Dirt is matter out-of-order. With its cleaning, perfuming and beautifying, society is perpetually reordering the environment and casting out, rejecting and condemning “any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” (45).

If an individual somehow becomes polluted by indecent contact with any of the dirty substance as mentioned above there are certain rites practiced to purify the defilement. These rites are practiced by various tribes, societies, and religions. The ritualization of defilement and purification is responsible for creating inequality between the sexes. Purity is usually associated with conducting one's sexual affair in certain ways especially avoiding incest. As a result, women are viewed as schemers who tempt and make man impure. In effect, men are given authority over women to prevent them from seducing the wrong person.

Abnormal body transgresses the ideal concept of body size and refutes the norms of body size inscribed by the patriarchal world exclusively for women. As a result, women are under constant control and practice self-surveillance. This fear of transgressing the ideal concept of body size creates a fear of slipping into the realm of the disgusting and the abject. This misconception about body produces a fear of failing to contain the imagined

ideal body which the symbolic world dictates. But one cannot appropriate this ideal concept of body size due to various psychological, anatomical and genetic reasons. In the symbolic world, those who have abnormal body are labelled as lazy, disgusting, unhealthy and unattractive.

Identifying the abject and giving life to it can be taken as a subversive strategy to reappropriate and reclaim the original identity of it. The abject and the repression of it has been a guiding force in the history of mankind. It is necessary and crucial to understand the effects of it on history for refuting the power structures which exists today. A deconstructive approach to the accepted norms of various discourses and institutions gives life to the abject. Hence through the identification and recognition of the abject a resignification is possible to dismantle the regimes of power.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* begins with a simple question. Feminists defend the idea of a concrete feminine identity because such an identity is essential and necessary for the development of women's matters. Feminists believe that without a centre and concrete identity, the issue and advancement would not be possible. The idea of a focal point is dismantled in various postmodern theories. So this leads Butler to ask a seemingly simple question: "Can feminist identity politics survive without a feminist identity?" (*Gender 2*). Many other feminists have challenged the idea of woman and her identity as a stable and well-defined category. Butler relies on Foucault arguing that society constructs subjects and then individuals come to represent them. The feminine identity is consistently produced by a societal mechanism which

defines women in an exclusionary way. Thus the very idea of a woman makes women alienated from their own society. The well-defined category and concepts have counter examples that obscure reality and marginalize some people.

Judith Butler's theory of knowledge is associated with feminist, gender, and queer theory. Gender Performativity, Parody, and drag are the concepts and practices associated with Butler. Butler's books interrogate the formation of identity and subjectivity and reveal the constructedness behind the formation of assumed identities as sexed, gendered and raced in the power-oriented society. To her subject is formed purely based on the linguistic structure. She questions the formation of the subject in the society and the process by which subjects come into existence and also look into the constructedness behind such formations. Butler, in fact, looks into the reality behind the performance of a stable and coherent identity. In practicing such stable and coherent identity, what is the reality of the identity he/she oppresses? If the practice of a stable identity fails will there be room for the subversive reconstruction of identity?

Butler's account of subjectivity is grounded in the discursive construction and signifying system. She argues "juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent" (*Gender2*) So the subject is something produced by the regimes of power. These power structures conceal their ideology and tend to naturalize their effects. Thus the subject stands outside of the discourse and signification and has an essence apart from

these practices. Butler terms this type of the subject as "Substantive subject." The substantive subject implies that subject as a substance is located apart from the signifying system and practices.

In the substantive model, the subject is repressed, regulated and conditioned by the signifying power structures. "On such a model, culture and discourse mire the subject, but do not constitute that subject" (*Gender* 143). The substantive subject is thus a myth for Butler. The existence of this substantive subject is through a signifying practice that conceals its own workings and thus naturalizes its effects. In short, the Substantive "I" is the product of discursive practices of signification. Both the subject and subjectivity is the product and outcome of linguistic discourse and it is hence performative. Butler asserts that subjects do not exist prior to signification, nor do they exist independent of signification. They only exist as a process of iteration.

it is simply there as an inert piece of entitative language...to qualify as a substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated entities, ones which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation In other words, what is signified as an identity is not signified at a given point in time after which of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity. Indeed, to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-

bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life (*Gender*144-145).

Butler's research on the process of becoming a subject is seen as with neither origin nor end and without precise end and final outcome. Her idea of the processor becoming draws heavily from the Hegelian notion of dialectic. Like the dialectical model of Hegel's, Butler's body of knowledge proceeds through opposition and cancellation and never fix an absolute or final outcome and hypothesize ideas cannot be fixed like the truth. The advantage of this model is it will help advancing alternate truth or knowledge regarding a matter which will be again revised and refuted by others.

Butler "regards resolution as dangerously anti-democratic" (*Gender* 4) because ideas and theories thus formulated are also embedded in ideology that caters a section and also oppresses certain groups especially minority. For instance how homosexuality is taken as wrong and abnormal and thus punished and prohibited. Thus Butler's works takes a dialectical approach to the theories so far developed and also investigates the configuration and constitution of the subject and seek alternate patterns of explanation for the same within the existing power structures.

Michel Foucault and his notion about the constructedness behind the sexuality have influenced Butler in her formations on the notions of gender, sex, and sexuality as unstable and unfixed. Both Butler and Foucault consider the formation of the subject as a "process" which is to be understood into the specific historical and discursive situations or contexts. Jacques Derrida's

theory of deconstruction also complements Butler's formulations of a subject. The approach and formulations of Butler are unique and distinct from others characterized by many influences. "Butler is neither a Freudian nor a Foucauldian nor is she a Marxist, a feminist or a post-structuralist; instead we might say that she shares affinities with these theories and their political projects, identifying with none of them in a singular sense but deploying a range of theoretical paradigms where ever it seems most appropriate in various sometimes unexpected combinations" (Salih 6).

Butler never acknowledges the experience of the individual and the process by which an individual assumes her status as a subject instead her formulations trace the processes by which identity of the subject is constructed within language and discourse. This genealogical mode of analysis is borrowed from Foucault. A geological investigation of the formation of the subject takes the view that it is the institution and various discourses that produce subjects. So it is through institutions and discourses that the meaning and existence of gender and sexuality originate. A subject is not born free rather it is forcefully instituted in specific contexts at a given point in time. So the moment from birth can be taken as a situation for subjectivation confined in the existing power structures. Butler adds to this notion of subjectivation that they confirm the identities of sex and gender are as mere performance because they forcefully presuppose the existence of a subject or an actor who does the performance.

Butler's notion of subject is rooted in the Hegelian Philosophy. Hegel's phenomenology is a study of successive forms of consciousness. Absolute knowledge is about the knowledge of the world in reality and at the end of phenomenology we discover that this ultimate reality resides in our minds. In other words, everything in the material world is a construct of consciousness. Hegel's subject is, therefore, a subject in progress that is the subject formed after destroying its own errorful assumption once formed and thus advancing and progressing error again and reaching another assumption which will be revised again. Thus the subject progresses by negating the error again and again without ever reaching a happy ending for it. It passes through many successive stages of understanding, certainty, perception, logic scepticism, stoicism, reason and so on that finally concludes the possibility of absolute knowledge.

The subject never ends up the journey while it discovers its own error because of another desire, a desire to know and find the infinite. Through this journey, desire makes an effort to overcome the difference and finally reaches to know the features of the subject itself, the desire for recognition and self-consciousness. Thus Desire always desires for the 'Other' which will eventually turn out to be a desire for the subject itself. Thus the desire to know the 'Other' will lead to the loss of the self and enable us to know ourselves or the self-consciousness.

Butler defines Hegelian Subject as "that omnivorous adventurer of the spirit who turns out, after a series of surprises, to be all that he encounters

along his dialectical way" (Salih 27). It is important to understand that desire or hunger for it is not taken in the literal sense but metaphorically a hunger to encounter the 'Other' and know the self. This process is called Supersession or Sublation and The Hegelian term is *Aufhebung* which means three things at the same time- to lift up, to cancel and to preserve. To Butler, *Aufhebung* is "a developing sequence of desire, consuming desire, desire for recognition, desire for another's desire" (Salih 27). Thus through the process of Supersession or Sublation of another, the recognition of the self of the subject comes into being.

According to Butler identity is a performative construct. "Butler's subject is an actor that gets up and performs its identity on a metaphorical stage of its own choosing" (Salih 45). Butler's notion of gender identity involves a sequence of acts and there can be no pre-existing performer who does the action. There is no doer behind or before the action. Gender is a process without any origin or end and it is something that we do. Thus Butler suggests that Gender is unnatural. Gender congeals or solidifies into a form that makes it appear to have been there all along.

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in the process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the 'congealing' is itself an insistent and

insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a *telos* that governs the process of acculturation and construction. (*Gender*33).

Butler refutes the assumption about sex, gender and sexuality are interconnected and the practice of femininity if one is biologically female. Butler asserts that there is no relationship between one's body and one's gender. So there is a chance for one to be masculine female and feminine female. Both gender and sex are constructed. Drawing insights from Foucault, Butler sees sex, gender and sexuality are discursive constructs that are to be analysed in the context of the specific historical context. These constructs are essentialist in nature and are also the part of political strategy.

Butler asserts in *Gender Trouble* that feminist critique should interrogate how the category of woman is produced and controlled in the existing power structures. She suggests for a 'feminist genealogy' of the category of women and a genealogy of gender ontology. This feminist genealogy investigates the origin and cause of those identity categories that are in reality the 'effects' of various institutions, discourses, and practices. Butler, in fact, is not occupied in tracking the origin or cause of gender category instead offers a genealogical investigation to understand the effects of these discourses upon gender in the heterosexual society. Butler argues that sex and gender are discursively constructed and there is no freedom for one to think and establish beyond the discourse.

Butler makes the distinction between sex and gender unstable by projecting the constructed nature of both. Thus gender becomes independent of sex " a free-floating artifice" (*Gender* 6). Sex does not cause gender and if sex is a fact then gender is open to alteration and transformation. The fact that sex does not determine gender implies that there can be no possibility of a link between sexed bodies and gendered identities. This leads to the proliferation of genders than confining it too masculine and feminine genders. Butler also questions whether sex is culturally constructed as gender and takes the perspective that sex was already gender and destabilizes the distinction between gender and sex. Butler refutes either gender or sex as 'an abiding substance' and exposes the ideology behind heterosexism in making gender and sex division as natural.

Butler claims that gender identities that do not conform to the system of 'compulsory and naturalize heterosexuality' expose how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained (*Gender* 22). The example of a hermaphrodite is taken to destabilize the rigid categorization of gender and sex into male/ female. Butler reaffirms the sexual heterogeneity referring those uncategorizable people and critique the metaphysics of substance and the identitarian categories of sex. (*Gender* 23-24) Instead, Butler favours phantasmatic cultural constructions of gender and sex than seeing them as natural material entities. The condition of hermaphrodite destabilizes the conformity to gender binaries. This reveals the fictive production behind

gender. All these assumptions of Butler lead to assert that gender is a performance.

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative - that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed (*Gender* 25).

Gender is located and regulated by the existing patterns of the power structure. Butler insists to subvert those constraints through recognizing our daily acts to which we are unaware of the subordination. The way male and female choose dresses to wear are conditioned according to the heterosexual norms. Butler opines that there is no literal freedom of choice to choose dresses for both categories. There is the choice for metaphorical clothes to suit the expectations of the power structure of the society. Everyone is expected to wear clothes as per the demands of peer groups, colleagues without recognizing the act of doing gender.

Butler suggests avoiding the expectations and restrictions imposed by the authoritative groups. This would definitely upset those who have

authority over or whose approval is a matter. It is not that easy in this high gender discriminated world to 're-invent' the gender and doing. In practicing such re-invention in order to signal that they are unconventional, he/she will have to change the concept of wearing clothes topsy-turvy. This reveals the truth that our gender choices are limited rather than free. This model of gender identity interrogates about an agency and the agent. A person choosing what to wear preoccupies the existence of a subject or an agent that is prior to gendering and there is an actor pre-existing the acts.

Butler questions the stability of gender categories and destabilizes the binary concepts of sex and gender. Her argument following Foucault is that dichotomies of gender and sex serve as epistemic and ontological status. Hence a genealogy of these binaries will reveal the power structures embedded in it. Butler demonstrates the regulatory and controlling function of gender dichotomies by analysing the incest taboo and the prohibition of homosexuality. A critical reading of Levi-Strauss, she recognizes the fact that the prohibition against homosexuality precedes the taboo against incest. The desire of the male child for the mother or the sister is purely based on his dispositions.

Butler draws insights from Freud and traces the masculine and feminine dispositions from the process of identifications. She is of the view that dispositions are the effects of the identifications with the parent of the same or opposite sex than the causes of those identifications. This means that desire does not come first. Freud describes ego formation as a melancholic

structure because the infant is forced to give up the desire for its parent because of the taboo against incest. Butler asserts that taboo against incest is preceded by the taboo against homosexuality. Depending upon dispositions, that is from birth onwards the infant desires any of the parents. So if a child has a desire for mother, her disposition is to choose the member of the same sex. Then what is the point of taboo in prohibiting the same-sex attraction? Later the heterosexual law forces the subject to appropriate within the category. Such prohibition against taboo for homosexuality precedes the incest taboo and in this way, sex identities are formed in response to prohibition.

As a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and feminine identification. Because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibitions sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire. The resolution of the Oedipal complex affects gender identification through not only the incest taboo but prior to that, the taboo against homosexuality (*Gender* 63).

Butler critique the repressive hypothesis formulated by Foucault, who dismisses the assumption that sexuality in the nineteenth century was repressed by law. Instead, he asserts that sexuality was produced by the law.

Speaking about sex is a tactful way of producing and controlling sex and as there is no parallel that can think beyond the law, Foucault argues that subversive move must happen within the discursive structure.

The critique of repressive hypothesis leads Butler to argue that the law itself invents and invites the homosexual/incestuous unions through the act of prohibition. The taboo on certain sexual identity, in fact, dictates sexuality and at the same time produces a provision for substitute identities that cannot be regulated. This implies that there is no other way to separate the repressive and productive function of both the taboo against homosexuality and incest.

In this sense, it is evident that heterosexuality requires homosexuality in order to find meaning and maintain stability."In other words, for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it requires an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible" (*Gender* 77). Thus heterosexuality is a "laborious construction" based upon their gradual repression.

Butler perceives that there is no pre-cultural or pre-discursive sex or gender which provides a base for its cultural description. Identity is the effect of signifying practices located in the regimes of power characterized and accepted as compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism. Hence doing a gender is a matter of these power regulations rather than an innate faculty of the individual. These performances are located and governed in the discursive

category of gender. Gender then is performative and not an inborn feature of the subject. These regulatory categories work within the binaries like masculine/ feminine, normal/abnormal. Human/nonhuman etc. There is a tendency to privilege the first binary to the second one and those subjects who fail to confirm proper performance and gender category are outside the heterosexual matrix.

The performance of gender produces an illusion of an identity and faculty. Through repeated usage, it becomes a cultural effect, a product of particular signifying practices. Thus the performance of gender involves a regular repetition of conventions which are maintained and made stable by the compulsory heterosexuality. All these practices gradually create the reality of gender and are not separable from agents or actors. This inseparability is questioned in Butler's account of performativity.

For example, Gays and Lesbians fail to exhibit proper masculine/ feminine traits to signal their desire towards others. In the heterosexual matrix, a male body signals desire towards female body alone. The desire for a male body is considered as an anomaly. This implies that the governing body regulates what kind of performances and physicality's are meant for meaningful practices to their signification system.

In the same sense woman as a category is taken to be less fully persons like homosexual people are considered. A desire for a man is the apt desire for a woman to exhibit. However, women are taken to be lesser beings to

the fully developed male counterpart. These outward gender characteristics are purely the products of discursive or signifying practices. This show off of the outward appearance is meant to conform to the gender norms." There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender, the identity is performatively constituted by the very expression that is said to be its results" (*Gender*25). Identity is simply the repetition of acts and converts them to a natural paradigm.

In other words acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are performative in the sense that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (*Gender* 136).

Society creates various laws for the easy functioning of the life of individuals and also for other social groups. Butler is of the opinion that the law is not internalized by the subject, as there is no interior to the gender. Instead, laws are incorporated and inscribed on the body which signals those laws through the body. Butler refutes the belief of an existence of a pre-

linguistic inner core. To her gender acts are not performed by the subject which signals a doer behind the action but they performatively constitute a subject that is through the effect of discourse and linguistic signifying system. Hence there is no interior to gender and is the result of fabrication. Gender is a fantasy and is written on the surface of bodies.

Society forces the heterosexual identities as essential and natural. In this sense gender is a parody like the drag, which imitates the act of performance fit for the lender concerned. "In imitating gender drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (*Gender* 137-38). Society has a tendency to punish those who do not do their gender properly. Butler destabilizes the notion of an original existence of gender category. She sees it as a repetition, a copy of a copy and eventually a gender parody. Through reiterated performance gender acquires meaning and stability. This suggests that it is an act of mere repetition, as drag artists do. This is a subversive strategy and thus gender a parody.

Butler argues that sex cannot be taken as an attribute of the natural body. But if such a belief of the natural view about the body and sex is considered within the culture, then a narrow understanding of the corporeality has to be assumed. This is the reason why our bodies cannot be understood outside the context of culture. So culture inscribes meaning on the surface of corporeality. As a matter of the binary system and privilege of one dichotomy over the other, male body becomes active and powerful and female body is passive and subjugated. So the culture produces a complex relation between

corporeality and identity. Culture is the process of identity formation and also regulates how bodies and selves are to be maintained. Thus culture is a kind of process and a process that make our identities. Our activities and practices are not an expression of some prior identity or done by an agent. In order to prove the above claims, Butler describes the concept of performativity.

The identity of gender that we possess is constituted through the performance of a set of acts that make our status a gendered being which is not a real position at all. Butler dismantles the notion of the essence of masculinity and femininity of what we do is expressive of what we are through the theory of performativity. The gendered acts are repeatable in various representations and thus repeated throughout becomes conventional. These conventional acts include gestures, movements, and styles exclusively separate for each gender. The way we learn to talk about ourselves, the type of dress we choose, food that we consume and reiterating these actions is how we come to be gendered. Through the repetition of conventional styles, we come to be the gendered self that we have learned to perform. Butler asserts that this performance is not the true core of inner identity, rather the cultural expression of an identity that is gained through our corporeal materiality.

The performative norm for Butler is a matter of compulsion and appropriation of the body according to the norm which confines within the limit of culture. Bodies are normalized and they are conditioned according to the convention and is repeated and thus accepted. Thus the abjected and marginalized bodies are outside the boundary where the normativity rejects the

realm of the conditioned space for them. Butler's account of the normativity of the performative is better understood in terms of power and force of the social relation among speaking bodies. Butler follows Foucault in the sense that the notion of power itself is described with originality and renders a natural effect.

The discourses that are considered social are the site for the productive or positive mode of power and assume the claim of being original. Thus, for instance, the medical discourse produce types of human identity as sexuality and its classification and definition of sexual types as true and normal. Such discourses regulate and normalize their subjects through classification of sexualities as normal or proper based on their own ideology. Thus our identities are the product of these discourses and regulations to which we are subject. Butler's conception of gender performativity is rooted in the Foucauldian account of sexuality as the normalizing work of power.

Butler uses the same performativity itself to subvert the regulatory work of gender performatives which are normalized and rendered natural. Performativity can also produce the abnormal and those who fall outside the realm of proper identity. Thus heterosexual norm is haunted by the non – heterosexual in order to imagine what it constitutes. In doing gender one can see the repetitive structure of performative because the ideal which the norm propound is never accomplished and has to attempt through repetition. Gradually the norm thus repeated and recited becomes vulnerable in the repetition. Those norms which became a law like and its spell could be broken thus. A chance for a political intervention occurs because of the vulnerability

behind repetition and that is called iterability or its citationality. Butler suggests that gender performative is a fictive process in the compulsory and the compulsive performance of gender as the citational quality of acts are and denied and hidden.

In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Butler dwells on the ways not only in which performance of gender in normalizing practice but also in the form of another performativity like a drag as part of queer culture. Butler draws heavily from the work of anthropologist Esther Newton for the concept of drag. Butler asserts that drag has the potential to break up the illusory nature of stable and coherent identity that renders naturalness of identity. Drags, in fact, subvert the normal order of gendered identity. On the one hand, drag demonstrates that performers outside appearance are feminine and the inside body is masculine and the other way also body considered as outside is masculine but the inner body as feminine. "The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (*Gender*137). Drag combine incompatible masculinity and femininity and also undo the rigid notion of the gender performativity in the heterosexual matrix. Drag reveals the unreal or fake assumption confined and give insight that all gender acts are equally and variously citational. Everyone's gender is a kind of fabrication and cannot be reduced to real and normal and also proves that everyone is in some kind of a drag.

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of a “woman” (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence (*Gender*137).

Butler develops a view of the body as a construction, an outcome of the effects of the regimes of power. Gender norms play a prominent role in the process of body construction. Butler rejects the Kristavian notion of the maternal body because it will concretize the notion which butler wants to dismantle as part of heterosexuality and phallogocentrism. The body cannot exist outside of linguistic discourse and agree to the fact that there is no gendered body. This does not mean the rejection of the existence of material body but it exists only in discourse and signifying system. The body is

culturally interpreted and is located in the social context. Thus Butler asserts that bodies are discursively constructed.

Butler shows the naturalized effect of discourse behind the conception of natural body. Body is both a signified and also a signification. This signals that body has meaning only in language and discourse. Butler calls 'the indissolubility of materiality and signification'- the body is signified in language and has no status outside a language which itself is material (*Bodies* 31). The term materialization refers the idea that body is a temporal process happening within the language and that too itself material. The body as Butler puts it "Bodies is a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter"(*Bodies* 9).

By sex Butler refers to the sexual identity of a being. The male and female categorization of human beings forms on whether they possess male or female genital organs and it is based on this that our sexual identity is formed soon after the birth. This allocation of sex to male and female bodies hence is not natural. We assume it to be natural to be a gendered body. We are not alert to the fact that these are only roles that the social order has invented. When we accept the role as natural we have become subject's within the ideology. Ideology works by naturalizing our constructed roles. This construction of subjects through ideology is what Althusser termed "Interpellation". Interpellation is the process of consenting to ideology, accepting it and not being aware of it. It makes the subject believe that it is an independent being and not controlled by outside forces. Thus woman is interpellated as a girl

child, daughter, mother and wife but made to believe that these are her natural roles. Butler relies on the notion of interpellation.

Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he' and in that naming the girl is 'killed' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that 'Girling' of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout the various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm (*Bodies*7-8).

Butler thus proposes a kind of resignification. She adopts a subversive strategy to expose the illusory nature of gendered acts and its effect on the natural body. This notion, in fact, dismantles the stability, coherence, and fixity of gendered identity in the patriarchal world. Butler put forward a twist to the so-called natural act through resignification.

Abject Bodies

Abjection is characterized by strong feelings of revulsion and negativity towards an object, people or situations. In various art forms like literature and also in the psychoanalytical theory the term is very much discussed. Abject is something that which have not desired and its presence is unwelcome to the system. The very core of human identity rejects it. What and who is demarcated as abject is based on the reigning system of signification. “It is that which upsets or befuddler order” (Grosz 192). In the light of this certain types of female bodies are unacknowledged and as a result woman struggle to maintain her physique physically and mentally. A woman is defined in terms of the body she possesses and not upon the potential she carries. A woman's body, her status, and position in the patriarchal world are characterized by subjugation and inferiority. To be an abject is to be subordinate and marginalized and to feel an attitude of shame and worthlessness. In this sense female body which transgresses beyond the so-called ideal body is an abject body.

Fat has always been conceived as a kind of cancerous growth and unwanted to the human body. Fatness is taken to be a corruption of the flesh and the removal of it leaves the body perfect and renders the good shape. Fat is that which we wear, it is on outside of our inside, that which is more counted. In this highly weight conscious society, nobody wishes to be the embodiment of it and dreams of it being removed from them. Throughout most of human history, fat has been the best thing, the beautiful and desirable stuff. But at a

certain period in human history with high religious sentiment, fat comes to be despised. Now the prejudice against fat seems universal and eternal and thinness acquires what is good and beautiful.

The diet and fitness industry began to grow after a second world war and created a mass obsession with weight and body shape. They problematize the notion of obesity as inherently abnormal or pathological. And hence fat body is seen as repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene and above all something to lose. Many radical feminists challenged the above conception about a fat body and argued that our perception about the fat body is ideologically constructed and thus not natural. In addition to this many medical discourses and scholarly books conceptualize the body as a blank slate upon which the psyche's contents are transcribed. Thus in this paradigm, the fat body became an abject body.

Abjection is thus characterized by revulsion, fear of contamination, association with the deathly aspects of the body, a repeated expulsion that makes the self's borders, consignment to the past, and constant revocation. Within mainstream representations of the body, the fat body functions as the abject: it takes up the burden of representing the horror of the body itself for the culture at large (Grosz 136).

Many psychologists identified fat oppression and fat phobia as responsible for the feelings of debasement and the low esteem in obese people.

The tendency within the psychological discourses has been to stigmatize the fat body into traumatized and abnormal without investigating other reasons and causes of obesity. Many new scientific theories argued the genetic cause of corpulence. Despite several findings, the fat body is considered a taboo, a market site around which other commodities proliferate. The ideological favour for thinness resulted in the long-term treatment of obesity and the subsequent development of drugs like appetite suppressant pills and myriad other sugar-free beverage products and fat substitutes.

The fat body is negated throughout this proliferation of commodities which resists and erodes corpulent body. Capitalistic and consumerist world propagate the harmful effects of obesity on health but few researchers investigate the side effects of these synthetically produced food substitutes or fat body substitutes because such research and findings would not fuel the market and economy of body commodities. The character Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, in fact, conspire to unmask the social creation of these discourses and suggests new ways of recognizing the power and politics of corpulence.

Esther by revolting with the body tries to reconceptualise and reconfigure corpulence. Her objective seems to unmask the fat body, renders its visibility and presence rather than invisible and absence. By constant struggle to achieve independence, Esther also unravels the discourses that define and fixes fat bodies. In this way, she resists the dominant discursive constructions of corpulence. The bodily protest of Esther put forward many questions about

how fatness has been differently constructed in the existing culture. How can we transgress the construction of corpulence within several medical, psychological and capitalistic discourses. How do media represent fat people and erase and asexualize them.

Alan and Esther, the husband and wife of the novel, *The Fat Women's Joke* had a common ground of love for food. It was this mutual love for food that set the pattern of their life. Both Alan and Esther planned and organized their daily menu for food. Esther enjoyed her status as a housewife and the entire focus of their family was their love for food. Esther planned and bought, cooked and served food of their choice. She also tried and experimented new versions of food items. In short, both Alan and Esther were gourmets. They never had a concern and botheration about the physical aspects of their body. Esther was a fat and enormous woman in her middle ages. Alan was thin, clever and had a craggy face. "Alan appeared insignificant, although when he was away from her, he stood out as a reasonably sized, reasonably endowed man" (*The Fat* 25).

It was at Gerry's and Phyllis house, the friends of Alan and Esther, during the treat, Alan all of a sudden declared the dieting plan to Esther. He says, Esther, that they are going to push back the enemy, and the middle age and will retain the youth. They both will go on a diet which will make them young and beautiful. Esther out of love and trust agrees to his unilateral plan of dieting from next day onwards. The reason for dieting by Alan is that he wants to become young and affirms, when he was young he had hopes and

aspirations. In fact, Alan is longing for not youth but an ideal body for his wife. Alan wants to be the husband of a young lady. A sudden change in the perspective and attitude of Alan is apparent.

Esther half-heartedly welcomes the plan of diet. When Juliet, the daily help speaks against the dieting plan, Esther openly says to her that it was for her husband's sake that she carries the plan. "To tell you the truth I am really going through with it for my husband's sake. For my own part, I don't really worry. But it's easier for him if I do it too. You know what men are. They haven't got all that much willpower" (*The Fat* 48). As Esther was inside the marriage institution, she was ready to cope up with the wild fantasies of it. She was very clear about the physicality and its impact on one's life. "One should be able to control one's size if one is going to control one's life" (*The Fat* 48). The flexible nature of woman is stressed when Esther wishes to follow and cater the needs of her husband.

Alan has a conditioned view of women like the other men in the phallic world. It is obvious when he says: "Women are what their husbands expect them to be; no more and no less. The more you flatter them, the more they thrive" (*The Fat* 28). Alan describes his secretary Susan as slim like a willow and adds she also has curves here and there. Hearing this Esther openly declares that she is fat. "And I'm so fat" (*The Fat* 29). A comparison of Esther's and Susan's body takes place in between their conversation. Alan frankly tells Esther that she is "just a little too fat" (*The Fat* 29). Esther

wonders hearing the reply of Alan and hints that he had never mentioned the same ever before.

Alan glorifies Susan's young body and compliments her saying that "You are very beautiful or look so to me this morning" (*The Fat* 43). He describes his diet of that very day and takes sympathy from Susan. Alan finds reason with his light head because of poor diet and his responsibility of actions based on the same. The hunger for food and the body is clubbed by Alan and manipulates his own actions to satisfy both types of hunger. It is clear from the comparison made by Alan about Esther's body and Susan's body in different instances that he is a person who is concerned about the physical aspect especially in the case of women. In fact, Alan represents the patriarchal man who demands body maintenance on the part of a woman.

Esther was suspicious about the relationship of Alan with Susan right from the beginning. She openly enquired about Susan and their possible grounds for a conversation with Alan. Alan very cleverly dismissed the topic of Susan. Esther sensed the reality behind the strict diet plan embarked upon her and wounded with the feeling she openly declares: "You mean I would. You don't find me attractive anymore. You're ashamed to be seen out with me because I'm fat and horrible, and you think people will be sorry for you because you're married to me" (*The Fat* 52). Alan also warned their son Peter taking dairy products. Peter was least bothered about his size of a body. Alan asked him to consider the chance of heredity to work against the same and this is a clear indication of Esther's body and heredity.

Esther reacted sharply when her son commented on her body: "You grew fat and cosy and comfortable, you mean" (*The Fat* 55) Hearing this Esther jumped to her feet and dismissed the claim of his son about her body. When Phyllis advised Esther to go on a diet, she reacted against the point of becoming young in these days. "There is only one virtue these days, and that is to be young. Everything is forgiven to the young- even fatness, and that is saying something. And I am no longer young. Nothing will be forgiven me. All I can hope is not to be noticed anymore" (*The Fat* 57) Esther reacts to the core problem of the society with the female body and plans to revolt against it with her own physicality. She is of the view that there is more dignity if one is neither young nor beautiful. She was very clear about the fact that why Alan insisted this diet plan. She found that Alan was fancying his secretary. Alan desires the same young body of Susan in Esther.

Esther after deserting her husband feels no respect towards marriage as an institution. The problem with marriage according to her is the dread of change that goes with it. She says she is wounded through it. As a husband, Alan is unable to accept the physical changes of the body. "Marriage is such a falling away. It hurts" (*The Fat* 59). The question of the status of women in the marriage institution is hinted by Esther while describing her own with her friend. In fact, it throws light upon how women are subjugated both physically and mentally in the institution. "Nothing is ever as it was, in marriage" (*The Fat* 59). The change in attitude and behaviour of Alan is very well noticed by Esther. He fancied Susan and as a result, he was nasty with Esther. That means

he did another mistake to uncover the original mistake of him out of guilty feeling. This way he justified his own behaviour.

When Esther needs some curry, she invites Phyllis to go with her to the restaurant to buy it. Phyllis advice Esther to change her dress as it is covered with the food particles she had. "If I don't care, why should you? I didn't bring anything with me when I left. I don't need clothes. I don't want anyone to look at me; It's their misfortune if they do. Are you ashamed to be seen out with me" (*The Fat 71*). Every one bothers about the looks and their dresses especially when they go outside the house and is certain that they are likely to meet people. Esther is least concerned with looks and dressing style. Esther remembers about her demeanour right in the childhood. "I was a very dirty little girl" (*The Fat 72*). Her mother occasionally taught her neatness.

Esther ridicules the act of Phyllis in welcoming her husband each day being attractive in all sense to impress him. Esther thinks out from the marriage institution and questions the subjugation of woman enduring unknowingly. She is right in the feeling when she says that "All these years of marriage, I could see, he had been laughing at me, playing with me, using me and my money, and caring nothing for me at all"(*The Fat 75*). When Esther came out of the marriage institution, she realized the bullying nature of her husband and also his fraud love that has been exhibiting throughout their life. "He lusted after someone half my age, and half my size" (*The Fat 75*).

In all of the incidents in the life of Esther, the problem revolves around her fat body. The character Esther transgresses our concepts of an ideal female body. It definitely evokes a sense of abjection as we have been taught to perceive by the phallic world. This fear and aversion to the abject explain how and why we are forced to move back with repulsion. Thus abjection indicates knowledge and practice about human behaviour and interrogates the basis for social and moral thinking. Abjection operates in the psychic domain and is materialized in the social and cultural life.

The abject body of Esther has dramatic consequences for the identity and self of the female body. It is understood that fatness is something that is feared and human beings want to escape from it. Fatness is the 'other'. This fear of the 'other' is central to the process of abjection. The fear of the 'other' stems from within as it is deeply rooted in the psyche. Society urges one to expel the otherness and in Esther's case her big fat body. The fat body is stigmatized because the reason and difference of the aspect are never analyzed and studied.

In contemporary culture, the fat body generally becomes visible only at the margins, if at all, and only when written into a pathologizing narrative in which fat is a cause of ill health and a symptom of poor behavior. This narrative creates fatness as a "spoiled identity", an identity that can communicate only its own failure, an identity for which all other narratives are impossible. The fat body is never

portrayed as effective, as powerful, or as sexual. Recent fat liberationist cultural production defies these limits, rewriting the fat body to challenge both abject images of the fat body and the horror of the body itself (Kent 368).

Abject body represents a threat, a fact that legitimizes their exclusion from the society. This discrimination based on ideal body figure especially in the case of women is traced in history. Those with the abject body in any terms are constantly warned of an accused threat that they represent the other and abject. They are always marginalized and looked with an eye of suspicion and the discourses prevent them with any of the strategies to include them within the mainstream. To unpack those discourses on othering offers a shift in perspective and also an attempt to reinvent new discursive practices. This reinvention and recitation is achieved by Esther through her body politics that is to remain intact with her abject body.

Esther stands outside of the signifying boundary. Her husband, Son, Mother, and Friend constitutes the immediate circle that constantly warns about her abject figure and offers various strategies to come out of it. But Esther wishes to remain in her present status of the body. She is, in fact, offering life to the abject body. The female body is both an abject and an object. When the body transgresses away from the ideal concept it becomes the abject and when it posses the traits and qualities of the so-called ideal body it becomes the object and thus objectified in the patriarchal world. It is evident that the

concept of abject originates psychologically and resonates throughout culture and society and unconsciously it affects our attitudes on fat body.

The decision of the Esther to voice the abject reveals the instability of identity and self. Her firm determination to remain as the fat figure shows us what happens when the self is shalowed by experiences of transgression. She is successful in instilling the feelings of abjection and at the same time provides a paradigm shift and deconstructs the notion of ideal female body. In the end, though Esther reconciles with the husband and decides to live with her husband, it is certain that she will deliberately cultivate her abject figure in future. Thus the abject figure of Esther reveals the plurality of body figures and destabilizes the ideal female body concept.

Ugly people like beautiful ones grab our attention as they deviate from the standard norm set by the cultural practices of the society. Ugliness in all forms is never acknowledged or accepted. We all discriminate ugly people because of the unpleasant feeling that we gain while looking at them. Ugliness is thus a social stigma situated in the social context. It threatens the boundaries of beauty norm. According to Przybylo ugliness is a political category:

Ugliness is political in at least two ways: (1) it denotes and bookmarks inequalities and hierarchies, serving as a repository for all that is 'other' in our culture and (2) ugliness is necessarily contingent and relational, it is never an individual concern but rather exists because bodies are

compared to one another, and because they are evaluated in accordance with the 'norm' (3).

To be ugly is painful at the individual, psychological and sociological level. We have a system bound with attributing hierarchical power to dichotomous words. Thus ugly is the second dichotomous pair of the word beautiful. Hence ugly is the 'other'. To be beautiful means to be something which is not ugly. For various other reasons, the representation of beautiful and ugly is set within the social context. The territory of ugliness is set easily with prescribed norms of appearance and behaviour. With the usage and practice of these the term ugly has various synonyms like dirty, unaltered, hideous, grotesque, monstrous, abject etc. There is no common ground or essential features that all ugly things carry but they involve the boundaries of dominance and the parameters of things that are not beautiful.

Ugliness relates to women in particular. A woman being the second dichotomous pair of the term 'man' emphasize the opposite or negative of the man. As a result, women have been forced to accept this abnormality as something real. She has been conditioned to think that she is the abnormal or ugly variation of man. The patriarchal world has given them a status of a mere object who needs a constant variation from the real and never accepted as the equal counterpart of man. Women thus are in a constant effort to alter their body, mind, behaviour etc. A feeling of dislike and wanting, results in various beautification processes including beauty parlours, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery

etc. Hence it is a materialization to escape from the ugliness which is deep-rooted in the consciousness of woman.

Ruth, the protagonist of the novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* is a born abject figure. Ruth was the eldest child and her mother was ashamed of her ugly face and appearance. She was called by her mother as “Little ugly duckling... What are we to do with you? What's to become of you?” (*Life and Loves* 8). Unlike Ruth, her mother was pretty. As a mother, she was more concerned with the looks of her daughter. This concern is not strange because we live in a world where the beauty of a woman plays a crucial role in her life. So the ugliness of her own daughter revolted the mind of the mother. Jocelyn and Miranda, half sisters of Ruth, got married well as they had good looks and hence lived peacefully.

Ruth had an unhappy childhood. Her father deserted and her mother married again a mining engineer and left to Western Australia taking the other two sisters with her. Ruth was staying in a hostel then and her stepfather took no interest in the visits of Ruth in their family. It is clear from the attitude of her parents that they don't want to take the responsibility of an ugly creature in future. The fortune of a woman is highly dependent on the physical appearance. And in most cases, ugly women are under placed especially in the marriage market and employment sector. Hence being an ugly creature Ruth was abandoned by her own parents.

Ruth worked in Angus typing pool established by Angus and his wife Brenda. She was very helpful and was bothered more about her job than her appearance. Ruth avoided mirrors and she was least bothered about her ugliness. Both Angus and his wife Brenda were deeply concerned about Ruth and felt sorry for being homeless. While the other girls in her group spent money for fashion, beauty, and cosmetics, Ruth never wasted money for such things. Brenda could easily recognize the feelings of Ruth because she herself was an ugly figure in her life.

Brenda identified with the feelings of Ruth and offered a homestay along with them on certain conditions. They gave the room of their son, Bobbo who was a college boy then, to her and when he came home, he was supposed to take sofa as bed. Despite the warning of his mother to take Ruth to be his sister, he experimented his sexual fantasies on her. He loved to sleep with her because she was warm and dark. Brenda wished her son to marry Ruth. She admires the skills of Ruth. But Bobbo was forced to marry Ruth because she was five months pregnant by him.

Ruth is six feet two inches tall, dark and has jutting jaws that dark women often have. She has a hooked nose and her eyes are sunk down. Her shoulders are broad and bony and her hips broad and fleshy. She believes that these characteristic features of her body are fit for a man and not for a woman. "My nature and my looks do not agree. I was unlucky, you might think, in the great lottery that is woman's life" (*Life and Loves* 5). The size and shape of a

woman are dictated by the existing cultural beauty constructs. Ruth is aware of the beauty and body perception of a woman in the society in which she lives.

In contrast to Ruth, Bobbo is a good looking man and often others opine that she is lucky to have a good looking husband. Bobbo is five feet ten, and four inches shorter than Ruth. Ruth is aware of the fact that she is not beautiful and her husband Bobbo loves his mistress, Mary Fisher. Ruth often thinks about how ugly women survive. Those ugly women are called by different names and their skin is hardened against such humiliation. They have no space in the world they live in and are rarely acknowledged by others for their physical appearance. Such ugly women have to wait till the old age to get at par treatment from others as it would be the time when things are no more related to their body and appearance.

The marriage of Bobbo and Ruth was a matter of convenience. Bobbo realized that his choice of a wife was wrong on the wedding day itself. He saw people sniggering at the massive size of his wife. He managed to manipulate the infidelity and freedom from his wife with tricky dialogues. “True love isn’t possessive, Jealousy, as everyone knows, is a mean and ignoble emotion” (*Life and Loves*35). Ruth realized the fact that Bobbo married her out of compulsion and guilty feeling and expected only essential duties from him. He lived in an apartment in the city and disliked to stay with his wife. He is ashamed to present Ruth in front of his clients because of her ugly face. His wife seemed immeasurably large. He asked her about the reason for the increase in weight. She is approximately two hundred and two pounds. It is

certain that Bobbo was concerned about the weight and looks of his wife. He said once "But you're not like everyone, Ruth" (*Life and Loves*21). He thought about the beauty of Mary Fisher even in the very act of crying and compared it with that of Ruth and assumed that her tears seemed bigger and watery than others.

The enormous pressure on Ruth about her body made her jealous of every pretty woman in the world. She tried to reconcile her mind with other blessings of her life like children, home, and husband. But she was haunted by the very self and body of her own. At a certain point in time, she realized beauty for a woman is the greatest power in the world. Bobbo found fault with every act of Ruth at home. He accused her of destructing the happiness at home. Ruth on the other side protested against the indifference of her husband. Bobbo says:

"You have worked terrible mischief here tonight! You have upset my parents, you have upset your children, and you have upset me. Even the animals were affected. I see you at last as you really are. You are a third-rate person. You are a bad mother, a worse wife, and a dreadful cook. In fact, I don't think you are a woman at all. I think that what you are is a she-devil!" (*Life and Loves* 47).

Ruth accepts that Bobbo is right in thinking about the ugly thing and accepts that she is a she-devil as named and called by her own husband.

Because Bobbo lives in a society which teaches them to discriminate ugly from the beautiful. Bobbo left home and declared his stay with Mary Fisher as he cannot stand all these scenes and sulks at home. He proposed Mary Fisher and she too accepted him. Ruth decides to peel away the motherhood and wifedom in her in the heterosexist world. She observes her face in the mirror and decides to be a real she-devil to take revenge, acquire power and money and to hate. She prepares herself and the body to be the actual she-devil.

Ruth decides to voice she-devil and abject by deconstructing the virtue embedded in a woman as a wife and a mother. The first deliberate step taken by her was the physical intimacy in the form of sexual intercourse with Carver, a poor old man who lived in a hut down at the Eden Grove Athletic field. Ruth did this act deliberately to break the first rule of marriage to have physical intimacy with the husband only. Ruth attempts to form a new foundation for her life. Her new law for life evolved with a pattern of webbing, webs of pain, pleasure, humiliation, degradation, transfiguration, and exultation etc. "But there is no beauty in my soul, not now, and I have no place, so I must make my own, and since I cannot change the world, I will change myself" (*Life and Loves* 63).

The second deconstruction from the part of Ruth is to set her own home on fire. Ruth took cigarettes from the pocket of Carver and kept in her handbag. Not being a smoker she did it inexpertly. After, sending the children Andy and Nichola out, she had set on all the electronic gadgets in her house. She manipulated the act of setting the house on fire in a natural way. She

brought out the pets: Harness, the dog, and Mercy the cat, except the guinea pig Richard. She lit the cigarette which she took from Carver's pocket and tried the act of smoking inexpertly. She threw it after stubbing into the wastebasket at Bobbo's room. She dragged the mattress off the bed and heaved it over the bedroom balcony. Meantime her neighbour Rosemary informed about the smell of burning. After a few seconds kitchen exploded. This was how Ruth set her own home on fire.

Ruth uprooted the base of her family, the living space and found the reason to deposit her children with Bobbo who was living with his mistress Mary Fisher at High Tower. Garcia, the man servant at High Tower opened the door at High Tower. He was both frightened and appalled by the size of Ruth. She seemed to him like "a giant chess piece, a clumsy black rook come to challenge the little ivory queen. Garcia thought "She would be his three girlfriends rolled into one" (*Life and Loves*78). The particular term "bulk buy" came to his mind.

Ruth deposited her children at the hands of Bobbo in the High Tower. Bobbo was reluctant to look after children and argued that they must stay with their mother. Mary Fisher also argues about her lack of maternal affection and suggests children cannot be occupied at her home. Ruth triumphs in her operation of settling children with Bobbo and Mary and left to unknown destination.

The first journey of Ruth in a train was towards east after deserting her husband and children. During the journey, she appeared to be a large lady with a dirty face and red-rimmed eyes. A little boy in the train was appalled at the sight of her enormous size and asked “Why does that woman look so funny?” (*Life and Loves*86). The mother of the child silenced him and changed his seating position. This question is representative of the society towards the abject figure. The family is the first school as far as a child is concerned. What is taught and heard from the family is reflected in every individual. Instead of silencing the child and not replying back on his curiosity, mother would have made the child to accept those abnormal figures around them. The silencing of the situation teaches the child to abject those massive size people in his life. An inclusive approach has to be developed to embrace plurality and multiplicity in all terms.

Another subverting strategy employed by Ruth is that she sold her wedding ring to Geoffrey Tufton at a bar whom she met in Travel Lodge. When she came inside the bar she had to bend her neck to pass through the mock- Tudor arch. Many giggled aloud seeing her. Geoffrey felt sorry for the giantess and approached her in the bar. They had friendly conversations and she handed him her wedding ring. This is also a deliberate action on the part of Ruth to deconstruct the emotions relating to marriage. A wedding ring is taken as holy and part of one's own identity after marriage. In order to destabilize, she deliberately sells it to this particular person and also shares an intimate physical relationship with him.

Ruth went to Rest Wood, an establishment by Mrs. Trumper where old women are looked after. She volunteered to take a job by looking after those inmates at the house. It was in Rest Wood that Mary Fisher's mother Mrs. Pearl Fisher inhabited. Ruth gave special attention to Mrs. Pearl Fisher, replaced her Valiumtablets with vitamin tablets and began talking about her daughter. Ruth was instrumental in sending Mrs. Fisher to stay along with her own daughter and destructing her private life and happiness. Thus Mary Fischer was distracted and realized the complexities of life and love.

Next step of manipulation by Ruth was obtaining certificates of general education in the name of Vesta Rose. Ruth joined with Lucas Hill Hospital in the name of Vesta Rose. It was a hospital where there were arsonists, lunatics, prisoners and criminals all dwelt along. Ruth met Nurse Hopkins in the emergency tranquilizing team of the hospital. They got on well with each other and agreed to share a bedroom together in the nursing block.

Like Ruth, Nurse Hopkins also is an abject figure. Her height is four feet eleven inches and her weight is two hundred pounds. She had some problem with the thyroid gland. "Freaks! That's what we two are" (*Life and Loves* 129) remarked Nurse Hopkins. Both Ruth and Nurse Hopkins slept together with their beds near and there was much cuddling, kissing and sexual experimentation between them. They had a lesbian relationship and explored the possibilities of a new pattern for sex, love, and belongingness. The change that reflected on Nurse Hopkins with their lesbian relation was very positive. The sexual activity had a profound effect on Hopkins. She got her menstrual

cycle regular, eyes shined, lost weight, got rid of sweating problems etc. “Wherever you go... I will follow. I have never been so happy in my life” (*Life and Loves*139).

Ruth established an employment agency with the help of Nurse Hopkins bank balance. Ruth managed to transfer many dollars from his client’s account into Bobbo’s personal account after a weekly visit to his office late night. She also removed any reference to these transactions on Bobbo’s bank statements by simply removing zeros. She managed to remove another two thousand dollars from Bobbo’s account by a nocturnal visit into his office. The office staff who came from Vesta Rose for training helped Ruth to transfer the money from Bobbo’s account. Ruth again transferred two million dollars from his account. Ruth left to Swiss bank in Lucerne and managed the huge amount of money with the help of Elsie as Olivia Honey.

The next move by Ruth as Polly Patch joined the house of Judge Henry Bishop as a nanny. The next intention was to influence the judge to give maximum punishment in the case of Bobbo who was in prison for manipulating his client's account. Ruth was able to win the heart of both Judge and his wife.

The Judge, after analysing the physical appearance of Ruth as Polly, the nanny at his home also found her ugly figure interesting. He is of the opinion that ugly people are in touch with reality. The judge estimated Ruth's size to be twice his wife's size and twice her wife's intelligence and found no threat to be dismissed by his wife. He was certain that with Ruth’s physical

appearance she might have been under placed in job and marriage alliance because of her abject figure. The abnormal figure in terms of her body has reduced her prospects to the job of a nanny. Ruth could gain the trust and admiration of Judge through her professional approach at his house. The judge discussed every case of the court with Ruth. He was attached to her in all terms. When the case of Bobbo was discussed, Ruth was instrumental in maximizing the punishment of Bobbo by influencing the Judge.

While her next stay with Vickie at Brad Well Park, she went to the leading surgeon Roche, who was famous in remodelling noses. She consulted him for a wide range, complex cosmetic requirements. Roche turned for the advice of his protégé Carl Ghengis. They examined the body of Ruth. “I want to look up to men” (*Life and Loves* 204). This was the demand of Ruth before her cosmetic alterations. This very well shows how she fervently longed for an appearance admired by men to take revenge. The act of beautifying was not to conform to the existing beauty ideals and to seek satisfaction. Doctors asked her to reduce forty pounds from her weight.

Ruth entered the house of Father Ferguson as Molly Wishant, the housekeeper. No person in the society could have a suspicion on Father Ferguson because Ruth was not like the other women. She could not possibly be seen by his parishioners as a source of erotic excitement. The abject figure again did well for Ruth that she was appointed at Father Ferguson's house as a housekeeper. Her reason for wanting that job was to lose forty pounds as the

doctor had suggested. Father also analyzed her appearance by thinking that mere loss of weight would not help the creature.

Father Ferguson liked the work of Ruth and thought she was a precious pearl among women. He did not want to leave her and feared if she loses her weight she would go from his house. He was satisfied with the work of Ruth. There began a good bond between them which later developed to the intimate physical relationship. Ruth was successful in insinuating Father Ferguson to take action against Mary's love theme in her novels. As a result, Father Ferguson consulted Mary and explained the consequences of the theme of love in her novels and the false expectations created in women. Mary Fisher's hand trembled with fear and she stopped writing. Thus Ruth succeeded in shaking the confidence of Mary Fisher.

Ruth after losing more than forty pounds called Dr. Roche from a telephone booth and fixed appointment as Miss Hunter. She went to a bookshop and bought the books of Mary Fisher to get the picture of her. She gave the picture to the doctor and asked him to change her looks and transform to the figure in the photograph. Roche hinted about the large expense required for the dramatic body change. Ruth was confident and ready to transfer the money to his account. He demanded a million dollar and Ruth was ready to give. Cosmetic surgery would be a very lengthy process as they have to reduce the size and length of her bones, muscles, sinews, arteries, and tendons have to be equally shortened. It will not be a simple task and also referred the risks involved in it.

Ruth accepts the risk part involved and is ready to take the full responsibility. The doctor discusses the concepts of both the body and personality and advises her that though she can change her body, she cannot change her personality. Ruth admits that she has an exceptional adaptable personality and assures him to settle with her new body. She remarks that the world into which she was born has failed. She is not a revolutionary to change the world. Hence she decides to change herself to change the world. The motto of her metamorphoses is to take revenge upon her husband Bobbo who abandoned her on account of her ugly appearance.

Soon after the surgery, Mr. Ghengis fell in love with her and requested to marry and live together. She was the star in a party offered by her cosmetic surgeons. Ruth after the transformation realized the tactics to be played in the coming days being a pretty woman. She understands she must learn to refuse men rather than to submit to them. A pretty woman would not have a sexual expertise like an ordinary woman. The doctors couldn't find her original identity and all they knew was she was a woman who wanted to be shorter and prettier. After the surgery, she was five feet six and a half inches.

Ruth observed Mary's funeral by sitting inside the car from a distance. She met Bobbo there and said that she is his wife. Bobbo was confused by the transformation of Ruth. Prisoners took him back to jail and they informed her about his depression. Ruth arranged lawyers for the release of Bobbo from jail. She purchased the High Tower property and made several renovations. She began to live in High Tower. She called back Garcia to be her

servant. She made love with Garcia not out of sexual impulse but for a different reason. She wants the relationship to be known to Bobbo to annoy him. The act is purely political.

Bobbo has become an old man now. He is confused with two Mary Fischer's. The transformation to a beautiful figure has given the power to take revenge and accomplish anything in the world. She realizes at the end that "It is not a matter of male or female, after all; it never was: merely of power" (*Life and Loves* 277). Ruth with her abject body at one point of time in her life gave meaning and embraced it through various politics. Instead of remaining as an abject figure, she transformed to a beautiful woman to understand and use power and to materialize revenge.

Illegitimacy is the status of a human being born out of an unmarried couple. The derogatory terms often used to address them are bastard, lovechild etc. Their status of illegitimacy is reflected in all aspects of their life. It is a universal phenomenon. The heterosexual matrix sets the pattern of the family in a society. The societal norms acknowledge only the legitimate children and illegitimates are placed outside the signification system. There are many factors in the society which can be considered as a reason for this fact. Education, age, income, broken family homes, poverty and patterns of living are some of the factors resulting in the matter of illegitimacy. Man is a social being. This very socializing aspect is denied in the case of illegitimate children. This affects psychologically and socially on illegitimate children. A sense of belongingness is the first aspect that a social human being craves for. This belongingness is

never fulfilled in illegitimate children. The attitude of society is crucial in their developmental stages.

The hostility from the society and the stigma attached to their status may result in various behavioural problems. Studies reveal illegitimate children are likely to have a poor emotional impulse, poor school performance, problematic self, and identity crisis, difficulty in delaying gratification, aggression, delinquency etc. The heterosexual matrix dictates identity separate for man, woman, and children. In such a world the self and identity of the illegitimate children are problematized. They are placed outside the signification system. Illegitimacy constitutes a social problem and threatens the boundaries of identity and self. It blurs the identity of self and identity. In this sense, they are abject beings as they stand outside the social matrix of the society. In the novel, *Praxis* illegitimacy becomes the most salient form of abjection.

Praxis Duveen and her sister Hypatia Duveen are two illegitimate children born to Benjamin Duveen and Lucy Duveen. Ben Duveen a Jew and a golf player found Lucy from sexual slumming. They lived together at 109 Holden Road, Brighton. It was a stout Edwardian house sheltered by laurel bushes, a circular drive in the front yard, well-maintained garden and a car porch. Ben a drunkard, beats his wife cruelly and the children stood helplessly observing the savagery of their father. Ben addressed her as the 'whore' and Lucy, in turn, called Ben a 'dirty Jew'. They were not married and had a living together relationship.

Lucy was married before at the age of seventeen to a young army officer and later deserted her. He was last heard in Hollywood films in the USA. Lucy had difficulty in dealing with the international divorce laws and thus remained as a deserted wife. The circumstances made her fate to be at sexual slumming where Ben found her. Lucy was scared about the complexities involved in marrying Ben without a divorce from her first husband. She believed that she lived in sin. "Better to live with the guilty secret than the open truth of their life together"(*Praxis*12).

Ben beats his wife cruelly when he was under the influence of alcohol. He had a habit of torturing her body and finally making love out of hatred. Ben dismissed his children from the place where they observed their parents indulging in verbal fights and physical encounters. Few visitors came to their house except some hard drinking friends of Ben. Lucy feared that Ben under the influence of alcohol may disclose the fact that she is a kept woman and not married. Lucy believed that she was living a sinful life and humiliatingly endured the animal nature of Ben.

No doubt theirs was a broken home. Lucy had moved away from her friends. She had no confidence to maintain and make new friends. For her own family, she was a disgrace and had cast her off. She was a trouble and shame to their family. After a short period, Ben eloped with Ruth, the dark little waitress at the golf club and deserted Lucy and their children. Both Lucy and children were in distress struggling with the new system of family. Hypatia and Praxis were helpless in the situation but they were assisted with some amount of

money from the paternal side by their grandmother with the help of a solicitor. Lucy was in distraught and children were in poor condition. Lucy burst into tears when Henry the photographer remarked about the single status of her life.

Hypatia and Praxis were denied of education and school system. Lucy was worried about the matter of children's schooling and the birth certificates. A close inspection of their birth certificates will reveal the fact that they are illegitimate and their true names to be Hypatia Parker and Praxis Parker and the mother's name as Lucy Parker and her status as spinster. But the column for father was written Benjamin Duveen not the humiliating word "Unknown". Lucy was scared about the abnormality of her relationship and thus denied education and school system for her children. She taught them how to read, write maths, launder, embroidery and sewing.

The vicar of the place Reverend Allbright enquired about the girl's education and advised on the need for the same. He was clever enough to understand the real status of Lucy but insisted to accept the status as 'widow'. He helped them to get admission at Church Of England School which was two miles away from their home. They were not enrolled in the secular school just near at the end of their road for various reasons. Praxis liked the school and atmosphere but Hypatia was just opposite that she liked less. Their household ran with Henry's income as a lodger and their servant Judith's pay was afforded by Butt and Son solicitor of Ben Duveen's family.

Butt and Son addressed letters in the name of Lucy Parker. When postman enquired about her surname, she explained that as she was a widow, letters were addressed as Miss Parker. Lucy had fits of hysteria occasionally. When Hypatia was admitted to the grammar school, Lucy changed her name to Hilda and also Praxis's as Patricia. Lucy disliked the original names of her children. The change in the name of her children reveals that she dislikes the present status. A change in the name suggests welcoming of a new identity. Hypatia won a scholarship to grammar school. Lucy was overjoyed by the achievement of her elder daughter. She wrote and informed her solicitors and wished to convey the same to Duveens family.

The fluidity of identity is experienced by Lucy and her children. The heterosexual matrix insists on the identity of father for the children. A woman and her children are known with the family name of their husband and father respectively. The patriarchal world practices a strict law for families to be known with the family name of the male member, the husband. Lucy, the unmarried mother suffers as she lives in a patriarchal society without a proper surname. She suffers hysteria occasionally as she cannot cope up with the reality of being a person without a proper identity for her and children. The reason for the change in the names of her children is a deliberate attempt to reposition the identity.

Praxis realized the status of being an outcast throughout her life “ I even think, sometimes, that narrow hypocritical society was right, and that Hypatia and myself had no right to be alive: and had better have remained the

outcasts we were born” (*Praxis*37). Praxis received the approach from the society as an outcast and never had the opportunity to think and learn according to the norms. As they both were placed outside the social system and lacked exposure, they were unaware about the accepted system. There is no wonder when she fell in love with a girl named Louise Gaynor.

When Praxis experienced her menstruation for the first time in her life she was horrified and ran to her mother. Mother couldn't believe the reality that Praxis before Hypatia who is elder than her met with it early. Patricia cried all night and thought that her life had a different turn and accepted the reality that she became a woman. A girl who faces the menstrual cycle is taught to have such an attitude towards it. Hypatia being elder did not console her nor did any help to her. Lucy should actually welcome the change and congratulate her daughter. But Lucy itself was horrified because Praxis met with it before Hypatia, the elder daughter. She complained herself that fifteen is the proper age for girls to start the menstrual cycle. Hypatia uses the word “unclean” (*Praxis* 40) for menstruation and her advice to Patricia was that “Of course men can't know you when you're unclean, said Hilda. It says so in the Bible. That's why it's called the curse. It's god's punishment” (*Praxis* 40). Julia Kristeva views that the menstrual experience in a woman threatens her border of identity in the social world.

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without the ego threatened by the non-ego, the society

threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference (71).

The female experience mutes the menstrual experience in the public space. The patriarchal society attaches a stigma to the menstruation in women and is obvious that she is forced to live in a constricted world. The stigma and disgrace attach to the process have been transferred over the ages. A woman is forced to view the menstruation process as negative and unacceptable. A woman actually lacks complete understanding of the physiology of menstruation. A woman should be proud of the menstruation process in reality as it is the biological capacity which enables a woman to give life to next generation. But the experience of man and his capacities in all realms like physical, intellectual, social and biological are termed as "manliness" and thus celebrated in all walks of life. But the "womanliness" and her exclusive experience finds no channel and acceptance. Elizabeth Groz is right in analyzing this:

The first issuing forth of sperm, the onset of nocturnal emissions, signals coming manhood for the boy, the sexual pleasures and encounters fantasized and yet to come; but the onset of menstruation is not an indication at all for the girl of

her developing sexuality, only her coming womanhood. And more over, whereas the boy is able to physically solidify the flow of the sperm, connecting it metonymically to a corporeal pleasure and metaphorically with the desired object (or atleast a place), for the girl, menstruation associated as it is with blood, with injury and the wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly,that leaks, uncontrollable, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicates the beginning of an out-of-control status that she was led to believe ends with childhood (205).

Praxis, Hypatia, and Lucy live in a social world where the very thought of menstrual blood pushes one to be an abject being and loses the boundary between other and self that have been constructed by separating mother in the socializing process. Menstrual blood is a fluid that blurs the boundaries and fixity of the social identity.

Human sexuality is not a fixed entity as favoured by the heterosexist society. Heterosexist society dictates and thrusts the patterns of sexuality upon the individuals. Sexuality is a diversified experience and is unique to every individual. The alternate sexuality was rarely acknowledged and accepted by the society. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sexuality form a minor group and their pattern of sexuality is looked down by the heterosexual society. Individuals are never free to choose their sexual orientation but are forced to accept and fit in the prescribed identity. Any deviance from the heterosexual

identity was considered as a defect on the individual and thus severely punished. "There is nothing essentially abject about homosexuality, for example, but it is defined as abject and is made abject in order to reduce its threat. These abject positions have an outcast status and occupy excluded sites that resist the possibility of cultural articulation" (Rina 8).

Elaine, the school friend of Praxis, instructed her to have a crush on someone. Praxis fell in love with a girl named Louise Gaynor who was excellent in Athletics, Latin, English and French. Praxis recorded her fact and fantasy in her diary. She fantasized the love for Louise by writing in her diary the imagination that how Louise kissed her behind the bicycle sheds after a school concert. Lucy happened to read her diary and shouted at Praxis for the recording of lesbian tendency. Lucy was completely derailed after reading and knowing the lesbian relationship of her daughter. When Praxis came back from school her mother was sitting with a policeman. "Little Jewess, after all. Sly little lesbian. Little slut. Filthy, dirty, little piece of slime, Little Bastard." The policeman attempted to intercede but failed, and presently gave up and left. There was a war on" (*Praxis* 44).

Lucy went fully mad after this incident. That night she did strange things. She never spoke to Praxis. If ever she felt like to say something it was through Hypatia. Lucy complained about the contents of Praxis's diary to her headmistress at school. Praxis and Louise were called in to the headmistress's room. They were thoroughly questioned and Louise saved Praxis by disclosing that it was her imagination alone. Praxis never had the inclination for same-sex

love. But the broken home and broken relationship at her house had made her think about a romantic friendship with Louise. Father, mother and sister never loved or cared Praxis. All through the life she was an abject being, illegitimate child and the society never acknowledged her needs. Praxis was looking for a belongingness but the events unfolded in an unexpected manner which had far-reaching consequences in her upcoming life.

All relationships are not sexual in nature. It is natural for individuals to have an inclination for same sex or opposite sex. The exclusion and discrimination suffered by Praxis had made her think about a relationship with Louise. Being an adolescent child she was longing for love, care and acceptance from everyone around. Instead of correcting and supporting, Lucy made this a big issue. Lucy and those involved in the issue could very well create a homophobia in the young mind of Praxis. Praxis was forced to abject the same sex relationship with Louise. She never had a stable relationship with anyone throughout her life. Her identity and self were divided. The forceful abjection may be the reason why she was unsuccessful as a lover, wife and mother in the heterosexist society. Praxis later in her life remembered thus “Yes, I am a bastard and a Jewess at that. My father abandoned me and my mother went mad and I was a lesbian for a time. Haha.” (*Praxis* 48).

Prostitution involves renting of the female body for male sexual fantasies. The existence of such an institution in the society reveals the fact that, sex within the institution of family and marriage limits the variety, inflow of cash and satisfaction. It is a necessary evil that protected other women and

cared other institutions like marriage and family from rape and other ravages of men's sexual appetites. It can be seen as an outcome of poverty and economic constraints and other psychological and social matters concerning an individual. The complex dimensions of sexuality, the sacred status and the emotional aspect involved in the matter of sex deny viewing prostitution as a job or work like any other labour. What a prostitute does is giving contract on her body for sexual service. The stigma is always attached to woman as a prostitute and the counterpart, usually the male, escapes scrutiny. It is a truth that the origin of prostitution is in men's natural sexual urge and is also a politicized terrain of male sex right, in which men are ensured access to women's bodies.

Praxis had chosen the profession as a prostitute along with her friend Elaine at Raffles Esplanade. Douglas, the Raffles owner was happy to have them there and that was a strategy to improve his business. Some of the customers at the bar would leave with any of the girls and he neither knew nor cared what happened later. The customers would be led to the summerhouse at the bottom of Elaine's long garden. After the fulfilment of task, a gift of money would change hands in return for the service of the sexual needs. Both Elaine and Praxis believed that: "Elaine and Praxis were definite about that. They were not prostitutes, just a couple of girls living life to the full, working their way out of difficulties, in a world which made any other solution impossible" (*Praxis* 123).

Elaine had worked for a time in marketing before her father's death. In order to attract and increase demand for a purchase, her strategy was to double the amount of it. She advised Praxis to double the charge of her sexual service. The psychological issue involved in prostitution is evident when Elaine opines whether most women enjoyed carnal knowledge or got anything out of it. She admits the fact that she enjoys doing: "But I admit I quite like doing it. I like to see men out of control, I really do. It's the peripheral bits of sex, not the sex itself, that women go for" (*Praxis* 124). Elaine throws light on the uniqueness of feeling in sexuality. The homogeneous status given to sexuality by the heterosexist society proves to be complex. Each individual's perspective is moulded by the society in which he/she lives. The double standards of the heterosexist society are revealed in the case of prostitution.

The discourses on sexuality itself construct the patterns of sexuality. Women, in general, are taught to have certain sexual behaviour. She must be submissive and undemanding in nature. The prostitutes are part of the same society but are rarely acknowledged and the sexual behaviour is different for them and varies to the customers approaching them. Praxis says: "The more bizarre requests puzzled her: yet it was the fulfilling of these which seemed to give the greatest relief" (*Praxis* 124). The circumstances prompted Praxis to this profession is economical and psychological. Praxis was struggling for a sense of belongingness. Being an individual with an insane mother, half-mad sister, and an abandoned father what she is expected to do as a social being.

The incest taboo is the prohibition of a system which allows sexual relations among close family members. There are different cultures in the society which permits some relationship to be sexual partners within the family. But father- daughter, brother-sister and mother-son sexual relations are taken as immoral, unnatural and highly improbable in every society. The ground for incest prohibition is a sociological concern. Incest disrupts both familial and social order. Feminists are of the opinion that it is the outcome of male-dominated society against the powerless females. It is an abusive way to exercise a familial power which is socially unacceptable. The sexual impulse inside the family is disruptive and destroys the bonds of kinship.

Praxis committed an incestuous relationship with her father unknowingly. She had chosen the profession of a prostitute for a short period in her life. Unknowingly her father became a sexual client. When they both had a casual talk, her father disclosed that he had lived in the Brighton before war days and had a wife named Loony Lucy. Praxis recognized the client to be her own father. Though she was helpless and ashamed of the act, she didn't let it know to her father. "To commit incest knowingly, Pattie supposed was a great deal worse than to do so unknowingly and that was bad enough" (*Praxis* 130). Soon after the incident Praxis left the life with Willie and flew to Colleen her friend at London taking Mary along.

The incestuous relationship with her father was later disclosed by Praxis to Diana, her friend and neighbour. But her profession for a short term as a prostitute was later informed to her husband Ivor by Hilda through a letter

and the result was the total destruction of her married life. She was leading a decent life with her husband Ivor and their children. She was trying hard to meet both ends of the family. The attitude of Ivor changed soon after and even exchanged his wife for a key party to his neighbour and friend. Praxis quit the life with Ivor. She then became the wife of Philip, when Irma left Philip. Philip at one point in her life insists her to take the nude photos of her for a movie shoot. Praxis denied first and later when she agreed, came to know that Philip got the nude photos of another woman Serena. Philip was in bed with Serena when Praxis went and met him for her willingness to take nude photos.

In the novel *Praxis*, it is evident that female body is abjected in different situations. Illegitimacy, attitude towards menstruation, same-sex love, prostitution, incest, and the use of the female body for the whims and fancies of male terrain are some of the situations in which the female body is abjected from the mainstream discourse and given a low status instead. The layers of abjection in the life of Praxis highlight the positioning of female body abjection in the heterosexist society and continue to exist in different domains of life. Praxis embraces the status of an abject throughout her life with confidence and courage.

Aging is a cultural construction and the dominant cultural languages push the concept of the aged body into the terrain of the abject. Most of the representations in art and literature portray aged body as something that is undesirable, problematic and lacks something. Aged body is described as frail, sick, unattractive, dependent and that which involves complexities and

becomes an embodiment of negative construction. We live in a world that gives undue importance to youth. Youth includes that which is beautiful and healthy. It has become a commodity that can be purchased. Youth is glorified and retained and with this what is pushed aside to the realm of the abject is aging.

With all this readily available disparagement of the aging body, the aging bodies themselves become more and more abject, to the observers and to the possessors of these bodies. The irony lies in that those observers that surveil these bodies with such horror will if they are very lucky, experience the same situation. Those of us who manage to survive all grow old, with all the bodily decline that that entails, or we die. No one seems to want either one. And yet these observers are failing to realize that *they too* are growing older. When will they feel old? When will they start to realize that their bodies are marking time? The concept of (older) age and the meanings of aging are extremely difficult to define and place in a specific societal context (Kori Myers 18).

According to Kristeva abject is that “me that is not me” (*Powers*5). Abject is that which disturbs the identity and social order. When something approaches the subject which cannot assimilate, it experiences a breakdown of the system and pushes it into the area of the abject. “I experience abjection only if an other has settled in place and instead of what will be ‘me’” (*Powers* 10). In the context of the concept of abject by Kristeva, the aged body is abject that

which disturbs the accepted system. In the novel *Death of a She-Devil*, two main characters Bobbo and Ruth are old and thus embody abjection. It is worth looking deeper into their embodiment. The attitudes they receive from others reveal the marginalization and abjection of the aged bodies. The old age signifies a loss of youth and reflects precisely Kristeva's ideas of the abject: "The abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments" (*Powers* 15).

Death of a She-Devil, the sequel to Weldon's early novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* was a novel before thirty-four years ago. Weldon has portrayed a monster protagonist Ruth, an ugly doormat who revenges her husband by completely destroying his life with his mistress Mary Fisher. She surgically transforms into a male fantasy figure, exactly the simulacrum of Mary Fisher, losing six inches of leg to become the desired figure. At the end Ruth is triumphant and succeeds in materializing the revenge and hence Bobbo, her husband becomes a prisoner and Mary dies out of Cancer.

Ruth was an abject figure because of her lack of beauty in terms of physical appearance and the ugliness made her life miserable in all terms. In the sequel, *Death of a She-Devil*, she is addressed with name "She-Devil", not with the real name Ruth. She-Devil is all powerful with a new world that has been arranged with "Women triumphant and men submissive" (*Death* 22). She-Devil is the president and chief executive of the Institute for Gender Parity (IGP). This institute was instrumental in making equal pay for women and a

better system for them. It is a charitable institution where a community of women are living and working in the High Tower. The mission of IGP is to bring about equality of dignity and wealth between the genders. She-Devil is honoured as Dame Ruth Patchett of St Rumbold's by her majesty, the Queen for services to the Community. "I wear the royal badge with pride, the only jewel a feminist can legitimately wear" (*Devil* 23).

The novel begins with the worries of She-Devil "I am in my eighties" (*Devil* 3). She is anxious about her successor in the High Tower. The reason behind such a tension is nothing but the compulsion of the society in which she lives. She sees no one fit to follow her footsteps because her relationship with her son and daughter is strained. Children and grandchildren did not speak to She-Devil as she deposited them at the hands of Bobbo and Mary to take revenge. Thus they had a miserable life with their father and his mistress, Mary Fisher. After materializing the revenge and its success, She-Devil worries about the transfer of power of High Tower because she realizes that she is aged. It is the conscience that troubles her.

But still, I wake uneasy in the mornings. And aching too, as one does at eighty-four. All is not well. Is it conscience that troubles me? When I step out upon the ground it seems to tremble-is it that the sea batters the rocks on which the High tower stands, or is it just that my limbs are old? I always did the best I could, surely within the limits of my own nature. I am without guilt. So why am I so hated? Why do I hate myself? (*Death* 4).

She-Devil is made to think by the existing discourse of aging that her youth was lost and immediately she needs a successor in her line. She has appointed staffs to continue the duties of the institute. The dependence on others had made her think about the loss of autonomy and lack of significant role for her in the IGP Institute. The fear of death does not haunt her but the help that she takes from others bothers her lot. Her panic and fear magnify the abject in the old age. Even at the age of eighty-four with all the limitations due to aging, She-Devil is positive and feels that something more has to be done to the nation and women.

Valerie Valeri, PA of She-Devil, is pretty, clever, competent and ambitious. She is the shield and support of IGP. Valerie who is only twenty years old is sixty years younger than She-Devil. Valerie is working for She-Devil for almost a year, editing lectures, articles, writing leaflets, arranging festivals and so on, travelling with her, bringing her wake up coffee. Valerie is an exemplary employee of the IGP and is competent, literate, dedicated feminist with a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney. She is enthusiastic with misconceptions and She-Devil fears the Widdershins Walk would be one.

She-Devil requests Valerie not to conduct and celebrate Widdershins Women Walk and her birthday. It's better to celebrate only the anniversary of IGP alone. She says "I am old I know, but growing older is nothing to celebrate, let alone remind others about. Age is bad for business. So no party. No widdershins. Concentrate on the IGP brochure" (*Death* 21). "I am old, old,

old, I would quite like to die. I am tired, my business is done, I am satisfied. The world is as I want it: women triumphant, men submissive” (*Death* 22).

The attitude of youth is well exemplified in the young employee, Valerie of IGP. To proclaim to the world outside that the gender war is no more, Valerie needs the presence of a male member during the walk. The idea behind the suggestion to include Bobbo, the old man in the walk is that there is no inherent danger and he is incapable of doing any harm as he is old. She suggests Bobbo, as he is on the board as a member, to parade with She-Devil. She-Devil disliked the idea of taking Bobbo for the parade. She dismisses the idea that Bobbo is far too ill to walk anywhere. This connotes the disintegration of the subject and identity of old people and also marks the invisibility of old age.

Valerie kept on reminding Ruth about the Widdershins Walk and asked about the need to have a man in the procession. Valerie next suggests the name of Tyler, the grandson of She-Devil. Valerie is of the opinion that they need a man in the parade to project that the war between the sexes has ended. Men are taken to be no longer the enemy of women. She-Devil rejects the idea of having Tyler in the parade and denies that he is her grandson. She pretends that she doesn't have a grandson named Tyler and adds if anyone claims to be, it is certain that he is an imposter.

In the Board meeting, Lady Patchett was feeling rather sleepy. She drowsed gently and occasionally snored throughout the meeting and no one

liked to wake her. Valerie presented the matter at the meeting and received applause from other members. She-Devil, the CEO and Chairperson at the age of eighty-four, due to old age, slips into sleep without the botheration of reality. Valerie being young takes the advantage of the situation and tries to be more powerful than She-Devil. Dr.Simmins had heard about She-Devil slumbering during the Board meeting. She prescribed wake-up pills to be taken before such events. Hearing this She-Devil was worried and took one pill on the spot and regrets on the particular act and wishes not to be used against her in future.

She-Devil takes undue care of her health. She had agreed to walk in the Widdershins Procession. Before the day of the procession, she hesitates to walk as it may affect her health. Her voice cracked and hoarsened as she spoke. “She was old, old, old” (*Death* 165). Valerie promises She-Devil to hold her arms while leading the walk and save her from a fall because of her age. This fear for the lack of control of one's own body is created in the aged people with reigning youth-obsessive culture. The changes in one's own body inspire horror in them and cannot overcome the feeling of helplessness. Valerie is trying to instil this notion of fear in She-Devil.

Representations of art and literature, media and advertisements, medical field, etc., project a pessimistic view on the concept of aging. They conceptualize the attitude towards aging through various societal discourses. The message that society gets from such discourses concerning old people is that aging is ugly and hence unattractive, disgusting, lonely and abject. The negative description of aged people become deeply embedded in the conscious

and unconscious mind of individuals. Hence there concretizes a view about them as useless and less significant and makes them invisible.

The mysterious disappearance of She-Devil at the end of the novel renders a positive outlook on her aged body which is treated as an abject body by the younger generation. She-Devil's body, never displays the disgust and fear associated with the aged body. She never depended on others for her very survival. She was a walking corpse but the narration of her end in the novel is a counter-discourse against the old age discourse. We never feel a disgust or repulsion towards She-Devil. This clearly indicates that those who have marks of change on the body have the power to change their narrative of life and death in a positive light. This repeated process may change discourse of old age.

Bobbo, the husband of She-Devil, is aged ninety-four, bedridden and has Alzheimer's. He is kept in the Lantern Room of the High Tower. He is described as "foul-mouthed old goat", "stringy and nasty old jailbird" (*Death* 5). He mutters occasionally about his life and happenings. He loves Mary and hates his own wife Ruth (*Death* 5). "Look at me now, living out my days between a bed and an armchair, so old I don't even have the strength to get it up anymore" (*Death* 6). He is looked after by a caretaker named Samantha and Dr. Simmins visits once a week to check his health. "Old Bobbo, once so vigorous, now this wretched scarp of living flesh" (*Death* 24). Guards, caretakers and Dr. Simmins ask her to prepare for the worst as Bobbo may die at any time.

She-Devil looks after Bobbo, not out of love and affection. The Charity Commissioners had insisted on the presence of one male member of the steering committee to justify the claim for gender parity. She-Devil selected her own aged husband even though he suffers from dementia because he is legally fit to sign a form. Bobbo no longer recognizes her and mistakes her for Mary as she looked exactly like her. Bobbo is confined to his bed at High Tower and has no distraction but his own disagreeable thoughts about life. He is, in fact, a prisoner of Ruth and old age. He rants his misogyny, expresses the love and hate for both Ruth and Mary, curses himself and sexually assaults the nurse Samantha.

According to nurse Samantha if Bobbo dies, it would not be a loss to the world. Bobbo slept quite a lot and when awoke his memory seemed unimpaired. If he remembered anything it was sharp and included too many details of it. His behaviour seems inappropriate and disproportionate sometimes. For Dr. Simmins, Bobbo's language was appalling, his manners worse and his views out of trend. Samantha moistened old Bobbo's lips with a damp cloth. Bobbo at times groaned and stirred a little on the bed and fell quiet again. Samantha knew about Bobbo's family as shattered and divided. She feels sorry for Bobbo to die alone in the room without seeing the family in his last days. She thinks of a family reconciliation for his sake, but did not know the rest of the members other than Tyler.

The ghost of Mary Fisher is in love with the young Tyler. She also understands the death of Bobbo is near and "I don't want him turning up

anywhere near me, filthy old man. I want to be with Tyler” (*Death* 120). The ghost of Mary now hates the old Bobbo and is interested in Tyler. The ghost of Mary wishes for the death of Bobbo but describes his present situation as “so now he’s grown into this disgusting old toad” (*Death* 95). Judith Butler deals with the abject in a social setting that helps us to understand why Bobbo’s situation represents the abject: “The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (*Bodies* 3).

When Dr. Simmins warned Valerie that Bobbo did not have long to go and doubted if he would be able to see this Christmas, Valerie was disappointed not because of the old man's death but out of concern to cancel Widdershins walk. Dr. Simmins says “One less useless soul on the earth” (*Death* 160). Valerie calls “That old thing” (*Death* 160). When Tyler bent down to hear Bobbo, his breath did not smell good. In the presence of Tyler, Bobbo breathed his last and Samantha says “Mind you, he was a dirty old man” (*Death* 209). The reference to the smell associated with old people recurs in the societal description of them. The changes in the body and the disgusting smell inspire horror and cannot overcome the condition of being an abject.

Disgust and revulsion are the two characteristics that society constructs around the concept of old age. Bobbo has become an alien and occupies a space less than a human being. His foul smell of the body is always

illustrated by different characters as disgusting is a sure move of belittling his existence as a human being. He is rendered invisible through his aged body. The condition of Bobbo as bedridden and awaiting for his death is not a painful matter for him but a burden for others. Valerie was more concerned about the cancellation of Widdershins Walk than Bobbo's death. She Devil was really upset over the demise of her best friend, Nurse Hopkins than the death of her husband, Bobbo. Bobbo's physical collapse and the attitude towards it reflect how the cultural language constructs old age.

What the entire humanity fear most is the concept of aging than death. Aging transforms someone into unrecognizable. The disintegration of body and its lack of control are more threatening than death itself. Bobbo's aged body is the manifestation of the cultural fear of old age that harbours in the mind of individuals. The socializing aspect is less in an aged body when compared to the young embodiment. Valerie says "Diavolessa, we must be seen to honour youth, beauty and innocence as well as the wisdom of old age... Let the young bury the old! Let the old rejoice with the young!" (*Death* 242). This idea to mix young and old people draws a dichotomous aspect to the words 'young' and 'old' respectively.

Aging and death are beyond our control and it should be taken as a passing phase in one's own life just like childhood. It seems that entire world is after youth because the culture has so conditioned us to thrive for it. Narrative constructs subjects and objects. The concept of old bodies is narrated not by the aged people but by others who assume the experience of aged embodiment.

Nobody wants to get aged and die. We have a narcissist culture which glorifies youth and youthful appearance. The aged people should deconstruct such assumptions and rebel against these constructs. The narratives and experiences of old people should be read in a positive light.

Performing Gender

The concept of gender is taken for granted and is difficult to watch the nuances of the construction. It is deeply embedded in the unconscious strata of human beings that one should act one's own gender either Male or Female. An appropriation of characteristics exclusively for each gender has been passed over from one generation to the next. Thus an individual learns the characteristics of each gender through observation, imitation, and performance. This act of performing gender is taken as a biological entity of human nature. Both human females and males are physically more similar in appearance and are alike in certain traits and behaviour. The physical attributes reinforce the differences in hairstyles, dressings cosmetics etc. Thus society succeeds in the construction of gender dichotomy with external differences.

Everyone does gender without being aware of it. It is hard to believe the fact that gender is constantly created and recreated with human interaction and patterned thus to cater the reigning signification system. The views of the theorist Judith Lorber is right in this sense that:

Gender signs and signals are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them—unless they are missing or ambiguous. Then we are uncomfortable until we have successfully placed the other person in a gender status; otherwise, we feel socially dislocated. In our society, in addition to man and woman, the status can be *a transvestite* (a person who dresses in opposite-

gender clothes) and *transsexual* (a person who has had sex-change surgery). Transvestites and transsexuals carefully construct their gender status by dressing, speaking, walking, gesturing in the ways prescribed for women or men—whichever they want to be taken for—and so does any "normal" person (14).

For an individual, the genitalia at the moment of birth assigns his sex category and based on that the gender construction commences. They are dressed according to the category and displays with physical attributes to provide meaning for gender category. Both sex and gender are thus interrelated and complex. The sex category is projected by gender status and gender signifiers. Once gender is displayed, the individual performs and reciprocates with the same sex gender group. This repeated performances and reciprocation stabilizes the notion of gender.

Judith Butler refutes the stability of gender that “gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (*Gender* 519). Butler examines the ways in which gender is constructed through meaningful corporeal acts. Body is the site on which the gender categorization is materialized. It is an organized materiality, embodies the possibilities and at the same time is conditioned and stabilized by the convention. “In other words, the body is a historical situation as Beauvoir claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical

situation” (*Gender* 525). Observation, imitation, and repetition are the strategies involved in the matter of embodiment. This doing of gender is subtle and involves political strategy.

In the general sense, all bodies enact gender. The body is transformed into his or her body and is known only by its gendered appearance. So to be a woman is to act like a woman. The concept compels the body to conform to the idea of woman and materializes those gender marked signifiers which categorize and stabilizes the gender. Hence gender is a project and its task is to render meaning to the category through repeated performances and over the years it acquires different meanings. Gender is not a fact but a cultural construct, "...body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time." (*Gender* 523)

The present chapter looks at those women characters in the novels who enact gender unconsciously and the strategies they employ to stabilize the meaning of gender and also those characters which consciously attempt to transgress the performance of gender and their body politics to destabilize the notion of gender through various methods. A close reading of the novels and the women characters enlighten and suggest possibilities of a new paradigm shift of gender. Each character is unique in its method of deconstruction. A deeper analysis of some of the women characters who give life and meaning to gender is also analysed and is contrasted with those who destabilize the notion of gender.

The Fat women's Joke portrays the dissolution of the unhappy marriage between Alan Wells and Esther. The stimulant for the destruction of the marriage system is the diet that the couple goes on and realizes the uneasiness already existing in their life. Alan, the husband declares a strict dieting plan for himself and wife all of a sudden. The reason is purely psychological and physiological at the same time. Alan fancies his secretary Susan and tries to retain his youth through the control of food. When Esther realizes the reason behind such a change in diet by her husband involves in excessive eating strategy. Dieting is meant for the regulation of health and body both physically and mentally. But the need of Alan is quite different from the above general conception of health. He wants himself and his wife to be regulated in physical terms alone.

The Fat Women's Joke is a novel that has a deep reflection of doing and undoing gender by different characters in the novel. The protagonist Esther Wells is a middle-aged woman who contests the act of doing gender in several situations throughout the novel. She destabilizes the fixity of gender roles in the heterosexual matrix through her body politics. After the destruction of the paired life with Alan, Esther lives alone in Earls Court in a basement flat where she enjoys the act of consuming food in large quantity. This deliberate act of eating from the part of Esther is a subtle move to dismantle heterofemininity.

The subject of the phallic is in a restraint to choose which gender he/she can enact. The performance is already scripted within a regulatory frame. As soon as the biological categorization is determined, the subject is at

first taught to appropriate the destined category. The gender style then emerges within the subject which disseminates which gender does he/she belongs to. Beauty and the shape of body matter very much in the feminine gender. They are forced to regulate their physical appearance as per the set standard of heterosexuality.

Phyllis the friend of Esther, advice her to stop eating and that highlights the concern of physical appearance, "You'll be like a balloon" (*The Fat* 9). She puts forward the needs of her adolescent son Peter who badly needs his mother at the crisis of his life. She laments over the ruined relationship of Wells family and seeks the reason of destruction from Esther. Phyllis favours the heterosexual marriage system and speaks positive aspects of it." Marriage to me is a source of strength, not a weight upon me" (*The Fat* 10). She compels Esther to rejoin her husband at the earliest to avoid further hardships for her husband and son.

When Esther opines that "Marriage is too strong an institution for me... It is altogether too heavy and powerful"(*The Fat* 10). Phyllis suspects a behavioural problem for her friend Esther. She advises consulting a doctor that her behaviour seems odd. Phyllis denies food when offered by Esther. The reason for denial is that she wants to take care of her figure. "No. I have to watch my figure" (*The Fat* 11).She comments on the size and shape of the body of Esther and advises to bother her body size and shape.

In both characters Esther and Phyllis, the oppositional and conforming traits of the patriarchal standards in terms of gender performance is dominant. Esther tries to depoliticize her gender in showing reluctance to control her body figure, in staying independently and breaking the marriage system of her own. Phyllis strongly upholds the phallic standards unconsciously and voices it to be the natural phenomenon. This is evident when Phyllis comments on the attitude of Esther that she is not following the rules of the society. "In any case, everything is different for you. You don't seem to have followed the rules" (*The Fat* 11). She adds that her own husband Gerry once fancied Esther while she had the ideal body.

Esther says "We are all separate people and we are all alone. It is a ridiculous thing to say that no man is an island" (*The Fat* 14). Esther opines to Phyllis that being a woman you will stop painting your toenail and stop wearing your best panties for parties at a certain point in time. "It will all be over for you as it is for me" (*The Fat* 14). Love, motherhood, and romance that have been experienced would be like dreams if they reach a particular age in their life. Food, drink, sleep, and books would be like drugs in your life at that point of time. (*The Fat* 14). This is very true in the case of women in general. Women have been pushed to the realm of domestic jobs and expressing affections unconditionally. When the assistance of a wife and mother is no more needed, they will be rarely acknowledged. In such situations, women will have to solely depend on other means to get emotionally balanced.

Esther again destabilizes the very notion of her gender that being a woman she must be beautiful, neat and presentable. She is reluctant to change her dress when she intends to go out and buy something from a restaurant. Phyllis requests her to do change the clothes. But she disagrees and says “I don’t need clothes. I don’t want anyone to look at me; It’s their misfortune if they do. Are you ashamed to be seen out with me?” (*The Fat* 71) Esther openly agrees that she is not basically a neat person. According to her, it is a very expensive business to be neat and clean. When she got married to Alan she tried her best to be neat and clean for the sake of her husband. Neatness is a quality often associated with housewives. Esther followed it when she stayed with Alan. But now hesitates to incorporate the quality of neatness as a deliberate move to deconstruct the gender oppression which she suffered as a wife. "None of it was my true nature" (*The Fat* 72)

Esther feels that those jobs which she did in the past as a housewife was utterly useless. She cleaned, polished, dusted, washed ironed etc. But even than her husband only found fault with her for not reaching the perfection. Phyllis is different from Esther. She cleaned and kept the house tidy for the happiness of her husband Gerry. She makes food and the smell of cooking food welcomed him. She also dressed up well and put on a “welcome- home-darling smile, just like in the women’s magazines” (*The Fat* 74)

In the matter of the extramarital relationship of men both Esther and Phyllis again have an oppositional stand. Phyllis did not think Gerry's affair with other girls as a threat to their marriage like Esther. Esther reacts against

this saying that Phyllis is not brave enough to be a single woman. Every relation came to Phyllis in the form of Gerry. She is a mere parasite. Phyllis is actually supporting the infidelity of Gerry and voicing that it is in a man's nature to be non monogamous. Esther had deep insight in recognizing the secret love affair of her own husband and reacted to the infidelity as an independent being, not as an enduring hetero female.

Alan hints that wives are supposed to be tactful and silent in bringing their husbands back from another woman. They will have to watch their figure and make themselves beautiful in all sense to gain attention back from husbands. Esther expects that if wives go with other men, their husbands would never take such an effort to bring back them. She realizes that “Just that there’s one law for husbands and another for wives” (*The Fat 97*) Esther says “I wish I had been born a man” (*The Fat 97*)

The difference is again revealed when Esther expresses her dislike of Alan being a writer. But Phyllis takes a different view that she would be happy if her husband Gerry was a writer. She sees the positive aspect of it that Gerry would be available at home most of the time and she too can help a lot in typing and all. Esther rethinks the situation that if she was the person who engaged in typing all through the evening, how would Alan take the situation. Esther is certain that Alan couldnot stand it. “That’s another of the rules of marriage. Husbands can snub wives, but wives aren’t allowed to indulge themselves in artistic endeavors: wives can only do so in secret when husbands

are out of the house. Wives are a miserable lot. I shall never be a wife again"
(*The Fat* 101)

The perspective of Phyllis is totally different from Esther's. She opines that it is not right to think this way. "It's perfectly natural for women to be wives, and to look after husbands who are not really fit to look after themselves, and it was very unfair of you to try and stop him writing. And most unwise. No wonder he looked elsewhere" (*The Fat*101). Esther is trying to get away from the gender oppression as part of the heteronormative system. She could well identify the double standards of morality of the system in marginalizing women. But Phyllis, on the other hand, is actually voicing the system and is totally unaware of the ideology.

Alan had been behaving in such a way at home that because of the marriage with Esther made him lose his creative talents. He had been acting thus to annoy Esther as if she was the obstacle. He assumed that despite the annoyance he could complete his writing. Esther has realized that "Men don't make women happy. Men make women unhappy" (*The Fat* 102) But Phyllis hold the view that "Gerry used to make me happy. I was so very happy once"
(*The Fat* 103). She believes that happiness can be imparted only by husbands.

The reason why Phyllis did a breast enlargement surgery because her husband fancied her bigger- breasted. Phyllis was angry when Esther disclosed about the surgery done by her on breasts. "You ought to be ashamed it was a degrading thing to do. To allow your body to be tampered with by a man, for

the gratification of a man, conforming to a wholly masculine notion of what a woman's body ought to be" (*The Fat* 136) "They are, let me remind you, mammary glands, milk producers, not male exciters" (*The Fat* 137) "Phyllis you became less of a woman, for all your brand new bubbly bosom" (*The Fat* 137).

When Phyllis called Alan and asked to reunite with his wife Esther, he found Esther's faults again. The reason for the irresponsible son Peter in his adolescent life is Esther. He even doubts the parentage of Peter that when he found contraceptives in his sons pocket that he was unlike his son at his age now. He again remarks the strange behaviour of Esther once she had. According to Alan Esther went mad because she cropped her hair, ate apples alone and went to streets. The men visitors frequently visited her in the flat. Susan admired Alan but Esther never did. She has no capacity to admire men Alan is a wreck because of lack of food, lust, literature, Esther's hysterics, Susan's neurotics and finally flu.

Phyllis met Alan in person to talk and solve his familial issues. Alan cleverly persuaded Phyllis into his bed. Phyllis after hearing the problems of Esther and the curiosity to know what happened between Gerry and Esther was thoughtless and allowed Alan to exploit the situation. Alan remarked Phyllis to be the proper feminine woman: "You are gentle and docile and slim and pretty and neat like a doll. You endure things" (*The Fat* 125). Phyllis didn't allow herself to complete the action by Alan and she realized before and left his house.

Alan found a positive feature in Susan like that of Phyllis that: "You take your pleasures simply and your relationships lightly" (*The Fat* 151). This was Alan expected from Susan in fact. Alan wants only some sexual experience from her. Susan expects a kind of adventure in terms of love that she has high regard when Alan loved her after deserting his wife. She is later disappointed when she has sexual intercourse with Alan. Susan finds a way to rescue from the sadistic pleasure of Alan when they were interrupted by her old lover William. Thus she realized the true nature of man.

The success of Esther lies in her insightful nature. She had great insight to realize the real need of Alan in planning the dieting plan. It was her insight that enabled her to understand the relationship between Alan and Susan and also the close intimate happenings between her husband Alan and Phyllis. The oppositional feminine strategy developed by Esther is also part of her insight to prove that gender is a particular type of process which caters the first dichotomous pair of gender distinction.

Esther even if she goes back and lives with Alan, she is resolved to collapse the distinction between sex and gender. That is clear when she thinks at the end of the novel thus: "It doesn't seem to make much difference where one is" (*The Fat* 188). This decision of Esther seems to point that even if she lives as part of the marriage institution, she will continue with the same perspective that gender is a kind of accomplishment and gender is not something that is natural but a series of acts which involves a repetition of doing rather than being. Butler points out this idea in *Gender Trouble*:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (33).

Esther is victorious at the end that she has liberated herself in the matter of gender performance. She imparts a fluid concept to the matter of gender performance. She refuses to voice the rigid distinctive features of gender category through her body politics. She is successful in marking the integrity of female body by nonconforming to the standards associated with it. It is certain that the life again with Alan would be a challenging one where she will completely prove that gender is a mere performance. This is rightly said by Butler thus: “Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent” (528).

The notion of gender performativity takes a different role in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. Ruth, the protagonist enacts gender unconsciously. She fairly appropriates her gender category like any other women in the world. The unexpected turn of life of the protagonist Ruth, made her rethink the role of gender in her life. The strategy employed by Ruth is quite strange.

Patriarchal standards value the beauty of women in all pursuit of her life. What is beautiful is regulated and maintained by mainstream discourses. The body politics that she involves is the destabilization of gendered motherhood and the full appropriation of her very self and beauty through a metamorphosis of plastic surgery. She succeeds in recreating a powerful identity through body manipulation and materializing revenge.

Motherhood has been the most popular unpaid work in the history of world and life of a woman. It requires a special performance on the part of the mother to look after the child and hold the full responsibility of the entire aspects of a child. Though the nature of work and expectations have advanced and changed, the magnitude of responsibility remains the same and intense. Mother is the first school as far as a child is concerned and no matter, if anything bad happens the first blame, is not upon the individual but upon the way he/she is brought up by. Thus society devalues if anything bad happens and rarely acknowledges mother if anything good happens for a member of the family.

For most of the women, motherhood is not an option but a compulsion thrust upon them as part of heterosexuality. In most cases, she has no control over the choice when and whether to be a mother or not at all. The long-standing stigma associated with choosing not to have a child has not been eradicated. Instead women are forced to represent the perfect mother like Keira opined thus: “we are confronted with impossible ideals of full-time motherhood: attachment moms who breastfeed, co-sleep, and literally wear

their babies day in and day out, or "helicopter helpers" who hover, chopper-like, ready to swoop in to do their kids' homework. These women have little time for anything other than mothering" (28).

It is important to analyse the two phases of motherhood in Ruth and the circumstances in which she decided to dismantle the gendered role of mother and woman. The strategy which Ruth employs to show that gender and gendered roles of a woman are just performance for the sake of hegemonic hands and it is worth analysing as it reveals those key sites of oppression. The second strategy she employs is again the appropriation of her ugly body through cosmetic surgery in the simulacrum of Mary Fisher's face and body. The development of the idea is not to experience how beautiful woman sustains but to materialize the revenge on the husband, Bobbo who forced her into the realm of abject misery.

The choice of becoming the wife of Bobbo and mother of Bobbo's kids was a matter of subjugation in the case of Ruth. Ruth was helpless in her adolescent stage as her mother and stepfather abandoned her for various reasons. The younger sisters of Ruth had good prospectus as they were charming and got married and settled. Ruth, on the other hand, was a very ugly looking girl and her parents worried about her physical appearance. Ruth was working with Angus and Brenda in the typing pool. Brenda empathized Ruth as she faced a similar situation in her life. They provided shelter for Ruth at their own house.

The sexual explorations of Bobbo on Ruth made her pregnant. Angus and Brenda wanted her son to marry Ruth. The situation demanded Bobbo marry Ruth when she was five months pregnant. On the very first day of the marriage, Bobbo realized he was wrong in his decision. He saw people sniggering at the huge size of his wife. As soon as the first baby was born, she conceived the next. Ruth never had a chance for selection and decision of the happenings of her own life. She never chooses wifedom, motherhood, and married life. The concept of good wife did not work in the life of Ruth.

But Ruth was a good mother and wife living in the Eden grove with her kids and with the occasional visits of her husband. The mother in law, Brenda often praised her qualities of being a good homemaker. "How nicely she does everything... How lucky Bobbo is" "She's such a good mother...You have to respect her" (*Life and Loves*15). Ruth was the ideal mother to her kids and she was made to feel happy with these traditional roles. It is right when Keira observes thus:

By the 1990s, even many feminists at least partially internalized the neo-traditional "mommy myth" that made criticism of the institution nearly impossible. Women, according to this myth, were incomplete without children, and Good Mothers devoted their entire beings—body, soul, time, and mind—to their children. Those mothers who did not fall within the narrow definition of the mommy myth—single,

working, or minority mothers—were, of course, Bad Mothers (29).

Ruth knows the secret affair of Bobbo with the writer Mary Fisher. Bobbo occasionally visits his wife and children. She was certain that Bobbo loved her but he is not in love with her. He loves only Mary Fisher. Bobbo openly states to Ruth that “Our marriage was rather one of convenience, my dear. I think we both acknowledged that at the time” (*Life and Loves* 22). Bobbo, in fact, does not love his children. They stood between him and Mary Fisher and he often had strange dreams in which they came to sorry ends.

The first phase of motherhood came to an end soon after the quarrel with Bobbo in front of his parents. Ruth disclosed the extramarital relationship of Bobbo with Mary Fisher in front of his parents. Bobbo out of uncontrolled anger shouted thus: " You are a third rate person, You are a bad mother, a worse wife, and a dreadful cook. In fact, I don't think you are a woman at all. I think that what you are is a she-devil!" (*Life and Loves* 47). With these terrifying words on Ruth, the second phase of her womanhood and motherhood commences.

Ruth decided to "peel away the wife, the mother" (*Life and Loves* 49) and began to think about the possibilities of a she-devil. She thinks there is no shame, no guilt and effort to be good in becoming a she-devil. She was a good wife beyond endurance and still, her husband abandoned her for a life with a beautiful mistress. The gender performance of Ruth at this juncture marks a

paradigm shift from the conventional role of wife and mother to purely unconventional which contest the traditional notions of femininity.

The house was in the name of Bobbo and he declared his new life with Mary Fisher to Ruth over the phone. He also added that a certain amount will be released at the expense of children. He also informed his plan to sell off the house to meet further expenses. The first step taken by Ruth to dismantle the conventional trait monogamy is by having a sexual relationship with the caretaker, Carver. When Carver enquires the reason of Ruth's entry into his house, She says: "This was the first step..the breaking of the first rule" (*Life and Loves* 60) According to West and Zimmerman:

Gender is not a fixed trait, but is an active accomplishment which occurs within specific social and historical contexts and intersects with age, race, and social class. Although gender is fluid and socially constructed, men and women are held accountable to normative notions of masculinity and femininity. Individuals possess agency to practice gender in multiple ways; however, nonnormative gendered performances are usually noticed and negatively assessed (136).

Ruth had set her own house on fire through careful manipulation. She succeeded in uprooting the base of the family. She also deposited her children at High Tower with Bobbo and his mistress Mary. Bobbo and Mary verified the happenings of a house fire and permitted a temporary stay for children in the hope of finding a new one soon. Ruth left to an unknown

destination where the second phase of her life without a gendered role is expected to commence.

Ruth in the second phase of motherhood never lamented over the loss of her children. She concentrated on the ambitions and goals of her second phase of life. She was well organized in executing the plans. She played a crucial role in bringing back the mother of Mary Fisher back from the old age home and destroyed the privacy of Mary at home. Ruth also cleverly manipulated the official account of Bobbo and could transfer a huge amount and thus cheated the clients of Bobbo. Ruth was also instrumental in influencing the judge to get maximum punishment for Bobbo in the matter fraud cheque and monetary issues. Mary Fisher in the meantime was afflicted with cancer and breathed her last. With the huge financial amount Ruth underwent a thorough plastic surgery and transformed into the exact figure and shape of Mary Fisher. The transformation into the simulacrum is not the actual appropriation to be a beautiful woman and take advantage of men and matters. It was a purely political strategy to materialize revenge and dismantle the traditional notions of domestic femininity.

Ruth was, in fact, enacting the motherhood defined by the male standards. She never regretted the past life. She identified herself with various other relationships where she became happy and content. One such relationship is Nurse Hopkins whom she met and befriended at Lucas Hill Hospital. Ruth met Nurse Hopkins in the emergency tranquilizing team of the hospital. They got on well each other and agreed to share a bedroom together in the nursing

block. "Freaks! That's what we two are" (*Life and Loves* 129) remarked Nurse Hopkins. Both Ruth and Nurse Hopkins slept together with their beds near and there was much cuddling, kissing and sexual experimentation between them. They both identified a lesbian love between them and maintained the relationship till death. Nurse Hopkins said, "I have never been so happy in my life" (*Life and Loves* 139).

Ruth after the cosmetic surgery attends Mary Fisher's funeral where she meets Bobbo as a prisoner. Bobbo is confused when he sees the figure of Mary Fisher alive. Ruth purchased the High Tower and at the end realized the power of beauty and money. She, in fact, set a new pattern of wifedom, womanhood, and motherhood. Ruth voices for a redefinition of the role of woman in the patriarchal world. In the western society, the father figure occupies the central figure but the motherhood is a gendered act dictated by the male terrain. Women in fact rarely experience the real feel of mothering. In the case of Ruth, she never had a bonded relationship with anyone throughout the end of the first phase of motherhood. She was looking after her husband and children just like any other woman in the world. She never experienced what it is meant to be loved. She was inside the family organization and was never satisfied with its double standards of morality.

Throughout the life, Ruth's identity was largely dependent on the expectation of others. As a daughter she was an "ugly duckling" and the very identity of her was restricted by the feminine notions. As an adolescent being, despite the ugliness, she was an object of sexual gratification and was at the

mercy of Angus and Brenda for survival. As a wife, she was rarely acknowledged, loved and cared by her own husband. Motherhood was not a chosen task like most of the women in the world. She proved to be the best homemaker as she was alone doing the task. The other roles other than the homemaker was dependant on the expectation of social norms and hence turned out to be complex.

It is certain that the blame falls on Ruth rather than on Bobbo in the matter of children. We are taught to think by the social norms that it is the duty of mother in the absence and presence of a father to cater to the needs of children. Ruth with her deliberate action made us rethink that it is also the duty of the father to look after children. None can blame Ruth for dismantling the motherhood because she was threatened of her very survival by her own husband. She was certain that if the situation continues, she would have to grapple more with children. Social norms rarely acknowledge a mother as an individual. She too is a human being with emotional necessities. But the moment when motherhood commences she is taken as an agent who is readily accessible for full service.

Ruth never made her children orphans and had deposited them at the right hands. Ruth with her nonnormative act questions the equality of parentage. A full service in the form of motherhood is expected from women by the society. Women never had the opportunity to realize the feeling of mothering. Reilly observes the difference between motherhood and mothering in the patriarchal world thus:

The term “motherhood” refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word “mothering” refers to women’s experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women. The reality of patriarchal motherhood thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of gynocentric or feminist mothering. In other words, while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women’s own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power (2).

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* refutes the gender dichotomy. Gender binary no longer stands when we confront a variety of genders other than male and female. Butler imparts a fluid aspect for gender and it is interesting to note that all identities are in a constant flux and prepares for the process of becoming. Gender identity is never a stable entity and never fulfils and completes the process. Butler describes Gender as: “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender* 45).

Butler’s theory suggests that there is no identity prior to these performances and the very notion of identity comes into being through repeated acts. Butler points out the performativity of gender because “There is no gender

identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender* 34). Motherhood in the patriarchal world is a gendered activity. To extend the performativity concept of Butler to other identities seems logical and understandable.

In the case of motherhood, it defines a different identity for a woman and hence it is a performative construct. Ruth never had a feeling of pride in becoming the mother of two children. She married Bobbo when she was five months pregnant. This clearly illuminates the difference between performing motherhood and being a mother. However, the heterosexual society pushes Ruth alone to the realm of a bad mother and rescues Bobbo from maternal qualities. The subversive strategy that Ruth adopted challenges the possibility of emotional tie exclusively existing between mother and children and also interrogates the role of the father in sharing the duties of parenting. If gender is a performance then all the relational identities as part of gendering are also performances.

Fay Weldon's novel *Praxis* concentrates on the lives of a woman and their dilemma and incompleteness at the hands of their respective partners. The women in the novel interrogate self and identity of the woman and offer a method for transformation and reinvention of the female identity. The theory of gender performance makes us think twice about gender, sexual categories, and gender expectations. 'Sex' and 'gender' are closely associated in the heterosexual matrix. The notions of gender and sex are preconceived and

hence subject performs the script already written taking it as natural and relevant. Gender is a particular type of process set in the reigning signification system with a rigid script of regulations to enact.

The protagonist of the novel *Praxis* performs her gender as a child, adolescent girl, lover, wife, and mother. It is worth analysing the gender performance of Praxis to understand the subject position and fixity of gender categories in the heterosexual matrix and how they are exploited maximum to cater the needs of men. The method of reinvention of a female identity is materialized with another interesting character named Irma. Irma, the college friend of Praxis is the kind of hard and incomplete woman to menfolk and those who follow patriarchal rules. The gender performance and deconstruction of it happen to both characters at a later stage. The exploitation of married life and inability to channelize the energy that which make them satisfied, made them frustrated and gradually changes and searches for the real identity.

Praxis, an illegitimate second daughter of her parents lived with her mad mother Lucy and her half cracked sister Hypatia. Praxis was the pretty girl and Hypatia artistic one and very sensitive. Praxis had little social connections as part of the type of family she was born into. Ben and Lucy had a living together relationship and they both were already married previously. Benjamin Duveen found Lucy from the sexual slumming and began a short period of life with her resulting in the birth of two daughters.

The gender roles and rules are consciously and unconsciously internalized through various positions, representations, and discourses. A girl is supposed to fall in love with a boy and that is rendered natural and real. But Praxis after the instruction that she gets from her friend Elaine: “You have to have a crush on somebody” (*Praxis* 39). Praxis selected a girl Louise Gaynor, as her lover who had bars in Athletics, Latin, English and French. She did not speak to Louise but held her passion in her heart and was away from the accepted reality. Praxis had a habit of writing a diary in which she mixed fact and fantasy. She narrated about the fantasy of love with Louise that they kissed behind the bicycle sheds after a school concert. Lucy read the diary of Praxis and made it an issue and informed school officials. “Patricia is corrupt and perverted. She’s the devil’s spawn. I’ve seen it in her eyes” (*Praxis* 46). Praxis’s act of selecting a girl lover is not a deliberate attempt to subvert gender role but can be the lack of knowledge of societal rules.

Praxis allows herself to exploit physically and mentally during Exeter University days. She met Philip and Willie at a weekly students dance session and in the fit of alcohol allowed Philip to explore her physical body thus losing virginity. Willie made use of her help in writing assignments, cooking food and doing other domestic activities and also physically experimenting her body sexually. Philip loses interest after the first encounter and Willie uses her as an instrument to enjoy the life by labouring Praxis. When once Praxis got a superior grade and Willie a lower one he began tormenting her hinting the first encounter with Philip was the matter of toss of a

coin between Willie and Philip. That Philip used her for the first time and then Willie should have her for her domestic and secretarial services. Praxis was shocked at the sudden presentation of the malice which underlies love and relationship between man and woman.

Praxis likes to maintain the status of having a steady boyfriend and endured such torments from the part of Willie. She thus purposefully bagged a lower grade for assignments and wrote Willies and made him win a superior grade. After the University days, Willie used Praxis and her home at Brighton for excusing rent. They had a living together relationship in 109 Holden Roadhouse. Despite the warning from friends like Irma and Colleen, she continued the life with Willie at Brighton. She worked hard for the material gain of Willie. Willie says: "The trouble with you, Praxis is that you are a born housewife" (*Praxis* 103).

Praxis seldom held actual cash in her hand. Willie was a miser and the little illicit family, all the same, were well fed and well clothed for remarkably little money. Praxis lost her studies and often wondered what she had done with life and realized it can't go on like this. Willie pressurized Praxis to find some job like that of the maid, Judith. Willie also requested her to marry on practical grounds. But Praxis disagreed. The need for money and independence made Praxis to be a prostitute at Raffles esplanade Dive along with her friend Elaine. That continued for a very short time and could earn only little because she realized that she committed incest that her father who deserted her family became a client unknowingly.

Praxis broke the life with Willie at Brighton after the shock of an incestuous relationship with father and relocated to London. Irma was instrumental in making Praxis presentable in terms of physical appearance. Irma says "It is all a matter of presentation" (*Praxis* 155). She took Praxis to the hairdresser and had a makeover. Praxis applied for a job in a research department of the BBC and failed to get it in as much as she had no qualifications. But the makeover brought prettiness in Praxis and because of that reason she got a job on the reception desk.

Praxis got married to Ivor within three months while working in the BBC on the research desk. Ivor believed in hard work, honesty, industry, and firm. He did not want to hear Praxis's life story and wanted her to have begun the day he met her and his opinions to be hers. Right from the beginning, Praxis realized "I'm a figment of your imagination" (*Praxis* 161). Most of the woman after marriage is expected to be the slave of their husbands. Ivor expected the same from Praxis. Praxis after series of conflicts and confusion finally agreed to marry Ivor.

Praxis lived to the plans of her husband Ivor. She gave up job her job as Ivor did not want a working wife. They had two children Robert and Claire. Praxis was depressed in the role of an active mother. She feels only disappointment not elevated or spirited in the new role. They both lived in the largest house on the estate. Ivor brought too many gifts to make her happier and repeatedly asked: "You are happy?" (*Praxis*169). She replied "Perfectly happy" (*Praxis* 169). But the question always puzzled her and She often

thought “How would she know if she were happy?” (*Praxis* 169) she felt neither happiness nor unhappiness. She waited for what she had no idea and sacrificed her role as a good mother and wife.

The conflict in the mind of Praxis is reflected in the act of developing short-term affairs with other men before marriage with Ivor and after marriage. Before marriage, Praxis went to a party and drank excess and came along with a cameraman. Ivor happened to see both of them in the bed and excused both of them with less reaction. Ivor knelt by Praxis bed and wept. Praxis says “I can do as I like... We’re not married” (*Praxis* 164). The other two relations after marriage were not known by Ivor. One was the estate agent and the other with a doctor. All these are sure signs of Praxis’s attempt to redefine the role of wife and motherhood unconsciously.

The smoothness of their life ended when Praxis asked Ivor for the accommodation of her mother Lucy to their house. Ivor was concerned with their children but not with the duty and responsibility of Praxis towards her mother. The situation got worsened when Hilda sent a letter to Ivor detailing the prostitution episode of Praxis life and thus ending the smooth flow of their life. Ivor began to find faults with every act of Praxis. There began a distance in all aspects of their life.

The revenge of Ivor towards Praxis was materialized when they accepted the key party invitation with neighbours and Praxis slept with Rory and Ivor slept with Carol. Praxis realized the fact that she could not stay with

her husband and children anymore and left the children with Beryl, the neighbour. Praxis left to Irma's house to look after her kids in Irma's absence. Peter and Irma, both of them were also not in good terms and at the same time Irma is pregnant. Praxis dismantled the concept of womanhood in terms of wife and mother in leaving them at the hands of Ivor alone. Praxis was living not for herself but to cater the needs of others alone. The act of deserting by Praxis seems purposeful as an attempt to search for a space of her own.

The life at the house of Philip and Irma soon got destabilized and strained. Philip and Praxis got married and Praxis had to play the active role of mother, wife and an employee in the Copy Department writing pamphlets for the electricity board. Praxis soon faced difficulty to meet both ends of her life in terms of work and home. Philip demanded the nude pictures of Praxis to edit with the film he is shooting as the present actress denied such photos. Praxis didn't give consent and the result was they both distanced from each other. Praxis at a later point of time gave consent but Philip had already done with another woman. The experience of life with Philip made Praxis realize the truth with a woman and her gender performance:

We are betrayed on all sides. Our bodies betray us, leading us to love where our interests do not lie. Our instincts betray us, inducing us to nest-build and procreate-but to follow instinct is not to achieve fulfillment, for we are more than animals. Our idleness betrays us, ... Our brains betray us, keeping one step, for the sake of convenience, to avoid hurt, behind the

male. Our passivity betrays us whispering in our ears, oh, it isn't worth a fight! He will only lie on the far side of the bed! Or be angry and violent! Or find someone else more agreeable! We cringe and placate, waiting for the master's smile. It is despicable. We are not even slaves (*Praxis* 205).

Praxis denied the next demand of Philip to shoot the dying days of her mother in the hospital. Praxis realized that Philip is a man with unfeeling and maturity. To have peace with him after the funeral, Praxis went straight to the hotel where the film unit is located. There she happened to see both Philip and Serena making love. The disagreement and quarrel after the intrusion to the room of Philip and Serena ended up with Praxis completely moving out from the house of Philip without any savings. Praxis wept for evaporating from the life of Philip and understood the fact that she has nowhere to go other than Irma and women friends.

The next phase of life of Praxis began with Irma. Irma promised a new life and world thus:

Your life is just beginning if you learn to live it among women. I know you have a low opinion of your own sex: it is inevitable, our inferiority is written into the language: but you must be aware, you must know what's happening: its half the battle. Come to a meeting (*Praxis* 226).

The contradiction existed with Praxis at the time with she began life with Irma. She believed that to be a wife and mother is the highest purpose of a woman. But Irma questioned and challenged the notion of Praxis by pointing her act in deserting her own children Robert and Claire at the hands of Ivor. The act of deserting children seems deliberate and at the same time she is searching for a platform of her own and could not identify with the life with any man associated with her. Praxis soon joined the consciousness-raising group.

Irma, Raya, Tracey and Bess as part of the Women's Movement were bringing out a weekly broadsheet devoted to the wrongs done to women by society. Bess rode on a bicycle and delivered the paper through letterboxes. Praxis was the editor of the broadsheet. The broadsheet grew into a newspaper and Praxis wrote rousing editorials which she half believed and half did not. Ideas once seemed strange now seemed commonplace and to her advantage, she was astonished to recollect how in the past she had endured and adjusted. Praxis acknowledged herself a convert to the Women's movement. The happiness and comfort of the present platform led her to think that let all women in the world think as she thought, join and carry the comfort of sisterhood in a happier family than the world had ever known.

Praxis with the new perspective saw women betrayed, exploited and oppressed. She saw that women did insignificant and unimportant works without any prejudice. She began to feel the men's lives were less important and the life of the women seemed significant in expressing the true self and

conditioned self. She lost her belief in man-made myths to cater patriarchy. She was elated and truly spirited in her writing and women from all walks of life listened what she had to say and believed and followed her. Praxis realized that she was safe and saved from the unwanted clutches of familial love, shoddy grieves, and pointless troubles. She can see the possibility and scope of a new version of self and identity in the new dimension. The new thoughts of Praxis had a tremendous consequence upon the life of other women associated with her.

Praxis went to the studio to take part in a discussion on the reform of the abortion laws on television. She was recognized as a spokesperson for the street by most of the people. There was the mixed opinion of mob towards the issue. A few came up to her and refused her as a mass murderer and most of them warmly welcomed her perspective. Praxis spent her valuable time for the betterment of the life of women in all walks of life. Praxis was not shattered when Victoria, the daughter of Irma and Philip announced her lesbian relationship openly to the family. Victoria moved from Philip's house and stayed with Irma and Praxis. She assured that lesbianism was a higher state than heterosexuality and there was affection, comfort, safety and happiness found in girls and only war and fights with boys. Praxis remembered about her lesbian love for Louise Gaynor and realized that things would have been different if she was like Victoria.

The new perspective on abortion laws became popular with the passage of time. It had greater consequence in the life of Praxis when Mary, the

daughter of Miss Leonard became pregnant by a married man whom she met at a party. Mary has two children of Edward who married her and went on sailing. The third pregnancy made her jobless and when she asked the opinion of Praxis she was against the birth and advised her to use contraceptives and also to think about abortion. Mary sticks to her own principle that she associated sex with procreation.

Mary was in the hospital and the third son was born and baby is a monogoloid. She was greatly depressed and regards the end of her life and job with such a baby. Mary also thought about the possible death of a newborn monogoloid baby. It was executed and materialized by Praxis when Mary left to the bathroom in the hospital. Praxis killed the baby by pressing the pillow tight on it and thus ended its life. She called the nurse and informed that baby had breathing difficulty. The result was the baby was no more. But Praxis confessed the act with Dr. Gibb and this led her two-year imprisonment in prison.

Praxis at the end of the novel is released from the prison and continues with the difficulties of age and other body related issues. As a woman, she has endured a bitter experience that any woman ever confronted. She has successfully performed the traditional role of wife and mother in three different situations. Praxis though contradicted with the feeling and duty that she fulfilled, she acted only when there was a bad reflex from the counterpart. The gender and its performance were successfully materialized in the three different life with men of her life. Butler's alternative with performativity has

been successfully leading by Praxis to break with the gender script through performing roles in new ways. Legitimate, committing incest, prostitution, the traditional role of wife three times, women activist and finally a murderess enabled her life journey to travel from conventional pole to the unconventional pole and recognized the truth behind it.

Death of a She-Devil explores negotiations of gender performances by man and woman to woman/woman relationships and alters the task of the performativity of doing gender in a newer light... The conventional notions of masculinity and femininity are deep-rooted in the psyche without being aware of the ideology and its performance behind it. The novel and its characters and incidents interrogate the conventionality and also establishes the possibility of new patterns of relationships among human beings. It also foregrounds the instability of gender as stable categories and heterosexual matrix. The characters revert the heteronormative power dynamics inherent in the relationship between man and woman.

The constructive nature of gender performance is fabricated and rendered natural by the heterosexual matrix. Suzanne Pennington is right in his observation that gender is not inherent in male and female:

Social constructionist perspectives perceive the gendered power differentials between women and men are instead an effect of cultural and social structural developments that create two sexes as masculine and feminine people; gender is

not a reflection of any inherent traits of males and females, but rather gendering is a process that occurs through performing certain sets of behaviours. Some critiques of biologically determined dual-sex categories attempt also, via their deconstructions of the male/female binary, to challenge heterosexuality as the sexual norm (35).

The alternative sexuality has been less acknowledged by the heteronormative society as it destabilizes the preconceived notions of its principles. Bisexuality disrupts binary categories of sexuality and opens up new possibilities of relationships that which is gender fluid. The bisexual tendency is natural not deviance and reveals the nature of sexuality as not a fixed entity. Heterosexuality operates discursively and is taken to be the norm and truth through various discourses. *Death of a She-Devil* opens up a platform for bisexual discourse in which the central characters both Tyler and Valerie represent and voices the alternative sexuality and performance. They constantly negotiate the representation of self within the binary of femininity and masculinity.

Tyler FinchPatchett, the grandson of She-Devil is a strikingly beautiful boy with an agreeable nature and I don't care attitude. He is aged twenty-three and is unemployed and hence resentful. He understands the reason behind it is his own physical appearance. He is very beautiful and possesses the features of a pretty girl. Often he is misunderstood as a gay which he was not. He wondered about the problem with his beauty and also thought for the

possible ways to make himself look less beautiful. He had a surgical procedure of his strabismus eye and cured of his eye misalignment. He even thought to pull out a front tooth and thus spoil his looks.

Tyler lived in different circumstances with his family. The unstable relationships among family have given him a different view on masculinity. And also his mother and sisters often attacked the superiority of masculinity. Thus he was conditioned right from the early age about the superiority of women as a category of sex. Though a graduate he was always pushed aside from the chance by a pretty girl. Tyler is least preferred by the employers to avoid unwanted troubles that may likely happen with handsome boys between other employees.

Miss Swanson of Jobcentre Plus suggested to apply for a minimum wage job at High Tower and also hints about the familial connections with Ruth Patchett. She also adds the possibility to reject him for being very beautiful. She opines thus “Employers have their own little ways. And you’re such a pretty boy. I suppose you could always dress up as a girl” (*Death* 36) Valerie suggests for the presence of one more male member other than Bobbo in the Widdershins Walk. She suggests Tyler, the grandson of She-Devil to expose that there exists no war between the sexes. Valerie at the same time wishes that If Tyler was a girl. “It is a pity Tyler isn’t a girl” (*Death* 41).

When Valerie persuades to include Tyler in the Widdershins Walk, She-Devil also thinks like the rest and imagines that the happenings would be

so different if Tyler was a girl. "If only I had been told about a granddaughter, not a grandson. A Tanya, not a Tyler. If she was halfway intelligent I could have trained her up. She could have been the one to take over" (*Death* 63). Valerie wants to project that feminism is not an exclusive space for women alone. "To show the world that feminist men are welcome" (*Death* 62). It is highly remarkable that when She-Devil enquires whether Tyler is a heterosexual or gay, Valerie remarks "Fluid... like so many of us" (*Death* 63).

Nurse Samantha Travers looks after Bobbo in the daytime. When she realized the death of Bobbo is very near and sympathized with the old man and thought about a family reconciliation. Bobbo also expressed his wish to see his children before death to Nurse Samantha. A sudden thought struck her as a bolt that she had actually been connected with the grandson of Bobbo, Tyler in their school days. Through Miss Swanson, she picked the phone number and arranged for the deathbed scene. As no men were allowed inside the High Tower, It would be possible that If Tyler dressed up as a girl, things would happen smooth.

Tyler dressed up as a woman in the white uniform of Samantha and wore his own shoes which seemed feminine. He also used a blue cloak to disguise his flat figure and passed the security check easily. He liked the sense of containment as he belted tightly his clothes, compressed in many parts and at the same time freer in some parts. Tyler thought "It was fun, he thought, being a girl, and could be perfectly well endured in a good cause. It was sort of like being reborn, starting afresh" (*Death* 192). The act of Tyler dressed up a

woman is a clear instance of performing drag. He is accustomed to a life and a world where a woman is all powerful and established. So he feels relieved and comfortable with the feminine outfit and doesn't make much difference as conceived by the heterosexual society.

Tyler was with Bobbo when he breathed his last. Tyler hid away in a shadowy corner of the room and slipped away unnoticed. But the security girls made him strip down to t-shirt and jeans and looked him up and down and asked for no further proof of his maleness. Valerie met him and was happy with it. Tyler, on the other hand, was inclined to a powerful woman like Valerie as he was accustomed to them. The intention behind all these dramas is for the hope of getting a job in the High Tower. High tower officials didn't make the entry of a man an issue because he was the grandson of She-Devil and also Valerie is totally interested in Tyler.

The fixity of original identity is destabilized within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual modification of the butch/femme identities. Gender categorization is a mere illusion practiced and idealized with repetitive patterns through ages. It is just a fabrication for the smooth functioning of the heterosexual matrix and is heavily inscribed on the surface of bodies. To Butler the very notion of drag and its performance dismantles the concept of gender dichotomy:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being

performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “Woman”(What its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence (*Gender* 137).

The act of Tyler dressed up as a girl is purely situational. He displays the essence of masculinity and also has a love affair with a goth girl named Hermoine. The gender category of masculine and its traits are well performed by the character Tyler but the misfortune of unemployment and the prospects of a new job opportunity and the emotionality involved in a relationship led him to perform the gender which is different from his anatomy. Weldon foresees an upcoming world where women all are powerful and established. In such world, men are tempted to become a woman to have all sort of comfort and satisfaction of life.

The success of She-Devil has led her to think Tyler, her grandson to be a granddaughter. She-Devil materialized the equal pay for jobs among man and woman. She has left a mark on the society and has become an admirable

personality. The Queen made her a dame. She is greatly adored by the society for her untiring service for the welfare of gender parity. She acknowledges that she is old now and would like to welcome death at any moment. She is happy and content at the old age as she has done her business and is quite satisfied. “The world is as I want it: Women triumphant, men submissive” (*Death 22*) Institute for Gender Parity is a community set for women forty years back. It is a community of women living and working in the high tower. The mission of IGP is to bring about equality of dignity and wealth between genders.

She-Devil feels depressed when Tyler undergoes gender reassignment surgery to become a female carried out by Dr. Ruby Simmins. She never thought Tyler would take the wish so seriously. She-Devil is certain that the IGP will have a remarkable future ahead. But on the other hand, Valerie pressurizes Tyler to be Tyla for different reasons. She has manipulated the process of gender transition to uphold the power of High Tower and eventually she elopes with Leda with a handful of money leaving Tyla alone after their marriage. Hence the right heir of She-Devil succeeds the throne after the mysterious death of She-Devil. This transition is actually a blessing in disguise that it set a platform for a new discourse that woman is powerful and man has transitioned to a woman to continue the leadership.

Bisexuality is not a deviance as far as an individual is concerned. Heterosexual matrix encourages the relationship between man and woman alone to serve the ideology of patriarchal world. The alternate sexuality was

curtailed by the reigning heterosexist culture. Bisexuality is an alternate mode of sexuality as Kay Vernalis defines it as thus:

Bisexuality, like heterosexuality and homosexuality, is a sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is usually defined in terms of one or more of the following criteria: *behaviour*, the gender of the people with whom one *has sex*; *sexual desire*- the gender of the people to whom one is attracted or finds arousing; *fantasy*- the content of one's sexual *imaginings*; and *self-identification*- the *label* one uses to describe or think of oneself (162).

Valerie, a twenty-five-year-old exemplary employee of the IGP is a competent, literate and a dedicated feminist with a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney. According to She-Devil, the lack of real experience of the women movement and mere understanding of theory have made her with full of misjudged enthusiasm. It is only a year that Valerie became She Devil's PA and since then she had become indispensable and a very good companion to her boss. Valerie challenges the notion of gender performance and its fixity by disclosing her stand as a lesbian "And I'm supposed to be a lesbian" (*Death* 62) and in another circumstance as a bisexual "I told you I was a bi" (*Death* 220). So Valerie is a bisexual that she loved Leda a security female staff once and married Tyla and also loved Tyler, grandson of She-Devil. Valerie is instrumental in bringing Tyler to the High Tower and transitioning him to Tyla.

It was Valerie's proposal to celebrate three things, Winter equinox, the fortieth anniversary of IGP and She-Devils eighty-fifth birthday, all on the same day of twenty-first of December. Valerie is thrilled to conduct Widdershins walk on the same day. Widdershins is a Scottish term meaning counter clockwise or against the sun. Widdershins means any direction that is not the proper or usual way. Traditionally, it is considered as a bad luck to move widdershins around a building or a person. Valerie plans twice Widdershins Women Walk but unfortunately, it gets cancelled of natural calamity.

For Valeria, the concept of International Widdershins Day is that women throughout the world would be reminded that the old concepts of feminism were over and men and women both must walk anti-clockwise the other way. She also has the intention to formally list the Widdershins Day in both UNESCO and the international Conference of Homophile Organization. To create a hype and as part of making news and setting trend, Valerie wants to incorporate a male member, preferably the grandson of She-Devil to expose that there exists no war between the sexes and only peace. The anti-clockwise walking direction is setting a new pattern of signification that challenges the conventions." Age and youth hand in hand leading the Women's Widdershins Walk! Feminism comes of age, male and female together, forward into the New age!" (*Death* 40).

Valerie went to the village of St Rumbold's carrying the appointments vacant card and met Tyler in the community service at the shop

of Mrs. Easton. It wasn't loved at first sight but lust at first sight. This happened with Valerie for girls but his time with a man. She enquired about the beautiful man at Mrs. Easton's shop and understood himself as the grandson of She-Devil, Tyler. She had the impression in her mind that “ He was the future” (*Death* 145). Which eventually proved at the end. After seeing Tyler, Valerie had an unfamiliar feeling of shyness and that made her fled from the shop. She was so overcome by emotion after seeing Tyler that she went to St Rumbold's church to recover.

Valerie was passionately in love with Tyler. As she wanted to take another look at Tyler, she went again and met. She communicated about the job vacancy for men in the High Tower. Their curly heads touched as they bent together to pick corned beef that fell to the ground. They had a feeling of electric shock of recognition ran through them both and rolled about on the floor in much intimacy. Tyler and Valerie had a sexual relationship when stayed High Tower as part of the formalities of the funeral of her grandfather, Bobbo. This act of Valerie indicates her stand as a bisexual where she can have a relationship with both men and women.

Valerie is also a Lesbian at the same time. She had a wondrous love affair at the age of sixteen with a girl named Amy. She also has a passionate love affair with Leda, the female staff in the security group. But Valerie is instrumental in changing Tyler to Tayla, a gender reassignment surgery in which Tyler is transitioned to a woman. She then plans a wedded life with Tayla. Valerie says: “You're a girl. All girls adore weddings. I'm the husband

so I'm wearing a penguin suit" (*Death* 327). Thus a ceremonial wedding of a woman to woman set a possibility of a new pattern of relationships and discourse between lesbians.

Valerie's next move was to manipulate the cheque and money to outsource a major amount of the She Devil's money. She succeeded in operating and eloped with her lesbian pair Leda to some unknown place leaving the wedded partner Tayla, who is Mrs Valerie alone. Valerie is successful with the bisexual stand and at the same time foregrounds a woman/woman space which would be a future reality.

Bisexuals questions the traits of feminine/masculine and thus causes gender trouble. A constant switch over of traits exposes the illusory nature of gender performativity. But they are marginalized communities as they are rendered invisible and their oppressed status continues to restrict their identification with each other. Those who volunteer are side lined and the evolvment of such communities is slow and muted because of the oppressive circumstances. The affiliation with a gay/lesbian/ bisexual or any other alternate sexualities is destructive because of the social stigma associated with it. An age's view is reflected in the literal and cultural discourses and *Death of a She-Devil* is a successful discourse of alternative sexualities. The central character openly asserts and identify herself as bisexual and the success of her life reflects a social change for patterns of relationships.

Conclusion

The materiality of the human body and its layers of meaning in the patriarchal world have gained momentum in the academic discussions recently. It is crucial to understand how bodies are read, written and interpreted in the postmodern discourses. The discourses set an age's view on particular aspects which then tie into material practices. It is high time that we realize that we are lost to a culturally manipulated body obsessive culture. The obsession of a need for uniform concept especially in the case of female body is the outcome of various ideological and monopolized acts which are invisible and deep rooted in the culture. Women in particular face various challenges with their externally defined identities and representations which hide their real identity, individuality and actual voice. Debra Walker King names the attempt to impart homogeneity in terms of ideal body as "Body Fictions". The fictional aspect of the body is rightly observed by Debra as "A fictional double whose aim is to mask individuality and mute the voice of personal agency" (8).

The fictional identity is constructed and operated by invisible forces beyond ourselves. Cultural representations, myths, media, books and various discourses naturalize the identity bestowed on women. Hence the "fictional double" operates within us unknowingly as natural. The "body fictions" distorts the originality and uniqueness of each individual and also forces to construct bodies culturally and socially. As a result female bodies are always under control to regulate the norms and always in search of the "ideal" which is impossible to attain. The fictional double negotiates with the actual space in

order to embrace the constructed concept. Women find their corporeality meaningful socially not individually.

The self that each individual possess is not personal or unique but is social or socially constructed. The self of an individual is enacted through the body. Body is also an individual possession as far as a human being is concerned. Body is fundamental to self because it is where the self manifests and expresses in physical terms. In this sense both self and body are regulated socially and thus made presentable and acceptable to the accepted system. Thus body becomes the medium of social culture and modern conceptions of gender. The gender binary materialize through the body. The very characteristic feature of maleness and femaleness is externally embodied on the physical body.

Physical body is central to the gender display of both men and women. The patterns of masculinity and femininity shift over the years. But the notion of femininity is central all through the ages and as a result women face intense pressure to accord with the set pattern of femininity. Beauty or physical attractiveness is more important in the case of a woman than a man. A woman is defined and identified in terms of physicality .The undue importance of physical appeal influence women on the physical, psychological and social level. Thus woman engage in body maintenance and alteration to meet the ideal factor and unknowingly becomes victims of problematic relationships with their bodies.

Apart from the fictionalized female body images thrust upon the lives of women, there also exists certain rules of body play exclusively for women. It is comforting and encouraging sight when a slim woman who seems young dances on the floor publically. But when a fat woman or an elder woman dances it is considered to be an appalling sight. It is clear from the above examples that there exists a body rule, a rule that is operated in the conscious and unconscious level of each individual psyche. Debra Walker calls this as “Conceptual violation”. When something happens against the concept, it is concluded to be a violation of self, body, mind and spirit.

This I call *conceptual violation*—

a violation so severe that it can kill. I use the term to suggest how body fictions produce overwhelming confrontations that act out violence against the mind and spirit of the individual whose body is gazed upon. We all react in some way when doors of opportunity shut tight before us, lines of communication breakdown, or we find ourselves victims of professional and social “type-casting” because we have been made invisible by a body fiction. Some of us simply ignore the attempted assault and move forward. Others stand and fight, while still others internalize the residue of their encounter until that residue erupts in the form of rage, fear, insanity, or death. It is through internalization of the negative that conceptual violation does its most damaging work (9-10).

Conceptual violation actually alienates women from each other. The fictional double that we carry ourselves threatens when it violates the concept. The fear of being violated can likely transform the behaviour of an individual. This fear of in appropriation pressurizes the self and body which results in the deviance of personality and character of an individual. The fear of being misjudged enables the fictional double to construct body fictions and also resists re interpretation. The body fictions transform and deviate through multiple actions of self presentation in order to accord with it. Eventually the natural or real self is muted, negated and thus abjected through various performances to conform to body fictions.

The identified abject bodies and their gender performance in the selected novels for the study undergo various body politics which makes clear the fictional aspects of culture, ideology of beauty and body and the drama of self. The characters who confront the fictional double, celebrate the defeat of it through various methodologies which question the constructed self and body. The journey of self of characters enables them to rediscover their own original self and body subjected to distortions. The reinterpretation of own self projects the destructive aspects of standards imposed on women by societal forces which are invisible and at the same time beyond their own control. Each journey of self is unique in its own sense while they discuss the creation, appropriation, resistance and reinterpretation of body fictions. The realization reveals the political manipulation that we all undertake and possess unconsciously as natural.

The analysis reveals the fact that a subject is produced and is made performed depending upon the constituting and regulating practices of the society. To be called as humans and subject is to fit in the category of norms constituted which negates the so called abnormal. The abnormal is the abject which threatens the entire signification system. The selected characters of the novel which are identified as abject bodies have confronted the so called normality and interrogated the same through various protests.

I examine the abject bodies and gender performance by different characters in Fay Weldon's Four Novels; *The Fat Woman's Joke*, *The Life and Loves of a She Devil*, *Praxis* and *Death of a She Devil*. In order to reconfigure the self and body politics they undergo body protest which takes different forms like hysteria, eating disorder, challenging the boundaries of body etc. These body protests reflect problems in individuation and autonomy. In addition, these protests are means of non-verbal expression that is the body speaking in lieu of language. In Fay Weldon's novels some of the characters protest with body in terms of eating disorders, hysteria, rejecting femininity etc as means to achieve autonomy and as a refusal of domestic femininity.

Fay Weldon is a contemporary writer who has consistency in writing about the victimization of women as well as the ways in which their female protagonists come to recognize and expunge it. The characters breakout of the patterns of dominance through bodily protests. But some characters are fairly tolerant of their condition and accept the dominating system. It is interesting to notice the female protagonists resort to more radical approaches to deal with

their problems and also take an adamant approach to gain strength and insight necessary to break the ties that bind them. The characters share a consistent concern with exposing the behaviours and cultural practices which seek to keep women from fully realizing themselves.

The Fat Women's Joke is the first novel of Fay Weldon which portrays a nonconformist protagonist who fights with her own body to deconstruct the patriarchal standards of female body. A close reading of the novel enables one to categorize three different phases of Esther's life and how in each phase she responds to the concept of Abjection and Gender performance which is the main point of the study. The success of each attempt lies in the manifestation and materialisation of new outlook and new self. Some of the attempts are purely conscious and others unconscious depending upon the nature of pressure it involves.

The first phase of life of Esther is obviously inside the marital institution. Esther was a normal middle aged house wife living with her husband and son. The mutual love of food of both Alan and Esther made their life smooth and interesting. It may seem strange when Esther called Alan each day to office and discussed about the food that they wanted for supper. But as far as certain people are concerned who enjoys cooking and consuming food, it is quite common for them to think and discuss each time what they would have next. This is also the case with both Alan and Esther. The discussion points out their mutual likes and their happy and content life.

Esther didn't refute the unilateral decision of Alan to have a strict diet from next day onwards. She openly discusses the plan of her husband with her daily help Juliet. This is a sure indication that projects her conformity to the patriarchal standards of life. Esther was not concerned about both health and appearance. The willingness to accept the dieting plan of her husband shows her flexible nature out of love and trust. The unquestioning attitude of Esther is the symbolic manifestation of the patriarchal wife.

The realization of being an abject figure happens at the first phase. The conflict gets raised when Alan forcefully restricts. When Esther plans to make an omelette using butter, Alan snatches the batter and pours it on the unbuttered pan. Alan restricts the use of dairy products. The whole system of life, food, trust and love gets dismantled because of the obsessive compulsion that Alan holds in the matter of food control. Esther understands the intention behind his compulsion. She becomes aware of the fact that her own physique is the crux of the problem.

This is again evident when her own son Peter who is unaware of dieting plans of his parents at the same time comment on the physical appearance of her own mother. Esther is helpless in this stage as a drastic change in the system of her life happened all of a sudden. To accept a change both physically and mentally requires time. Esther is shattered totally and finds difficulty in adapting to the situation. She slowly realizes the change in Alan. He seemed to be a stranger and a totally different man to her. Hunger made

Alan aggressive and Esther bored and detached from the smooth flow of life. Both seemed dissatisfied in their own ways.

The opinion of her son Peter on the ninth day of diet is highly remarkable. It clearly suggests the youth obsessive attitude where human beings other than youth category are insignificant and pointless. Peter opines no one cares whether Esther is fat or thin. “You are out of the age group where it matters” (*The Fat 92*). He wants Esther to be a “nice, cozy comfy mum” (*The Fat 92*). This attitude also points out the uncitedness as a mother figure that is meant exclusively to cater other’s needs. A mother and her duties are again abjected from the mainstream discourse. This is the other way of fixing uncitedness in Esther as a mother and also as a middle aged person.

Esther wishes if she had been born man. She rethinks the domestic duties done by her to satisfy the family. She realizes the objectification of the body and spirit that squeezed the energy of every patriarchal wife and mother in supporting their husbands and children. She is logical in deriving because she understands the patriarchal ideological standards which bind it. She did not hate Alan personally but the entire race. She catches the far reaching consequences of the masculine privilege.

The second phase of Esther’s life is revolutionary and reformatory. It is understood that she resolves to live alone in a flat at Earls Court. She is independent and happy now as she is away from the husband and son. She wakes early in the morning and the silence disturbed her. To break up the

monotony of silence she prefers eating. During the day she would read science fictions and occasionally watched television. But she concentrated on eating variety of food. “And she ate, and ate, and drank and ate” (*The Fat* 8). According to her the act of cooking had been almost as absorbing as the act of eating. She enjoyed both cooking and eating alone at her flat. “She had not felt so secure since she spent her days in a pram” (*The Fat* 8).

Phyllis, the common friend of Both Alan and Esther visits her one day and pressurizes to confess about the broken relation with her husband Alan. Phyllis is deeply emotional at the plight of Esther and her family. She compels Esther to rejoin the family. She justifies saying that both Alan and Peter needs their wife and mother at their crucial time in their life. Esther is strong and firm with her decision that she has no plan to rejoin them. Phyllis is unable to think about the crucial time of Esther where she underwent a major crisis in her life. As women are born and conditioned to serve the needs of others, Phyllis cannot deconstruct and think the other way.

Esther concluded that marriage is a strong institution where she cannot withstand. She explains to Phyllis about the nature of independence of that she enjoys in the present life. She compares the act of eating food with that of sexual activity. She sees no complexity in the consumption of food and the only issue with it is that one may get fatter. Esther subtly hints the complexities of sex and the after effects. The complex aspect of sex is suffered hardly by woman alone. Men keep away from all sorts of complexities.

When Esther offers food for Phyllis, she rejects it on the ground of increase of body size. She has to watch her figure. This throws light on the ideal female body concept inscribed in the masculine language and internalization of that standards. Phyllis opines about the vulgarity of Esther's fat body and comment on it openly. Both Esther and Phyllis represents opposite standards which are in constant disagreement with each other. Phyllis conforms to patriarchal standards of female body and the idealized version of it. Esther on the other hand revolts it through her own body in becoming huge size and an appalling sight.

Binge eating is a type of eating disorder which includes consumption of food in large quantities frequently. It is also called Bulimia Nervosa. Binge eating is highly associated with lack of control of an individual in the matter of the consumption of food. It is followed by feelings of shame and guilt immediately after the intake. Surprisingly those with binging also tend to control their body and engage in weight control activity.

Binge eating is the intake of food in a short interval of time. The feeling of guilt and shame is overcome by the act of purging. This can be either vomiting or taking laxatives. Medical world refers Bulimia as associated with certain psychological disorders. Depression, anxiety, side effects of medicines, dissatisfaction can cause binging. The reason can be both biological and social at the same time. There is evidence of genetic reasons contributing to the eating disorders. The pressure to embrace the ideal body shape especially in the case of women is also a contributing factor for Bulimia.

The eating disorder identified in Esther is purely social and revolutionary. The first phase of her life reveals the gourmet nature and not binging. It is in her second phase which is independent from all the clutches of patriarchy and marital institution, she has the tendency to over eat. It is clear when Phyllis meets her at the flat where she lives alone, Esther takes food and consumes at short intervals of time. She enjoys not only consumption but also cooking and stocking food for future use. She never attempts to purge it any situation. She is not guilty at the act also. This suggests that the act of binging is purely psychological and social in Esther.

Esther considers both food and body as a weapon to refute the social pressure thrust on women in the patriarchal world. The love of food during the first phase is changed to the extreme extent of over eating and finding solace in it. So the act of Esther is purely psychological and it also sublimates her satisfaction level. The social pressure is also another pointing factor that enables Esther in the act of binging. Esther is not away from reality in any sense. From all the above discussed points about binging, it can be concluded that Esther's over eating is not a psychic disorder. It is a deliberate attempt from her part to depoliticize the abject figure.

The third phase begins when Alan, her husband comes and takes her to their home for a next phase of life. Esther will definitely continue with the same resolutions with courage and confidence. She would never live for the sake of others. She will set a new pattern of life and discourse which will enlighten and inspire future womanhood. The flexible nature of Esther is the

clear indication of her victory at all the three phases of her life. She succeeded in the first phase by conforming and at the same time the courage shown to non conform with the patriarchal standards of ideal female body size. In the second phase she was independent and at the same time a non conformist in terms of her body politics. The third phase again reveals the adventurous spirit of Esther who would recite her uncitedness in terms of body and self.

The abject self and abject body play a crucial role in the life of Esther. Esther understands the abjection of her own fat body during the first phase of her life. The conflicts and dilemmas that she suffered were heavily by the abject body which she was encompassing. During the second phase of her life she voices abjection by resolving herself to be a fat body by the act of binge eating. It is certain that she will celebrate the abject body and its composition in the third phase after rejoining with her husband Alan again.

Gender performance by the characters is also remarkable in complementing the abject body. In the novel, Esther negates the gender performance regulated by the reigning patriarchal world. Gender performance is materialized in the early phase of Esther's life where the husband, Alan, Esther and their son Peter lived happily for a while. Esther performed well the role of a patriarchal mother and wife in fulfilling the duties assigned for her. She realizes the flaw and the performativity behind it during the second phase and opines with her friend Phyllis that, she is not strong enough for the patriarchal reconfiguration. Phyllis who conforms with the patriarchy only finds fault with the new resolution of Esther.

The typical specimen of gender performance is manifested in the character Phyllis. Right from the beginning to the end she is conscious of her body and self in conforming to the patriarchal standards. When Esther offers a small amount of food, she is reluctant to consume as it may cause an increase in her body weight. She also alters her breasts through surgery to the whims and fancies of her own husband. With the altered figure and the so called ideal body, Phyllis never has self realization like Esther. Phyllis at last fell as a prey and victim in the hands of Alan who used and consumed her body. Esther had a very great insight that she speculated the possible relationship between Esther and Phyllis.

The gender performance by Susan is also notable that, Susan manifests the ideal body concept of the patriarchal world. The advantage of to be young and beautiful is exploited at the hands of Alan. Alan sees Susan as an object of sexual desire. Susan realized the same when they had intimate physical relation. Susan was shocked at the act of Alan and left home crying understanding the true nature of objectification. Susan was searching for genuine love and Alan was searching for variety and ideal female body for sexual gratification.

Esther dismantles the very notion of performativity in giving up the two main roles where women fully manifest and materialize their gender performances, Wife and Motherhood. The final phase of her life is certain about the fact that Esther would reconfigure gender performance with new light that would provide a resignification of womanhood in all terms. It is highly

notable that it is Alan who wishes to compromise with her and he comes and requests to Esther. This is a sure indication that Esther would remain as the reconfigured self where ever she lives.

It is a highly remarkable feature of Weldon's novels taken for study addresses the life and experience of women in general. Weldon presents women characters in difficult and different situations. How women are in the house old placed and treated by other members of the family, their work place experience, relationships with others, husband and wife relationships etc. Her characters project how they are manipulated in the male dominated world and also how they manipulate the feminine qualities inscribed on them.

We live in a world that gives undue importance to beauty and looks of a person. If one is attractive she/ he is termed as cute or sweet. If one is ugly then the possible taglines would be awkward, creepy or clumsy. The existing discourse makes our brain capable of making judgements and emotions to people. This allows or makes us to consider other people as beautiful or ugly. It also makes us to uphold our own beauty standards. This parameters set in our mind allows us to have preferences, likes and dislikes. *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* questions the default image of proper femininity as white and beautiful through the life of monstrous heroine Ruth Patchett. Ruth was pregnant before marriage and thus Bobbo married Ruth because of the social pressure and compulsion. Ruth was an abject figure and no one included her in the social circle. The reason behind such avoidance is clear because she had a clumsy disposition.

Being an abject figure, Ruth never had happy moments in her life. As she was ugly, her own parents deserted her and left the country. She was forced to accept her marriage partner as Bobbo. She was obedient, dutiful and a submissive wife. She looked after her children and in laws. When her husband begins a love affair with Mary Fisher, Ruth reacts and descends a She Devil. Her reactions at first seemed to be normal as a frustrated suburban house wife, But later she turns to be scheming, practical and a bitter woman.

The first phase of her life is in the realm of abjection. She is an “ugly duckling” named by her parents. Her ugly appearance is the only reason why parents abandoned her and the ill treatment she received in her marital life. The second phase of her life begins when she determines to destabilize the expected roles done by women in the society. She destabilizes motherhood, wifedom, friendship and womanhood. It is right to observe the actions done by Ruth during the second phase as welcoming abject positions and thus voicing and giving life to it.

The third phase of her life is in the realm of power. For Ruth, undergoing cosmetic surgery and becoming the replica of Mary Fisher is not to enjoy the advantageous position of beautiful woman. Soon after the metamorphosis the cosmetic surgeon fell in love with her. She has no mind to respond to the request of surgeon. Ruth is determined of the objectives set by her after becoming a beautiful woman. She wants to materialise the revenge and wants to work for the welfare of her own category of people. Ruth is successful in revenging her husband. She finally resumes her place beside her

husband and looks after him when he is ill. The journey from the realm of abjection to the realm of power taught her the advantage of becoming beautiful in the patriarchal society.

The Gender Performance of Ruth has two dimensions. In the first phase Ruth is a woman who enacts gender and motherhood like any other woman in the world. She is a normal suburban wife and mother of two children. As a wife she does her duty but it was rarely acknowledged by her own husband. She has compromised and adjusted the loveless attitude of her own husband. The submissive attitude of Ruth is well revealed in the first phase of her life. Ruth problematizes the complex site of wifedom when she decides to voice the She Devil. The deliberate attempt from her part to indulge in sex with various men can be taken as purely a political stance to destabilize the meaning of ideal wifedom.

Motherhood is a gendered position in the patriarchal society. The task of caring and nurturing children is more at the hands of mothers than fathers. The discourse of movies, advertisements and any other medium propagate the message that it is the mothers who have to be more with children than their fathers. Thus it is a culturally rooted and conditioned view on mothers. Ruth like any other woman was a good mother in looking after her own children. When she decides to give life to She Devil, her destabilisation strategy enabled her to uproot the very concept of motherhood and thus deposited children at the hands of her husband Bobbo and his mistress, Mary Fisher. Thus Ruth set objectives to be fulfilled to materialize the revenge. Ruth

and her various strategies in fact gave life to She Devil and offered a paradigm shift to see things in an alternative way.

The novel *Praxis* narrates the life story of the protagonist Praxis from childhood to late middle age. It is easy to understand different stages of her life as the plot unfolds in a linear way. It is interesting to analyse and at the same time realize the abject positions that the protagonist had throughout her life journey. Weldon's characters are normal class people who enable us to understand the common man's feelings, emotions and problems. It also helps us to interrogate certain practices which prove to be unhealthy and unethical in the society.

Praxis details the issues of modern patriarchy in exploiting women both morally and physically. Praxis is an illegitimate second child of her parents. As a child she was treated as an outcast. Praxis never had a happy moment in her childhood days. Born to a mad mother, abandoned father and a half crack sister, Praxis never had an exposure both inside and outside the family. Her own mother restricted the social circle as her status of living together relationship with a man would be out and that was the most degrading thing for a woman of her time.

Praxis is right at her observation that she thinks once that herself and her sister Hypatia have no right to be born in this narrow hypocritical society. Praxis is a social being compared to her sister Hypatia who seemed an introvert and at the same time muddle headed. Lucy, the mother restricts Praxis to play

with the common girls near to their home. Both Praxis and Hypatia were denied of education for a while in their life because of not having proper parentage.

Praxis problematise the position of woman in taking a stand exclusively comfortable for women alone. Weldon successfully portrayed the struggle of heroine as an abject figure in various circumstances in her life. The extra ordinary life experience of Praxis also reveals the performative nature of gender. The various abject positions which Praxis underwent throughout her life as an illegitimate child, embracing the menstrual body, lesbian relationship, prostitution, incest and finally becoming a murderess. These abject situations of Praxis are the outcome of double standards of morality practiced by the main stream discourse.

Being an illegitimate is not a matter of choice as far as a human being is concerned. The attitude that these people are likely to encounter at the hands of society would definitely be a bitter one. No one welcomes them in to any plat form. It is clear in the analysis of Praxis as an abject figure. She and her sister are denied of formal education and friendship circle because of being illegitimate children. The psychological impact of an outcast is reflected throughout her life. She could not be aggressive in the first part of her life.

Throughout much of history, menstrual bleeding is viewed as an unclean event. This feeling for menstruation as an abject is actually developed by the existing discourse. When manliness and its aspects are celebrated,

womanliness and one of its major aspects being menstruation is rarely acknowledged, welcomed and celebrated. No woman would proudly present their menstrual body. As part of this women tend to develop a low self-esteem and lack of confidence during menstrual days. This is the reason why Praxis was horrified and muted when she experienced the menstruation for the first time.

It is remarkably noticeable the lesbian inclination of Praxis right in her childhood days. Praxis and her family were outside the social circle of their locality. The discourse of the reigning signification system is less influenced in the case of Praxis. The lesbian crush that Praxis felt for Loïse Gaynor can be taken as an ordinary feeling which every person can feel and develop in their own life. The act of Praxis is purely natural and not political to problematize fixed identity categories. Praxis in fact proves the natural and the real in a relationship and thus destabilizes the queering aspect of the lesbian. The same sex love of Praxis in fact questions the coherent and stable nature of sexual identities developed and propagated by the heterosexual matrix. Thus Praxis renders naturalness to the lesbian abject position.

Praxis has chosen prostitution as a profession like any another form of labour available to women. Hence she thinks being a prostitute was as much a choice for women as being a driver or any other labour was for men. Prostitution is an illegal act throughout the world, except in few countries it is permitted only in a licensed manner. As a prostitute, Praxis transcends the boundary of morality/ immorality and interrogates the abject responses of the

society which are loaded with anxiety about the maintenance of boundaries. Praxis kept her job as a prostitute secret to Willie because prostitution as a job is treated with reference to disgust or revulsion. She did the job without any mental tensions until when she realized that she had consensual sex with her own father. Praxis in fact voiced the abject status of prostitution.

Praxis had an incestuous relationship with her father unknowingly. No doubt the incest is a concept of unrepresentable in the society. When we are confronted with the abject there is a constant repulsion experienced. The abject derives a feeling of disgust with each confrontation. It often results in tension and anxiety and threatens once sense of beingness. In the case of Praxis, the moment she realized her incestuous relationship, she confronted it with courage and boldness. She was already feeling exploited by Willie and that was the reason for choosing prostitution as profession. She found the happening as a reason to break the life with Willie and flew to London to begin a new life. She was neither happy nor unhappy or felt any regret in her action. She handled the situation with much maturity and sense and also accepted the status of abjection with its reality.

The gender performance of Praxis is highly remarkable and noticeable in the novel. Praxis as a student, lover, wife and mother performed the roles successfully. Her motherly affection is projected in the case of Mary, the daughter of Leonard. Without becoming the real mother, she could offer motherly realm to Mary. Being a lover to Willie, Praxis was highly obedient and submissive. As wife to both Philip and Ivor, Praxis has put her energy and

effort to make both of them happy. But when circumstances turned anyone of them helped or adjusted with Praxis. The first phase of her life is really successful as a wife and mother to the patriarchal world but a failure to her own life.

The second phase of her life is loaded with inner conflict and tensions. She began to develop extra marital relationships with men. This act from the part of Praxis is purely political to destabilize the gender performance as expected by the patriarchal society. She has destabilized the role of motherhood by depositing children at the hands of Ivor. As a wife to Willie, Ivor and Philip she did her maximum to make a smooth family. But at a certain point of time she deconstructed her own roles and began working for the Women's Movement. The act of murdering the son of Mary is actually out of concern for her. Thus Praxis proved to be successful at the second phase of her life when she reconfigured her gender performance in a newer light. Praxis takes reader to a level beyond the perception of patriarchal world and offers possibility for change and alternate solutions.

We make statements of our own body by using clothes, tattoos, make ups, hairstyles and with several collections of materials. These materials are actually identity markers that impart meaning to our own body. Hence we have different category of materials to be used for different age groups. Each identity marker represents certain class of people. We are all aware that we are being observed and assessed by others in public space. All are subject to surveillance and judgements. Thus Bryan Turner states “ The body is always

socially formed and located” (59). As part of this social formation we have a tendency to project desired image of ourselves. We have a youth obsessed culture and everyone strives to be young and attractive. Nowhere in the mainstream platform can one see aged body as strong and powerful. This is again a social construction on aged bodies where it is often described as unattractive, frail, sickly, incapable, dependent, whiny etc.

The abject bodies identified in the novel *Death of a She Devil* are the aged bodies of Ruth Patchet and Bobbo. Ruth is confident at the age of eighty four and is concerned only with the follower to rule after her death. Being an aged person Ruth is happy and content by the achievements she bagged after the metamorphosis of her own body and she boast at the age of eighty four that “ I am as good as any man, and crow the triumph of the true, the proud , the honest working women of today, the ones that we set free”. (*Death* 3) Every morning she awakes with a positive note and expectation that she has some more work to do for the nation in general and women in particular.

Bobbo, the husband of Ruth is ninety four, bedridden and has Alzheimer’s. After the death of Mary Fisher, Bobbo is looked after by Ruth and is kept in the Lantern Room of the High Tower. Ruth never visits Bobbo in the Lantern room as he is confused with the present figure of Ruth that she is the ghost of Mary Fisher. It is evident from the muttering that Bobbo is still after Mary Fisher and is against Ruth in his thoughts. Bobbo is aware at times that his days have been between bed and an arm chair and he doesn’t have the

strength to get up any more. But even at the age of ninety four Bobbo has clarity in his thoughts which is highly remarkable being an Alzheimer's patient.

Ruth at the age of eighty four never repents over her actions in the past against Bobbo and Mary Fisher. When old age approach people have a tendency to regret and forgive their past actions. Ruth is certain she did not love Bobbo as Mary did. Bobbo was just her wedded husband, father of her children, her status and income. But Ruth has regret over one thing that she handed over her children to Bobbo and Mary and is troubled to think about the silence of her children and grand children. They did not speak to Ruth for abandoning them.

Valerie Valerie PA to Ruth has the idea of celebrating three things- the winter equinox, IGP Forty years anniversary and Ruth's Eighty Fifth Birthday all on the same day , the 21st of December. But Ruth protested the idea because as there will be high tide and the rocks will be far too wet and slippery for any sort of procession. Ruth also dismissed the idea of celebrating birthday. Ruth with the experience of life and climate cleverly protests the idea of Widdershins Walk and birthday celebration. She is more concerned with the business and progress than celebrations.

Ruth is happy and satisfied with her services to the community. Ruth is honoured by the Queen for Services to the community, now Dame Ruth Patchet of St Rumbold's. She is the president of the Institute of Gender Parity, a major incorporated charity, a community of women living and working in the

High Tower. Their mission is to bring about equality of dignity and wealth between the genders. She openly declares “I am old, old, old. I would quite like to die. I am tired, my business is done. I am satisfied. The world is I want it: women triumphant, men submissive”. (*Death 22*) Ruth is confident and happy over the contribution made to women and equality. She wishes to die not because of aging but while thinking about the achievements and contributions made to her own gender.

Bobbo is bedridden and thus confined to his bed in the High Tower. Everyone is of the opinion that he suffers from dementia. A close analysis of his disagreeable thoughts reveals that as a person he has not changed his attitude. There is coherence in his thoughts. He analyses the love of Mary and Ruth. He never repents over his past actions. Bobbo very well hears the warnings of Dr. Simmins and he is not haunted to hear the same. Instead he boldly believes that he has life and is not ready to leave the world. This is a clear indication that only body is down but thoughts and feelings are still bold in the aged body of Bobbo.

Valerie plans for the Widdershins Walk and wants to have a man in the procession. Valerie suggests Bobbo as he is on the board of Institute of Gender Parity. Valerie is confident in the case of Bobbo, though he is ninety four. She had seen him running down the stairs from the Lantern Room in bare feet and pyjamas. Ruth dismisses the suggestion of Valerie that as Bobbo has Alzheimer’s and keeps trying to run away that he should not be included in the

Widdershins Walk. Ruth dismissed the idea of incorporating Bobbo in the walk is due to his illness as he will have a temptation to run away.

In the novel Bobbo dies at the age of ninety four. During several instances those embodying youth in the novel described and treated Bobbo as an abject figure with “foul mouthed”. Everyone in IGP has concern over Bobbo as an old man. She Devil never had such sympathy and concern as an old man to Bobbo. She treated him till the end of his life as a husband and the member of the board of the IGP. The mysterious disappearance of the She Devil is a strategy adopted to transgress the aged body construction of the society and to get away from the feelings associated with corpse.

Death of a She Devil projects a world where women are powerful and successful. Institute of Gender Parity is an organisation led by She Devil as the head. She has materialised equal pay for jobs among man and woman. The equality is at the hands of both gender. Gender is just a performance has been proved by Tyler, the grand son of She Devil when he transforms to Tyla, through sex reassignment surgery. As IGP is need of a successor after She Devil, Tyler was ready to accept the assignment. It is clear that the need for power of IGP is not only the reason behind transition but Tyler with his own experiences was ready and happy for the change. He had never felt women as inferior beings.

Again gender is a performance has been proved by Valerie. Valerie fell in love with Tyler, the grand son of She Devil. They both had a good time

physically and mentally during the stay at IGP. Valerie openly declared that she had lesbian relationship early. After manipulating the accounts and money of IGP, Valerie eloped with Leda, a woman and driver of IGP to some unknown place. The bisexual nature of Valerie proves that gender is just an assignment and can be done by anyone. She has dismantled the concept of masculine/ feminine pairing alone. She is free to accept any gender as her pair and that has been projected in her various relationships throughout the novel. In fact both Tyler and Valerie has imparted gender fluidity to this highly gender conscious world and also challenges and subverts the mainstream discourse and presents the nuances of individual experience.

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