

COOCH BEHAR PANCHNAN BARMA UNIVERSITY COOCH BEHAR

B.A. HONOURS IN ENGLISH

UNDER CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM

SEMESTER -6

CE 14: WOMEN'S WRITING

Sylvia Plath: 'Daddy', 'Lady Lazarus'

Q.Daddy: A Critical appreciation or feminist poem or dramatic monologue.

"**Daddy**" is a poem written by American Confessional poet Sylvia Plath on October 12, 1962, four months before her death and one month after her separation from Ted Hughes. "Daddy" employs controversial metaphors of the Holocaust to explain Plath's complex relationship with her father, Otto Plath, who died shortly after her eighth birthday as a result of undiagnosed diabetes. The poem itself is cryptic, a widely anthologized poem in American literature and its implications, as well as thematic concerns, have been reviewed academically, with many differing conclusions. The famous critic Steiner calls this haunting poem the "Guernica of modern poetry."

Daddy may be considered as a confessional poem where the speaker speaks in the first person narrative in which Plath opens her heart to the readers, her feelings and emotions of love and hate for her father without mincing matters. Daddy is a challenging study for two reasons, one is that the poem could be classed with Rousseau's Confessions, Thomas De Quency's Confessions of an English Opium –Eater, George Morre's Confessions of a Young Man ; secondly this is a poem which has been written in Defiance of the theory of impersonality championed by T.S. Eliot.

Plath becomes the spokeswoman of all the women whose realm of exploration is confined between kitchen and cradle. She voices her agonies representing other women who also suffer like her and who also want like her to live not only physically but also, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. She is such a woman as not be put behind the veil and kept shut-out from asserting her spirit, talent and impulses and becoming great in life. She represents those women who simmers with anger and refuse to be dominated by overbearing and overpowering male dominance. She writes:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white'
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy is a dramatic monologue, a poem consisting of the words of a single character who reveals in his speech his own nature and the dramatic situation. The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra Complex of Freudian psychology. The daughter in the poem is in love with her father whom she also hated at the same time. She oscillates between abhorrence for and love for her father. According to P Rajan, "the love hate for the father has become an amalgam of conflicting emotions."

The poem, Daddy, veers between love and hate, revenge and regret, Eros and Thanatos. The poem is rightly titled as Daddy for the main focus is always on the father of Sylvia Plath from the beginning of the poem to the end. Daddy keeps returning in the poem in different guises: statue, shoe, Nazi, Teacher, devil and a vampire:

You stand at the black board, Daddy
In the picture I have you.

The father has been envisioned in terms of his sexual dominance, cruelty and authoritarianism. The poet imagines herself as a Jew, tortured and tormented, and her father as a Nazi, oppressor and tyrant, her husband is imagined as a vampire who sucked her blood leaving her languishing in the sore need for punishment to counter the loss of love.

In this feminist poem Sylvia Plath makes a candid confession of her relation with her father after whom the poem is titled as Daddy. Here she confesses her father to be a tyrannical person, a Nazi commander, a patriarchal statue against whose domination she voices her right. This poem is a monologue of a female figure who wants to assert her identity in this male dominated society.

Q. Explain the significance of the title of the poem, Daddy.

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