

# GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE ENGLISH POETRY OF FEMALE POETS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** Women are generally considered weak, fragile, and dependent on men and therefore the way male poets present them in their poems, is no surprise. What is startling, however, is the projection of women in the same fashion in the poetry produced by female poets. The current paper aims to focus on the way women construct their own gender identity through poetry. The themes that female poets choose for their poems and the language they use for the construction of their own identity reflect how they view themselves in comparison with the opposite gender. The data for the study are based on the selected poems of female poets, writing in English. In order to explore the construction of gender identity in detail, English poems of female poets from different socio-cultural background and time periods have been selected and analyzed within the framework of *Critical Discourse Analysis* to discover the gender inequality that is projected through the process of identity construction. A detailed analysis of the female poets' work reveals that irrespective of their origin and era, the female poets construct a gender identity which is based on *dependence, self-pity, passivity, complete surrender, objectification of the self*, and in some cases *self-annihilation*. The construction of this kind of gender identity harmonizes with the roles society reserves for women, who to a certain extent are themselves responsible for the marginalization of their own gender.

**Keywords:** *Identity construction, Gender identity, Gender roles, Gender inequality.*

Woman----a pleasing but a short liv'd Flow'r,  
Too soft for business, and too weak for Pow'r:  
A Wife in Bondage, or neglected Maid;  
Despis'd, if ugly; if she's fair----betray'd.

(Mary Leapor's *An Essay on Woman*)

## 1.0 Introduction

The history of the world bears testimony to the marginalization of women, particularly, in patriarchal societies. Women are denied the freedom to express themselves in such societies; in societies where they are given the right to express themselves, they often project a weak image of themselves to satisfy the ego of male chauvinists. The gender ideology that is promoted in male-dominated societies is anti-feminist to such an extent that women are relegated to a low status irrespective of what post they hold otherwise. Each and every act of theirs is judged with a microscopic eye to detect even the minutest blunder in order to prove that they are less competent than men. The impact of this gender ideology is so strong that a vast majority of women develop a negative self-image and tend to believe that they are inferior to men in every

respect, while some of them because of this injustice develop a strong hatred for men assuming that men are responsible for all the injustice against women in the world, which of course does not hold true in all the cases. What women fail to realize is that their own gender has an equal role to play in the disempowerment of their female identity.

### **1.1 Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to explore the construction of gender identity by female poets writing in English. Although the major focus of the study is on exploring the female identity construction, how the female poets construct male identity is also examined through a comparative analysis of the selected works. Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the female persona in all literary genres, this study is confined to just one literary genre ----- poetry. The reason for choosing this genre is the ample freedom that writers have in exploiting this medium. No other genre gives as much freedom to writers as poetry. Another reason for choosing this genre is that it is a medium that is exploited by female writers more than any other literary genre. Whether it is America, Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, or Middle-East, one can find female writers exploiting the medium of poetry to give voice to their emotions. The poetry produced by female writers is enough to see the female voice and its impact on the minds of the readers.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

- 1) What gender identity do the female poets writing in English construct in their poems?
- 2) How does the female identity constructed in the female poets' work differ from the identity that they construct of the opposite gender?

## **2. Literature Review**

Research on gender identity has received considerable attention since the publication of Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place* in 1973. Although most of Lakoff's findings were based on assumptions, lacking empirical evidence, the book provided the impetus to Sociolinguists, particularly female Sociolinguists and feminist scholars to further investigate the field. As a result of the seminal works of Spender (1980), Cameron (1985), Coates (1986), Holmes (1986), Tannen (1990), and Butler (1990), the approaches to gender identity have undergone a paradigm shift.

Owing to the substantial amount of research conducted in the field of Language and Gender, the term 'gender' is no more used as a synonym of 'sex' but is rather seen as a social and

psychological construct which owes its existence to the actions one performs (verbal and non-verbal) for the construction of one's gender identity. Identity is no more understood in a traditional sense, as something that exists in itself; in fact, it is now understood as something which is based on the way one constructs it with the joint efforts of other members of the society. In other words, identity construction cannot take place in a vacuum, but is rather the product of one's interaction with the self and with the world outside. Seen from this perspective, gender identity is also based on '*performing gender*', a concept introduced by Butler (1990) in her work on gender. According to Butler (1990), one is not born a male or a female rather becomes one through performing gender and this performance is evaluated or judged against the social norms of the speech community one is a member of. This means that one cannot use the terms 'gender' and 'sex' interchangeably. According to Stoller (1968):

[While] sex and gender seem to common sense to be practically synonymous and in everyday life to be inextricably bound together... the two realms (sex and gender) are not inevitably bound in anything like a one-to-one relationship, but each may go in its quite independent way. (p. xiii).

The study of language and gender took a different turn after the emergence of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), which aims to identify instances of power abuse and injustice with the intention to resist all such unjust acts. In the contemporary research in Applied Linguistics, CDA as a methodological framework has become very popular especially for analyzing texts that display power struggle with regard to gender (Fairclough, 1995; Janks, 1997; Lazar, 2007; Wodak, 2005). There are a few studies rooted in CDA that aim to study the language used in literary texts that are specifically constructed to manipulate power with reference to gender roles and display explicit or implicit signs of gender bias, particularly against the female gender (Hua, 2013; Khosravizadeh & Mahabadi, 2011; Sheikh & Khan, 2012). Besides using CDA as an analytical framework for exploring gender bias in both spoken and written texts, particularly in political discourse, linguistic analysis is also performed on literary texts based on different genres to highlight the element of gender bias in such texts. One such study conducted by Ali (2005) traces gender discrimination in Shakespeare's tragedies. Not only does the study critically analyze the language Shakespeare put into the mouth of his female characters but also analyzes the language the male characters use for women in different tragedies. The results of the study reveal the bias

against women showing a glimpse of the attitude the Elizabethans had towards women in general.

The current study is different from the earlier studies for two reasons. Firstly, the study focuses on the female writers from different eras as well as different socio-political contexts. Secondly, it exclusively focuses on one of the most widely exploited literary genres, i.e., poetry.

### **3. Methodology**

The data for the study are based on the selected poems of nine female poets, writing in English, from different origins and eras. The reason for selecting female poets from different backgrounds and time periods is to explore identity construction involved in each case. The aim is to see whether their gender acts as a binding force in constructing their identity irrespective of their background and age or is there a difference in the projection of identity in each case. The female poets whose works have been analyzed include: *Emily Bronte*, *Anne Sexton*, *Lisa Zaran*, *Sylvia Plath*, *Maya Angelou*, *Margret Atwood*, *Kamala Das*, *Sujata Bhatt*, and *Muniza Alvi*. The reason for choosing these poets is that they represent different socio-political backgrounds and time periods. *Emily Bronte* (1818-1848) belonged to Britain and represents the female voice of the Victorian era. *Anne Sexton* (1928-1974), *Sylvia Plath* (1932-1963), and *Lisa Zaran* (1969-till present), represent American society. *Maya Angelou* (1928-2014) is the voice of African American women; *Margret Atwood's* (1939-till present) poems project Canadian women, while *Kamala Das* (1934-2009), *Sujata Bhatt* (1956-till present) and *Muniza Alvi* (1954-till present) represent South Asian society and its treatment of women.

The poems are analyzed thematically and linguistically using the framework of *Critical Discourse Analysis* to see how gender identity is constructed and how women are projected by their own gender. CDA is necessary to unmask the gender ideologies hidden beneath the discourses created by female writers in their poems, as it “aims at investigating critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak, 2002, p. 11). CDA is employed in this study with the intention of drawing the reader’s attention towards the instances of injustice done by the female writers against their own gender.

## 4. Data Analysis

As stated earlier, the data based on the selected poems of the female poets included in this study are analyzed within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. Following themes emerge on the basis of the analysis of the selected poems:

### 4.1 Dependence

Women are not only viewed as dependent on men by male chauvinists but also by their own gender which is evident from the voice of the female poets. Whether it is a female poet from Britain or America or any South Asian country, one can find the element of dependence in their projection of women.

“You are a self made man.  
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You are the curve  
I burrow into. The strength  
I borrow. You are the red sun  
rising over the mountain.  
You are the mountain.”

*(You are the Mountain by Lisa Zaran)*

The two metaphors ‘sun’ and ‘mountain’ used for men are strong enough to indicate how women see men as emblems of power and strength and how they yearn to get strength from them. The desire to get power from men carries a very strong implication for women considering themselves devoid of any power.

“In him I swim  
All broken with longing.  
In his robust blood I float  
Drying off my tears.  
Yet I never can forget  
The only man who hurts.  
The only one who seems to know

The only way to hurt.

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...when he did not love,

Believe me,

All I could do was to sob like a fool.”

(Lines from *The Suicide* by Kamala Das)

The last three lines quoted above reflect a woman's utter helplessness if she is denied a man's love. The poet's comparison of herself to a 'fool' shows how a woman underestimates her own worth and intelligence relegating herself to an insignificant creature as compared to a man. This feeling of worthlessness has its roots in the feeling of powerlessness and inferiority complex inculcated in females in patriarchal societies since their childhood. By the time, females mature, the feeling becomes so strong that it cannot be eradicated easily. Majority of women live with this sense of being worthless all their life and consider it to be an integral part of their personality, which obliterates their identity as women. The following lines from one of Kamala Das's poems reveal the same feeling of dependence on men:

“Until I found you,  
I wrote verse, drew pictures,  
And, went out with friends  
For walks...  
Now that I love you,  
Curled like an old mongrel  
My life lies, content,  
In you....”

(From *Summer in Calcutta* by Kamala Das)

The theme of dependence is further reinforced by Kamala Das in the lines where she confesses living an aimless life before finding her man. Now that she has found him, she feels satisfied. The nature of this contentment, however, is extremely disturbing for any female reader as the poet uses the image of a 'mongrel'. By comparing herself with 'an old mongrel' the poet has mutilated her own identity as a female. The word 'mongrel' has two meanings: 'a dog that has

an uncertain origin’, and ‘an obnoxious person’, as given in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2012). Both the meanings are used in a highly pejorative sense.

In *Subtraction Flower*, Lisa Zaran, an American poet, speaks on every woman’s behalf but the irony is that although she represents every woman, instead of projecting a better image, she presents an image that makes women appear inferior to men.

“As women  
we blindly wish  
past the climax of passion  
as we vanish into a world of men  
whose ribcages we were scraped from”

(Lines from *Subtraction Flower* by Lisa Zaran)

The choice of the lexical items, ‘blindly’, ‘vanish’, and ‘scraped’ implies that women lack vision, have no identity of their own and are inferior to men as historically their very existence depended on a man. Seen from historical point of view, the lines seem to imply that women are still dependent on the opposite gender. All the examples cited here indicate that women poets do not seem to be interested in presenting themselves as independent souls. Using CDA framework, one can easily detect the underlying theme that runs throughout these poets’ work---- male dominance vs. female powerlessness and the female poets seem to endorse this theme through their projection of females as powerless and dependent.

The notion of dependence depicting gender inequality is projected with even greater force in the last line of Judith Wright’s poem: *A Woman to a Man* in which the speaker makes a desperate plea to her lover saying “Oh hold me, for I am afraid.” The line gives the impression that the touch of a man can have a magical effect on a woman as if all her fears would vanish with his mere touch.

#### **4.2 Uncertainty**

A general belief found in many societies is that a woman’s voice is the voice of uncertainty. This uncertainty may be seen as a reflection of her lack of conviction in certain matters. In one of her poems, Sujata Bhatt gives voice to her uncertainty in the following lines:

“I hesitate to say  
what I think:”

The same uncertainty is echoed in Lisa Zaran’s poem *Subtraction Flower*:

“Perhaps  
every flower you see  
is a woman”

(Lines from *Subtraction Flower* by Lisa Zaran)

The use of the word ‘perhaps’ reinforces the absence of authority in females. Besides this, the floral imagery used for women shows the poet’s notion of women as delicate creatures and this delicacy is in turn associated with their frailty. Gardiner (1981) has made an apt comment “Women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. At the same time, they are taught to create socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech, and behavior” (p. 360). What Gardner (1981) has stated holds true for women in all male-dominated societies, where their world view is shaped by the male members who are in complete control of their life.

### **4.3 Self-pity**

Women’s voice is the voice of sentimentality lying on the bank of self-pity, a river that women love to drown in. Self-pity is a sign of weakness and can be attributed to low self-esteem; it implies reinforcement of the notion of weak sex. Although there is not enough research evidence establishing the link between female gender and low self-esteem, the female poets’ portrayal of women (themselves and others representing the same gender) provide some data for investigating the relation between self-esteem and gender. The following lines by *Emily Bronte* depict extreme form of self-pity, which springs from very low self-esteem.

“I am the only being whose doom  
No tongue would ask, no eye would mourn;  
I’ve never caused a thought of gloom,  
A smile of joy, since I was born.”

(Lines from *I’m the only being...* by Emily Bronte)



The same feelings are echoed in the lines from Sylvia Plath's poem *I am Vertical*:

“Compared with me, a tree is immortal  
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,  
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,  
The trees and flowers have been strewing their cool odors.

I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.”

(Lines from *I am Vertical* by Sylvia Plath)

Both the women poets referred to in this section project their female identity through underestimating their worth as women. Plath's complaint (“I walk among them, but none of them are noticing”) in the poem, *I'm Vertical*, manifests a woman's desire to be noticed and admired, while the lines by Emily Bronte quoted earlier are steeped in self-pity and reveal the poet's sense of dejection. With regard to women poets of the Victorian age, Brown (2000) writes:

Women were encouraged to write the pretty, sentimental lyricism that was considered to be a simple extension of themselves. This complied with the domestic ideology because it was neither time nor energy consuming, and so was seen as an accomplishment or pastime. They were deemed to not have the intellect, creative abilities, or privilege to attempt poetry. (p. 181)

These comments are not only apt for the Victorian female poets but also hold true for many female contemporary poets writing in different parts of the world. One example is that of Lisa Zaran's poem: *Homeless* in which a girl voices her helplessness. She pities her own state to invite sympathies from others.

“I ain't got no home....

~the Band

I lost my father.

I'm a lonely girl.

I bring home

no lover.

Only a son.

He's as weary

of me as any

husband would be.

The afternoon

yellow

into evening.

My father is gone.

I'm a lonely girl.”

(*Homeless* by Lisa Zaran)

#### **4.4 Objectification**

Women are not only presented as sex objects by male poets, female poets also construct a somewhat similar female identity by presenting women as objects for the sexual gratification of men. Seen from another perspective, while presenting women as submissive, surrendering to men, there is an implicit acceptance of male dominance.

“One day they hold you in the  
Palms of their hands, gentle, as if you  
Were the last raw egg in the world.”

(Lines from *Men* by Maya Angelou)

Another example is from the opening lines of *Lady Lazarus* by Sylvia Plath:

“I am your opus,  
I am your valuable,  
The pure gold baby  
That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.”

(Lines from *Lady Lazarus* by Sylvia Plath)

In *Buying the Whore*, Anne Sexton takes on the persona of a man whose referring expressions reveal how men look at women.

“You are the roast beef I have purchased  
and I stuff you with my very own onion.

You are a boat I have rented by the hour  
and I steer you with my rage until you run aground.

You are a glass that I have paid to shatter  
and I swallow the pieces down with my spit.

You are the grate I warm my trembling hands on,  
searing the flesh until it's nice and juicy.”

(Lines from *Buying the Whore* by Anne Sexton)

The use of the lexical items, ‘roast beef’, ‘boat’, ‘glass’, and ‘grate’ manifest the theme of denial of human status to women. The assertive tone that Anne Saxton uses in this poem is not found in her other poems. Since in this poem she has taken on the persona of a man, the voice sounds like that of an oppressor. The arrogance in the couplet “You are a glass that I have paid to shatter/ and I swallow the pieces down with my spit” is the arrogance of a man who loves to control a woman to satisfy his ego and considers his right to treat a woman as a sex toy.

In Sexton’s *Anna who was Mad*, one gets to hear the voice of a woman whose voice is no different from that of any man who treats women as sex objects. The following lines from *Anna*

*who was Mad* prove that it is not only men who see women as mere sex objects but women also project themselves in more or less the same way.

“Eat me. Eat me up like cream pudding.  
Take me in.”

(Lines from *Anna who was Mad* by Sexton)

The use of the verb ‘eat’ and its repetition give the image of a desperate woman who is obsessed with the desire to be consumed by her lover and how she compares herself with a dessert. Moreover, the use of the expression ‘cream pudding’ further strengthens the idea of objectification of women. Women are often compared with eatables in English language. Although such terms are used for men as well, they are far less in number as compared to the ones used for women. Some of the terms used for women in English include: *cheesecake, duck, tomato, chic, hen, cracker, fish, cookie, cupcake, dumpling, honey, jelly*, etc. These terms imply the insignificance of women and this insignificance is not only accepted without any objection by women but they also feel flattered if they are referred to by these terms.

#### **4.5 Inferiority Complex**

Female poets are often engaged in an effort to judge their worth in comparison to men but ironically give the judgement in favour of men instead of themselves. They seem to give this impression to their readers that their existence depends on men. Most of the poems produced by the female poets under investigation project male superiority over females giving a very biased message to both the male and the female readers that without a man’s love, a woman has no worth; she is a deprived soul. While projecting her inferiority as a female, Kamala Das also reinforces male supremacy in her poem *The Suicide*.

“O sea,  
You generous cow,  
You and I are big flops.  
We are too sentimental  
For our own  
Good.”

(Lines from *The Suicide* by Kamala Das)

Kamala Das has very openly attacked her own gender by using the expression 'big flops' and has also criticized the sentimentality of women. Like Kamala Das, Sylvia Plath also talks about her insignificance as a woman in her poem *I am Vertical*.

“Compared with me, a tree is immortal  
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,  
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,  
The trees and flowers have been strewing their cool odors.

I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.”

(Lines from *I'm Vertical* by Plath)

In her poem *Sheep in Fog*, Plath views herself as a worthless creature who disappoints both, living as well as non-living entities.

“The hills step off into whiteness  
People or stars  
Regard me sadly, I disappoint them.”

(Lines from *Sheep in Fog* by Plath)

'Sheep' is often used as a symbol of innocence and naivety. By using the metaphor of 'sheep' Plath presents her own naivety and innocence, while the metaphor of 'fog' is used to represent blurry vision. Through the use of these metaphors she weaves a web of dejection and uncertainty. The same sense of failure and loss is echoed by Margret Atwood in the following lines from her poem *Flying Inside your Own Body*:

“The sun's white winds blow through you,  
there's nothing above you,  
you see the earth now as an oval jewel,

radiant & sea blue with love.

It's only in dreams you can do this.

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You try & try to rise but you cannot.”

(Lines from *Flying Inside your Own Body* )

(Atwood, 1976)

By making the addressee of the poem (who is a female) realize that she can only achieve her ambitions in dreams, Atwood makes her and by extension all women believe that in reality they cannot attain the heights of success. In other words, success is only within the reach of men.

#### **4.6 Passivity and Complete Surrender**

Female poets present themselves as passive creatures as opposed to males, which is yet another way of mutilating their own identity. Since women are expected to remain passive, those who deviate from this passive role to actively participate in social, political or educational domains are either discouraged through severe criticism from society or are ostracized from the mainstream society which implies disapproval of their active engagement in the spheres of life other than the home domain.

Attached to the notion of passivity is the idea of complete surrender to satisfy male ego. Men do not like women who question male supremacy and speak for their own rights. Women poets are no different from ordinary women who make continuous efforts to please a man in their life to seek his approval.

“Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman.”

(Lines from *Getting a man to love you is easy* by Das)

These lines reflect women who think that their only purpose in this world is to satisfy the carnal desires of men. They believe that the gratification of men's desires is the only thing that can make women worthy in their eyes. While commenting on women's surrender to men, Berger (1972) writes:

Women are depicted in quite a different way to men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. (p. 64).

#### **4.7 Marginalization**

Marginalizing the weak is a common practice all over the world. In majority of the cases, the marginalized groups are either religious or ethno-linguistic minorities or women. Since it is easy to suppress their voice, such groups are often made the victims of oppression. As far as women are concerned, they are the easy target in such societies where gender discrimination against women is the norm and is therefore reflected even in the literature produced in such societies. The surprising thing is that it is not only the male writers who project women as marginalized souls but the female writers do the same. This trend is found in all literary genres and poetry is no exception.

Feminist critics often accuse male poets of marginalizing women in their work. What the feminist critics fail to notice is the marginalization of women by female poets themselves. In *This is a Photograph of Me*, Margret Atwood, a Canadian poet, projects the marginalization of her own gender.

“I am in the lake, in the center  
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where  
precisely, or to say  
how large or small I am:  
the effect of water  
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,  
eventually  
you will be able to see me.”

*(This is a photograph of me by Atwood).*

#### **4.8 Stereotyping women’s role**

Women are considered devoid of intellect and are often projected as creatures reserved for domestic chores only. There are numerous proverbs in different languages that project women as creatures who lack wisdom and are incapable of any intellectually productive work.

The following lines by Maya Angelou indicate how hard the life of a woman is as she remains busy from morning till evening. Nevertheless, the work she does is petty and does not require intellect. She is shown doing household chores which are not even acknowledged.

“I’ve got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
Then the chicken to fry  
The baby to dry  
I got company to feed  
The garden to weed  
I’ve got shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The can to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick.”

(*Woman Work* by Angelou)

#### **4.9 Self-annihilation**

Self-annihilation is an extreme form of mutilation of one’s identity as an individual which is a common feature found in female poets’ writings. According to Lipking (1988): “Women poets create from a sense of loss; the myth, not of hope pursued, but of hope abandoned” (p. 180). The poem ‘*Tulips*’ which represents Plath’s own battle with mental illness and psychiatric treatments is a classic example of self-annihilation.

“I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.  
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses  
And my history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons”

(Lines from *Tulips* by Plath)



The above lines mirror the helplessness of the persona, as she gives herself away to the nurses and doctors in the hospital. This specific act of surrender on the part of the poet can be considered as an instance of self-annihilation of the female identity. Commenting on Plath's poetry, Lant (1993) writes: "For her, the body stands not as a shimmering emblem of the soul's glory but seems, rather, an embarrassing reminder of the self's failures, an icon of the poet's vulnerability." (p. 625)

The feeling of self-denial was not only limited to Plath, but can also be observed among other female poets from different origins. Below is a line from one of the poems of Lisa Zaran in which she laments having no lover and therefore having no identity. The line carries a very strong implication that a woman's identity is tied to her lover. Absence of a lover implies annihilation of female identity.

"I am no one and nobody is my lover." (a line from *Tenderness* by Lisa Zaran)

Since women are denied the freedom to assert themselves, many of them develop thick walls of ignorance from their surroundings and develop a desire not to be noticed as is evident in the following lines by Muniza Alvi, a Pakistani poet, who expresses the wish not to be noticed at all.

"I would like to be a dot in a painting by Miro.

Barely distinguishable from other dots,  
it's true, but quite uniquely placed.  
And from my dark centre

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I'll never make out what's going on  
around me, and that's the joy of it.

The fact that I'm not a perfect circle  
makes me more interesting in this world.  
People will stare forever"

(Lines from *I would like to be a dot...* by Muniza Alvi)

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of the poems produced by female poets proves that females have unconsciously developed a negative self-image. If they had been conscious, they would not have distorted their own image through their poems. Nevertheless, if we assume this representation to be conscious, then it can be seen as a diatribe projecting the discrimination against women and its impact on the female psyche. Whatever the case, it cannot be denied that the texts that are produced by these poets reinforce gender inequality rendering women powerless. It is true that gender equality is a myth but the kind of inequality that is reflected in the female poetry is particularly disturbing for the female readers; it can convince them that they are powerless and this thought of having no power can have a very shattering effect on the female intellect which in turn can deprive them of whatever power they have otherwise. No ending can serve the purpose of this paper better than the following words by Wollstonecraft (1792, p.69):

“I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.”

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