

Poetry as a Sexual-textual Site of Transgression: Some Insights into the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Forough Farrokhzad

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Abstract

This paper explores different representations of female sexuality portrayed in the poetry of a nineteenth-century American poet, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) and a twentieth-century Iranian poet, Forough Farrokhzad (1934-1967). Their poetry has been largely characterized by an assertion of female sexuality and its impact on female creativity. Their works particularly highlight the ways male sexuality subjugates female sexuality and formulates an androcentric world of creativity. As their poetry postulates, women's suppressions and sufferings in their personal-sexual-textual world can be attributed to the phallogocentric world that consists of a myriad of socio-ethico-cultural regimens. The patriarchal world is shaped and continues to be consolidated by gender differentiations or binaries which exalt men as superior beings in everything and debase women through masculine hegemony. Thus, this paper traces the counter-masculine representations of female sexuality and creativity in the poetry of Dickinson and Farrokhzad.

Keywords: Sexuality, creative power, gendering, masculine hegemony, and feminine resistance

The poetry of Dickinson and Farrokhzad can be placed within the creative-critical continuum of female sexuality and creativity as well as the counter-masculine hegemonic explorations of patriarchy and representations of female sexuality. They belonged to two separate cultures and wrote in two separate centuries and languages. Nevertheless, there is much in common with regards to the relevance and significance of their poetry in the sexual-textual politics of female sexuality and creativity. Dickinson maintained no adherence to the conventions of form and metre of nineteenth-century American poetry. Farrokhzad also broke herself away from the embedded classicism of the Persian poetry of her previous era. They launched a distinct type of poetry with a unique manoeuvre of radical themes and styles. While Farrokhzad overtly revealed the feminine erotic fervour in her poetry, Dickinson, with her abstruse symbols and subtle sexual images, portrayed female sexuality and its impact on creative women. On top of that, both were skeptical about the religious status quo of their milieus. Dickinson hardly went to the church; rather she found her spiritual peace within herself. Farrokhzad suffered the brunt of misogyny and gender strictures that were ingrained in the mid-twentieth century religious fabric of Iran. This paper addresses the ways Emily Dickinson and Forough Farrokhzad coincide with each other with regard to their real-life sufferings, confrontational poetic

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ventures, creative-critical representation of female sexuality and their theo-critical significance in the feminist scholarship on speaking/writing about women's resistance.

Dickinson's life was marred by rumors and controversies over her several alleged love affairs. Moreover, her enigmatic seclusion, unrequited love, loss of several kindred ones, anxiety over poetic recognition turned her forlorn and cut her off from the creative world. Again, her assiduous venture of creativity was always at odds with traditional gender ideology. All these left some indelible scars on her mind and she ventilated all her agonies in her poems. Many tried to put her into a certain category of personality. Pohl (1933) digs out this facet of Dickinson's life that there were:

Speculation and controversies over the identity of the man who was the inspiration of her love poems. Many admirers and even critics evinced their curiosity in labeling her as "mystic", "queer" and "hypersensitive", while some attempted to see her as "prim, bloodless, and emotionally static". (p. 468)

Despite all these traumas and tensions, she wrote prolifically, preferring poetry as her language of agony, love and rebellion. As Rich (1993) pointed out, Dickinson was a "Vesuvius at home", who

chose her seclusion, knowing she was exceptional and knowing what she needed ... She carefully selected her society and controlled the disposal of her time ... neither eccentric nor quaint; she was determined to survive, to use her powers, to practice necessary economics. (p. 179)

Most of Dickinson's poems were published posthumously and received critical acclaim. Throughout her short writing career, she felt an emotional urge to reach her readers. In a letter to Winston Higginson, a noted editor and mentor popular with the budding authors of Amherst, she asked for guidance and recognition:

Mr. Higginson,
Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?
The Mind is so near itself – it cannot see, distinctly – and I have none to ask –
Should you think it breathed – and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude –
If I make the mistake – that you dared to tell me – would give me sincerer honor – toward you –
I enclose my name – asking you, if you please – Sir – to tell me what is true?
That you will not betray me – it is needless to ask – since Honor is its own pawn – (as cited in Sewall, 1976, p. 541)

This letter evinces her striving for a voice to be heard - a voice that was ignored by the editorial pundits of her locale largely represented by the male. Unfortunately, in her whole lifetime only ten of her poems and a letter were published.

Farrokhzad creates an overture in modern Persian poetry and her poetic success marks a breakthrough in the coming-to-being process for the female litterateurs in modern Iran. Wolpe's (2007) translation of the selected poems from Farrokhzad's debut repertoire *Gonah* (*Sin*, 1954) poems introduced her to a global audience. A radical cosmopolitanism and a non-parochial perspective of female sexuality and creativity

characterize Farrokhzad's poetry that can be seen as an endeavour to represent Persian female poets in the global arena. As Radjy (2019) observes:

After the overthrow of Iran's secular monarchy in 1979, the Islamic Republic banned her poetry for almost a decade. But that censorship only elevated her appeal to new generations of Iranians, who saw Farrokhzad as a symbol of artistic, personal and sexual freedom. (para 6)

Radjy (2019) further digs out Farrokhzad's milieu. During the autocratic reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-41) freedom of expression, including cultural and literary voice, was enormously suppressed. However, literature of this time did not cease to resist the regime of Pahlavi: cutting away from traditional forms and themes modern Persian poetry emerged as a counter-expression against political despotism and literary stalemate of Iran in the post-revolution era. Persian poetry received its European influence – especially in terms of French symbolism, European modernist literature's use of imagery and prosody—with a host of mid-20th century writers, e.g., Nima Yushij, Ahmad Shamlu, Forough Farrokhzad, Mehdi Akhvan-e Sales, and Nader Naderpour. Farrokhzad was one of the exponential poets of modern Persian poets (Radjy, 2019). A cosmopolitan humanist, Farrokhzad blended the Iranian with the Western. Thus, she was successful in making a breakthrough with her outspoken delineation of female sexuality and its suppressive treatment in modern Iran. But she was tormented with public censure and media controversies. As Wolpé observes:

Her poetry was the poetry of protest - protest through revelation - revelation of the innermost world of women (considered taboo until then), their intimate secrets and desires, their sorrows, longings, aspirations and at times even their articulation through silence. Her expressions of physical and emotional intimacy, much lacking in Persian women's poetry up to that point, placed her at the center of controversy, even among the intellectuals of the time. She was subjected to tabloid gossip and portrayed as a woman of loose morals. (para. 2)

Farrokhzad's divorce, failed love affair, despair and several suicide attempts, mental ailment, bold sexual life and reception of public censure characterized her topsy-turvy family and romantic life. Besides, her gender identity affected her authorial and private life quite badly. Her poem "Gonah" ("The Sin", 1954), opening up with a radical feminine eroticism – "I sinned a sin of pleasure" – which jerked the patriarchal notion of femininity and thus incurred public censure. Her break-up with Nasser Khodayar, the chief editor of the literary magazine *Roshanfeker*, in 1954 and subsequently Khodayar's targeted defamation of Farrokhzad through some of his short stories profoundly traumatized Farrokhzad. She resigned herself from the creative world. It was rumoured that she had gone mad. In such a climate of patriarchal insensibility and feminine vulnerability, she had to continue writing poetry (Radjy, 2019).

This paper ascertains inter alia the theo-critical perspectives of gender-based ideological forces that affected the creative and real life of Dickinson and Farrokhzad. It also discusses how both of them imprinted a culture of resistance through their poetry. It analyses some of Dickinson's poems that portray her philosophy on the relationship between the female creative and sexual urge and on how patriarchal conventions can stifle both these urges. Farrokhzad wrote in Persian language. Her poetic oeuvre is quite

vast. This paper cites some of her poems, translated into English, that offer Farrokhzad's subversive critiques of patriarchal-religious encroachment on feminine sexual-creative existence.

Dickinson and the interplay of sexuality and power

Emily Dickinson's poems on romance and love, which remain enigmatic, ambiguous and unconventional, reflect an interplay of gender and power in the physical and creative world dominated by a monolithic masculinity through many of her poems. She articulates, in her characteristic queer but pronounced ways, how a self-driven feminine identity can emanate a counter-assertion of women's sexual and creative autonomy. In light of some of her poems, this paper examines Dickinsonian ways of understanding gender-power relationship. Creativity and gender dominance have always been seen as inter-mingled by the masculinist canonicity and the male authors have easily been privileged by this normative writing tradition. As Bennet (1990) posits, citing Gilbert and Gubar, "male writers have felt free to glorify their sex and to identify their penises with their pens" (p. 153). This culture has been making the women writers overawed and overshadowed by a phallicentric sexual-textual world. The way women are compelled to succumb to the phallic urge of the male, a female writer is exposed to the influence of the androcentric writing tradition. We find this reflection in Dickinson's poems, e.g., "They shut me up in Prose", "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun", "He fumbles at your spirit", "Why make it doubt - it" and so on.

In "He fumbles at your spirit", we encounter the metaphoric connotations of tyranny and power of a patriarchal writing trend, as expressed through the word imageries like "stuns", "blow", "hammers", and "imperial thunderbolt". The speaker is all-surrendering to her lover just as a female writer looks up to the male writers. In "Why make it doubt - it", we see the emphatic reiteration of this fear through the word imageries like "hurt", "sick", "strong", "dangerous", "pinching fear", "offend", and "misery". These again connote a feminine timidity and vulnerability which are also experienced by a female writer. As Dickinson (1999) writes:

For that dear—distant—dangerous—Sake—
But—the Instead—the Pinching fear
That Something –it did do—or dare—
Offend the Vision—and it flee — (lines vii-x)

In "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun", the imageries like "loaded gun", "carried away", "Vesuvian face", and such like direct us to the extended metaphors of an all-pervading phallic encroachment and influence upon the women's physical and creative world. As we see Dickinson (1999) write:

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -
In Corners - till a Day
The Owner passed - identified -
And carried Me away - (lines i-iv)

The gun-like power of the violent sadism and mindlessness involved in phallic pleasure and masculine creative condescension is debilitating and women are benumbed by this

power. Dickinson, by writing against this power, turns mysteriously rebellious as if through her ability to understand phallic politics she created a rupture against this politics. As Faderman (2016) observes: “She creates a radical disjuncture between text and meaning indicating that an experience of profound significance is being expressed, but refusing to name that experience” (p. 118). Her poems foreshadow a power in the offing to make a counter-assertion of women’s identity.

The odyssey of Dickinson as a woman striving to write poems was replete with socio-ethico-creative challenges, which will be detailed later on in this paper. Though she surmounted those blows, she realized how alienating her journey was. As we encounter in “They shut me up in Prose”:

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me “still” - (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv)

In this poem, we also explore the continuation of male ideology’s humiliating misconception of women’s creative power. According to this norm, a woman is not fit for writing poetry; rather she should continue her reclusive life and ‘prose-tale-writing’ about this life. The mentions of metaphoric images like “still”, “bird”, and “captivity” do not only show the inhibiting forces with which Dickinson had to grapple, but the demeaning cultural eye or assumption out of which women’s creative power had been evaluated. It has been true of all times and been possible because of the predominance of male gender in the world of economic, political, creative and sexual order. Women have always been rendered incompatible with this wider world and the prose signifies this world of misogyny and male chauvinism. Consequently, gender and genre politics foreshadows a broader spectrum of men’s unscrupulous power and women’s existential negations.

Dickinson, however, wrote and resisted staying within these negations without morphing herself into a self-effacing and morose story-teller; rather she transcended all societal and sexual dogmas on women’s autonomous gender identity, whether creative or sexual. As Runzo (1999) maintains:

Dickinson’s embodiment of numerous female roles – wife, bride, queen, schoolgirl, maid, heterosexual lover, nun, lady, empress, housewife – would appear to place her solidly within heterosexist ideology and conventional social codes; however, her unrestrained assumption of female roles conveys such excess that Dickinson’s ostensibly “inconspicuous” presentation of herself as a woman turns into something else – something incongruous, dissonant, defiant. (p. 59)

Moreover, the phallogocentric grounds of gender and power are repudiated by Dickinson through her poetic idiosyncrasies lying in the contents, the style and stature of her poems. Juhasz (2005) stresses this aspect of Dickinson’s poetry, quoting Amy Lowell’s poem “The Sisters,” where the latter espouses Dickinson, Elizabeth Barret Browning and Sappho: “We’re a queer lot / we women who write poetry” (p. 32). Juhasz (2005) further holds: “Dickinson’s queer poetics, orchestrated by the textual electric, its metaphoric language, creates a most complex erotic amplitude” (p. 32). Dickinson’s is an avanguardist style – a blend of subjectivised speaker in the form of authorial persona “I”, self-adopted

meter and off-rhyme, use of capitalisations of the middle words, mostly common nouns and most notably, use of dashes –was deemed to be a queer style but made a Dickinsonian symbol of poetry that constitutes her own stylistic poetics of resistance in a culture where writing poetry was entirely grounded upon phalocentric canonical conventions. Barker (2002) aptly observes the metaphoric depth of this self-chosen style of Dickinson:

As revolutionary as her contemporary Walt Whitman, Dickinson broke the bounds of nineteenth-century verse form, refusing the confines of conventional poetics. And like Whitman, she too wrote of the difficulties of being someone not cut out of dimity, someone who did not fit within the comfortable definitions of gendered behavior. (p. 87)

Her recurrent use of dashes, violation of grammatical usage, pithy poems and abstruse imagery make her poetry indiscernible: she becomes herself through her poetry and thus finds her existence in the sensitive readers who will be fervent in reading her poetry. Thus, she sets forth a different language and definition of poetry. Poetry, then for Dickinson's, turns out to be a "language of intense thought, of extreme experience, whether internally "at the White Heat" or in "uniforms of snow." A private language, a language different from the language of the "majority," poetry is not for everybody" (Barker, 2002, p. 84). Like "snow" or "heat" she hovers above common heights and leaves a provocation to the audience to read her with serious compassion and concentration.

In her poems, Dickinson conjures up a new-age woman who is not only outspokenly talking about male constructs on creative power, but is radicalising the foul plays with which women have been demeaned in the creative world. She dismantles the taboos on female sexuality which have been kept away even from the thought-world of the women: she has made her poems loaded with sexual and genital images like 'birds', 'bees', 'crumb', 'dew' and so on and direct visualisation of caressing lovers on the 'little bed' (Dickinson, 1999). Bennet (1990) observes the celebration of the littleness by writing poems on these radical themes and bringing phallic politics into light is a creative subversion and counter-assertion of a new woman's identity.

This woman can rupture the regimes of masculine creativity and relish homoerotic sexual drives by throwing off the "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, as cited in Bennet, 1990, p.165), hetero-sexualised meaning of sexuality imposed upon her as a tool of subordination. In poems addressing Susan, Mrs Bowels, Mrs Holland, the Norecross cousins and her sister Vinnie, Dickinson underlies this open power to enjoy her homoerotic zeal. For example in the poem "One Sister Have I in our House", we discover such resonance:

I spilt the dew -
 But took the morn, -
 I chose this single star
 From out the wide night's numbers -
 Sue - forevermore! (Dickinson, 1999, lines xxiii - xxvii)

Koski (1996) emphasizes "her homoerotic feelings" (p. 26) by referring to a letter of Dickinson, which was addressed to Susan:

Susie, will you indeed come home next Saturday, and be my own again, and kiss me ... I hope for you so much, and feel so eager for you, feel that I *cannot* wait, feel that *now* I must have you—that the expectation once more to see your face again, makes me feel hot and feverish, and my heart beats so fast ... my darling, so near I seem to you, that I *disdain* this pen, and wait for a *warmer* language. (pp. 28-9)

According to Bennet (1990), Dickinson's poem "'Tis Seasons since the Dimpled War", records "a lifetime of mutual loving and fighting, presumably with Susan." As we see:

'Tis Seasons since the Dimpled War
 In which we each were Conqueror
 And each of us were slain
 And Centuries 'twill be and more. (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv)

In "Wild Nights, Wild Nights" we get this same resonance of homoeroticism:

Wild nights - Wild nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild nights should be
 Our luxury!

...

Rowing in Eden -
 Ah - the Sea!
 Might I but moor - tonight -
 In thee! (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv & ix-xii)

These lines echo an explicit erotic appeal to her mysterious beloved. The erotic implications flow with an articulate emotional visualisation of a secret chamber shared by her lover and herself. In the ambience of "wild night", her love passionately imbibes herself into being ravished by her beloved. This beloved is arguably Susan Gilbert but it is not explicated in the poem. As Smith argues (2002):

Although their relationship has strong elements of romantic friendship and also might be called prototypically lesbian, as well as mutually mentoring their dynamic devotion does not fit comfortably into any standard category – lover, sister, mentor, best friend, neighbour, or companion – though it has elements of each. (p. 59)

In the face of public rumours and controversies, she kept her ties with Susan – an enigma that is itself her rebellious imperviousness to public constructs on her personal life.

Through these harbingers of creative and sexual individuality, Dickinson has set a transcending autonomy for creative women. We can here note Butler's (2011) stance:

Writing appears to take issue with genitally organised sexuality per se and to call for an alternative economy of pleasures which would both contest the construction of female subjectivity marked by women's supposedly distinctive reproductive function. (p. 36)

Her decision to remain an audacious spinster, her seclusion and disloyalty to religious indoctrinations, skepticism about male-dominated world of creativity and publication as well as denunciation of gendering or sexualizing norms form a significant resistance:

The Soul selects her own Society —
 Then — shuts the Door —
 To her divine Majority —
 Present no more — (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv)

She is again straightforward about her own sexual life that is purely her own. Hence, she “shuts the door” or all cheap and popular gossips or controversies that encroached upon her individual autonomy. She also makes the inconsiderate “majority” eschew all obnoxious encroachment upon women’s sexual and creative life. The sardonic irony becomes more scathing when she calls these distasteful people “divine majority” who sees a heterosexual marriage as the foremost expression of someone’s romantic or sexual life. She subverts these popular truths on marriage:

Doom is the House without the Door –
 ’Tis entered from the Sun –
 And then the Ladder’s thrown away,
 Because Escape – is done — (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv)

For Dickinson, a marriage based on suppressive sexuality is a “doom” for women. This sort of marriage is an agency of violence on women: the spirit or self of women is taken away by a dictating and sex-obsessed husband who like the “mighty sun” “scorch” or “scathe” the bride, throwing off her freedom and possibilities of success and glory (Barker, 2002). The capitalist society which was in the offing in the New England would debase and dominate women’s sexual and creative empowerment by according them a sexualized marital status stripping of their own emancipation or “escape” from the identity of a dependent and reproductive object.

Dickinson was outspoken in revealing her distrust on and rejection of all dogmatic indoctrinations of Christianity, as practiced in her locale. She denounces faith as suppressive and insensitive:

Faith is a fine invention
 For Gentlemen who *see!*
 But Microscopes are prudent
 In an Emergency! (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv)

Here she interrogates the role of indoctrinated religious view that can be agentive for the “gentlemen”, as does an “invention”, in ensuring some control and surveillance on the faithful people who are fated to be subservient and surrendering towards their rulers.

She resisted the publication ethics and policies of her time which were largely constructed by her male counterparts:

“Publication — is the Auction
 Of the Mind of Man —

Poverty — be justifying
For so foul a thing

...

In the Parcel — Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace —
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price —” (Dickinson, 1999, lines i-iv & xiii-xvi)

She unveils the sense of commodification and interference that operates through “the auction of the mind of man”. She resents over and warns of the “foul thing” – manifestation of the non-scholarly exercises of limiting creative pursuits to mere “price” - that was going to be a trend in the creative industry of the world.

These poems I have analyzed here establish Dickinson as a conscious reader of masculine hypocrisy and demagoguery which have been naturalized into women’s psyche. As Brittan and Maynard (1984) hold: “...what men understand as a natural relationship between themselves and women disguises the actuality of their power” (p.181). Dickinson discerned and subverted this kind of masculine ideology. The selected poems discussed here decipher the relationship between gender and power and showed that men are the arbitrary proprietors of this relationship. However, she articulates that women can also partake and influence this power-gender liaison through their own gender and formation of creative identity.

Farrokhzad’s sexual-creative iconoclasm

Forough Farrokhzad (1934-1967) is a short-lived yet very influential Iranian modern poet and a prominent artist and documentary maker. Her personal pursuit of sexuality, her divorce, her plights in her in-laws house, her estrangement from her son, her pathetic loss of the custodial rights to her own son, allegations of being a nymphomaniac woman and her audacity to pursue poetry as a charged site of expressing Iranian women’s sexualized identity incurred her a socio-political hostility. She, however, struggled all through her life by not only writing poems, but by resisting as a literary and intellectual iconoclast. Iran in her poems is represented by a politicized indoctrination of gendering norms; it infringes upon the psychic and physical world of women. In its rigid patriarchal regime, women had to live up to man-made constructs or ideologies of ideal womanhood. Quarantined in conventional household chores, they participated in the compulsory heterosexual bond with male husbands. Farrokhzad examines how the culture of sexualization generates a mentality of servitude and renders women passive either in making resistance against this reproductive commodification of their autonomous body, or in creative or productive expressions of their potentials.

Farrokhzad’s intermingling of sexuality and textuality puts her authorial and real life into a beautiful symmetry. Post-Islamic Revolution Iran banned her poetry. In the face of such a suppressive patriarchal regime, she did not only indict fundamentalist masculine hegemony, but resisted against her own personal predicaments in the conservative Islamist society of Iran, She had ambitions of subverting the culture of denigration and suppression of women’s sexual, economic and creative rights. She

strongly reveals that there is a societal and discursive implantation of self-effacement and lack of sexual-creative expression - deep into women's psyche through the conditioning and normalization of making, believing and seeing women within a sexual docility and regenerative body either as a sensuous wife or servile creature.

Poetry as a charged site of awareness of the self and all the patriarchal wrongs affecting the self is exponentially shaped by Farrokhzad. Modern Persian poetry has been marked by a passivity about this responsible awareness of the miseries of the self of women and the ethico-religious cabals which continue to haunt and harm the self of Iranian women. As Farrokhzad contends:

I believe that any artistic endeavor must be accompanied by awareness. Awareness of life, existence, body, even of this apple we bite into. One cannot—indeed, must not—live with instinct alone. One must form an opinion about oneself and the world and this forces the artist to think. Once the process of thinking begins, one can stand firmly rooted upon the ground. I am not saying that poetry must be purely an intellectual endeavor. No. That's foolish. I'm saying that an artistic work must be the result of inspiration. (Wolpé, 2007, p.xxvi)

She transcended the parochiality lying in feminist or any humanist movement which fails to undertake the real-world sufferings of women in manifold ways. In the creative or artistic world, female authors suffer a myriad of insidious obstructions that also remain unexplored in the phallogocentric discourses.

She foresaw the looming threat of dogmatic fundamentalism in Iran. Women would be easy targets and vulnerable creatures in the totalitarian male-dominated Iran. But she envisions a death with an indomitable and united belief amongst her women folk:

“Let us believe,
let us believe in the dawn of the cold season.
Let us believe in the ruin of imaginary gardens,
in idle inverted scythes, in confined seeds.
Look how it snows . . .” (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

The mentions of “cold season, confined seeds, snow” are the manifestations of her and her fellow women's lifetime predicaments. But Farrokhzad is not tarnished by any form of patriarchy. Her poetry as her self-created beloved represents all women's creative power and Iranian women's ongoing resistance and resilience as a source of life. Her resonance of optimism still permeates strongly and aligns herself with all suffering women who long for an existential meaning and change in their suppressed life. As her persona reiterates in “Let us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season”:

Perhaps the truth was those two young hands,
those young hands
buried beneath snow—
... beloved, my truest friend.
Let us believe in the dawn of the cold season.... (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

Here the “two young hands” of the persona indicate the bogged-down state of women at large but out of these “buried” lives they can foster a future of “spring” of women's

empowered life. She sensitizes the need to hope and fight back and consoling herself through an impassioned conversation with her “truest friend”, i.e., her own poems which, she believes, will live strong and enliven the buried womanhood.

Farrokhzad’s *Captive* (1955) transgressed the modern Iranian literature that portrayed women in a sexualized and subordinated stature. In her poetry, the timid and sexually ostracized women were relegated to perform the role of ideal womanhood according to the handed-down tradition of Iranian patriarchy. She dismantled this sexual subservience and passivity of women by portraying her persona reversing the role of dominance in the sexual consummation or intercourse. Her female speaker is shown to be making the sexual advances and amorous arousal for the male lover. This reversal of sex-role is indicative of the way women can bounce back sexually and tear apart sexual brutality and dominance that account for their feeling of abnegation and normalization of a certain sexualized or objectified identity. This also dampens their possibilities of individuation. Farrokhzad also shatters the taboo or patriarchal sexualization that has been accumulated over the centuries to sustain women’s manifold subordinations. Her persona through her erotic move towards her lover avowedly subverted the phallogentric ideals of sexuality and sexual body. She writes on women-men sexuality and body in such a fluid and free manner that her poetry cannot but work as a weapon against age-old patriarchal notions and practice of sexuality. Moreover, her poetry itself becomes identical to the body of her beloved which she aspires to enjoy with a freedom and reciprocity of spiritual love that remain missing in a phallogentric compulsory sexuality. Here we can cite Wolpé’s (2007) observations:

Farrokhzad’s first collection of poems, *Asir (Captive, 1955)*, is released. It is a collection of forty-four poems, radiating with sensuality and pushing the boundaries of what can be said by an Iranian woman. Historically, women—their beautiful breasts, hair, etc.—have often been made the subjects of Iranian poetry, but now Forugh has made men her poetic subjects, her objects of love and reverie, of passion and sexual desire. Her poems are autobiographical and from a clearly feminine perspective. (p.xx)

As Wolpé (2007) also pinpoints: she puts herself at the vantage of her poetic tales because her poetry is by extension drawn from her life. Her speaker or she here is an alter ego of all Iranian women who are pitted against the obtrusive and immoral sexual crimes and controls that patriarchy have wrought upon them over the centuries. She turns her poems of this collection into a surrendering male beloved and thus signals that sexualized or “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 138-9) would counter-act creatively and through an individual sexual subjectivity. Giv and Shahbazi (2016) hold that “the evolution of contemporary Persian poetry was performed step by step. Years 1961 to 1970 can be called escalation of armed conflict in Iran (p. 1378)”. Farrokhzad’s intellectual and artistic ventures lie at the center of this period. “Farrokhzad is the only explosion of silence”, Giv and Shahbazi (2016) further examine, “solitude and complex of Iranian women” (in Baraheni 210). She expresses boldly her opinions on women’s sexuality in her poems. Her poetry is the outcry of a contemporary woman against conventions limiting women in the Eastern society.

The Iranian literary history being predominantly androcentric branded Farrokhzad as a notorious poet. After the Islamic Revolution (1979) her poetry was banned and her publisher was brutalized and even the publishing house was vandalized (Giv & Shahbazi, 2016). Farrokhzad's poem, "I Feel Sorry for the Garden" captures this tumult and trauma of her life:

No one's thinking about the flowers
 No one's thinking about the fish
 No one wants to believe the garden's dying
 That its heart has grown swollen under the sun
 That its mind is being drained of green memories
 That its senses lie huddled and rotting in a corner. (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

The poem "Sorrow of Loneliness" touches upon this history of predicaments of Farrokhzad. As the speaker says:

You no longer keep me warm,
 Love, you frozen sun.
 My heart is a wasteland of despair,
 I am fatigued, fatigued from love. (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

The persona here embodies the ways compulsory heterosexual relationships devastate the psychic and physical world of women. In Iran and worldwide, religion-backed gender ideology allows a phallogocentric ownership and control of women's bodies for men. Thus, women suffer for centuries the "frozen" torments of profound physical agonies and psychological trauma that render them "fatigued", and their visions and ambitions become "wasteland of despair". As Darznik (2010) observes:

"Gonah" ("The Sin", 1954), evokes an idyll frequently depicted by the fourteenth-century lyric poet Hafez: the sensual communion between two lovers. But in Farrokhzad's poem, the "beloved" of ancient verse becomes herself the "lover". The reversal at once upends poetic and moral conventions. Here, it is the woman whose eyes linger on the man's body and who captures her own "sin" with poetic rapture. (p.107)

This poetics of sexuality can signal a major breakthrough that Milani (2020) sees as the "unveiling" (p.110) of women's sexual zeal through her speaker as well as revelation of the male beloved as the object of sexualizing drive of speaker. Darznik (2010) reiterates the significance of this radical projection of female sexuality in her poetry.

In a culture in which anxieties about female sexuality have for centuries stood at the heart of legal and moral control of women's lives, Farrokhzad's treatment of sexual themes was without precedent or parallel, and it would produce a revolution in Iranian women's writing. (p. 106)

Farrokhzad's poem "The Wall" (1956) accentuates this conscious radicalization of female sexuality in her poetry:

I have sinned a rapturous sin
 in a warm enflamed embrace.
 Sinned in a pair of vindictive arms,
 arms violent and ablaze. (Farrokhzad, 2020, lines i-iv)

It is more than a taboo-breaking gesture in her contemporary Iranian society which sees women's real-life and creative expression of female sexuality as a violent sin. "In this poem, she not only celebrates committing a carnal sin", Darznic (2010) states, "but in the hearts of many commits an even greater transgression by so unabashedly expressing an intimately feminine point of view" (p.xxi). In her poem, "On Loving", she espouses this empowering feminine love:

Yes, so love begins,
 and though the road's end is out of sight
 I do not think of the end for it is the loving I so love" (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines vii-x)

To unveil her speaker's lust for the male body, Farrokhzad does not simply invoke a purely heterosexual or sexualizing or commodifying erotic urge; she instead endeavors an emotionally empowering sexual engagement with her beloved which remains absent in the compulsory sex-based love in the heterosexual relations. In the poem "Wind-up Doll" her persona utters:

With an alien voice, utterly false,
 one can cry out: I love!
 In the oppressive arms of a man
 one can be a robust, beautiful female—
 skin like leather tablecloth,
 breasts large and hard. (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines xvii-xxii)

These lines inscribe a newly-discovered emotion and reverence out of which the woman either as a beloved or as a wife should be treated. The conventional constructs of sensuous and surrendered wife or mistress, as demanded by heterosexual conjugality, are debunked in so many poems of Farrokhzad. Milani notes this perspective: "The Captive", "The Wall", and "Rebellion" reveal a unified concern about the nature and issue of womanhood. The focus on portraying a modern woman—experienced, not created—is an important attribute of this early poetry" (2020, p.120). Furthermore, Farrokhzad issues scathing criticism of the commodifying nature of male attitude to female sexuality. Counter-representation of men's body has been created by her to insinuate how the male counterparts react to the ways of making male bodies solely into sexed bodies. In this way, she teasingly questions male insensitivity about the sheer commodification and subjugation of the female bodies. Her audacious attack on male sexuality receives the attention of Milani (2020):

Man is presented time and again in the first three collections as a merely physical creature. Led by his erotic instincts, he cares only for the carnal aspect of love. This capacity to shift his affections according to the desires of the moment leads inevitably to his betrayal of the woman who asks for an emotional commitment to match her own to. (p.123)

We confront this shattering of patriarchal conception of body-based power of male sexuality in the poem “Bitter Myth”:

He was taught nothing but desire,
 Interested in nothing but appearances.
 Wherever he went, they whispered in his ears,
 Woman was created for your pleasure. (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

In the Iranian culture, new language and outlook in the portrayal and revelation of female sexuality are set forth by her poetry. Female sexuality is cocooned into a taboo or a vile matter not only in daily conversations and thoughts but also in patriarchal Persian poetry. Farrokhzad (Milani, 2020) once avowedly subverted this literary fuss around female love or sexuality:

The attitude of modern poets toward love is utterly superficial. Love in today's poetry is confined to a certain amount of desire, heartache, and anguish, culminating in a few words about union which is the end of everything, while it could and should very well be the beginning. Love has not found an opening to newer dimensions of thought, reflection and emotion. (p. 125)

Farrokhzad has observed how patriarchal literary culture produces creative arts out of female sexuality and their body but retains a shroud of seriousness and inhibition for women that do not allow them to converse about their own sexuality in creative sites or in the real-life world. Farrokhzad subverts this hypocritical irony in the creative and practical world of the patriarchs. She tears down all stiff taboo and constructs of sin around female love and its natural sexual expression. As we see in the lines below, the speaker in “My Lover” asserts without any shyness and fear to her beloved man:

My lover is a simple man,
 a simple man whom I have hidden
 between the bushes of my breasts
 like the last token of a wondrous faith
 in an awesome wondrous land...
 He is savagely free
 like a healthy instinct
 in the heart of an uninhabited island. (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines xxi-xxiii & xlv-xlviii)

Through this explicit amorous or erotic revelation of female sexual urge or advance she yearns for “a free”, “healthy instinct” and “wondrous faith” to attain an emotional and creative freedom and fulfilment. “The heart of an uninhabited island” represents the realistic gendering norms and taboos women suffer in pursuing a healthy and autonomous sexual and creative life. For Farrokhzad, this audacious unveiling of female sexuality through her poetry marks a sexual-textual identity and resistance for Iranian women. The poem “Another Birth” emblems this radical awakening of womanhood out of the ashes of male subjugation:

One dark word is all I am
 Uttering you again and again

Until you wake where you blossom forever
 In this word I breathed you, breathed
 And in this word bound you
 To trees, water, flame. (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines i-vi)

In “Window”, she does not reveal a self-effacing surrender to patriarchal dominations and merely complains about the virulent nature of patriarchy. As the speaker of “Window” outrages:

I come from the homeland of dolls
 from beneath the shades of paper-trees
 in the garden of a picture book
 from the dry seasons of impotent experiences in friendship and love
 in the soil-covered alleys of innocence.” (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines xiv-xviii)

The mentions “homeland of dolls”, “shades”, “impotent experiences in friendship and love”, “tuberculous school” and such like connote the impact of an imposed sexuality that is validated by marital ideology for women. They quarantined women within their roles as suppressed, surrendered and silent creatures.

Unabashed and adamant rapport with poetry marks Farrokhzad’s supreme identity that has not betrayed her. The intercourse of her pen with her poem is more than a satisfying erotic orgasm for her. As the persona of “Sin” loudly espouses this bond:

I sinned, a sin all filled with pleasure
 next to a body now limp and languid
 I know not what I did, God
 in that dim and quiet place of seclusion. (Farrokhzad, 2007, lines xxi-xxiv)

The connotations of “seclusion” “body” and “pleasure” connotes an interplay between a free sexual, private and a creative or autonomous life of woman that Farrokhzad strove for all her lifetime. So she has reposed her profound faith in the future Iranian intellectually motivated resisting voices that they would forge ahead for a free sexual and creative identity that post -1979 Iran has bogged down. As her speaker sighs but again signals in “Later On” that Farrokhzad’s anti-patriarchal, anti-dogmatic and anti-dehumanisation resistance will be continued:

My death will come someday to me
 One bittersweet day, like all my days
 ...
 Slowly my hands slide o’er my notes
 Delivered from poetry’s spell,
 I recall that once in my hands
 I held the flaming blood of poetry. (Farrokhzad, n.d., lines i-ii & xviii-xxi)

She feels elegiac but strongly faithful to her self-created beloved, her poetry, that will fight back against the century-old sexist, classicist and racist gender codes and

encroachments on Iranian women's sexual and creative life. As Farzaneh Millani (2011) aptly reflects:

Even the iconoclastic Forough Farrokhzad, who challenged feminine definitions and spaces, speaks of feminine deviousness in the poem "Confession." Moving with fluid ease from the particular to the general, from a personal confession to a collective trait, she refers to the female capacity for treachery: "O, don't ever believe My heart is one with my tongue All I said were lies, a pack of lies I never told you what I desired". (Farrokhzad, n.d.)

The very female bodies that are sexualized as a source of gratification and a site of phallogocentric power can be counter-expressed as a site of resistance. Her remarriage and radical sexual and authorial life becomes an act of resistance against the "naïvetés, and moralisms" (Foucault, 1978, p.65) of sexuality and thus forges her authorial authority. As a woman and poet, Farrokhzad was confronted with the Iranian cultural regimens and suffered traumatic experiences. She has been accused of blasphemy. Her poems have been censored for its alleged anti-Islamic contents and outspoken treatment of female sexuality. But she wrestled with a consistent moral courage and intellectual resistance against all the allegations and accusations against her.

Poetry as an act of undoing masculine hegemony

Masculinity is a mode of dominance and control of women which has been perennially ingrained in every familial or social fabric of man-woman relationship. The world order that we experience and grow up with is marked by myriad explicit and implicit power relations. Gender relations are one of the pivotal entities of power relations by which every society is operated. Interestingly, gender relations being essentially power relations characterize certain forms of dominance which involves gendering or othering one gender from another in a way to normalize the superiority of a particular gender which enjoys a by-default prerogative of power. Patriarchy has always been that by-default power cabal and has been complicit in essentializing ownership and control of any other sex. As Vijayan (2019) asserts: "'Patriarchy' refers to the organization of inter- and intra-sex relations, especially sexual relations, by any given society, in such a way that they favour men, favour the dominance of men, as well as the institutions and discourses endorsing such an organization" (p.11). Donaldson (as cited in Howson, 2005) examines this exclusionary, dehumanizing and discriminatory politics ingrained in patriarchy as "hegemonic masculinity" that is -

a culturally idealised form", is both a personal and collective project ... exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent. ... is constructed through difficult negotiation over a life-time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with. (p. 3)

Hegemonic masculinity has lifelong dangers for women: it deprives and suppresses women in so many ways and makes women uncritical and almost fatalistic about their sexual, economic, creative and political deprivations at the hands of their male-counterparts. Besides, the gender ideologies or indoctrinations, which masculinize feminine head and heart, render women impervious to the evils of patriarchy and all-pervading impacts of slavery and subordination of women and erasure of women from

any empowering actions that can emancipate them from continued hegemonic oppression of the masculine world and counter-act against the insidious threats of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has its deep roots into the creative world of women: creative women can neither establish their own voice and presence via art or literature, nor can they shun male creative obtrusions. Gilbert and Gubar (in Mori, 2002) investigate how a male-centred creative world of the nineteenth century and its continued impact in the twentieth century navigates around a phallogocentric myth of creativity that views the author as a “Divine creator” who are thought to “father the text” (Mori, 2002). As they put:

Since both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women, before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts which, defining them as ‘Cyphers’, deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen. (p. 56)

Dickinson and Farrokhzad defied this phallogocentric writing-editing conventions and asserted their own feminine language and style with a nuanced statement of feminine power of creativity.

Dickinson advances a political awareness as an instrument to fight masculine hegemony that leaves women restricted to the male-decided circle of life. Dickinson’s poem “We Play at Paste” strongly reveals this arousal of this awareness:

The Shapes, tho’, were similar,
And our new Hands
Learned Gem Tactics
Practicing Sands— (Dickinson, 2019, lines v-viii)

“Gem tactics” emblems Dickinson’s transgressive and revolutionary “overcoming oneself as subject” (Ching Wu, 2015, p. 334). Her reiterated enactment of “I” at the crux of almost every poem, use of images like “clear light”, “day”, “sun”, “rock” and so on and her bold eschewal of traditional poetic verse and espousal of prosy poetry, as deciphered in poems like “They Shut Me up in Prose” and “Titanic Opera” gesture her evolutionary rebirth as a poet of her stature. She confessed unambiguously that her life “passes sure” through “dark sod” or “dark night” and “sand” but she did not give in. She instead moulded and remoulded out of her experiences of pain, loss, humiliation, alienation, love, trust and distrust - all forming a distinct poetics for herself- the metaphorical “gem tactics”. As she articulates in “So from the mold” in her characteristic subtle details:

So from the mold,
Scarlet and Gold,
Many a bulb will rise
...
So from Cocoon
Many a Worm
Leap so Highland gay,
Peasants like me,

Peasants like Thee

Gaze perplexedly! (Dickinson, 2019, lines i-iii & v-x)

“The mould” manifests the distasteful mass and scathing critics burdening her creative and real life with backlashes and rumours and the “cocoon” expresses her reclusive life with immense creative power and mystical subtleties. As Wendy Barker (2002) puts it as a “negative capability” that “exulted” her as a poet and a transgressive being who “reveled in the finest of subtleties, in varying points of view, who refused to pin down her writing to tidy endings, who delighted in ambiguity” (p.88). Farrokhzad evinced her poetic conviction in an eloquent way: “Perhaps because no woman before me took steps toward breaking the shackles binding women's hands and feet, and because I am the first to do so, they have made such a controversy out of me” (as cited in Radjy, 2019, para 3). Farrokhzad argues that female authors must feel the urge to forge their authorial identity:

In this field, an artist's work is private and individualistic. How long can he or she survive this isolation, conversing only with the door and the four walls? This is a question, the answer to which lies in the capacity and forbearance of each individual artist. Those who grow silent or have nothing more to say, had better keep their peace, otherwise their ability to cope with this frightful sewage becomes impossible, and they find themselves abandoned and useless. The only way to survive is that one should reach such a state of detachment and maturity that he or she can become both a builder of and a mouthpiece for his/her world, both an observer and a judge. (Wolpé, 2007, p. xxix)

Farrokhzad's personal sexual life and her unwavering expression of female sexuality in her poetry breaks away from the phallogocentric tradition of writing poetry and representing of female sexuality. Notwithstanding the gender-based infringements on women's practical, political, sexual and creative life at the pre-Islamic revolution juncture, Farrokhzad interrogated the traditional Persian patriarchal representations of female sexuality, as it has been treated in Persian poetry and Islamist society. She contests the gendering norms that believe in effacing and negating women's identity, whether it is creative, political or sexual, in the process of securing absolute patriarchal authority. Moreover, Farrokhzad's resistance represents a revolution of women with self-empowering sexual-creative identity. Living and writing poetry in the rigid patriarchal regime of Iran, she forged her identity as the first-ever successful modern female poet of Iran and one of the most eminent modern Persian poets amongst all canonical Persian male poets. Hence, her authorial identity and her contents of poetry, i.e., female sexual and creative freedom and discursive and religious subjugation of Persian women, advances a counter-convention of female sexuality and female creativity. In her personal ventures, she clearly defies the androcentric cultural tendency of “normalizing-disciplinary power” that has dehumanized, dominated and deprived Iranian women for centuries (Armstrong, n.d., para. 7). Her personal and authorial chagrin transforms her into a combatant who has been able to embolden new-age women in defying the burden of patriarchal narrowness of seeing women as sexualised bodies. Farrokhzad could sense that women of her society had assimilated and conformed to the debasing and dehumanizing patriarchal constructs of women. She initiates the counter-belief that represents the awakening of women's sexual and creative voice. Her works inculcate Persian women into “refusing their own bodies” which have been hegemonically

believed to be docile and hence incapable of being a “potential site of resistance and power for them” (Armstrong, n.d., para. 7). At the root of this emergence, women’s individual recognition - as attested by Farrokhzad’s struggle and quest for poetry - will be the culminating identity. To exemplify, Farrokhzad’s poem “The Forgotten” transgresses the allures of patriarchy:

As long as his eyes are not amazed by my face
 What use is this beauty to me?
 O Mother, break this mirror
 What do I gain by adorning myself? (Farrokhzad, as cited in Scuts,
 2020, para. 4)

The image of “mirror” signifies the male-constructed practices and norms that define women’s ways of being. This is, in effect, indicative of a double threat for women; that is, women can neither go beyond patriarchal boundaries, nor can they forge their own identity through a meaningful enactment of their ability and expectation. Joanna Scuts holds that women in the global scale “were beginning to identify that same sense of confinement, that same longing for freedom, even if they did not yet have the words for it. In America a few years later, Betty Friedan would call it “the problem that has no name (Scuts, 2020, para 7). The problem is, as the above analysis shows, a masculine hegemony and a lack of counter-masculine discursive resistance with which Dickinson and Farrokhzad grappled. But they subverted masculine hegemony and its agentive cultural-practical discourses that they inherited and inhabited rather than internalized.

Both of them strongly embody what Helen Cixous terms “Eriecture Feminine” – the writing or voicing women. Their writing can be seen as a “privileging of the voice” that interlaces “writing and voice together” (Cixous, as cited in Moi, 2002, pp. 112-13). The writing/speaking women that Dickinson and Farrokhzad erect through their poetry - poetry on female sexual-creative desire - is “immensely powerful”, given that they emanate a voicing woman persona who “physically materializes what she’s thinking”. Writing from and inside the domains of all-pervading masculine hegemony is a counter-voice - a feminine resistance - which itself is a power because “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power...” (Foucault 1976, p. 95).

Dickinson and Farrokhzad’s writing oeuvre heralds a revolutionary female identity that emerges counter-actively from masculine or patriarchal hegemony. They wrote from and within the margins they belonged to but with a counter-discursive femininity and liberal yet interrupting or interrogating approach to the masculine discourse of femininity. This registers a visionary “counter-hegemonic revolution” and erases feminist fundamentalism in utterly repudiating masculine discourses on the feminine. Thus, their resistance with their poetic voice that they attained living within masculine hegemonic–religious, political and cultural/creative–discourses equipped them with the understanding of the pitfalls of absolute feminine assimilation of the logic of patriarchal superiority and feminine inferiority. Roland Barthes’s (as cited in Przybyłowicz, 1989) conceptualization of counter-discursive act or voice fits into this perspective of feminine discursive authority:

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. (p.282)

Seen through this optic, Dickinson and Farrokhzad can be considered successful in mastering their discursive authority over the male: they first received this from their male counterparts and then would exert their authority to counteract or pit themselves against the so-called male masterly discourses. Their poetry issues a radical "refusal of the fixed, stable or naturalized identity" (Armstrong, n.d.) that retards women's creative life. This identity is strongly dismissive of what Judith Butler calls "a highly rigid regulatory frame" and radically ambitious of evolving an "appearance of substance of a natural sort of being" (1990, p. 33). Moreover, their poetry ushers a "female rebellion" rather than a continuation of age-old "feminine silence, submission and purity" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 36). Thus, it becomes a site of "significant action" that gives voice to the "silenced" or hegemonized women and ushers a chance of coming-to-being of "a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story" (2000, p. 36) of a larger counter-hegemonic revolution.

Conclusion

Both Farrokhzad and Dickinson have transcended the conventional bogged-down status of womanhood by forging their sexual-creative identity. Venturing into writing poetry in an individualising style and embodying female sexuality in line with female creativity and critiquing masculine hegemony form their poetics of resistance. The androcentric world enjoys a prerogative in revealing their sexual identity and exercising their sexual yearning. Writing on sexuality is backed up by this freedom which is largely normalized and validated by the masculine creative-cultural continuum. On the other hand, women's sexual identity-expression, either through natural-sexual practices or creative representations, has been branded as a taboo gesture and stigmatised.

Dickinson and Farrokhzad critiqued all deterrents created by the suppression of women's sexual and creative freedom and set forth a counter-culture of female sexuality and creativity. Dickinson delineates the tensions created by patriarchal control of women's body and creativity and then advances her clitorocentric take-on of poetry that embodies women's sexuality and sexual identity as the meaningful source of broader feminine emancipation. Contrariwise, Farrokhzad sees poetry as a potent site of unveiling women's sexual zeal and makes overt erotic imageries and connotations to subvert the taboo and stigma deep-seated in the masculine hegemonic treatment of female sexuality and creativity. Concerning all these lenses, it can be inferred that the poetry of Dickinson and Farrokhzad on female sexuality and suppressions of women can be seen as a counter-discourse on new-age women's sexual-textual creative resistance.

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