

## Labeling Women Mad

Dr. Manav Sharma\*

\*Associate Professor, Padmoday Universal College, G.T Road Aligarh, email: manavsharma75@gmail.com

### Abstract:

Labelling woman mad is a research paper which has become a showcase of today's feminism. It studies the historical and literary construction of the phrase, "Are you mad", and a habit of labelling it on women by its male counterpart. It reveals and examines how male have been strategically using the label mad on women to domesticate her and bring her in their control especially those women who have their own creativity, independence, desire to do something on their own or tries to do something which is mostly done by males. Focussing on the works of Helen Small, Elaine Showalter, Mary Jacobus, Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert this research paper probes into the habit of labelling women mad by males and also display how they have taken their stance in reinterpreting this labelling. After a thorough dissection of the texts of the works of Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, "The Yellow Wallpaper", and Lewis Carroll's, Alice in the Wonderland this paper explores the deliberately constructed gendered association of women with madness devised to shield the male domination. This research papers discusses that some feminist writers have idolized madness as a figure of liberation while Mary Jacobus alarms against this trap stressing on breaking the structures that compare women freedom with madness and irrationality. This paper infers ,meticulously designed strategy of male control of labelling woman mad and its validity in the era of liberation and its implication on the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** *Labelling, Mad, Woman, Control, Male, Domination, Suppression, Gender, Reason, Domestic*

### Introduction:

Since time immemorial Males have confined women's personality narrowly into household roles, slavishness, kindness, tolerance and selflessness. If any divergence is found in the defined norms, especially when women want to express herself or assert her point or position it is dealt with an iron hand of branding her with the label of "Mad". Labelling Woman Mad, explores the chronicled and scholarly expressions of this portent, investigating how the denunciation of madness has functioned as a device of patriarchal control, subduing women's voices and corroborating their inferior role. This study evaluates how the label "Mad" has been used to disgrace women who "have something to tell", those who decline to ensure the ideals of selflessness, nurturing and domesticated female figure. As Gilbert and Gubar critically state, "To be selfless is not to be noble it is to be dead", surfacing the engrained dichotomy in demanding selflessness from human beings who are alive and withhold an urge for self-expression. This research paper will evaluate the judgemental remarks embracing female madness, concentrating on the perception of the key female thinkers who have raised their voice against the patriarchal configuration of this label. The deconstruction of the literary works such as, "The Yellow Paper" and "Alice in wonderland", alongside the works of Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf, this paper will establish how the connection of women with madness is profoundly an inherent cultural fabrication. This research paper will additionally probe into the intricacies of replenishing the , "madwomen" prototype, regarding both its achievability and the intrinsic threats of glamourising mental illness . The works of literary giants such as Elain Show Walter, Helen Small and Mary Jacobus will be predominant to this study, furnishing distinguishable interpretations on the

innuendoes of the chronicled labelling and its incessant felicitousness in the concurrent dialogue of gender and power. Finally this research pinpoints to reveal information on the paths on which label of "madness" has been employed to cripple women and to investigate on the persistent endeavor of women to raise their voices and individuality in a society still continuing with the heritage of male predominance.

### **Labelling Woman Mad:**

Whenever a woman wants to come out of the role which she had been given by males for centuries, she is labeled mad. Even the word "Author" is male, and if she uses her "Reason" that too is male and is labeled mad. She is considered good, homely, caring and wise if she is within the roles given to her by her male counterpart. The man who is born from the womb of a woman denies her freedom and labels her. She is dictated all through her life. In some societies and cultures even today woman is controlled to an extent that what she has to wear, what food she has to eat, how much she has to eat and how she has to talk, with whom she has to talk, how long to talk. A few of the women writers who gathered courage to at least express their thoughts are Gilbert and Gubar. They stingingly comment, "To be selfless is not to be noble it is to be dead. A life that has no story, like the life of Goethe's *Makerie*, is really a life of death, a death in life. The ideal of contemplative purity evokes, finally both heaven and grave".

If a woman has something to tell, if she refuses to be selfless shows fiasco for the domestic role given to her from centuries nurtures, mothers, her text against the image of the divine creator, "Author", is labeled mad.

Long back slavery had been abolished, but still the same old dominant patriarchal ideology prevails, the male chauvinist can't acquiesce her in another role and just for her different role she's labeled mad at large.

Creativity has been defined as male, but the best creation of this nature is human being which is born out of the womb of a woman. Woman has given birth to male and male has denied women the right to create their own image of femaleness and instead, seeks to confirm to the patriarchal ideology imposed on them. Gilbert and Gubar stingingly comments, "To be selfless is not to be noble it is to be dead. A life that has no story, like the life of Goethe's *Makerie*, is really a life of death, a death in life. The ideal of contemplative purity evokes, finally both heaven and grave".

The male idealization of mad woman is that she should be either selfless (dead) or she is mad. A mad woman is a woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own who has a story to tell, who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her. On the other hand, the definition of a mad woman given by the women writers is- a mad woman is duplicitous because she has something to tell: there is always the possibility that she may not choose to tell - or tell a different story. She is opaque to, man, whose mind will not let itself be penetrated by phallic thoughts.

This research paper focuses on the thoughts & criticism of female writers such as Elaine Showalter, Helen Small, Mary Jacobus, Charlotte Perkin Gilman, Susan Gilbert and Gubar.

These writers took their pen against the label "mad", which has crossed all the boundaries of decencies.

"The Female Malady: Women: Madness and English Culture" (1985), Elaine Showalter wrote this by using the phrase, "the female malady", to refer to both the female experience of domestic confinement and to the identification of mental and emotional disturbances in woman which could be called female disorder, the above extract is from, "mad women and attics: themes and issues in woman's fiction". After reading it carefully, though written against the label touches only the outline, that how madness has been discussed in connection with literature by and about women. If we consider its contents the strength which this paragraph really needs in the end does not have. Women were and are succumbing to male domination and could not dare more than to accept it as female disorder. The male writer who was happy rather delighted to give this phrase has been accepted calmly by female writers. It is not their fault that their horizon has been touched: but it is the male domination which has junked her fertile mind and has given it a small world.

The assigning of the label, "mad", and its interpretation in textual and cultural context is as in "Alice in the Wonderland", "How do you know I am mad?", said Alice.

"You must be", said the cat, or you wouldn't have come here (Lewis Carroll, complete works, 1939edn.P.65)

Madness is a condition announced by Cheshire cat, i.e., Lewis Carroll said through male cat to Alice. It is a label with all kinds of negative connotations a label more powerful because it is not defined. If we try to analyze why Carroll through cat has said Alice mad? We find somewhere in his subconscious mind he cannot accept the outdoor role of Alice. On the contrary in 'The Yellow Wall paper'- the male figures which threaten with the label "mad" seem to present an unassailable male power which determines meaning by assuming the right to designate 'correct' usage of language and rules for female behavior.

Madness as a theme is intrinsically gendered. At the very basic level often females are called mad and males call them so. The conditions which make women mad and the language is used to describe madness; are also gendered. The central female figure of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is reduced to madness by the obstacles placed in her way of pronouncing herself through creative writing Charlotte Perkins Gilman searching herself in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' does not mean writing as a form of work but for both of them it is a means of expressing- identity. As it is the nature of law when one source is blocked another comes for the rescue so for both Gilman and her female character madness can be the means of escape, an avenue for the 'liberation of women'

Sometimes the label mad is very common and imprecise term for a variety of very real conditions. Several authors known have been chronically depressed; Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf are paradigms. Their suicide made them famous and for that they have to pay the price and the cost was labeled with Madness and both wrote about madness too. In 'The Bell Jar' (1963) Sylvia Plath, described a young woman's nervous breakdown and her deadly experiences of patriarchal domination. This analysis only gives the prima-facie result, never it has been tried to find out the real reason, why that sort of literature was written? When they took up their pen, they had to face patriarchal domination, which they any how or other, with their metal subdued. Secondly the text which they 'authored' as Author is considered to be male, was not accepted. Thirdly, because misogynists felt happy when they read about the madness of women Ernest Heming Way is too standing on the same platform with Sylvia Plath & Virginia Woolf his notorious suicide could be viewed alongside those of Woolf & Plath, but he was never labeled mad, on the contrary, his literature, is read differently; as a conflict between masculine ideal created in his fiction and the life of the artist. His suicide is seen as a heroic act, while Plath's & Woolf's are linked with depression and were labeled mad.

In their effort to bring themselves out or to pronounce themselves the female voice became duplicitous, but nevertheless true, and truly female voice. The strategy which they employed, consists in, assaulting and revising, deconstructing & reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature, especially the paradigmatic polarities of angel and monster, and it was the point from where the mad women made her entrée. At this juncture it is very necessary to refer Gilbert & Gubar; Visually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry & the fiction written by woman conjures up this mad creature so that female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be. Nineteenth-twentieth century women writers took this risk of romanticizing madness was only to liberate the mad woman from the attic. But whoever they were, Felmen, Gillian, Gilbert & Gubar, etc, were not insightful enough to understand the consequences of patriating the mad image duplicitously, because they in their endeavor of liberating madwoman from attic took it to the dangerous-edge form where they can't revert back, but were labeled mad. It was only Mary Jacobus's objection (visionary enough) to their portraying in mad woman as a form of liberation, she was of the opinion, that, embracing the madwoman as a symbol of the condition of all women is not the way to liberate women from structures of thought which have traditionally equated them with irrationality, silence, nature and the body (the male correlatives are reason, discourse culture and mind) from Mad woman and the attic: themes and issues in woman fiction. P(117). Historically, female insanity makes a difference to the interpretation of madness as a theme in woman's writing. The literature written in

the past on woman's madness mostly has been produced by women writers and quite a number of them were ready to eroticize female insanity but the women described the insanity in a restricted conventional way, and logic behind it is that they themselves were altering the meaning of madness for their own representation. Long back in 1798 in her last novel *Maria or, "The Wrongs of Woman"*, Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen in his first novel, *'Sense and Sensibility'* (1811) oppose to the late eighteenth century sentimental vogue for madness. They actively resist romanticizing mental breakdown and insisted that female insanity and degradation should not be taken as literary fashion or ornament. Charlotte Perkins Gilman came out with the analysis that why women themselves were ready to eroticize female insanity? The language which society gives us, a language which privileges men, emphasize on male patriarchal domination doesn't allow them (women writers) to grow up to certain level, from where they can give reason for it, this can be proved from the example of Salem witch Trail in New England in 1691-92. The entire community of Salem was seized in a witch hunt that led to the trial and execution of tens of women and a few men there were men also in the trial but the whole trial was bent upon to label women en masse as mad.

Helen Small had discussed about women insanity as theme as it is obviously influenced by the form of expression in language because, 'language' and even 'reason' are gendered.

'Irrational' or 'emotional' ways of seeing the world, (including romance and intuition) have traditionally been seen as 'feminine' counterpart to male 'reason'. In the era of deconstruction whether we buy this argument or not, but the fact is it has held sway over philosophical, religious and educational debates for centuries and still tend to influence thought on relationship between language and power.

Mary Jacobus takes madness of women as a perverse triumph over the imprisoning domesticity in which she is trapped by patriarchy. Her reading of, *'The Yellow Wallpaper'* of Gilman brought contradictory claims: -

(i) she's driven mad by patriarchy and

(ii) it is patriarchy that's mad, not her.

According to her, "Women are simultaneously not mad and their madness isn't their fault". This effort can be called a daring and rational because it tries to make sense out of the literary text.

She stresses, instead, the uncanniness of the text, the way in which the madness of the text can be read as an irreducible madness in reading science and meanings in a literary text; it's this madness to which the heroine could be thought of as succumbing to the madness or becoming a figure for madness. For here Gilman's madness was nothing but liberation because it is worth remembering that her own breakdown in 1887 reduced her to becoming a figure of madness.

The tendency to romanticize madness particularly hysteria as a feminist tool peaked in 1970/80s in the critical attention given to Freud's hysteric, Dora. She is considered heroic for her refusal to participate in Freud's attempt to analyze her. Though this reading of hysteria has been important for feminist psychoanalytic criticism, open to the objection that hysteria and madness haven't provided women with much political purchase and should certainly be regarded as tragic to painful for women themselves even if their hysteria is read as a form of resistance or non-cooperation. She suggested that Gilman treated her heroine's madness a shock not only to her doctor husband but to her readers' that the story is skulking, sketching on gothic traditions of the mad woman that goes back to *Birthing Mason* in *Jane Eyre*.

The process of being driven mad by conflicting patterns and signs in studying text may strike like a chord. Her novel is open to a very wide range of readings & interpretations. A lot is left to readers' imagination, because our sympathies lie with the narrator partly because she herself went mad, partly because the implications of the story are so chilling for what they say about the treatment of women.

Helen Small goes deeper into the matter by some degrees by asking to what extent might 'madness' be an alternative 'role' for women to play? That is when all practical options for women are bleak or oppressive (stifling creativity, individuality, sexuality), 'madness' might be one way to escape. And if so, at what cost? There are no easy answers for this question of Helen Small. The theme goes beyond the representation of madness in literature; to the reality of madness; it is difficult to determine when

a mind choose it, or is imposed or adopts it by default. A possibility of deliberate subterfuge cannot be denied because it may sit too comfortably alongside a traditional paternalistic view of woman a contrivance. This is also a brutal side but in some cases a proven fact.

Show Walter discusses 'madness', can itself be a form of dissent. Any vague dissent by women, not by women writers, can be called madness. She argues the term 'mad' was applied to the woman suffragists when they fought public for the rights of women. When they continued, and as a member of the articulate and persuasive speakers-which include Gilman, Alcott & Susan Glaspell all joined, slowly but surely to win the vote.

This process was gained gradually, at great cost to the women and men involved. This was premeditated, measured and powerful exposure of the flaws in the reasoning of the fundamental ideas most commonly used to restrict the rights of women. The convenient and effective way of silencing suffragists was treating them as 'mad'. And in the end when this strategy didn't work and the vote was won, it is memorable that many women suffragists were literally labeled 'mad' because they did not comply.

Concludingly we can say it has been pointed out by Show Walter, that the label mad was applied routinely to women who refused to conform to 'norms' of femininity which were physically unhealthy, the wearing of corset ,eating habits, suppression of creative energy and artistic expression in favour of the domestic. As far as Alice's episode is concerned, we can infer that the label 'mad' was often applied to women who were willful, strong, determined, creative, inquisitive. If we again come to 'The Yellow Wallpaper', narrator tells when she is meant to eat, what she is meant to eat, how much she is meant to eat and how and her denial to all these restrictions was just to label her 'mad'. The role of the domestic and the emphasis on outward appearance take on much dark implications when the insistence on maintaining 'feminine' standards is associated with a risk of physical or mental/emotional violence. The narrator is left with ambiguous future, driven mad by patriarchal authority and power structures, to put it crudely will be imprisoned. Most probably never to recover. She is a woman of substance who has something to tell, had she been a domestic women, she would have been a happy housewife.

Women discussed here are often cast in two roles the monster and they are labeled 'mad' because they were somewhere able to listen the voice of their soul and as soon as or whenever they tried to bring it forth the label was pasted on them.

In this pluralistic society of ours where women today is rubbing her shoulder with equal strength, is it wise enough for her male counterpart to label her 'mad', on the contrary this labeling has labeled the so-called MCP's 'mad', as it was even claimed by Mary Jacobus.

## Conclusion

The label "mad" has been an ongoing patriarchal devise to suppress and domesticate woman throughout history. This research paper has examined the chronicled and wicked literary applications of the label, "Mad", showcasing how it has been habituated in invalidating women's voices, creativity and strife. We have been witnessing the male dominated culture throughout the world and there those women who resist the prescribed norms, have their own thinking or have a story to tell are typically suppressed and are labelled, "Mad". This label subordinates their creativity, innovativeness, ideas and experience and four walls them to the domestic miniature ,The repertoire of feminist women of letters like Elaine Showalter, Helen Small, and Mary Jacobus have been indispensable in blowing the whistle on the hazards of this label. They have exposed how it can be used to reflect women and make them question their own rationality. However, the stereotype of madness can also be a genesis of empowerment for some women. By encompassing the label of "mad," they can deteriorate its significance and retrieve their reputation. This is restrictively obvious in the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" reinvestigates the protagonist's debilitation into madness as a form of rebellion against her severe household status.The conundrum of whether madness can be a truly emancipating force for women remains changeling. As Mary Jacobus persuades, simply labeling oneself "mad" does not break down the patriarchal erections that commemorate this label.Infering ,

the label of "mad" is a notorious mechanism that has been used to hold and lull women for ages. However, by apprehending its history and its footprints, we can begin to challenge its power and work towards a more even-handed society where women's voices are appreciated and held in high regards. This research paper has focused on both the western and oriental literary traditions. It was absorbing to explore how the notion of female madness is attended in different cultures and historical periods. The paper has also dealt with the medicalization of female madness.

**REFERENCES:**

1. Show Walter. E (1987) *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture*, Virago.
2. Show Walter. E (1990) *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Finde Siecle*, Viking Penguin.
3. Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan (1979). *The madwoman in the Attic. The Woman writer and the Nineteenth- century literary imagination*. New Haven Yale University press
4. Spiwak, Gayatri Chakraworty (1981) *French Feminism in an international frame*; Yale French studies.
5. Jacobus Mary (1979) – ‘The Buried Letter: feminism and romanticism in Villette’, in Jacobus Mary (ed) *Women Writing About Women* London, Croom Helm.
6. Jacobus Mary (1986) - *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Methun.
7. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed ;60,P.901 volume 15,2020