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## **Pro-Choice or enforced choice- the rhetoric of abortion through Gwendolyn brooks' 'The Mother'**

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**Abstract**--Today in this 21st century, whenever we talk about women empowerment, amongst the several unresolved issues that steals our attention is the burning topic of pro-choice and enforced abortion. Although it's being said that women today opt for abortion willingly, the percentage of women in reality, happily prefers it, is really to be researched out. Hence, today also the latest report of WHO (2019) says most of the women all over the world die out of infection from unhygienic abortion, secretly done. And the death rate due to this, is maximum in Sub Saharan Africa, wherein racism, gender inequalities, patriarchal domination, societal hegemony still victimize the women. The post abortion trauma, life-long guilty feeling, and depression that these women undergo is another strong evidence of their reluctant choice, enforced upon them as pro-choice. Rather a woman seeks a narrow situational escape through this process. Because, there is hardly any mother who would like to kill its own mini-self, and hurl herself into the intolerable mental suffering. It is actually enforced upon her by the over-decisive society that from time immemorial has been determining the role of a female body as a daughter, a wife, a mother, with the status marker of a virgin, a married woman and a widow. The rhetorical analysis of *The Mother* by Gwendolyn Brooks attempts to reveal this mental conflict and agony that a mother is forcefully subjected to by the circumstantial situations in a hegemonic society, from an intersectional perspective. This intersectional perspective captures not only the oppression that the black women suffer from one wing of the patriarchal society, but from various wings including race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. and ultimately, with no option left, bindingly opt for abortion. The paper reveals how the objectification and the victimization of the female body and the gender identity frame today has become a world issue and must be taken care of immediately.

**Keywords**---intersectionality, abortion, maternal body, entangled subjectivity, motherhood.

‘What shall I give my children? who are poor,  
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,  
...who demand  
No velvet and no velvety velour;  
But who have begged me for a brisk contour,  
Crying that they are quasi, contraband’  
-(Annie Allen: ‘The children of the poor’, 1949)

### **Introduction**

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks, the first African-American Pulitzer Prize winner for her magnificent *Annie Allen* (1949), and writer of such poesies like, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), *Kitchenette Building* (1945), *The Bean Eaters* (1960), *In the Mecca* (1968), was brought up in an African-American society, where the people of colour, especially the women of colour were being pulverized every day in each and every sector of life by racism, nationalism, and above all, hostile sexism. Thus, children and mother, and various gender issues related to them such as abortion, premature death due to infection, rape and murder of girl child, often used to be the subject line of her poetry, the best examples being *In the Mecca* (1968), *Annie Allen* (1949) and *The Mother* (1945). While in *In the Mecca* she exquisitely brings out the search of a mother for her raped and killed daughter, *Annie Allen*’s (1949) ‘The Children of the Poor’ with utmost poise echoes the helpless cry of a black mother to find some safe and secured space for her innocent, little ‘sweetest lepers’, ‘quasi, contraband’. (Brooks, 1949).

The incessant social injustice on these weaker sections of the society especially the black women and children moved her tender heart in such a way that she in fact, grew up to a perspicaciously ardent supporter of the slogan of ‘self-determination and nationalism’ of Black Arts Movement from the very day of its inception. The Black Arts Movement pullulating from such drives like Civil Rights and Black Power Movement was basically a retaliation and remonstrance against the socio-political inequalities of the time fostering racial discrimination against the Africans in America, and this movement assorted to poetry as the genre of its protest. Brooks strongly charged with the belief that poetry is a distilled reflection of life, her sensitive mind awakened to every destructiveness, every heinous assault against women, also took refuge in the poetry to voice her protest. And in trying to blast out the invisible hands of societal power structure, deeply rooted in patriarchy, through logic and language, she batters at the fencing boundary walls of the human condition, rather women’s condition itself.

*The Mother* is the instance of one such endeavour wherein through the blend of real and imaginary, existing and non-existing bodies of the remorseful mother and the aborted child(ren) she beautifully portrays the ruthlessness of the backstage giants with superhuman misogynistic appetites; describes a black world of black mothers in language so rich and extravagantly full of pathos that it transcends all geographical boundary and pierce the heart of the mothers of whole universe

irrespective of race, class, caste, religion, culture and ethnicity. Thus, the poem from being the sheer cry of an abortion-undergone African mother becomes the expression of regret and remorse, and subtle protest of all the mothers who confront this situation against their wish under various compulsions. In the poems like *In The Mecca*, or her later works Brooks tried to portray the personal and the communal significance of the characters and the depicted situations, but in *The Mother*, Brooks is found to be more probing.

Here, she is seen to be keener to deal with the personal life experiences of the character and the context they are in, revealing their strengths and weaknesses while fighting adverse situations. Brooks is found to be more interested in her character's behaviour, and attitude to life, her moral sense and ethical values, and her commitment towards her family, friends, society, her child(ren) and her oneness with those who have been victimized by race, class, gender like her. Hence the pathos becomes more intense as the mother tries to communicate and apologize to her lost child(ren) weaving an imaginative world freed from all shackles of patriarchal domination and imposition, where her wish-fulfilment can never be inhibited by biased societal norms and religious prohibitions, where she could freely live with her unborn, unseen children far away from this real, oppressive world. This kind of communication in the form of a dramatic monologue offer infinite material for body aesthetic, philosophical and psychosocial inquiry, and thus, raises questions regarding the societal power structure and patriarchy, women rights as prescribed by WHO, reproductive and foetal rights; raises questions regarding the various measures like contraception and abortion taken to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and what is it that drives them to choose between contraception and abortion.

### **Literature review**

Though abortion law was passed in US in 1973 by the Supreme Court guaranteeing women the right to abortion, National Abortion Federation (2019) in its 'History on abortion' says that in the United States there was a time much earlier than 1973's court decision on Roe v Wade case, when it was legally practiced. It was only 'in the mid-to-late 1800s states began passing laws that made abortion illegal...One of the reasons included fears that the population would be dominated by the children of newly arriving immigrants, whose birth rates higher than those of "native" Anglo-Saxon women.' (Daou 2019, 136) And when in 1973 this abortion was legalized by the Supreme Court, it read-

State criminal abortion laws, like those involved here, that except from criminality only a life-saving procedure on the mother's behalf without regard to the stage of her pregnancy and other interests involved violate the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which protects against state action the right to privacy, including a woman's qualified right to terminate her pregnancy. Though the State cannot override that right, it has legitimate interests in protecting both the pregnant woman's health and the potentiality of human life, each of which interests grows and reaches a "compelling" point at various stages of the woman's approach to term. (147-164)

Thus, while removing the anti-abortion law keeping in mind the health and rights of women, then also in reality the impoverished condition of a victimized unmarried woman acted as the prime driving force. The national need to curb or foster the growth of population actually motivated the decision. Had the nation been in a position to provide all the amenities to Roe, had the socio-economic condition of Roe been a sound and respectable one, neither she would have to give away two of her earlier children for adoption to two couples, nor would have had to go for aborting this third unborn little one. Thus, we find that whether it is 'late-mid-1800s' or late 1970s, maternal body has always been the center of National Politics. (Thompson 2020; Alexander 2011; Eriksen 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997; Anne McClintock 1993; Parker et al. 1992; Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989; Mosse 1985) The revolutionary American psychologist Carol Gilligan and writer of the book *In a Different Voice* (1982), very nicely exemplifies the body politics that has been victimizing women aeons after aeons as she shares a few incidents in a Conference keynote address.

She narrates the case of a 24 years married Catholic nurse Janet who tries to console herself while aborting her second child saying, 'I think my morality is strong, and if these reasons- financial, physical reality, and also for the whole family involved- were not here, that I wouldn't have to do it, and then it would be a self-sacrifice.' (Gilligan 2015, 22) Janet was continually torn apart like Brooks' victimized mother, by the tug of war between moral and psychological torments and the real impoverished situation involving the in-built unseen family pressure compelling her to opt for that abortion, the 'self-sacrifice'. Actually, this motherhood rather than being seen by the society as a *self*-experience, is more seen as a shared experience. The mother has no right to live only for the happiness of her own *self* and her *double-self*, the child; she must live for a shared happiness, and in this way acquire a gender identity in a family, in a society. And more importantly, if at times that shared happiness calls for the abortion of the child with the throttling of her entangled subjectivity and embodiment, she should abide by that. She is not only responsible for herself or her child, but for others in her family, society, and nation too.

A report of a German researcher shows that in China, in the name of national policy on 'birth quotas', till date abortion is being forced upon the women, 'A report by Adrian Zenz, ..... says Uighur women and other ethnic minorities are being threatened with internment in the camps for refusing to abort pregnancies that exceed birth quotas.' (*The Guardian* 29 June, 2020). According to the report of WHO maternal death has reached 86 percent in 2019 in Sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh, and one of its reasons is unsafe abortion that often the women have to opt for against their wishes to save their honour, to help the unborn not to live an illegitimate life of disdain and insult. In Kelantan state of Malaysia, Police's report on sex assaults, child rape shows "the statistics from January to October in 2019, a total of 594 cases were recorded, compared to 575 last year in the same period." (Mubin & Muhamad, 2020, 3189) Actually, the condition of women all over the world be it South Africa, USA, Canada, UK, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Malaysia is more or less the same.

Thus, writes Sharon Olds (2003), the famous American writer, echoing the pain of a mother in *The End*, 'The next morning I had to kneel/ an hour on that floor, to

clean up my blood, /.... translucent spots, as one has to soak/a long time to deglaze the pan/ when the feast is over.' This is why all nations felt the urgency of legalizing anti-abortion law all over the world in 1973. However, still in South Africa, as shows another report of recent past, 'Unwanted pregnancies are the most common cause of infanticide and neonaticide' (Abrahams et al. 2016, 9) and this is wherein 1945's poem still finds relevance in 2021- it is this brutality towards the mothers and their children which is the cause of the mother's unbearable agony oozing out of her words in *The Mother*.

## **Methodology**

Our present rhetorical analysis of *The Mother* has been done following Kimberle Williams Crenshaw's (1989) theory of Intersectionality. Intersectional study being inclusive of all the sections of the society has several edges over the other existing theories. And hence this particular theory has been chosen for this present rhetorical analysis. Crenshaw the proponent of 'structural intersectionality', herself explains its edges over the other proposing it as 'a method...a heuristic and analytical tool' (Crenshaw et al. 2013). Actually, intersectionality enables us to investigate the fight against racism, xenophobic, nationalism, sexism which victimize the women, especially women of colour, considering them as *indivisible*. She observed that the mainstream feminism had become subjugated, and favoured most the experiences of the white women, while the traditional civil rights groups enjoyed the leadership and experiences of black or other men of colour. This marginalizes the women of colour.

Officials, and even the feminists belonging to their (officials') group disregarded their (women of colour's) experiences or complaints against domestic violence and sexual assault, and overlooked both sexism and racism, thereby perpetuating the suffering of the black women or women of colour in the hands of their abusive husbands who were egoist, class-based, national and racial males. Even the police did not extend their helping hands towards them. The present poem under study depicts such a situation when social, political, religious, all supports turned their faces away from the oppressions of the mother representing the black women or women of colour. Hence an intersectional perspective has been adopted here to study her language, the vehicle of her painful experience. It aims at revealing how the rhetorical devices helped the poet to bring to the fore the universal subjugation of the mothers through the various oppressions the black women are subjected to, through the practice of abortion. And in this poem through a very touching depiction of a traumatized mother, apostrophizing her lost children, alienated from her through compulsive abortion, Brooks voices several unsaid words.

She unveils how the invisible hands of the patriarchal society, culture, racism and National policy actually strangles the children to death through abortion in the name of the willing-decision of the mother, and makes her a 'killer' in everybody's eyes, while in reality the destitute motherhood continually grapples around in dream and reality her those lost possessions, her 'embodied self', being oblivious of this existing world. None of these oppressions, that the mother or these women face at different levels of the power structure, are additive, i.e. matters to be considered in separate layers, in isolation; rather all of them formed

a constitutive whole each one (of oppression) complementing the other. These women of colour suffer double oppression and isolation- while they experience a different form of racial discrimination from the men of colour, they also face a distinct type of sexism from the white women. From this aspect gender is found to be always *raced* and race is always *gendered*, and this is what this rhetorical study shows.

As a matter of fact, Intersectional perspective not only considers race, class, normative gender, nation as the only primary oppressions, but also sexuality, physical (dis)ability, religion, and age that vary from time to time causing various degrees of advantage and disadvantage creating inequality. Hence in this present age too, when such age-old issues of 'Black movement' are still so evidently alive in recent incidents of the brutal death of Floyd, in the highest death rate of South African girls and mothers due to FGM and infection, so many cases of abortion, infanticide, and neonaticide, a rhetorical study of 1945's *The Mother* from intersectional perspective seems very essential and appropriate. Intersectionality basically is a 'work-in-progress' (Carbado et al. 2013) that gives access to any performative approach (of gender) which like the *body* 'gains legibility only through cultural interaction.' (Ghisleni et al. 2016, 770). It even takes into account this 'construction' of women as an important feature in studying the global gender inequality in order to justify why some women in comparison to others are preferred more and subjected to specific roles in the global political economy over time, and subjugated. Thus, this theory of Intersectionality has been used here which enables us to decipher through the rhetorical study of the language, the concerned poem's various gender issues from various intersecting domain or category such as class, race, religion, ethnicity, society, ideology, education etc., so that we can head on towards a discrimination-free society world-wide.

## **Discussion**

According to Aristotle, classical rhetoric is of three types- judicial (or forensic), deliberative (or legislative) and epideictic (or ceremonial). And Gwendolyn Brooks' writing style conforms with this third one, her aim, as declared by her being, 'in my next future, to write poems that will somehow successfully call (see Imamu Baraka's "SOS") all black people: black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate...black people in pulpits, black people in mines, on farms, on thrones.' (Brooks 1972, RPO183). However, Brooks realized that to make the 'call' successful the most important thing to be accomplished not only by her but by every black South African was 'to polish his technique, his way of presenting his truths and beauties, that these may be more insinuating, and, therefore, more overwhelming.' (Brooks 1950, 312). To acquire this presentability, thus Brooks assorts to the rhetorical figures to break what Kristeva (1998) calls 'the inertia of language-habits' thereby impregnating the linguistic expressions with a new set of implications and interpretation within the entire set of signifying denotation. Unlike the other poets of Black Aesthetic Movement, Brooks did not however, make any distinction amongst the poetic forms as the mark or 'forms' of the coloured and non-coloured poets and writers. She with an all encompassing, wide perspective 'continued to write poems that neither took up the typical Black Arts

chant rhythm, the common experimentation with line indentation and the visual form of the poem, nor dwelt in any easily recognizable African American vernacular.’ (Crawford 2017) Even in her post-conversion poetry written after 1967, like *In the Mecca* etc., Brooks continued to be complex in her presentation with ‘street vernacular diction’. Thus, her formalized approach with a structuralist viewpoint pervaded all her poetry. *The Mother* first published in *A Street in Bronzeville* in 1945 too stands no exception to it either in terms of motif or in terms of Brooks’ style.

The most notable feature found to be used in *The Mother* is the ekphrasis in combination with apostrophe, addressing the dead children as if they are her present passive listeners. Ekphrasis, traditionally refers to the verbal representation of the visual depiction and is often categorised into actual and notional ekphrasis. However, Jean Hagstrum uses the term ekphrastic for ‘a sort of dramatic monologue in which the picture or sculpture is itself made to speak.’ (Hollander 1988, 209) But as notes Hollander, ‘Notional ekphrasis inheres in modern poetry’s actual ekphrasis, and provides a thematic microcosm of a basic paradox about poetry and truth..... Ekphrastic poems....put powerful interpretative constructions on them, construe them with deep effect.’ (Hollander, 1988, 209)

In *The Mother* it is the address of the poet and the delineation of the unborn children, and the pain of an abortion-undergone mother that serve a quasi-ekphrastic function, while fostering a wider interpretation of epideictic style traditionally fencing around the sheer discourse of blame or praise. In *The Mother* by Brooks, the epideictic style achieves a broader spectrum of revisioning the general values and the unjustified beliefs and customs of our society as Brooks directly pleads the timeless social issues of objectifying and victimizing women’s bodies through compulsive child abortion, in her free verse narrative style. No sooner she begins the poem with ‘Abortions will not let you forget.’, than Brooks immediately engages the audience as a direct victim, a sufferer of the cruel practice of the society, and the audience too in no uncertainty becomes a part of that unintentional heinous deed. Though a reader, she too starts feeling an irrevocable loss of self-identity, possession of the self, in the heart of heart as Brooks continues to adumbrate the picture of the lost children, the traumatized state of an abortion undergone mother, in the form of a dramatic monologue- ‘You remember the children you got that you did not get’ (L2) plunging the readers into that abysmal pain of lost motherhood. This compulsive talking blends into a background of shrouded infancy and motherly cares- the innocent flesh, the hairless body, their naughty deeds, mother’s silencing them with some candies, or pretentious chides and rolling eyes, the unheard sounds of babbling and cooing, and the sweet holophrastic words and the telegraphic utterances of the could be born but never born babies. And all the articulated sound and language of the helpless mother gets equated with the inarticulate sounds of the dead children lost in a world of patriarchal dominance in such a way, that to her, today rest other words, just rest behind as a mere cacophony. Her sensitive ears could only hear those unheard sounds (L11) of those conceived but lost children as pure, distinct sounds, free of all material meaning and makes her pain even more penetrating, reverberating, and unforgettable, numbing her, all other senses and feelings.

The beautiful juxtaposition of 'you got' and 'you did not get' further digs wide the gaping wound making Brooks' epideictic poem more absorbing as it 'calls upon us to join with our community in giving thought to what we witness.' (Rosenfield 1980). It renders fulfilment to what the contemporary rhetoricians understand by epideictic style as that must evolve around an issue that compels public deliberation. Hence Brooks through *The Mother* tries to italicize not only 'black (women's) identity, black solidarity, black self-possession and self-address' (Brooks 1975), but also of all the subjugated women's, of all the oppressed mother's self-identity and 'embodied self'. Brooks' address arouses the dormant past of the passive listeners irrespective of any caste or creed and metamorphose them into active social thinkers, human rights claimants. And herein, lies the greatest success of Brooks' poetic style serving a quasi-ekphrastic function as it dramatically dresses the address in a way against compelled abortion and the lost motherhood as if it itself becomes the voice of the victim mother overwhelmingly appealing to all the silent and silenced mothers, arousing them to their latent feeling of squashed double-self with utmost poignancy.

Gwendolyn Brooks in her poem *The Mother* actually aims to reveal the invisible hands the silent social and patriarchal barriers killing the Black women every day. She tries to bring out how the South African women's conditions are like out of the frying pan into the fire- not only they are hegemonized by the external or structural barriers of the society, but also by the in-house barriers, being dominated by the male-head or the matriarchs of their families. And to reflect upon these internal and external obstacles and atrocities parallelly operating on the Black women, Brooks wittily, at the syntactic level of the poem, assorts to parallelism defined as 'an even balance in the parts of a sentence' (Freeborn 1996, 70). By patterning the sentences in a similar syntactic mould, she establishes a rhythm that enables her to digress or shift from one state of mind or idea to the other as they swiftly move from one line to the next. And in this way, she introduces and gradually reveals the whole gamut of pain and torture inflected on the black women. In the expository stanza the impersonal tone reflected through the second person while strategically deflects towards a universal growing fact of victimizing the women, from a mere racial projection of preyed Black women (or mothers), the very return to the first person in the second stanza, further intensifies the trauma and guilt-feeling of an individual mother who despite her unwillingness had to succumb to abortion and put an end to a budding life. And all these smooth perambulation in the pool of thoughtful, introspective dramatic monologues is beautifully achieved through the marvellous use of parallelism in combination with anaphora:

You will never       # neglect  
                                   or # beat/Them,  
                                   # silence  
                                   # buy with a sweet.

You will never       # wind up the sucking-thumb  
                                   or # scuttle off ghosts that come.

You will never       # leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,  
                                   # Return for a snack of them with gobbling mother-eye.

The repetition of 'You will never' in the beginning of every sentence while syntactically maintains the subtle semantic link through the line of reference, the parallel structures stacked one upon the other creates a strong bond between the varied possible activities in her lost world of motherhood, and adds a momentum to the thinking process. This while renders an extra velocity in the direction of wishful fulfilment, at the same time it with same force intensifies the lacuna, the undesired inexistence of the child. This psychological tug of war which so long has been tearing apart the mother, now pierces the heart of the empathetic readers too. Thus, parallelism together with anaphora, the two rhetorical vectors, here operates in such a way that despite working in the same (syntactic) level on the same base i.e., repetition, a negative resultant, a heart-rending effect is being produced. They, while with all due poetic aesthetics link up the stanzas, following different narrative style, by presenting the recurring images directly or indirectly associated with the idea of motherhood, and forceful abortion, beautifully makes a psychoanalytic probe into the victim's mind through enjambment.

In the second stanza this effect becomes more vivified with the repetition of 'I have heard...', 'I have contracted', 'I have eased...', 'I have said...' along with 'if I sinned', 'if I seized', 'if I stole', 'if I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths', with a helpless effort by the mother to convince her-self, her 'split-self' for a heart-felt condonation. Thus, the use of parallelism not only fosters momentum but also vividly presents the experience of being brought to a kind of self-awareness, an awareness of a growing body within a mother in both form and weight. It exquisitely reveals how the concept of 'split-subjectivity' and 'embodied self' (Young 1984) supersedes Plügge (1970) and Straus' (1963) idea of pregnancy leading to 'alienated objectification' of the pregnant body, the womb carrying the child as an obstacle to all of her movements, and refutes the idea of a pregnant body as one that 'imprisons' her. (Young 1984, 50) The present poem rather intensifies a mother's true spontaneous feelings which says, in addition to experiencing the body as a transparent mediator for our projects or an objectified and alienated resistance or pain, we also at times experience our bodily being in an aesthetic mode. That is, we can become aware of ourselves as body and take interest in its sensations and limitations for their own sake, experiencing them as a fullness rather than a lack. (Gadow 1980)

Young (1984), to which very aptly adds, 'Pregnant consciousness is animated by a double intentionality: my subjectivity splits between awareness of myself as body and awareness of my aims and projects.' (50). Gwendolyn Brooks' *The Mother* is just a celebration of that 'aesthetic mode' experienced and expressed through the pregnancy, and is a protest against the forceful deprivation through abortion of the mothers from enjoying this aesthetically rich experience of creation. Hence remarks Johnson when comparing Boudelaire's *Moesta et Errabunda* with Brooks' *The Mother*, 'while Baudelaire's speaker actively seeks a fusion between present self and lost child, Brooks' speaker is attempting to fight her way out of a state of confusion between self and other' because Brooks 'can no more distinguish between "I" and "you" than it can come up with a proper definition of life.' (Johnson 1986, 33) Brooks' poem with this view, also firmly repudiates the third Wave of Feminism's blame on the Second wave to which Brooks was very much an active part, that the Second wave of Feminism despised motherhood in order

to reach out to their aims and fulfillments. Second wave of Feminism just wanted 'a room of my own' (Woolf 1929, 5), enjoy Womanhood from all aspects- as a woman as well as a human being like any man. Thus, Alice Walker coins the term *womanist* which she metaphorically defines as 'Womanist to feminist as purple to lavender.', one who 'Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.' (Walker 1983, xi) It wanted to envisage women as carrying out all her duties as a girl, as a wife, as a mother, while also fully living the life of intellectual recognition with socio-economic independence and religiopolitical freedom like any independent male member of the society. That no mother, for any reason, would ever prefer to kill her own 'double self', is what the poem most blatantly brings to the fore. It proclaims to the world through the self-condemnation of the retrospecting, mournful mother that, it is rather the invisible social, political, religious and economic barriers laid and lead by patriarchy that is the main convict, and culprit of these feticides, subjecting the mothers to compulsive abortion. As the covert presentation of the guilty-feeling mother parallelly makes an overt presentation of the sociological aspects of these dominant gender issues, curbing every healthy growth not only of motherhood and new lives, but also of a race, and of a nation as a whole, through her retrospection and introspection, the poem becomes more overpowering in its emotional appeal and profundity.

Few other figures of speech prolifically used in the poem are asyndeton, polysyndeton and paratactic structures. They foster the smooth functioning of these parallelism and anaphora to achieve the desired poetic aim. If we observe minutely, it will become clear that the parallel structures are set one after the other paratactically, often separated by a conjunction or a comma. In the first stanza (lines 3-9) while polysyndeton is being deployed, in the second stanza (lines 14-23 and lines 29-30) and the last stanza, asyndeton outnumbers it with comma acting as the linker. These figures of speech in combination with several other rhetorical figures, besides adding to the momentum of the poem, also act as a symbol communicative of deeper thoughts and serious social messages, insinuating at the invisible functioning of patriarchy. Lines 14-20 ending with a heart-felt appeal- 'Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.' (line 21), probably testifies this the best. Here the use of hyperbaton in combination with polyptoton, characterized by the use of the same word in different grammatical form (Quinn 1982, 74-75), highlights the degree of physical and psychological oppression the women were subjected to in the society through abortion. While hyperbaton, achieved through the inversion of the grammatical word order (Quinn 1982, 40-42), not only draws the whole emphasis on the word 'deliberateness', the repetitive use of this word at the ends in different grammatical forms, producing an alliterating effect, foregrounds the idea of the helplessness of the mother in succumbing to forceful abortion.

Brooks here brings out the extreme vulnerability of the African mothers who are diurnally being subjected to men who 'think it is their right to demand children from women.... (and even) ...hold women to ransom by demanding that they have children before they will pursue a relationship with them.' (Walker 1996, 60) She reveals these uncoded, patriarchal cruel practices with such an exquisite poetic combination of so many poetic devices, operating altogether in all the four linguistic levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, that it directly

appeals to the readers' emotional core. The rhetorical question Brooks uses with anadiplosis, repeating the end word at the beginning of the next line— 'Though why should I whine,/ Whine that the crime was other than mine?' (lines 23-24), unveils before the readers the nude picture of the hegemonic society depicting women as intellectually and physically inferior object naturally formed for men (heteronormativity), for entertaining them, producing their children when they would want them to, and raising them up, else, undergo abortion, and silently take all the blames and the religious curses for it. She shows, how in a South African society, women are victimized directly not only by the men inside and outside the home, but also by the patriarchal society, the religious and the cultural norms. There the notion is 'Women who are having abortions are like killers... killing the child' (Walker 1996, 51) and it is believed that 'Women have these problems because of promiscuity....she jumps from man to man.' (ibid, 52) while the truth is as writes Sulter, 'As a black Woman... I have been /mounted in rape/..... I have been/ subjected to abortion/ injected with contraception/ sterilised without my consent (Sulter, *As a Black Woman* 1985) Yet the men, the master hand, are considered 'blameless' and 'childlike' and thus can't be expected to behave responsibly-'Men - for all their shortcomings and patent weaknesses - remain head of the household; women for all their demonstrable strength in maintaining their families, must remain weak in submitting to the authority of men, particularly over women's fertility.' (Walker 1996, 65)

Brooks hails from, and is writing about a society where even after abortion has been legalized (1975) so many years ago, till date the death of the mothers due to unscientific abortion, is maximum (WHO 2019), and brutal female genital mutilation (FGM) is enforced upon women in the name of national identity, religion, culture, ethnicity and sign of virginity in spite of so many health awareness programs. (WHO 3 Feb, 2020) And the time when she was writing this poem i.e. 1945, hardly any such rule was passed. So, it could be well understood how deplorable the condition of the women was. Till date, as reports WHO (3Feb, 2020), More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to the practice according to data from 30 countries where population data exist. .... FGM is a social convention (social norm), the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing, as well as the need to be accepted socially and the fear of being rejected by the community, are strong motivations to perpetuate the practice.

This current report is sufficient to portray before us, how much tyrannical South African society has always been on their women, and till date how it continues to be the same in women body politics despite the United Nation has made so many rules to protect and empower women of the whole world, and given so many Women's Rights to make their claims, and voice their protests. It also clarifies why though not actually guilty, the mother in the poem continues self-accusation, and can never overcome the trauma. It's again the hegemonic societal structure that never allows the women to stand up straight by continually subjecting her to mental tortures from various levels, so that psychologically she cripples down completely, and soon becomes mentally disbalanced, and can never unmask the real 'killers'. Thus, she further asks, 'oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?' A sense of dilemma, a fear of the subjugating society, always trying to silence the subversive women even using religion (Fuse & Crenshaw 2006, 7) as a

sharp weapon, works in her, and despite knowing the truth, she can't share it even with her dead children. All her suppressed thoughts and true facts, thus, come out as the repetitive mutterings of the same words harping on the very unforgettable, un-shareable loss of motherhood, in the same pattern of a circular sentence (epanalepsis) – 'You were born, you had body, you died. /It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.' tapering down to only- 'Believe me, I loved you all. /Believe me, ... I loved, I loved you/ All.' further taking the readers back to the first stanza as if perambulating in an exit-less circular path of this perennial problem of compulsive abortion, and the never ending trauma of throttled motherhood, her murdered 'split-subjectivity' and 'embodied self'- 'You remember the children you got that you did not get,/...You will never neglect, or beat/Them, or silence or buy with a sweet....'.

This is how structurally, through parallelism, circular sentences (Weathers & Winchester 1978, 276), anaphora, and enjambment, making an intersectional probe, Brooks probes deep into the semantic level brilliantly excavating out the inner meanings of the poem reading in between the lines of the text. As the theme of the poem is very much an expression of the inner state of a traumatized mind perambulating around the loss of the possession of her embodied self, here the rhyme scheme is also not a fixed one as we find in general poetry- rather it is a free verse showing internal rhymes more than the external, reflecting the mother's obliviousness of the external, worldly happenings, and total absorption in her inner being. In the first stanza even though we find aa-bb-cc-de-ff pattern, in the second and third stanza it becomes more irregular as the speaker becomes more mentally disturbed, and gradually becomes speechless, and fully withdrawn to her lost motherhood and double-self. Sporadically external rhymes are noted- *suck-luck* (lines 13-15), *names-games* (lines 17-18), *deaths-breaths* (lines 19-20), *whine-mine* (lines 22-23), *dead-instead* (lines 24-25), *made-afraid-said* (lines 26-28), *died-cried* (lines 29-30). This utter discordance and rare mental attachment to the external happenings, is what gets reflected through this free verse style. Here 'utterance is only an intermittent emergence from speech, and whose complexity derives more from multiplicity of tone than from multiplicity of meaning.' (Fowler 1987, 102) In this poem hence, we do not have any fixed meter or length of line. Rather by assorting to the dislocated syntax, the poet 're-articulates language at the outset and versification is rendered in this sense otiose.' (ibid, 103) which permits the analysis of the present poem using the different prosodic factors of both personal reading and regional reading. It also enables Brooks to make a wider appeal engaging all her readers ubiquitously in her psychological event and emotional state by willingly withdrawing the accepted prosody and allowing the individual to move at her own pace, using her own intonation, and emphasis. The irregular rhyme scheme further adds to it as 'the irregular rhyme of free verse is a structuring rather than structural device and is a better guide to the tempo of memory, emotion etc. than variation in line-length' (Fowler 1987, 103)

## **Conclusion**

Thus, this paper shows how Brooks uses the rhetoric to voice the pain of reluctant abortion, to foreground the trauma and the unbearable pain of a mother, and this rhetorical representation reaches such a height that the pangs

of a forcibly aborted Black mother in reality becomes the voice of all the suppressed, dishonoured women irrespective of any boundary, caste, religion or ethnicity. *The Mother*, hence, besides *The Slave Mother* (Harper 1854) and *As a Black Woman* (Sulter 1985), reminds us of *The End* by Sharon Olds (2003) of America, *Catholic Mother* by the Indian poet Eunice D Souza (1979), and fiery Kamala Das' (1973) *Nani* and her column 'Let us invade the brothels and rescue the children!'; recalls to our mind the bold Pakistani poets Kishwar Naheed's *Who am I* (Ahmad 1991, 43), and Sara Shagufta's *Woman and Salt* (Ahmad 1991, 103-105). Brooks' poem *The Mother* makes afresh in our memory the famous Caribbean poem *Brown Baby Blues* (Marson 1937, 97) with the lamentations of a single mother and invincible fear of an undeterminable future of her mixed-raced 'brown' baby girl. How much we clamour around, till date women, in general, stand most vulnerable to our so called educated patriarchal society, and in the name of respect, humiliated the most-into coffin of respectability./ From house to pavement we own nothing/ respectability has to do with how we manage/ respectability is the spear used to brand us/ the selvedge of respectability begins on our tongues/ If someone tastes the salt of our bodies at night/ for a lifetime we become tasteless bread. (Sara Shagufta: *Women & Salt*, self-emphasis)

Abortion is a very sensitive issue and a topic of ceaseless debate. The way Brooks apostrophizes, animates and humanizes the aborted children, it foregrounds that the choice of abortion, rather than being a selection between 'violence and non-violence', is more an issue 'between simple violence to a fetus and complex, less determinate violence to an involuntary mother and/or an unwanted child' (Jhonson 1986, 33, emphasis by self). From the poem one thing that becomes clear is, to every single mother how much dear the child is and how much traumatic it is once she has to undergo unwanted abortion of her embodiment, the child. Another picture that becomes vivid from the above discussion, Bergh's (2019) case study on the highest rate of homicide in South Africa involving children, and WHO's 2020 report on the highest death rate of women due to unsafe abortion in Africa and other places of the world is that, even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century women's condition remains more or less the same. It also raises questions about how far today in 2020, WHO has been successful in wiping out the pains that used to inflict 1945 African mothers. It brings out WHO's inadequacy in its implementation of the Women's rights to family planning, reproduction, and abortion with cent percent success.

Women have always been negotiating with their gender identity as a matured girl, as a mother, as a wife, and this poem brilliantly brings out through its rhetoric, how they while tormenting own self even negotiate with their 'pregnant embodiment' (Young 1984) resulting into the exclusion of her entangled self, the 'child' under various pressurized situations to maintain everybody's happiness, family's respect, to maintain the traditional and cultural values of a society, the national heritage of a country. The pitiable condition of the mother in *The Mother* reflects how gender identity is socially, politically and religiously propounded to be an inherited, inner truth rather than a gender performance, and how in the name of birth control, abortion laws are mal-practiced especially amongst the women of colour, in South Africa, and women are sexually harassed and are compelled to go for abortion despite their unwillingness. This poem unveils how

the invisible hands of patriarchy in the name of pro-choice operating through the National State Health and Educational Policy and other social authorities actually murder the unborn 'foetus', and the mothers become the criminal in everybody's eyes, while in reality the women, oppressed and defiled, continually seeking an identity of the *self* through her child lost in darkness forever, become almost insane. As long as she lives the only thing that keeps haunting her is, Somebody who should have been born is gone. (Anne Sexton: *The Abortion*)

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