

# **Gender Divide and Discriminations: Struggle for Self-Actualization of Women in Anne Tyler's *a Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions***

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**Abstract** The word 'gender' is girdled with identity which critically represents an individual's identity as male, female and a combination of certain male and female traits. In other words, gender identity provides a universal acknowledgement for both physical and behavioral manifestations. Conventionally, the patriarchal society brings out the gender discrimination or gender divide to determine the credentials of both men and women in the public or private space of domesticity. Significantly, Anne Tyler's *A Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions* persevere on to demonstrate the undesirable functions in the expression of patriarchal society. Further, the paper purports to analyze the term, 'gender divide' in order to highlight Anne Tyler's investigation on the unpremeditated intricacies related to gender division in the American family. Markedly, the paper relies on Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation in which woman/man fulfills her/his other needs which include physiological need, safety need, love or belongingness need and esteem need to attain the highest need such as self-actualization in the hierarchy of needs. Thus, the paper ensures that the women in these novels attain self-actualization to illustrate how gender plays a crucial role in everyone's life.

**Keywords** Gender Divide; Domesticity; Behavioral Manifestations; Patriarchal Society; Gender Discrimination; Self-Actualization

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### **Introduction**

According to conceptual analysis and pragmatic observations, the uniqueness of each society has been experimented with the constructive gender and competencies of patriarchy due to gender division. In general, men encircled within traditional patriarchal norms are entirely clubbed to perform certain behavioral attachments. Considerably, the research analysis of literature is favorable if one contemplates how humanity functions to study the theoretical framework of gender conviction in the society. Markedly, gender identity and patriarchy are two distinguished concepts which can be performed to provide insightful experiments of their influences collectively in American society.

Within the limits of the topic, the term, 'Patriarchy' rules for a longer period to reflect on the male adaptations of canonical, gubernatorial, economical and dialectal power. Analogously, by taking into consideration the restricted charge of dialectal power, the other species of humanity, 'female' performs to maintain the convalescent partnership with superiority of 'male.' On the surface, this restricted analogy of females in the male dominant patriarchy takes a spirit of competency to respond to their 'enmeshed selves' in the domestic incarceration. Nevertheless, the patriarchal authority is connotated with 'male' rather than with 'female.' In short, the work on gender studies aims to replace the power patriarchy of men to ensure that women attain a measurable amount of privilege.

Earlier the terms 'sex' and 'gender' had been prominent in any society with similar ambivalence. It has been observed that the sexual differences between men and women are determined due to their biological formation of medical domain. In

due course of time, the language bestows upon the capacity to formulate its own principles for each gender that men and women are categorized and controlled to follow without protest. Under these circumstances, sex and gender receives responses through feminist perspectives. Being placed on display, this prominence gives forth women to confront the complications of possessing adequate dialectal power in the patriarchal domain. In other words, women try to transform the methods of articulation and implications which are predominant in the patriarchal environment.

Predictably, women's requirement to excel with the multiple dimensions of patriarchy have been persistent to achieve the most desirable goals. Similarly, feminism plays a pivotal role to necessitate the untrodden path for women to identify their gender by breaking the monotonous adaptations of themselves as mere 'suppressed' species. Further, an introspective account of gender can be fixed in the American community with respect to demonstrative and behavioral influences of traditional hegemony by scrutinizing Anne Tyler's novels such as *A Slipping Down Life* (1970) and *Earthly Possessions* (1977).

In the context of gender identity and expression, many of the women writers have been stifling to establish their identities through their female characters in every field of literature. In particular, the women are found to be the ever-grown puppets in the hands of their life partners. Interestingly, Anne Tyler focuses more on the trauma undergone by Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory within the clutches of their partners to lead a traumatic life. Beneath the surface, both the male protagonists, Drumstrings Casey and Saul Emory exhibit the gender-based norms initially but later decline to possess rationality or strength. Astutely, the paper is concerned more with the self-actualization of both the female protagonists, Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory on their journey towards discovering the inexpressible gender based societal standards encountered by their male partners, Drumstrings Casey and Saul Emory.

In actuality, Drumstrings Casey and Saul Emory are self-centered to pose their self-centeredness in their respective professions with complete defiance. Distinctively, both the men with their gender expressions of patriarchy suppress their spouses to accept their orders. For the most part, Drumstrings builds castles in the air to flourish in his unattainable musical profession despite Evie's warnings. Along the same way, Saul Emory poses a threat to Charlotte with his mandatory minstrel preaching of sermons despite Charlotte's antithetical views.

Traditionally, Anne Tyler's female protagonists have their own individual way of perceiving the territory around them with inexpressible perception to cultivate

their conventional thoughts within the patriarchal boundary. While Tyler's male protagonists are of indefinite order, her female protagonists engulf themselves in burdened issues to explicate their individualism as multifarious roles of femininity. In fact, Tyler herself deals with the altercation by expostulating with the notion that is staid for a feminist. In reality, the shift from the 1940s to the 1960s shows us the transformation of women in society.

During war, women searched for an opportunity to voice for their rights to establish their independence. Substantially, women moved in quest for identity but they returned to play the role of homemakers. In an elaborate manner, Anne Tyler brings out the concept of gender inequality or gender division and patriarchal expression in *A Slipping Down Life and Earthly Possessions* through the characters of Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory. Therefore, the objectives of the paper are: (i) to analyze the prevalence of surmounting gender divide in these two novels taken for study and also (ii) to identify self-actualization of Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory in these two novels.

In the light of discussing the domestic sphere, Mary Douglas, the British social anthropologist, women in the household have been associated with their children and the household chores, while men have been associated with their whimsical thoughts with their fellow beings in the external world. Gaston Bachelard suggests that "in the intimate harmony of walls and furniture it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside" (68). The inevitable division of labor begins from childhood while boys appear to be socializing externally in the public sphere and girls internally. In compliance with the concept of gender discrimination, Judith Brown in his article, declares that: "No where in the world is the rearing of children primarily the responsibility of men and only in a few societies are women exempted from participation in subsistence activities" (1075). In accordance with this statement, Tyler's both male protagonists, Drumstrings Casey and Saul Emory enjoy the privilege of labeling themselves as 'men' and within this umbrella term, they exercise the power politics of patriarchy to their female counterparts.

In this regard, some enterprises distanced from home are ordained by the parents, such as delivering papers and building the structure of the house by the boys and baby-sitting is done by the girls. Typically, Drumstrings Casey in *A Slipping Down Life* loiters around aimlessly and takes care of himself without prioritizing his partner's needs and thereby spoils his career by building a meaningless mirage. Whereas Saul Emory dauntlessly exercises dictatorship to his partner in looking after the horde of relatives without contributing to his family. However, Bachelard

also recommends that such external enterprises provide them the opportunity for the boys to comprehend the outside world and acquire a sense of place. On the other hand, an activity like baby-sitting seems to provide stress and home-boundness for the girls without seeking adventures.

### **Methodology**

The paper has followed the close reading methodology in order to focus on the two novels taken under study in the light of gender divide. From this standpoint, it is believed that gender roles are to be adopted by having communion with surroundings in which each individual likes to complete the tasks of oneself irrespective of men and women. For instance, in *A Slipping Down Life*, Evie Decker deliberately acts as a breadwinner to seek adventure for her life with an unborn baby in her womb. Adventurously, she breaks the stereotypical manifestation of women to earn a living for her disloyal husband and her baby, the sole provider of her life. Similarly, gender discrimination has been accorded in Tyler's *Earthly Possessions* to project Charlotte Emory as an object for sacrificing her needs for the sake of her patriarchal husband and crowded relatives.

In her article, "Family as Microcosm of Anne Tyler's *A Slipping Down Life*," Donipati Sumalatha (2014) has assessed the novel *A Slipping Down Life* by Anne Tyler through postmodern parables in which Evie Decker struggles to find self-recognition in a family without a life partner and parents (23-32). Through her analysis, the researcher has confirmed that family is a microcosmic unit without which no soul can exist. Whereas, Mergumi Tanji (2019) in her article, "Young woman's quest for self-hood: A Study of Anne Tyler's *A Slipping Down Life* and *The Clock Winder*" has explored independent and confident women in Evie Decker and Elizabeth Abbott through their attainment of motherhood in these novels (55-68).

The present paper has envisioned to give a detailed analysis of Evie and Charlotte's impregnable complications to win over the patriarchal expression of gender discrimination in *A Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions*. More appropriately, the paper ensures to bring out the challenges faced by Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory so as to attain self-actualization in their journey.

### **Surmounting Gender Divide**

Evidently, John Gray's book suggests, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, in which he firmly propagates the contentious variations which are omnipresent between the two sexes. By contrast, as far as the title proceeds, Gray has opinionated that both men and women are two separate beings and they exist

in this universe with a specific disposition to contribute to their personalities and their riveted frames of mind. Relatedly, on these incompatible interpretations of gender, the gender-based division of work has been surmounting and can be examined by identifying their geneses in the archaic period. Repeatedly, men engrossed themselves in hunting and women were the custodians of the household and participated in cooking, cleaning and feeding. Judith Butler, on her views on gender, fixes that Masculine and Feminine roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed. Contrarily, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender and it is performatively constituted by the very expressions” (33). Juxtaposing this quote, both Eve Decker and Charlotte Emory initiate the question of asking for choices in the patriarchal interventions of dominant men. Structurally, these women characters are reminiscences of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem, *The Princess*. In which, Tennyson discusses the determination of gender divide ordained by the society.

As are the roots of Earth  
and base of all;  
Man, for the field and Woman for the hearth:  
Man, for the sword and for the needle she:  
Man, with the head and woman with the heart:  
Man, to command and woman to obey;  
All else confusion (298).

Sympathetically, Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory in the above -mentioned novels prolong to struggle in the male dominant society from the beginning till the end to ensure their gender with an optimistic outlook. Analytically, the tradition of the family exposes an individual’s birth to arrive at their gender identity. In this context, the family milieu settles the roles taken by men and women since their births to instigate the conservative trait that as how, what and when the male and female children should comply with as regards labor. Inquisitively, men are intrinsic in public work with the advent of capitalism to remain as the ruling powers of the public sphere and the depiction of the women are entailed within the domesticity of the private sphere. Despite an inability to earn for his livelihood, Drumstrings Casey in *A Slipping Down Life*, retains his male supremacy and demands, “No Biscuits? Breakfast is not Breakfast without no biscuits. I mean later. For the future. I’m used to having biscuits every morning” (Tyler, *A Slipping Down Life* 115). Further, he asks Evie’s father: “Evie and I will need furniture. Do you reckon we could

borrow what you have extra?" (Tyler, *A Slipping Down Life* 125). Thus, gender and patriarchy are inbuilt in Casey whose intention is to gain comfort whereas for Evie, marriage would offer her happiness and peace. In the ancient mythology, the concept of Eve's creation from Adam's rib and her surrender towards her husband is evidently shown and to demonstrate the predetermined idea that Eve being a female should conscientiously conform to the configured frame of rules set by Adam with respect to discharge her duties. Indubitably, the gender-based division has been surmounting since ancient times.

### **Stereotypical Patriarchal Standards and Behavioral Manifestations in *A Slipping Down Life***

*A Slipping Down Life* is self-assured as Evie's unbreakable sense of identity has been portrayed within the patriarchal expressions of the society. Further, the genuine love and passion of Evie for Casey as she spoils her forehead by engraving Casey's name on her forehead is one of the most significant aspects of the novel. By the time, Evie is astonished to discover her husband's identity in bed with another woman to reveal the true color and hereby the troubles are prompted to take mountainous shape in Evie's life. Eventually, Tyler brings gender variation or gender divide by uniting the two young people in a discontented marriage to rub salt in a wound of bondage. At this juncture, Drum, in a disconsolate state puts forth that, "What is the point in me sitting here strumming? I'll never get anywhere. I ain't but nineteen years old and already leading a slipping down life and hard rock is fading so pretty soon nobody won't want it" (Tyler, *A Slipping Down Life* 133).

More specifically, the paper discusses how Evie has been presented without a mother and obscure presence of the father who hasn't nurtured Evie with proper parental care and remains insignificant, uncommunicative and incongruous. Hence Evie runs away from her home of void space to find asylum in Casey's terrain whereas Drumstrings Casey's love is impure and presumptuous. More crucially, the social and intellectual aspects of women's position are more contemplated to penetrate in depth into the analysis of her freedom which is persistently questioned in the patriarchal standards of men. As being natural with emotions, Evie Decker boldly takes a drastic effort in finding a solution to her unstable mind.

Although Evie clearly imprints on the minds of the readers that she hasn't been consoled with the concept of marriage as an organization and the capacity to enmesh the female self within the connubial relationship. Among the partners, the most affected female suffers with a conservatism of gender discrimination and as regards Evie's prerogatives have been questioned at a larger extent. Zorica Markovic

describes that “relationship between a man and a woman should be a combination of affection and sexual components” (383). But this novel is rooted in adolescence, homely, stylistically conservative as it’s heroine, motherless Evie Decker of Pulqua, North Caroline, a plumb drab girl cuts into her forehead the last name of her rock star lover, Drumstrings’ name on her forehead with a sole intention to marry him and learn to live a life of a naive housewife.

Emphatically, Evie becomes pregnant with a hope of journeying towards her child with the vexatious rock star who refuses to move away from his stereotypical behavioral manifestations. Without further delay, Evie sooner prepares to swallow her lonely life without her reticent and rather unstimulating father who abruptly dies to leave her in morose. Mysteriously, Casey does not get captivated by Evie for her pudgy appearance. Significantly, she unmindfully remains obese and in fact whole heartedly dictates herself that it is quite normal and inherent in her to stay overweight. Persistently, Evie first becomes enthralled with Drumstrings Casey when she learns his unpredictable plans on the radio and indeed, she gives an instant thought to be crazy with a youngster whom she considers to be naive and discerning. At this point of time, she is conscious of societal views to consider them to be supportive or unsupportive and determined not to give space for the society to contemplate whether she is attractive enough to deserve him. Vehemently, the expression of gender creeps into the societal standard.

In contrast, his wife Evie seems to thrive in marriage due to the expression of patriarchy. Had she been missed within the confinement of the high schooler; she would have been embroiled at home under the patriarchal standards. Unlike Drum, whose patriarchy proves to be insignificant as his rock star persona, Evie succumbs to execute her duties with the blindfolded predicament as regards demanded by the society due to her gender. For example, Evie blatantly identifies the gender discrimination being implanted in Casey when Drum defies having a working wife at home by not giving her a space to think and administer her thoughts. With marriage, the gender divide prompts her to be within the structure of a female framed by the patriarchal expression which Evie forcibly clutches the values and standards of conduct. This newly found gender identity of a house wife provides power of external knowledge to her to move away from the dominative patriarchal structures. Laura Mulvey opines that woman then stands in patriarchal structure as a signifier for the male perspective and in other words, Mulvey points out that woman “holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (809).

A significant factor to be noted is that Casey’s mother acts as a primary concern for the family whose sole liability is to be the pillar of support behind

Casey in all aspects. With reference to Ora, a distinctive quality is that she being the embodiment of permissiveness puts Casey in a self-centered position by permitting him to carry over with his whims and fancies. Sarcastically, even before gaining attention through his musical profession, Casey's mother instills a self-centered element in him as she says: "Deep down I know he has a wonderful career in front of him" (Tyler, *A Slipping Down Life* 77). Unhesitatingly, Casey is built with the gender expression of patriarchy to move forward to achieve the pinnacle point in his unsuccessful career.

Apparently, Evie being conscious of his failure, she elopes with him just as the gender discrimination plays a crucial role in the marital life to think constantly that she cannot leave him in utter failure. Behind the plot, Evie's self-revelation points out her individuality to enable her to get liberated by an autarchic experience of discontented marriage. Specifically, Drumstrings Casey is unclear and mysterious about his life and for the most part, Casey is selfish and accordingly changes his color between closeness and loneliness.

In the similar pattern, being overwhelmed by mother's statement, Casey accepts his mother's words obsequiously when Ora utters: "We may not be college-educated in our family but we are law-abiding" (Tyler, *A Slipping Down Life* 97). Unfortunately, the mother makes him free from shouldering the responsibilities. A key feature to be noted is that being hailed from relatively modest means lower in status than Evie Decker, Casey's father works in a gas station to meet the financial requirements. Aside from believing, Evie is seen as a fallen victim to Casey's false career unmindful of gender expression.

Subsequently, dereliction is projected on the central character Drumstrings as he spends his life in search of stardom. Frantically, he does not accomplish success but completely depends on his wife, Evie to help him win over the unfavorable circumstances. As a needle in a haystack, Drum never succeeds in growing with popularity. In an article, Cecilia Donohue has investigated Anne Tyler's *A Slipping Down Life* and commented: "transcend the carving up of her forehead (and the threat of a slipping-down life) to the carving out of a grounded, firm-footed, reality-based existence sans rock-star fantasies" (54). To a large extent, Evie's slippery slope in her youth with a nugatory marital life gives the reader a premonition of her deceitful marriage. In the final analysis, it is interestingly pregnancy more than marriage that brings out the self-realization in Evie Decker.

In an incisive study, Margaret Morganroth Gullette (1985) observes that Evie "needs a real house and an organized life for the sake of the baby, the boy-husband no longer matters. She leaves him behind when he won't go along" (326).

Symbolically, through dismemberment of her forehead and through elopement discovers the weak Casey's disturbed patriarchal interventions. Without pressing the matter too much, strengthens her womanhood to immerse herself into the role of mother. Selflessly, Evie identifies her gender and attains self-actualization by providing her life and her efforts to support his child selflessly with fulfillment in motherhood.

### **Indoctrinate Formulations of Patriarchy within Domesticity in *Earthly Possessions***

In discussing another novel, the paper lays foundation on the theoretical framework of defining the conventional roles of the female protagonist, Charlotte Emory as regards gender identity. In the amplitude of discussion, Anne Tyler's *Earthly Possessions* preponderantly manifests the theme of a runaway housewife, Charlotte Emory within the indoctrinated formulations of patriarchy. Basically, Charlotte builds the household to keep her children under her care whereas her husband Saul Emory consistently performs in distancing himself from the domestic space to stick to the notion of administering the household. Though Charlotte Emory estimates her domestic arena as her own possession, this private space gradually becomes cramped for her as her husband Saul brings furniture and loads the house with furniture and people. Charlotte finds her house with "an end table in front of another end table, a second sofa backed against the first. It was crazy. Every piece of furniture had its shadow, a Siamese twin" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 85).

More strangely, Charlotte does not discard the disarranged physical space of the domestic sphere but she considers her husband and children as unavoidable clutters in her life. Frustrated by her constrained thoughts within the littered space of her house, she has been considered not as a subject but as an object of male gaze. Conclusively, Judith Butler emphasizes in her analysis of Simon de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* that "gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired" (Butler 35-49). Unable to endure the silent abuse, Charlotte runs away from the cluttered objects and stuffed people to give vent to her fettered self to acquire the perfect gender identity. Moreover, Charlotte considers "her husband was another encumbrance; I often thought that. And children even more so. How did I end up so much, when I had thrown so much away?" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 31). On a personal note, Charlotte explicates that within the clutter of her relationships, she is unable to take her breath and for a while, thinks about escaping from the clutters of her children and husband to identify the self within the gender differences.

However, the protagonist fights back the conventional traits of patriarchy in

which a housewife has been burdened to unburden the responsibility in surveillance of the events taking place around the lives of her children and her indifferent husband. From her childhood, Charlotte conceptualizes a complex kind of life to move out of the domestic realm and face the external space of challenges but being a woman of the domestic dimension, she faces the invincible struggles to clear away the haltered sentiments from mind. Therefore, Voelker maintains, “her mother’s child Charlotte inevitably became a person upon whom domestic burdens fall; while she has rejected them in principle, she has become in fact the caretaker and servant in Saul’s household” (120). Hereby, gender acts as an agent in the case of Charlotte and hesitantly moves out to find for a better survival though she is an object in the male dominion of the house.

Sympathetically, Charlotte Emory being the raconteur of the novel, narrates the escape from the burdensome domestic interventions of her family consisting of ailing mother and dominant and unemotional husband and faces the turbulence in the domestic thralldom of long thirty-five years. Meanwhile, her unanticipated trip with the captor Jake Simms mounts her to escalate pressure by emancipating herself from private stagnation of domestic liabilities. It is observed that apart from being born as an exchanged child in the hospital, Charlotte encounters by being caged in a domestic incarceration of her parents who look at her scornfully ever since she has been exchanged in the hospital. Firstly, Charlotte confronts such miseries unflinchingly. Secondly, she is seen as an unemotional toy in the hands of her husband, Saul Emory from the sight of first infatuation. In this regard, Gender divide is discussed to an extremity while Charlotte’s prerogatives have been questioned and remain unanswered in the patriarchal interferences of Saul Emory.

Distinctively, a disrupted setting of her life approaches Charlotte, the moment she meets her husband and gets intimidated. While she expresses her subdued emotions of love towards him, she is unbelievably confident that Saul would be an impeccable man to pursue her dreams and also would travel a distant land to attain peace in her newly found hope of the new domestic possession. Realistically, Charlotte reinforces to assert herself that she is indeed moving out of the patriarchy to possess the dream world of marital life in a strange land with her husband remaining similar with no difference. In other words, the dreams deceive her and prove tactless as the events in her life are unthinkable. At close examination, Jerome Tognoli, (1979) says that “Freudian and Jungian dream symbolism affirm the houses as representing femaleness” (604). Charlotte meets the consequences of gender differences even in the new territory of unfamiliar domesticity in this regard.

Doggedly the idiosyncrasies of Saul Emory’s passion are explained at certain

aspects. Ironically, Saul Emory's sympathy towards Charlotte's unwell mother occupies his thoughts more than Charlotte as he cultivates an intimacy with her mother and embeds in his mind to give her protection. Though Charlotte has built in her mind to monitor her bedridden mother, she tries to escape from the reality of the threatening burden of her house. On the contrary, remains calm in the face of precariousness to protest against her husband's patriarchal authority. In this context, Charlotte laments: "I have been trying to get rid of all belongings that would weigh me down on a long foot march" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 21).

Moreover, Saul's stuffed thoughts of issuing six offspring under her care adds intensified pressure and combats the fate without voicing for her ideas as she discourages his fanciful ideas. As a result, she brings forth six off springs as ordained by fate to nurture them but encased in these domestic chores, Charlotte finds a direction to escape. Inevitably, gender expression plays a pivotal role and obstructs her spontaneity of thoughts. At this juncture, she falls in love with her brother-in-law to break the monotonous stereotypical norms of gender by eloping with him to discover her identity. Sooner arrives at a self-revelation that she would be stifling with her self-consciousness. Thus, Charlotte brings out the expression of feminine gender to cling on to conventional roles of a mother more than a wife.

Arguably, Charlotte's troubled self finds an agonized house full of relatives including her husband's brothers, sinners who surrender to her preacher husband by settling to get relieved from their inhibitions. For instance, Charlotte's protest to attend the church and refusal of imbibing these sermons instigate her husband to create petty scuffles with Charlotte. To add fuel to fire, Saul's harsh patriarchal thoughts pollute him and ideate that it is a woman in particular a wife's primal duty to feed the massive relatives including the mourners but Charlotte has the opposite view to perceive and foresee about the distant future. In an utter discomforted state, Charlotte mulls over to escape from the clutches of the patriarchal rules and regulations. As she complains: "What I was aiming for was a house with the bare, polished look of a bleached skull" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 160).

Unquestionably, Charlotte moves out of the expression of gender being looked upon as a woman and escapes from the domestic internment to establish her independence. Before escaping from her household, Charlotte grieves: "My life has been a history of casting off encumbrances, paring down to these bare essentials, stripping for the journey" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 37). Untiringly, with a strengthened power she runs away to the bank for financial expenses. Meanwhile she provides a definition of her escape from the neurotic self as a real dream but she is kidnapped by Jake Simms for his personal accomplishment. Subsequently,

Charlotte realizes that the kidnapper is a blessing in disguise who has served to put her in a comfortable zone by being a protector for her unbalanced state of mind. In due course of action, differing from her imagination, the kidnapper is found to be a sufferer of fatal events and has indeed kidnapped Charlotte for feeding his pregnant wife, Mindy, and also strengthening himself financially.

Conversely, gender takes a new dimension through the kidnapper who erases the faulty self of Charlotte's former self with an inclination to replace her in the same dominion of her household. It is also worthwhile to mention that Charlotte grows in her own idiosyncratic way to tread on the path of traditional patriarchal standards. In the final analysis, Charlotte unconsciously craves for self-actualization which forces her to move past the territory of patriarchy. Hence, Charlotte moves back to reside within the strict and tightened patriarchal structure to arrive at the conclusion which requires her physical presence in order to help define the presence of her partner and children. Finally, through her struggle for self-actualization, she becomes the bearer of her fate. In addition, she is bound by the "silent image" that categorizes her as a good homemaker. When Charlotte returns, her "foot-steps had a steady sound, like rain" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 197).

Nonetheless, Jake Simms interrogates, exhorts and bombards Charlotte with questions about her past life which she describes in crude terms as her life has been confined within the domestic imprisonment and thereby dictated by the patriarchal authority of her husband to live in perpetual agitation. Later, Jake Simms delves into a deeper examination of Charlotte's mind to recreate, reframe and retrieve the memories of the past to regenerate by getting back to former life which has given her the mistaken proof of identity. Eventually developing comradeship with the kidnapper and his innocent wife, Charlotte realizes by adhering to live a principled life with reconciliation and togetherness. Ironically, it is Jake who preaches her the true adaptation of dream in one of his insights. He preaches to her that, "I believe, anytime you see someone running, it's their old fault, self they're running from" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 134).

Ultimately, having come to a possible revelation of self, Charlotte returns to her dominion while Alice Petry Hall (1994), being unsatisfied with this transformation of self in Charlotte maintains that: "Charlotte's return is yet another manifestation of her capacity to be passive Therefore, she concludes that the latter transformed self of Charlotte is nothing but an urge to return to the former self of homemaker's passivity" (38). Contrarily, Robert Scott Stewart put forth his motive that "her life may be identified with home but she has come to reconstruct herself through her travels and has begun to take possession of her life" (Stewart 78). Paradoxically,

Charlotte's return to her domestic boundary has been differently interpreted by her as a fresh beginning of Charlotte who has the capacity to change the mind of her patriarchal husband for a reconsideration of contemplated gender.

In truth, Charlotte expresses bitterly to Saul at the end of *Earthly Possessions*. "We have been traveling for years, traveled all our lives. We are still traveling. We couldn't stay in one's place if we tried" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 170). Indisputably, Charlotte, without eschewing the paradigm of relationships, discovers that the gender identity for women can be given a prerogative wherever women reside. Hence, a new Charlotte emerges and now "she marvels at her slipperiness" (Tyler, *Earthly Possessions* 198). Evie Decker in *A Slipping Down Life* is substantially enmeshed in a drudgery to attain self-revelation within the impoundment of turbulent domestic life. While being acquiescent to the demands, Charlotte in *Earthly Possessions* abruptly moves away from the commotion of patriarchy where gender is contemplated.

### **Self-Actualization of Women in *A Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions***

Although the term 'self-actualization' was popularized by Abraham Maslow, it was coined by Kurt Goldstein who acknowledged self-actualization as a denotation or individuation of achieving the need for self. As a matter of fact, Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of needs, interpreted self-actualization by asserting: "What a man can be, he must be" (370-396). This is what is referred to as self-actualization as declared by Abraham Maslow. In other words, self-actualization can be elaborated as the complete realization of one's internal potential by overcoming the external forces in reality. Magnificently, both Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory get stimulated to overcome the externalities of gender divide to attain self-actualization. Contextually, "Self-actualization to be fulfilled implies courage, effort, risk-taking and sometimes suffering, frustration and isolation. Self-actualization is a *growth motivation* that is found within each individual, a need to develop his own psychic potential" (Rusu 1104). Both Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory strengthen their potential by overcoming risk-taking, frustration and isolation to attain self-actualization.

Consequently, the paper brings forth more ideologies on gender and in particular, Lois Tyson (2006) in his *Critical Theory Today* puts forth the argument that "traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive" (Tyson 85). Habitually and traditionally, Anne Tyler's men in the latter part of twentieth century novels are vehemently connected to the strict patriarchal procedures of hindering the progress of women with a strong inclination to occupy

the domain of the household. Yet, women in both the novels deliberately crave for gender identity which can be equivalent to men in every aspect of life. On the surface, the men in these novels have been ingrained to be insular, unfriendly, uncooperative to the women folks throughout the narration.

It can be argued that it is only through the clarity of detaching themselves from their current lifestyles that women's faulty vision begins its process of clarification. Instinctively, as per the argument, beyond sacrificing their needs for their families, women have to progress far by detaching themselves. In addition, Evie Decker detaches herself from the disloyal partner to progress for self-definition. Whereas Charlotte detaches herself from the stringent patriarchal norms set by her dominant partner who controls her every moment. Behind the analysis, Charlotte submerges into motherhood deeply and returns to establish within her gender by continuing to be a mother to her naïve children rather than being a wife. At this stage, both the women fulfill the needs of motherhood without connecting with the reminiscences of the past. Moreover, Maslow's hierarchy of needs show that people should fulfill the hierarchies of basic needs, physiological needs, safety needs, psychological needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. These women are able to sustain individually by meeting these needs with self-actualization.

Therefore, through the findings of gender divide, both the female protagonists are bolstered up with vigor and indomitable spirit to define their roles without fear or unhappiness to procure self-actualization. More appropriately, these women characters, particularly Evie Decker and Charlotte Emory have been created to remain in the unflappable crisis of 'womanhood.'

Later, these women progress to conquer the identity which has been hidden by the patriarchy of their male counterparts. Incongruously, Evie Decker in *A Slipping Down Life* (1970), hankers after the concealed love and kindness in her birth place to discover another frustrated world of sorrow in the bitter marital relationship with Drumstrings Casey. Nonetheless, Evie builds up self-actualization of attaining motherhood in response to the concept of gender without her partner. Ultimately, Charlotte Emory too emerges as a new woman after undergoing the untold trauma of being a stereotypical home maker in Emory's household. Hence, to achieve a sense of self-actualization, Charlotte returns to exercise the functions of a mother by actualizing herself. Crucially, Charlotte defines her image clearly that it is not mere submission or complete surrender to the patriarchal framework but she has achieved in actualizing herself in her absence during the trials of kidnapping.

## **Discussion**

According to the general perception, our society is constructed such that gender is closely interlinked with behavioral patterns of men and women. A thorough comprehensive investigation of American, social and emotional behavioral patterns is plausible and probable by introspecting and comparing the novels such as *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, *Clock Dance* and *Ladder of years* of Anne Tyler. Generally, gender and power are completely a combination of unique areas of study but are related and mutually interconnected concepts. Particularly, a community of men are always possessed with dominance and superiority. By taking at least partial charge of competent power, women try harder to struggle to become more prominent in the male patriarchal community.

Traditionally, feminism dwells on the necessity for women to encounter the ordeals which compel them to be housewives and men to be breadwinners by social conventions. Specifically, gender roles are prominent in these novels. More emphatically, the paper has taken up and compared Pearl Tull in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, Willa Drake in *Clock Dance* and Delia Grinstead in *Ladder of Years* along with the novels taken for present study, *A Slipping Down Life* and *Earthly Possessions* to display how these women hanker after success self-actualization to achieve in male dominant society.

The past studies had shown how women have been struggling to identify their roles in their families with particular reference to novels. In particular, in *Earthly Possessions*, Tyler has brought out the insipid life of Charlotte Emory, a helpless house wife who sets far apart to depart her dominant husband but gets trapped in a bungled bank burglary. In addition, she observes the predicament in such an unexpected situation with a bank robber, Jake Simms. During the journey, Charlotte explained her befuddled domestic life to Jake to seek clarification. But Jake convinces Charlotte to accept the former life to find self-realization in her family. Here, she realizes that women's internal expectation of self-identity is being with the family to envision a new life and not to be departed from it.

Similarly, "*Ladder of Years*" demonstrated the theme of another run -away house wife novel which depicts the character of Delia Grinstead who, being born as a daughter to a medical practitioner has never been given an opportunity to enjoy a prestigious life of her own. Neither her father nor her husband has given her complete freedom to make choices in life, Later, Delia escapes into the land of Bay borough, works in a company then becomes a caretaker of twelve-year-old Nara. Suddenly, Delia returns to her family and seeks self-identity in being with her children and family.

Conventionally. Pearl Tull in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* welcomes

to be married at an early age after neglecting her uncle's offer of higher education. According to her plans, she executes and marries Beck Tull to create a family of her own. Fortunately, Pearl accepts to be a homemaker and travels along with Beck to enjoy her family life but Pearl sacrifices by letting Beck move away from her for the sake of taking up his career. Unexpectedly, Beck turns away from taking responsibilities and indeed burdens Pearl to bring forth children. Hence, Pearl works single-handedly as a store keeper to fulfill the monetary needs of the family as executed by Evie in *A Slipping Down Life*. Critically, Willa Drake in *Clock Dance* projects the arduous zeal of herself who continuously struggles to discover an identity for herself in the patriarchal society. It is only at the age of sixty-one, Willa begins to realize and regret the decisions she has made in her life for being lived and sacrificed for the sake of others. From this point, Willa learns to live for herself by possessing the unshakeable vigor and faith in being a powerful woman to question the patriarchal order to which she had been submissive throughout her two marriages.

In *A Slipping Down Life*, Tyler has narrated the story of innocent Evie Decker whose sole relative and companion is her uncommunicative father. In other words, Evie learns the outside world from watching television and listening to the radio. In the first place, Evie Decker being a less pretty girl decides to seek self-identity. Secondly, Evie falls in love with an unsuccessful rock star, Casey and to identify herself with the rock star, she desperately cuts the unsuccessful rock star's name on her forehead to attain popularity for Casey. Correspondingly, Evie has been deceived by Casey who spoils her by developing an illicit relationship with Evie's friend. Hence, Evie's determination to seek self-identity with her unborn baby is commendable as she moves far ahead from the male constructed society. On the whole, Evie Decker, Charlotte Emory, Pearl Tull, Willa Drake and Delia Grinstead, during their quest for individualism become bearers of silent image which projects them as good wives and ideal home makers.

### **Conclusion**

Substantially, the paper has focused on women's quest for identity in the power patriarchal structures of the society. *A Slipping Down Life* displays the traditional patriarchy of men with an influence on society. While Evie Decker is determined to take a courageous step to work for the family, her partner Drumstrings Casey criticizes her and dictates her to be at home despite his failure in his profession. Through his downright thoughts, Casey is more preoccupied with the reaction of the society than prioritizing the needs of Evie. Later, it is understood at length that Evie

Decker in *A Slipping Down Life* has reached the state of hoping for a better place to survive to overcome the gender division in the problematic patriarchal world. Effortlessly, Evie finds self-actualization of gender expression with the meaningful attainment of leading a lonely life with her unborn baby.

In the closing pages of the novel, Charlotte identifies herself with her children who have been longing to meet her in *Earthly Possessions*. As on her return, she ensures that she would transform the whole household with the new definition of gender whereas contrastingly, her partner remains unchanged with his patriarchal power structure whereas the new woman in Charlotte persuades her to have a different outlook of her partner. On the whole, both Evie and Charlotte attain self-actualization by occupying the domestic sphere with the identity of mother in the troublesome patriarchal world. To sum up, the paper signifies firmly as how women in both these novels conquer individuality by empowering themselves to be constructive after confronting with destiny in the world of surmounting gender division.

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