

## A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf's Selected Novels *Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse*

Isam M. Shihada  
Al-Aqsa University

**Abstract:** *The aim of this study is to examine Virginia Woolf's contribution to the feminist question in her selected novels: Mrs. Dalloway (1925) and To the Lighthouse (1927). The study shows how Mrs. Woolf employed her novels to show women the way to obtain meaning in life and realize their identities. Virginia Woolf established herself as a distinguished feminist woman writer in her treatment of women's helpless situation. She unveiled the causes of women's oppression and provided us with a comprehensive answer for the women's question.*

### 1. Introductory

Virginia Woolf's novels show an intellectual commitment to political, social and feminist principles. Woolf was one of the writers whose view of life was conditioned by the forces of their age. She had acute awareness of the damage of the contemporary life, and her writings condemned the British patriarchal culture. In her novels, Woolf intended to portray a satiric picture and terrible indictment of the English social system. She found that the emotional strain of modern life almost damaged the bonds of communication among people. She asserted that personal relationships provide the order and meaning in life, but with the traditional values of life, loss of meaning and social relevance, human relationships have suffered a serious blow. This state of confusion is expressed in Woolf's novels through her characters' inability to communicate with each other. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, (1925), Clarissa tries to discover a means of communication with others, but she fails to overcome her sense of loneliness. In *To the Light House* (1927), though the Ramsays and their guests live together, each is an isolated soul. Woolf dedicated her novels to analyze the miseries and loneliness of women's lives that have been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional means. Miss Kilman and Rezia are outstanding examples of the cruelty of the blind social political doctrine of the English society. She aimed at creating an androgynous world in which there is a balance between intellect and emotion. Woolf introduced women characters who signify hope in this world such as Elizabeth in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Lily in *To The Lighthouse*.

Before the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were considered weak intellectually and physically. Such concept was consolidated by social conventions. According to that concept, society was divided into two worlds: private and public world. The private world implied that women should stay at home. They were not allowed to work or learn. They were educated only in a

way that suited their claimed weak nature such as sewing, nursing and painting. The sole vocation for women was marriage. According to that role, women couldn't revolt because of fear, shame and rejection by society. The public world implied that men are strong mentally and physically. They were allowed to work, and were given proper education such as mathematics and science, ... etc. The sole vocation of men was to work and build society.

That formula of dividing the world into two worlds was against human nature. Accordingly, it led to the emergence of several feminist groups which attempted to provide solutions to women's question. The feminist groups could be classified into liberal, Marxist, radical, psycho-analytic, social, existentialist and post-modernist. None of them has developed a comprehensive answer to the feminist question. But such co-ordination and understanding among them can make feminists achieve their goals, and help them eradicate women's sufferings concretely.

According to the liberal feminists, the cause of women's oppression lies deep in traditions and false moral codes. They demand that women should be provided with proper education and economic equality with men. Mary Wollstonecraft called for re-organizing society and educating women in order to develop them morally and intellectually. J.S. Mill argued that women are in need of the same civil liberties and economic opportunities as men, and that men should work for liberating women and changing the traditional way of their thinking. Marxist feminists stressed that capitalism is the primary source of women's oppression. They demanded that the capitalist system must be replaced by a social one, in which means of production belong to all. The existentialist feminist Simone De Beauvoir, in her book, *The Second Sex (1940)*, demanded that women should choose whether they become mothers or not. She called women to create a special world for themselves, and demanded that women should read books by great writers like Virginia Woolf and Catherine Mansfield. In her opinion, women should be independent financially and autonomous professionally. For radical feminists, the oppression of women is rooted in the patriarchal system. They demanded that society must be purged from legal, social, political and cultural principles of patriarchy. Psycho-analytic feminists found the source of women's oppression is hidden deep in women's psyche.

They called women to probe the depth of their psyche in order to evaluate their position as women. Post-modern feminist argued that the more feminist thought they have, the better. Helen Cixous argued that women write differently from men because of their biological differences. She believed that, by developing a feminine writing, women would change the way the world thinks of them and their place as well. Julia Kristeva differs from Cixous. She rejected Cixous' identification of the masculine with biological men and the feminine

with biological women. She thought that boys can be identified with their mothers, and girls can be identified with their fathers. Girls can write in a masculine mode, and boys can write in a feminine mode.

Social feminists thought that psychology, patriarchy and capitalism determine women's destiny, so the oppression of women is rooted in social, economic, and psychological factors. It implies the need for self-organization and change in gender identity. They developed two approaches to provide a comprehensive answer to the women's question: dual and unified. The dual approach feminists believed in that was any change in the status of women should be accompanied by the defeat of capitalism and patriarchy. This can be achieved by changing patriarchy's economic aspects through material means and its social and ideological aspects by non-material means, psycho-analytic means. The unified approach took both defeat of capitalism and patriarchy in one direction. The unified approach feminists argued for that is if women were equated with men, regarding the same division of labour and the same fee, they would be equated with men regarding the same value and status. They argued that the division of labour analysis has the conceptual power to change Marxist – feminist theory which is powerful enough to accommodate the ideas of Marxist, radical and psycho-analytic feminists in a unitary framework. Social feminists unveiled the reasons and suggested a comprehensive answer for women's oppression.

## 2. A Feminist Perspective

At Woolf's time, people were affected by the collapse of the old concepts and values that influenced the entire conceptual world. Virginia Woolf had acute awareness of the ravage and demolition of the contemporary life. The human nature underwent a change in her writing after the shock of the First World War. She criticized the authoritarian power that made autocrats of husbands and fathers.

Virginia Woolf was subjected to a depressive atmosphere and patriarchal rule in her family. She was affected by her father's domination of his wife and daughters. In Marcus "New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf" Ellen Hawks comments on woolf's view towards her mother.

It was the woman, the human being whose sex made it her sacred duty to sacrifice herself to the father, whom Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett had to kill. (Marcus, 1981: 45)

After the death of her mother and half-sister, her father's demands and needs for sympathy and attention from his daughters increased. She was also affected by the sexual expression of power and manipulation of her step-brothers. Her strong admiration for women was coupled with growing dislike for males' domination, represented by her father and step-brothers especially by George and Gerald. She and Vanessa formed a league together and united against the depressing atmosphere and patriarchal rule in their family. On the basis of this relationship,

Woolf appreciated the need for women's friendship and continued to insist on the importance of women's friendship against patriarchal machinery.

Being aware of the importance of the need for all women to rebel against the patriarchal system, Woolf examined the literary works and biographies of women writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Mary Wollstonecraft, Russell Mitford and others. She examined their lives and the way they translated their resentment of males' dominance in literature. She discovered that killing the stereotyped feminine, "the angel of the house", as Woolf called her, was a part of the occupation of women writers. These women writers maintained their integrity, and insisted upon their own identities against patriarchal society. She believed that the artist needs shared goals, tradition and continuity. Woolf comments in "A room of one's own"

Masterpieces are not single and solitary births, they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body, so that the experience of mass is behind the single voice. (Woolf, 1957: 68-9)

Virginia Woolf found that women were excluded by men from being the makers of these masterpieces, so she created for women a female tradition in "A Room of One's Own" (1929). In order to kill the angel and create an artist, women should create their own identity, talk about their own experiences and encourage women's writing.

Some of Woolf's friends were central to her development of politics such as Margaret Davies, president of the National Women's Co-operative Guild, and Janet Case. Woolf recognized that women might change society's values and save it from self-destruction. Hawkes quoted the following part from a letter that Virginia Woolf sent to Margaret, in 1916,

I become steadily more feminist... and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer... without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it. (Marcus, 1981: 34)

Virginia Woolf called for recognition of what she had seen in her friendship with women- the characteristics that would have protected them from emotional exploitation. She called for a world of sympathy. She called for a society of women as an alternative to authoritarian structures. In her call, she bids women to believe in themselves, maintain integrity of their values and exclude from society all masculine values of hierarchy, dominance and power. In her short story *A Society* (1920), she talked about a group of women who join together to investigate the masculine world. Hawkes comments on Woolf's view in the story,

Woolf stresses the most important lesson to be learned by women, not from men but from each. As the narrator, of the story tells one of the members of the society, 'Once [your daughter] knows how to read there is only one thing you can teach her to believe in- and that is her self.' And the friend replies, 'Well, that would be a change. (Marcus, 1981: 14)

Woolf worked for and was influenced by several feminist groups such as the Suffrage Movement, World Women Organization, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and Women Co-operative Guild. Social feminists believed in the distinctiveness of women's values and capabilities. Virginia Woolf's views can be considered identical to those of social feminists. She argued that women who give life are not so careless of it and women's socialization would keep a government run by women from being imperialistic.

Virginia Woolf was, actively, an interested writer of the feminist question. In her writings, she calls women to express themselves in all professions open to humanity. Woolf says in "A room of one's own",

Literature is open to every body. I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are to run me off the grass. Lock up your liberties if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no blot that can set upon the freedom of my mind.(Woolf, 1957: 75-6)

In "A room of one's own", Woolf also called women not to allow men to talk about their experiences, but they should talk about themselves.

For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to them for pleasure. Lamp, Browne, Thackeray, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey – however it may be - never helped a woman yet, though she may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use.(Woolf, 1957: 68-9)

Virginia Woolf dedicated her major novels to analyze the patriarchal English society.. She portrayed different types of women in various contexts. She opened women's eyes on their inferior status and provided them with a female tradition to rely on. She strived to provide women with the proper clues for having a meaning in life. She believed that such meaning would lead to a purpose in life, and thus it would create a modern and normal life.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf tries to answer the question of why there have been so few female writers. She refers this to women's minor status largely to socio-economic factors; especially their poverty and lack of privacy. Woolf also exposes gender-consciousness. She believed that it cripples both male and female writers. She posits that men historically belittle women as a means of asserting their own superiority. Men are threatened by the thought of losing their power, so they disparage women to glorify themselves. Consequently, women's writing is marked by the feelings of anger and fear, and men's writing is marked by aggression. In her feminist essay *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf sets them a part from the patriarchal world and recommends that women must be in league together against patriarchy for the creation of a healthy and normal life.

### 3. *Mrs. Dalloway*

Woolf portrays the impact of the patriarchal society of England on women's lives. She portrays the loneliness and frustration of women's lives that have been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional factors.

The action of *Mrs. Dalloway* is confined to a single day in June. On this day, Clarissa gives a party in the evening. Peter Walsh comes unexpectedly and calls upon her. The party brings together several other friends from her young days: Sally Seton, Whitbread and others. Clarissa is a middle-aged woman, over fifty and the wife of Richard Dalloway, a conservative member in the parliament. They live in West-minister, a rich and fashionable locality of London. Clarissa holds the centre of the stage, and her experiences of love are part of every warp and woof of the novel. There is her love-story with Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway and Sally Seton. The most important love-story of Clarissa's life was that with Peter. Whenever she thinks of the past, of Bourton, the town where Clarissa lived with her parents before marriage, she thinks of Peter. She loved Peter when she was a young girl and still loves him. Memories of Peter keep coming to her mind throughout the novel. After she had refused Peter's offer of marriage, he went to India, and married another woman, but that marriage didn't turn out to be a happy one. At the age of fifty-two, he fell in love with a married woman. The relationship between Clarissa and Peter starts with love, but it has been marked with a sense of tension. Clarissa's soul craves for love and to be loved, but also wants privacy and independence of her own. In her relationship with Peter, her soul underwent a constant tension between love and individual freedom. Clarissa wants to preserve her virginity. She equates virginity with freedom as a result of an aggressive social structure where women were snubbed and despised. Peter is portrayed as a male dictator who believes that he has the right to dictate to her how she should live and what she should do. Clarissa thought that if she had married Peter, he would have engulfed her and forced her soul. She gives reasons for rejecting him and marrying Richard.

For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him (where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared, everything gone into. (Mrs. Dalloway P.10)

Clarissa feared intimacy with Peter, and was unwilling to share him her feelings and thoughts. She was attracted and frightened at the same time. The reason behind not marrying Peter was her apprehension that he would not give her the kind of freedom that she thought essential for her happiness. On the other hand, Peter thought that she was cold and lacked female sympathy. He couldn't understand the importance of her emotional need. Peter is unconventional and visionary in society. He can't fit into the conventional society of London. He is able to see the worldliness, hypocrisy and insecurity of his society. In his youth, he aspired to be a brilliant poet. He was deeply interested in the affairs of the world. It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 9)



On the other hand, Clarissa possessed nothing except giving parties.

Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary... She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now ... Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on.(Mrs. Dalloway P. 11)

Clarissa is not a visionary in society like Peter. She gives parties and likes to bring people together. She regards her parties as an offering, though she doesn't know precisely to whom. She compensates her need of warmth by giving parties and seeking the warmth that other people offer. Clarissa vacillates between her need of love and her need of independence. She lacks depth of feelings and understanding, and can't see the inward troubled soul of society. She only sees the world's glittering body, but she knows nothing about social problems.

This tendency in Clarissa seems to Peter to be excessive, and has made him say that she would prove to be the perfect hostess. He thinks that she cared for rank and society. He sees through Clarissa the hypocrisy and insecurity of the society of London. He always scolded her and said sarcastically that she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase. Clarissa felt such comments were pretty hurtful and often wept.

The perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 10)

Consequently, their relationship ended in failure.

Tell me the truth, tell me the truth,' he kept on saying..... And when she said,' It's no use. It's no use. This is the end.'.....,it was as if she had hit him in the face. (Mrs. Dalloway PP. 71-2)

In "Mrs. Dalloway", Clarissa's relationship with her husband hasn't proved to be successful. Throughout Virginia Woolf's presentation of Clarissa-Richard marital relationship, she emphasizes that marriage is not a guarantee of a happy relationship and mutual understanding between a husband and a wife in patriarchal society, even while living under the same roof.

Clarissa rejected Peter because his love was too possessive and domineering while Richard's is not. In her decision to marry Richard, she chose privacy over passion. But whenever she thinks of Richard, she automatically thinks of Peter. Clarissa tries to feel convinced that she acted wisely in rejecting Peter, but the virtues she attributes to Richard as a husband are obviously representing a pathetic attempt to view her married life as a total success.

So she would still find herself arguing ...still making out that she had been right- and she had too- not to marry him... ...she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 10)

Clarissa lacks effusiveness and generosity. She can't respond to male demands of sympathy and is unable to provide her husband with the kind of romantic passion usually expected in heterosexual relationships. She chooses an attic

room as a refuge from the traditional female role. This kind of marital relationship caused a state of loneliness and lack of intimacy in marriage. Loneliness without any sense of partnership with the husband is suggested through the narrow bed.

Clarissa has to mitigate her loneliness through social life and idle gossip. She has come to accept that there is a gulf even between husband and wife. The following conversation presents an evidence of the casual nature of Clarissa-Richard relationship:

Some committee?' She asked, as he opened the door. 'Armenians,' he said; or perhaps it was 'Albanians. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 132)

This conversation shows also that Richard is so preoccupied with politics more than his wife. In response to his loyalty to the social duties of upper class, he leaves his wife for a meeting that he does not care about. Again we find Richard invited to Lady Bruton's party without his wife. This action fills Clarissa with a sense of emptiness Richard is excluded from Clarissa's room and insists on her resting undisturbed because of a heart affliction. Clarissa mocks her husband's attempt at taking a hot water bottle as a substitute for her warmth:

And if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed! (Mrs. Dalloway P. 37)

Naik cited in Aston (1998:114) explains Woolf's view on this incident between Clarissa and Richard:

Woolf interprets Richard's withdrawal from his wife, Clarissa, as an attempt to impose strictures, on female desire under the garb of medical impositions by disinterested men of authority in medical profession.

Virginia Woolf called for excluding all masculine values of hierarchy, competition and dominance. She called for the society of women as alternative to the authoritarian structures, and insisted on the importance of women's friendship against these structures. Woolf found a refreshing freedom and mutual understanding in her relationship with women. She found it so secret and private compared with men. Virginia and Vita Sack-West experienced astonishing revelations with each other and Woolf wrote about it truthfully in Mrs. Dalloway:

It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which spilt its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extra-ordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 37)



In her youth, Clarissa, sought for the society of women.

She couldn't resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident-like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 36)

Clarissa's love for Sally Seton was the most intense emotion she will ever experience. Woolf expresses this kind of relationship in the following words:

The strange thing on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side, sprang from a sense of being in league together. (Mrs. Dalloway PP. 38-9)

Sally was anti-patriarchal woman. She asserted herself as a woman and demanded equal rights for women Sally was Clarissa's inspiration to think beyond the walls of Bourton, read and philosophize.

There they sat, hour after hour..... talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 38).

Woolf describes Clarissa-Sally relationship as a gift:

She felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it- a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (Mrs. Dalloway P. 40)

Clarissa broke the authorial patriarchal voice as uniting with women results in equal relationship. This kind of relationships was a reaction against patriarchy and for the creation of a society for women.

Though Clarissa was attracted to Sally, she was stifled by the traditions of society. Sally Seton represented the forbidden in patriarchal society, and her vision was not shared and accepted by the narrow-minded people of the world. People like Sally aren't welcomed by society, and they are compelled to conform and resign. Her acceptance of the social roles and constraints of respectability prevented her from following her union with Sally. Her defeat and acceptance of these roles are clear in her reaction to the thought of a woman becoming pregnant before marriage. Sally mentioned that the housemaid had married the neighbouring squire and had given birth before marriage. Peter considers Clarissa's reaction as the death of her will.

He could see Clarissa now, turning bright pink; somehow contracting; and saying, 'Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!' Whereupon the whole party sitting round the tea- table seemed to wobble. It was very uncomfortable

..'The death of her soul.' He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do-the death of her soul.(Mrs. Dalloway P. 66)

Sally Seton was also compelled to yield and accept the patriarchal forces. She got married to a rich industrialist and resigned to be a conventional mother. Both Clarissa and Sally were defeated because the only accepted female identity was the one that was accepted by patriarchy.

We are introduced to Miss Kilman who has a grudge against the world. She lost her job as a school-teacher when the war came because she was suspected of having German sympathies. She felt that she had been cheated, and wanted to have revenge against the whole world. The cruelty of life drove her to seek solace in the church. Religion for her is a choice of despair. She failed to get that solace because the church didn't help her in mastering the raging passion of hatred. While religion teaches love, it could not fulfil its purpose of anchorage. She felt that she would have triumphed on this grim reality only by humiliating Clarissa. In humiliating Clarissa, she wants to humiliate the cruel world that knows nothing about her suffering and poverty. Under the pretext of religion, she is obsessed with the thought of possessing Elizabeth's soul. Miss Kilman hates Clarissa because she views her as a product of the patriarchal society by which she was victimized. Miss Kilman's grudge against Clarissa is expressed effectively in the following words:

If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body, it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep, could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to knees crying. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 138)

This thought makes her repress her femininity by dressing like men, behaving with ruthlessness and adopting aggressive masculine values. An example of the unconventional woman is portrayed through the character of Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth has ambitions to have a career and a professional life. She has planned to be a doctor, farmer, or to go into Parliament. The disintegration and lack of mutual understanding which mark her parents' relationship have their impact on her own life. Her father fails to recognize her at the party. When he does, he accepts her as a decorative object- a part of the trivial feminine world. Her mother feels shocked, and helpless on finding her daughter under Miss Kilman's influence all the time. Clarissa's helplessness as a mother is expressed,

With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the banisters and cried out, 'Remember the party! Remember our party to- night.' But Elizabeth had already opened the front door; there was a van passing; she didn't answer. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 139)

Elizabeth has to choose between participating in the trivial feminine society of her mother or taking part in the male dominated society. None of these choices is adequate example for the creation of a modern woman. But blending the

emotional side of Clarissa with the ambitions of the professional life of Miss Kilman gives a promise for the birth of a new identity for women.

Lady Burton is an aristocratic woman and a representative of patriarchy. She is proud of her ancient decent, social status and style of living. She has an ambition to solve social and political problems. Lady Bradshaw is a classical example of the upper class Victorian woman. She obeys her husband and responds fully to his effort to attain power and domination over her. She keeps herself busy in the trivial life of attending dinner-parties.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the dark picture of patriarchal society is portrayed through Septimus-Rezia relationship. Septimus had gone to war with a sense of total dedication to the ideal of freedom which was seriously threatened by the German hordes. The grim experience of war has given him a new vision of the truth. He is able to see the painful reality of English society and wouldn't accept the world as different from what he actually sees it. This vision of Septimus makes him an insane person through his doctors and people's eyes. He married Rezia without loving her because he couldn't stay alone at night. Rezia suffers silently and alone. Her husband rejects to have a child because he rejects to join patriarchy by becoming a father himself. Rezia finds herself alone in a foreign country without a husband or a child.

She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctively; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing. His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, he descended another step into the pit. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 100)

Woolf compares Rezia to a flower attempting to protect her battered husband with her maternal petals:

Sitting close, sitting besides him, he thought, as if all her petals were about her. She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 163)

Rezia tries to restore her marriage. She refuses anyone to separate her from her husband, but Dr. Holmes, the agent of death pushed his way up to Septimus, who jumps to death, and Rezia is driven to darkness and destruction. Septimus's death is a moment of vision for Clarissa. She comes to understand that Septimus, in his madness, has denied society and its constructing conventions that have imprisoned her into a snobbish hostess. Woolf depicts Clarissa's final apprehension of the truth of life:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically,

evaded them; closeness drew a part; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 202)

Clarissa feels a shamed of her past and ignorance of the painful nature of life.

Somehow it was her disaster-her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing lasts too long. (Mrs. Dalloway P. 203)

#### 4. *To the Lighthouse*

*To the Lighthouse* (1927) is concerned with the Victorian arrangement of patriarchal society, and it questions the distinction between men and women's social roles. Throughout the novel, we find that there are two distinctive worlds: the world of men, the masculine, and the world of women, the feminine. The masculine is marked by egotism, rigidity, and insistence on intellect over feeling. By contrast, the feminine is marked by imagination, intuition and compromise. The patriarchal society has discouraged mixing the characteristics of these two worlds, and thus prevented the creation of a modern society, in which there is balance between the masculine intellect and the feminine emotion. Mrs. Ramsay represents the conventional and the submissive female to patriarchal society. Her medium is emotion and her form is human relationships. Lily Briscoe is a representative of the unconventional and rebellious against gender boundaries. Her medium is intellect and her form is her painting. Through Woolf's projection of Mrs. Ramsay's life and her relationships to men characters, she affirms the female values of fertility, giving and creating harmony, which are associated with Mrs. Ramsay; but Woolf criticizes the way she has chosen to subject her positive femininity to masculine definitions. Woolf's projection of Lily's life and her relationships to Mrs. Ramsay and male characters is an attempt to teach women to accept their femininity, cultivate their masculinity, and choose the role that they want to play as independent women. Examining the lives of these two female characters, we find Woolf seeking to integrate the masculine and feminine qualities into a balanced whole that would render men and women the capacity to achieve meaning in life.

Ramsays' marriage is a patriarchal marriage based on middle-class Victorian values. We find inadequacy in this marriage which doesn't allow mature intellectual interchange. The character of Mr. Ramsay is based on Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen. Marcus comments, according to Leslie,

It was a natural law that a wife should have no legal rights, no right of her own property or money, no training for any job, nor any hope for obtaining one. (Marcus 1981:152)

Mrs. Ramsay is subordinated to his needs and engulfed by his world. She has been badly crippled by her narrow education and trained to be intellectually inferior. Charles Tansley says that women can not write and paint. Marcus (1981: 152) comments that

being trained to be intellectually inferior has the desired effect on Mr. Ramsay. The stupider the wife appears to the husband, the more desirable she becomes.

Yet Mrs. Ramsay is not as stupid as her husband thinks of her .She is frightened of her potential of intellectual achievement, but she never had time to read books. His wife's stupidity makes him see her astonishingly beautiful. Yet Woolf expresses her view regarding this matter through Lily's consciousness,

Beauty was not every thing. Beauty had this penalty – it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life –froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flesh, the pallor, some sight or shadow, which made the face unrecognizable ... It was simpler to smooth that all out under the cover of beauty. (To the Lighthouse P.193)

Hypocrisy is evident in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's interaction. Mrs. Ramsay subdues herself to her husband because she suspects her husband's intellectual abilities. Mr. Ramsay wants to reach the heights of genius, the letter Z, and to be like Shakespeare. He has no questions about the division of social roles which have shaped the relationship between husband and wife in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, his lack of the feminine qualities of creativity denies him an access to the forces of life. He wants to be assured that he lives in the heart of life. His need of sympathy renders him reliant on his wife's femininity. He comes to her not only for sympathy but to feel that he is needed over the world.

Mrs. Ramsay looking at the same time be animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating, and into this delicious fecundity, this foundation and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said.(To the Lighthouse PP. 42-3)

Mrs. Ramsay doubts her husbands' intelligence, but she doesn't let herself, even for a second, to feel finer than him. She doesn't discuss her husbands' intellectual problems, but she takes the role of fulfiller to his needs and makes him dependent on her femininity.

But it was their relationship, and his coming to her like that, openly, so that anyone could see, that discomposed her, for then people said he depended on her. (To the Lighthouse P.45)

Such hypocrisy between husband and wife raises an accusing finger at patriarchy which imprisons the intellectual maturity of their husbands. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are aware of the irremovable barrier which separates them

They had nothing to say, but something seemed, nevertheless, to go from him to her. It was the life, it was the power of it. It was the tremendous humour, she knew, that made him slap his thighs. Don't interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don't say anything; just sit there. And he went on reading. (To the Lighthouse P.129)

Woolf emphasizes the separation between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay:

He turned and saw her.' Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than ever.' he thought. But he couldn't speak to her...He passed without a word, though it hurt him that she should look so distant, and he couldn't reach her...again he would have passed her without a word had she not. (To the LighthouseP.172)

Both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay accept the limits of their marriage .In their silence, they want certain barriers to be maintained. Mrs. Ramsay has a mania for arranging marriages. She insists that Minta must marry and she wishes to create something that lasts between Paul and Minta. She succeeds in getting them in marriage, but their marriage fails.

Paul had come in and gone to bed early. Minta was late. There was Minta, wreathed, tinted, garish on the stairs about three o'clock in the morning. Paul came out in his pyjamas carrying a poker in case of burglars... He spoke indignant, jealous words abusing her...she flamboyant, careless. For things had worked loose after the first year or so; the marriage had turned out rather badly.(To the LighthousePP.187-8)

Shwarz (1999: 293) comments,

Love need not be the prelude to marriage or even sexual intimacy. The putative marital happiness that Mrs. Ramsay had created for the Rayleys is belied by their actual lives.

Mrs. Ramsay thinks of another marriage between Mr. Bankes and Lily. Yet Mrs. Ramsay doesn't succeed in getting them married. She thinks that Lily is unwomanly. Mrs. Ramsay can't understand that being womanly means no longer being defined by one's relation to men or one's reproductive system. Mrs. Ramsay pities Mr. Bankes for being unmarried. Mrs. Ramsay succeeds in bringing Mr. Bankes to her dinner party, but she fails to fulfil his need for intimacy and unity. Mr. Bankes is not satisfied with the emotional aspects of Mr. Ramsay's life. He feels they have weakened Mr. Ramsay's potential .For Mr. Bankes, family life is at odds with intellectual life. He finds that Mr. Ramsay's life vacillates between his sterile thought and fertile wife. In Mrs. Ramsay's party, her superficiality bore Mr. Bankes. This makes him not attracted to the domestic life of Mrs. Ramsay; since it is not satisfactory to his need of fulfilment. Mrs. Ramsay herself is stuck by the same questioning of Mr. Bankes in the party. At this moment, all affection for her husband is momentarily gone,



and all what she wants to believe and create is gone. She comes to question her status as a woman.

But what I have done with my life?...The room was very shabby...nothing seemed to have emerged. They all sat separate. (To the Lighthouse PP.90-1)

Mrs. Ramsay has sometimes the skill of making men feel good. That is because she makes them feel superior. She feels satisfied when they feel proud through her admiration of them. Ironically, men need women's acknowledgment of their worth, and only through their admiration they can feel proud. At the dinner party, Tansley doesn't enjoy Mrs. Ramsay's effort and sees through her superficiality. His insecurity, regarding his feelings of his social inadequacy, prevents him from understanding how to socialize effectively. Mrs. Ramsay pities him and forces Lily to stop bothering him.

The novel stresses the antagonism between the father, and his children. James, the youngest of Ramsays' children looks forward to making a trip to the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay promises him to go tomorrow if the weather were fine. Yet James's hope is dashed to the ground by his father's saying that the weather will not be fine. Then, Woolf describes James's rage against his father:

Had there an axe handy, a poker or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it. (To the Lighthouse P.8)

Mrs. Ramsay feels angry about her husband's abnormal concern for his children's feelings and she tries to comfort James compassionately. She is infuriated by her saying and calls it the folly of her mind. The reason for his anger is that he thinks that Mrs. Ramsay gives a false hope which was utterly out of the question. But in this way, Mr. Ramsay turns into a symbol of tyranny and despotism in his children's eyes. Mrs. Ramsay tries to make her children more tolerant and more sympathetic. She regrets that her children will grow up in this atmosphere. She doesn't want them to grow up in a terrible and hostile life.

Lily Briscoe is a representative of unconventionality. Her rebellion against the given social roles is demonstrated in her pursuance of truth. Yet, under the expectations of the feminine role in patriarchal society, Lily undergoes self-division. She is divided between her inspiration for the world of self-actualization and the limitations of the maternal world. Consequently, Lily's divided self imprisons her femininity and places restraints on her relationship with men. She finds feminine roles unfulfilling. She is afraid of her femininity and denies it.

Lily feels guilty and insincere about being forced to relieve Tansley in the party. Lily fights these limitations through her art, but she can't achieve fulfilment. She is confused in regard to a romantic relationship with Mr. Banks. She understands its beauty; but on the other hand, she fears its degradation. In the dinner party, she says to herself, "She needn't marry, thank Heaven, she needn't undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution." (To the

Lighthouse P.111). Lily Briscoe likes and admires Mr. Bankes. She feels a shamed of her impulse towards him and, at the same time, wants to compliment him, but she doesn't say anything. Unlike Mr. Bankes, Mr. Ramsay lacks the ability to understand and admire the feminine. Lily criticizes this in Mr. Ramsay in comparison with Mr. Bankes.

After the death of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay demands Lily's sympathy. Yet he expresses his need as a desire to give her. Instead of giving sympathy, Lily compliments his boots. Lily associates giving with femininity and she refuses and revolts against men's need of sympathy. Yet Mr. Ramsay respects the compliment and smiles. Now Lily has made advance to Mr. Ramsay as an equal, not a woman to man, but as a man to man. He can see her now as a person interested in similar things. Mr. Ramsay acknowledges that she admires his traits rather than she fulfils his need for sympathy. At this moment, Lily's role is about being an ungendered equal and Mr. Ramsay's need for sympathy diminishes.

Lily's confusion drives her to assert her gender through her painting, and to find the truth inside herself. Yet, Lily is unable to define her femininity and yearns to the security of the ideal woman, Mrs. Ramsay. She wants to express Mrs. Ramsay's idealization of her painting, but Lily knows that Mrs. Ramsay's idealization is an illusion. Her inability to accept her femininity and Mrs. Ramsay's idealization prevents her from establishing a vision of truth in art. Ten years after Mrs. Ramsay's death, she recalls Mrs. Ramsay's life and comes to cherish in herself powers different from those that motivated Mrs. Ramsay for imposing harmony and order in life. The memory of Mr. Ramsay is a catalyst for Lily's growth. She realizes that her thoughts about Mrs. Ramsay's life have imprisoned her and crippled her talents. She understands that time prevented Mrs. Ramsay from creating meaning and intimacy in life,

What is the meaning of life...Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) this was the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and following (she looked at the clouds, going and leaves shaking) was struck in to stability. Life stands still here. Mrs. Ramsay said 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' She repeated. She owed this revelation to her. (To the Lighthouse, PP.175-6)

Now Lily achieves a moment of community and a sense of unity. Finally, she is able to get rid of her confusions. She is able to achieve the emotional side of Mrs. Ramsay's life. Lily's first inspiration about her painting comes when she thinks about the misguided pity that Mrs. Ramsay has for Mr. Bankes. She thinks that Mr. Bankes doesn't need this pity because he is a whole and that he is fulfilled in his work. This reminds her that she, too, has her work. At this moment, she accepts her masculinity. The first revelation comes when she strays herself away from the given gender roles. She has her concept of the ideal femininity and acknowledges that her work is a pursuance of the truth and a

rejection of the illusion of the maternally enclosed world. Lily's acceptance of her work as a masculine and her final assertion of her femininity bring out her vision. She is able to express her mature vision that femininity and masculinity are separate, but equal and personal. Lily draws a line down the middle of her painting. There is a mass on the right which is Mrs. Ramsay and a mass on the left which is Mr. Ramsay. The line down the middle is a divider into equal halves.

She looked at her canvass; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (To the Lighthouse P.226)

## 5. Conclusion

Mrs. Woolf was one of the great writers whose works reflect her philosophy of life and identification of women. She grew up with an intense interest in the feminist question, and her novels hold the key to the meaning of life and the position of women. Naik cited in (Aston 1998: 107) comments,

In her writing, Woolf makes a sifting appraisal of women's problem, their peculiar dilemmas and conditioning in the traditional Victorian society...Woolf was the most vociferous and vehement on feminist issues such as subjectivity, class, sexuality and culture. In her critiques, Woolf questions an aesthetic that disallows anger, unreason and passion as productive emotions.

Before Woolf's literary works, women's writings were marked by feelings of anger and fear. Woolf bemoaned that women writers' talents were crippled by the authoritarian forces which prevented women from expressing their feelings about the body and mind truthfully. Naik cited in (Aston 1998: 107) remarks,

Woolf felt that novels written by women were influenced by their resentment to the treatment meted on their sex and ended up pleading for their rights. Woolf felt that this weakened the cause of women struggling to carve a niche for themselves in the literary canon.

Woolf believed that it is a part of the occupation of women writers to destroy the patriarchal structures. Woolf strived to give women female identity. In Woolf's strife to set the woman away from the patriarchal society, she called women to re-write the history of women through female eyes and talk about themselves and their experiences truthfully. Woolf's novels, especially *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, are devoted to portray a picture of a patriarchal and imperialistic society, and to detail the factors that have limited women's opportunities for a meaningful life. In both novels, women suffer alone, have no chances for education, lack warmth and are compelled to suppress their needs.

Virginia Woolf aimed at communicating the message that such a blind social system must be eradicated from its roots. Woolf believed that the oppression of women is rooted in social, economic and psychological factors. Woolf's solution implies the need for self-organization and change in gender

identity-different masculinity and femininity. She strived for creating a new man and woman- life, in which both man and woman's identities are realized. Woolf believed in the distinctiveness of women's values. She argued that these values are compelling reasons for women's participation in public life and necessary to improve the defective social system. She emphasized women's capacity to educate and add a meaningful contribution to our life. It is significant that Woolf chose women characters, not men, to recognize the vision of truth as seen at the end of both novels.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa is able to understand Septimus's vision of reality. Woolf's point is that war can be understood only with reference to the feelings which society considers appropriate only to women. *To the Lighthouse* ends also in a positive feminist note which is seen in Lily's mature vision. By writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf meant to send an outcry against patriarchy and its representatives. Clarissa moves from one relation to another and every time she is frustrated, and loses the chance to have a happy life with each partner. Clarissa fails in love and marriage, and misses her chance with Sally. Her conventionality, lack of understanding and lack of education are in sharp contrast with Peter's patriarchal demands on woman and his inability to understand her needs. Clarissa rejected Peter's offer of marriage because she prefers privacy to emotion. Entering a marital relationship with Richard, Clarissa is unable to provide him with the kind of relationship usually expected in heterosexual relationships. Clarissa's need for privacy drove her to preserve her virginity, even after having got married to Richard. Richard is excluded from her room, and she gets along with her loneliness and the triviality of her social life. Woolf always insisted on the importance of women's friendship, and called for a society for women against the oppressive male-dominated society. Clarissa, in her relationship with Sally Seton, sought a society for women. She sought for fulfilling relationship on equal terms. Woolf describes this relationship as 'a protective one'. Clarissa, in her relationship with Sally, broke the authorial voice because bonding with a woman means relationship on equal terms. Yet both Clarissa and Sally were defeated. They were compelled to ignore their needs because the only accepted female identity was that accepted by patriarchy. Missing the chance with Sally darkens Clarissa's life and fills it with agony. Had she responded to her impulse with Sally Seton, she might have been psychologically fulfilled.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the terrible influence of patriarchy is effectively portrayed through the presentation of Miss Kilman and Rezia's lives. Both are victims of the cruelty of the social and political doctrine of the English society and their only guilt is that they are merely women. What is really tragic about Rezia is not her husband's death, but the unfriendly manner in which the world treats her. The cruelty of Miss Kilman's world and her inability to invade the male-dominated teaching profession drove her to deny her femininity and adopt aggressive masculine values. She turns to be a ruthless woman and her life turns to be full of darkness and bitterness.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf makes sharp critical examination of aspects of men-women relationships. Woolf projects the defects of private and public life, and proves that in none of them we can find an adequate model for modern life. The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay proves that marriage is not a guarantee of mature and healthy relationship between husband and wife. On one hand, Woolf affirms the femininity of Mrs. Ramsay, but criticizes the way she has chosen to subject her positive feminine traits to male demands.

Lily, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, revolts against masculine needs. She denies her femininity and gets along with self-division in the face of her relationships with men. On the other hand, Woolf discards Mr. Ramsay's masculinity by commenting sarcastically that he has a splendid mind. The tone of the description of his mind is sarcastic because his masculinity is not shown as a positive quality, neither in his relationship with his wife, nor with his children and his work. Mr. Ramsay fails to develop a mature relationship with his wife. He turns into a symbol of tyranny and despotism for his children. Positive masculinity is to choose methods of fulfillment when the male is able to use his work to be independent and unique, and when he admires and understands the feminine. Had Mr. Ramsay cultivated his femininity and had Mrs. Ramsay had some access to self-fulfilment outside the domestic sphere, they would have held the key for a mature marital relationship.

By writing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Woolf aimed at setting up a new formula for personal development. She aspired always for the wholeness of personality - androgyny. Androgyny is the blending and balancing of intellect and emotion. It implies that the traditional gender identity, which restricts personal development, can be reformulated through the equal acquisition of the positive feminine and masculine traits. Woolf introduces women characters who symbolize hope in creating the androgynous world. Elizabeth Dalloway signifies the emergence of the new dawn of women. Thirty years before Elizabeth's age, women couldn't dare to imagine or think of professional life. Elizabeth admires the intelligence of Miss Kilman, and is influenced by her mother more than she realizes. Woolf suggests that Elizabeth becomes the new woman by uniting her tutor's cleverness and ambitions with her mother's humane sympathies. Henke cited in Marcus (1981: 138) says,

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf expressed a hope for a generation of independent women united in profession solidarity. By allowing Elizabeth Dalloway a glimpse of that some vision, Woolf suggests that the adolescent girl may yet blossom into a new woman who unites the cleverness and ambition of Miss Kilman with the humane sympathies of some one such as Clarissa.

We find Clarissa that has her own vision in Septimus's death which allows her to face her own misery, step out of the social prison, and have a new vision of life. In comprehending Septimus's death, Clarissa discovers her own identity and becomes a whole. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf rationalizes her quest for the androgynous world through tracing the development of two lines and the coincidence of their triumph at the end of the novel. The completion of Lily's

picture and the arrival of the Ramsays at the Lighthouse came due to the development of the characters' personalities regarding the truth of their gender. On one hand, Mr. Ramsay tries to fulfil his quest by paying his penance to the memory of his wife, and putting an end to the old enmity with his children. This can be seen as an improvement of his personality and refinement of his femininity. On the other hand, Lily has the first inspiration about her painting the moment she acknowledges that her work is masculine and also embodies pursuance of truth. At the end of the novel, Lily has a moment of personal wholeness when she accepts the femininity that she has always denied. The novel ends with Lily's vision that femininity and masculinity are separate but equal and personal. Mrs. Woolf ends *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* with two female visions of the truth of our life: Clarissa and Lily's visions. Woolf ends the two novels with a hope for the new woman. Woolf's point is that women shouldn't lose their femininity, and also shouldn't be limited to it, but the woman of the future embraces her femininity and masculinity and makes a choice of how to use that within herself to achieve fulfilment.

### References & Works Cited

- Aston, N. M.** (1998). *Trends in the Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- M. Elaine and Isabella de C. (ed)** (1981). *Cixous, H. The laugh of the Medusa in New French Feminism*. New York: Schochen.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Gubar, Susan** (1994). *No Mans' Land, Volume\_3: Letters from the Front*. London: Yale University Press,
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1980). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Latham, Jacqueline (ed)** (1970). *Critics On Virginia Woolf*. Florida: University of Miami Press.
- Marcus, J.** (1981). *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. London: Macmillan.
- Schwarz D. R.** (1999). *The Transformation of the English Novel, 1890-1930* London: Macmillan.
- Tong, R.** (.1989). *Feminist Thought* .London: Unwin Hyman.
- Transve, Pamela. J.** (1986). *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style*. Albany: Suny P.
- Viola, Andre** (2004). "Fluidity versus Muscularity: Lily's Dilemma in Woolf's *To the Light House*" *Journal Of Modern Literature*, 24:271-289.
- Woolf, V.** (1927). *To the Lighthouse*. London: Hograth Press,
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1957). *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt. Brace and World.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1996). *Mrs. Dalloway*, London: Penguin books,
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1967). *Collected Essays .Vol.2*.New York: Harcourt Brace and World,