

Woolf's Renovated Women in *To The Lighthouse*

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Abstract: Women have always been internalized and considered insignificant in comparison to men in a patriarchy. Women seek male approval for almost everything subordinating their position and drowning their inner voices. However, for Woolf, renovation of women is kind of a self- destruction from the male created psyche. In her *To the Lighthouse*, she implies that women challenge and subvert the patriarchal system by achieving self-discovery.

Key words: Patriarchy, gendered, de-construction, Dominance, renovated Woman.

Introduction:

A number of studies were devoted towards women from the Victorian era [1]. Attitudes of women in the Victorian era were common to the Western civilization where women from the propertied classes were completely dependent on their husband's earnings or wealth. In lower orders, women were on a more equal footing with men in terms of earnings and economics. Religion was another influential factor in positioning women in a society. Protestant religions subordinated the position of women. In Elizabethan England, girls were prepared for running homes and household knowledge was the focus besides reading and writing. This kind of women education did not leave the ground of common sense [2]. The Economic Position of Women in society changed only when there were changes in agriculture and industry. When agriculture was the main source of subsistence, men, women and children were mutually dependent on each other for their living. Man and Woman in a family contributed equally by being partners for the good of the whole family. The rise of Capitalism saw husbands working outside their household for wages. Arable land turned into pastures leading to the disappearance of small landowners who were forced to become wage labourers. This deprived women from additional sources of income. The final nail on women equality was nailed by Rousseau's views. Rousseau in his *Emile* (1761) stressed the differences between sexes and those men and women should not strive to do the same things. He said that the place of women was home and that women were made to please men and reflected in:

the entire education of women ought to be in relation to man. To please him, to be of use to him, to love and honour him, to rear his children, to tend him in manhood, counsel, console

him, make life pleasant and sweet for him; these are the duties of woman in all ages and what they should learn in their infancy. [3]

Women were limited to a position in which they had to strike an unsure balance between elementary and superficial knowledge.

She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband. . ."

Women had to maintain a lofty position by remaining pure and innocent and earned taboos like respectable wives, mothers, daughters and sisters. It was believed that only prostitutes and mistresses felt sexual desires and enjoyment. The respectability in wives and mothers was encouraged. Widows were socially isolated. In the late 19th century, all those who continued viewing women as inferior to men, received new support from science through Charles Darwin. His theories concerning sexual selection published in *The Descent of Man* (1871), used examples of men's pre-eminence over women in science and arts and in the course of time, through natural selection men ultimately became superior to women. [4].

Darwin also echoed the opinion of his Victorian contemporaries:

Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness . . . Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. Woman is credited with "the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation" to a greater extent than man; "but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization".

Various ideas about sexes started appearing in literature. The "good" and the "bad" in women represented different poles and any attempt to emancipate women was not supported either by men or women of those times. Even successful women were reluctant to support other women or women emancipation as women were worried that they might lose their influence as a moral force in society when emancipated. An Appeal Against Female Suffrage (1889) was signed by well-known signatories including Julia Duckworth, mother of Virginia Woolf [5] in an effort to change the position of women in society. This led to the development of feminist movement which in turn led to an increasing interest in the field and conflicting ideas and opinions concerning women and their various roles emerged.

Though Virginia Woolf had spent her childhood in the late Victorian period, She was one of those few writers who echoed female emancipation in her writings. Her novels dealt with the problems of families living in accordance with the principles of the 19th century ideology. Parent-generation women in her novels are representative of Victorian ideal of womanhood, while her protagonists clear themselves out of all social constraints, society constructed gender

roles and patriarchal demands. This growth of Woolf's women from subjugation to renovation in her novel *To The Lighthouse* is detailed in the next section.

Renovation of Women

According to Woolf, Women are excluded from culture as they lack the phallus, and cannot signify speech and desire. Women are speechless objects of male theorizing, fears, desires and fears for ages and they have to reclaim their silenced voices and usurped bodies. Women need a new language and politics which is a challenging process in patriarchy. Women need to move beyond the limitations of this oppressive formulation of desire. Woolf demonstrates in two main characters what women should be in Lily (Modern Women) and what they should be not in Mrs. Ramsay (Victorian Women). Victorian woman's attention was centred on her husband. Her first duty was to him. The code of behaviour made her responsible, not only for his physical comfort, but also for his spiritual and moral standards. The upper-middle-class man could insist that the family not make demands that interfered with his work. He expected preferential treatment because of his profession.

Woolf, in Mrs. Ramsay, represents a Victorian woman called an angel and mirror when she sacrifices her life for others. She is also a great source of solace to her guests. But despite all these female qualities she faces dilemmas and has serious doubts about her marriage. She knows that her life is in vain and that she has two representative bodies -

***".....body for others..... bound by.....social interaction.....and.. visionary body..... different from the gendered body....."* (Hite, 2000, p.1).**

When she is lonely and away from her family

***".....feelsher visionary bodyinviolable place for.....definitive experience"* (Hite, 2000, p.17).[6]**

Mrs. Ramsay gets renovated on the light from the lighthouse. On the falling of the light she crosses the 'dark continent' of the phallogocentric world to experience exquisite pleasures instead of the usual feeling of uncertainty and fear. She is fluid and cannot be shaped or controlled:

***"watching it with fascination, hypnotized,..... known happiness..... it silvered the rough waves..... as daylight faded..... it rolled in waves of pure lemon..... burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced..... her mind....."* (TTL, p.54).**

However, for women such experiences are short lived as depicted by Woolf in Mrs. Ramsay's death. The change in Mrs. Ramsay is noticed by her husband who feels a deep inner sense of threat from

***"...fluid bod..... evaporate, consume him..... canno..... be held on to"* (Irigaray, 1985, p.237). [7]**

He then changes his tactics to prove his authority over her by turning on the heat on her. Unable to resist him she yields to him and allows him to explore her physically. Her lack of staying power culminates in her death. Woolf cleverly indicates that men tune women for their phallogocentric wishes, while women could experience pleasures other than sex ideologically.

Woolf challenges this body image of a woman which is largely influenced by false assumptions of male opinions. She creates sensuous and passionate female characters who remain aloof from motherhood and love affairs:

‘visional body’, represent “an inspired solution to the problems of women’s culturally sanctioned vulnerability” (Hite, 2000, p.6). Woolf creates that body, “sealed off from social consequences, secure from interruption or invasion” (Hite, 2000, p.6),

Woolf in her voice against patriarchal treatment of women lays the foundations for transforming the patriarchal ‘docile body’ into a ‘fluid body’ that cannot be controlled or shaped. Woolf through ‘Lily’ presents a woman not aligned to Victorian ideologies. Lily is an independent little creature who deals with art and artistic creation instead of getting married and having children. or kills the ‘Angel’ in a house. She creates the female modernist body or visionary woman body that reaches the states of enlightenment and transcendence. It is Woolf’s way of self- destruction. She claims women have to get rid of docile bodies and disembody their minds to clear themselves from all the social constraints, society constructed gender roles and patriarchal demands. Women can assert themselves only through their bodies. They should be encouraged to resist phallogocentrism while exploring their self-awareness and expressions. Lily completes her painting only when she sets it free from moral codes and phallogocentric male dominated world.

“.....she began..... dipping among the blues..... moving her brush hither what and thither..... rhythm..... Dictated..... she lost consciousness of outer things..... mind kept throwing up..... a fountain spurting over that glaring..... she modelled it with greens and blues (TTL, p. 134).

Lily’s tracing of her body gives her rhythm:

“..... trembles in “a painful.... exciting ecstasy” (TTL, p.132).

Lily understands that “white space” is her maternal body that is fertile for creations and starts to trace her lost mother from whom she can get a sense of completeness and the spirit of creation with which she can complete her masterpiece. She paints the ‘white ink’ to represent a mode away from her father’s universe and describe the her primary relations to ‘the maternal feminine’ (Irigaray, 1985).

The maturing of Lily

Woolf depicts dynamic changes in the surroundings through Lily’s changes in ontological, psychological, personal and social perspectives. Lily’s appreciation of her work and realization

of her surroundings depicts the value of art in humanity. This ontological sense of herself makes her appreciate her deep inner self. It promotes the love that she had been longing for and fills up her missing links in the chain. Woolf through Lily looks at Art as a representation of personal and philosophical views and existing truth that of life and death. Lily's recreation of Art helps her understand people around her and their views, real world realities, dreams, and her existence amidst her own contemplations of nature. Mrs. Ramsay influences her greatly while asking her to continue her artistic pursuits. Lily feels a sense of intimacy towards Mrs. Ramsay when she understands the depth of emotions and sentiments in Mrs. Ramsay and helps Lily cling to hopes and dreams. She sees the love and appreciation of art in Mrs. Ramsay which is deep:

“ Was it knowledge?..... Mrs. Ramsay.....physically, touching her..... treasure in the tombs of kings.....would teach one everything.....but..... never be offered openly.....What art was there..... one pressed through into these secret chambers? (51)

Mrs. Ramsay is a mirror for women looking for their dreams on art. Lily has a strong sense of sympathy on Mrs. Ramsay as Mrs. Ramsay's dreams were not real and remained hidden secrets. Through Mrs. Ramsay Lily realizes that every woman has some dream to achieve and feels is reflection of women suppressing all their desires.

“she could remember..... Mrs. Ramsay's face..... sympathy, of delight..... the reason..... conferred..... supreme bliss..... human nature was capable” (150).

Woolf projects (Patriarchy) through Mr. Ramsay, the exact opposite of Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's thoughts, a system that does not care about art, emotions, and faith. That actually goes in line with the parallel between the "lighthouse" and the ambivalent/contradictory views of people about it. Mrs. Ramsay does not judge the selfishness and tyranny of her husband.

“.....Mr. Ramsay-advancing towards them..... a hypocrite?..... the truest.....the best.....looking down.....he is absorbed in himself.... tyrannical.... Unjust..... she keep steady, staying with the Ramsay” (46).

Mr. Ramsay a part of the phallogocentric world keeps criticizing Lily on her art demeaning her creations. Lily continues to draw from her mind feeling is it a typical criticism of woman:

“Women can't write..... can't paint.....She must make it once more.....I must move the tree to the middle..... nothing else..... She..... not lose her temper, and not argue.... she wanted revenge take it by laughing at him.....Do take me to the light house.....” (86)

Lily could see in the lighthouse the things that she aspires to get. She could see the missing things that she keeps searching for but never have found like the ultimate freedom, the beauty of the self, eternity and continuation. The more she contemplates the lighthouse, the more she discovers the harmony and the unity of the self and the very axioms of life and death. Lily can also see grief and contentment, life and death, deepness and shallowness, glow and doom. Lily

understands that light can be seen only through darkness or realize self through others. Lighthouse is the focal point of the story, everything that is progressive for women starts with the light house like Lily's artistic wishes that has been searching in the outside world. The artist blooms from this place and makes her realize her self. The light that she could see in the lighthouse is only the light that she could discover in herself at the end, and by the time she had this self-epiphany she could notice how she has changed and how things around her have also completely changed by time.

Conclusion

The lighthouse represents aspirations of characters synchronized with perspectives of life irrespective of whether they are personal/familial, psychological or social. Constant changes in surroundings depict dynamic changes in the conditions or aspirations or dreams of people. They imply the rotation of life and death that keep repeating. Woolf, in *To the Lighthouse*, deconstructs patriarchal ignorance on all types of woman to woman relationships by focusing on the reintegration of a lost mother's maternal body. Woolf clarifies Freud and Lacan's arguments on Pre-Oedipal structure that matricentric theory is a gateway to the symbolic register [8]. While Freud and Lacan, advocate separation from a mother for a woman's success, Woolf argues that it is not required. The author identifies a new dimension in human life, a dimension that can obtain unity with the mother :

“outer & the inner... New combinations....body like painting” (Woolf, 1982, p.353).

She emphasizes that this dimension is the mother's womb [9] as it gives equal chances to both sexes. The womb is the centre of production and not mystery and in the words of Lily

“....tunneling her way..... into the past” (TTL, p. 145),

during her creation and returns to 'unity' with the mother, Mrs. Ramsay, who promises her unity and she then overcomes her own insecurities and is in peace with the memory of Mrs. Ramsay. She completes her painting just after *“peace had come”* (TTL, p. 120).

Finally Lily finds a path to express her body's inexpressible feelings and thus transforms indefiniteness to vision. Lily succeeds in making *“... shadow on the step”* (TTL, p. 170)

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