
PSEUDO-REALITY AND EMPOWERED WOMEN IN MRS. DALLOWAY

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Abstract: Empowered women today are expected to be insightful, decisive and efficient. They do function independently and with great confidence. Their analytical skills and assessment of people and situations are mostly striking. Yet women who choose their profession, their life partner, their society based on the materialistic factors may appear empowered but may not be so in the true sense. Their happiness, sense of belonging, identity, inner peace and so on may be seriously affected. The reality they believed and longed for would in course of time prove to be pseudo - reality. The disappointments faced on account of this would make the feminist search for new and authentic versions of reality that can empower them. Virginia Woolf in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* portrays an independent woman who is destroyed because of her indecisiveness. Power, position and freedom make her accept Mr Richard the Member of the Parliament who will soon become the Cabinet member as her husband. She rejects the love of Peter Walsh who was simple and unassuming. He had the habit of teasing Clarissa endlessly and also wanted her to share all that happened with him. He was a romantic at heart. Yet Clarissa felt that she may lose her freedom as a woman. Therefore she rejected his proposal. Clarissa now in her 50s feels that her life had been superficial and monotonous with no real joy. She regrets having married Richard and contemplates death. The inner turmoil creates lot of unhappiness and stress.

Empowered women therefore may not be effectively empowered to lead a happy life accepting the situation they are placed in. Authentic realism must be employed. Moreover being more realistic and practical in real life is more important and it must be cultivated. The maturity to stay away from a temptingly rich high lifestyle is important as it can ruin one's happiness. The moral and spiritual dimensions to life ought to be applied. Thus true empowerment is facing and challenging all the negative aspects that destroy life. Death is not the answer for a truly empowered woman, instead destroying the very thought of death reflects the real power of a woman. She should not let the situations demoralize her but she should destabilize such unpleasant occurrences in life. A strong woman will be happy and radiate happiness around reflecting the positive energy within her.

Key words: Pseudo-reality, Holistic empowerment, authentic realism, re-examining feminism, transformational feminism.

Introduction: Women have evolved as leaders, administrators, educationalists, artists, philosophers, scientists and so on, and have significantly left a mark wherever they are placed. The world therefore is embedded with talents and potentials that brighten the technical and the intellectual side of life. The achievements today inspire men and women to develop and display their confidence and independence. This image to exercise their innate strength has resulted in reaching their set goals in amazing ways. The power to compete and to construct has deemed women strong and efficient. The women writers have discussed gender roles from different angles, "gender roles were constructed modified and reinforced - sometimes challenged". (Knoppers 9). They have passionately pursued their career and endlessly engaged in knowledge acquisition. Yet, at the end of it all, women in their private lives still stay longing for recognition, love, understanding and unconditional acceptance. This feeling of hurt may cause lot of damage within the family erupting in unexpected ways, resulting in estrangement and loneliness. Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* presents an empowered woman

battling with disappointments that dampen her life." Woolf revised the association of Modernism with Masculinity by associating it with femininity instead. Her arguments for the subversiveness of Modernist form, its ability to penetrate and represent the underlying, multiplicitous truths of consciousness and psyche beneath the outward, unitary, coherent appearances of social, realist fictional, convention" (Levenson 225) serve as possibilities to unearth reality.

Multitasking is the way of life today. Power and position tempt one to adorn life with gifts that are ornate and enviable. Clarissa marries a member of the Parliament Richard Dalloway attracted by the status and gloating over the freedom she would enjoy. She wakes up to reality when her dreams are destroyed. If the mind loses its strength during the weakest moments life turns pitiable. "Virginia Woolf's fiction explores the nature of the human condition: what makes up our consciousness when we are alone and when we are with others, how we live in time, and to what extent our natures are determined by the accidents of gender, class and historical moment." (Sellers 70). Clarissa wonders if her

rejection of Peter Walsh for the sake of reputation and ostentation has been fatal. The women who claim to be accomplished and wonder-working may not be the emotionally stable true women one would look for in today's world. Clarissa appears to be happy, retaining her charm and vivacity but her psychological insight reveals her inability to retain her inner peace. "She felt young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as though watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary" (Woolf 7). Though she decided on Richard to be her ideal partner, though she does her part as a great hostess and cheerfully entertains people, there is this emptiness in her. She is confused and also disturbed over the flashbacks that drain her vivacity and strength. "She sat with her dress upon her knee, and her needle held to the end of green silk, trembling a little. He was in love! Not with her. With some younger woman, of course." (Woolf 38). She appears to be happily married but her thought process betrays her regrets, longings, unhappiness and gloom. Clarissa who is introduced as a cheerful, happy individual is in reality a bundle of disappointments and failures. There is the longing to feel wanted. Her daughter Elizabeth is closer to her tutor Mr Kilman and the mother in Clarissa feels insecure. Mrs Burton fails to invite Clarissa along with Richard and Clarissa therefore feels unwanted and ignored. Hugh her friend is laughed at for his fickle mindedness by her friend Sally. Peter Walsh is still in love with someone else and Clarissa stays meditating over this. Unduly anxious and uncertain, she smiles pleasing everyone with a pleasant encounter veiling her crushed and shattered self.

Clarissa remained focused over the plans for her future. With Peter Walsh her life she thought, will have a fixed pattern with no freedom. She may be confined to her family and her freedom to socialize and interact with the outside world may not be possible. This lack of excitement which she visualized made her consider and evaluate the limitations involved in accepting Peter Walsh. Her independent assessment, her dreams, her priorities, her understanding of both her suitors made her decide on the Member of the Parliament who will become the Cabinet Minister. The high fashionable London, position, power and reputation blinded her vision towards the simple joys that would have kept her eternally happy. Unfortunately, what to her seemed real was pseudo - reality and by the time she realized her mistake the damage was already done and she lived in regrets. "Every time she gave a party

she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another." (Woolf 145) She felt that she had surrendered the true love of Peter for social pride and eminence. This social drama that at one stage meant everything to her was in fact hateful to real life. All the pain that affected her was a result of loneliness in spite of the ostentatious lifestyle. All pretentious, flamboyant, ornate patterns left her pitiless and careworn. Clarissa felt that "still these semblances, these triumphs ..., had a hollowness; at arms length they were not in the heart; and it and it might be that she was growing old, but they satisfied her no longer as they used;" (Woolf 148). The need to escape life became the nagging thought that troubled her soul. This presents lifelessness in life. The insipid and superficial life is the net result of understanding feminism the wrong way. "She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said - how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity; then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of." (Woolf 132). Her limitations in her levels of confidence, perceptions, assumptions and her will to live made her weak emotionally.

Pseudo-reality is practiced with efficacy whenever Clarissa exercises her social skills. "How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to everyone. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst - effusive, insincere." (Woolf 142) Peter Walsh laments over her behaviour and analyses his attitude and tries to change his perception though it is late. "He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticize? Why always take and never give? Why not risk one's one little point of view? There he was wandering off, and she must speak to him. But she would not get the chance. Life was that - humiliation, renunciation." (Woolf 142). Conflicts and confusions thus rule the life of Clarissa. The nuclear family system refuses to be the nucleus of nourishing and nurturing a loving family. Men and women focus on materialistic enhancement that they stay poor emotionally. The urge towards self-enhancement and self-advancement is activated with raging restlessness and selfishness that the family is found to fall apart. The world today is willing to change and accommodate changes as long as it fulfils the norms they wish to establish. Dr Bradshaw and the other doctors do excel in their profession forgetful of human touch. Therefore though they are outstanding in their field, accomplishing their

objectives that are technically sound. They are unable to offer comfort and instill confidence among their clients. Septimus Warren, shell shocked and mentally unstable is taken care of by his wife Lucrecia with concern and great commitment. The doctors become a threatening force in her life as they go by rules and rule out possibilities that give the needful assurance and emotional support to the family. The world must now be empowered towards retaining the human touch. The relentless struggle to build sometimes demolishes the family concept. Septimus finally commits suicide and Rezia is isolated. He contemplates death and accepts it. "Human beings are perhaps the only animals who live in the perpetual shadow of death." (Eagleton 12). Clarissa finds that her dream of death had taken the perfect course in the life of Septimus, "

she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself.

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. She had wanted success," (Woolf 157)

Resource management, time management, stress management had helped many industries and institutions but the family is mismanaged by the educated and well informed circles. This makes one think of the fact that however accomplished a woman may be, she is not truly empowered if she fails to be happy and raise a secure happy family. Clarissa though independent, educated and rational does not prove to be an empowered woman, instead struggles with the concept of death. "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death." (Woolf 156).

Values are valuable to peaceful living. Love, loyalty and commitment to the family reflect the moral, ethical and spiritual values that are practiced. It is found that "an adequate conception of the moral acknowledges its complexity and its centrality to any imaginable form of social life. And the same is true for the ethical realm in general; the realm of which the moral is a part." (Freadman 53). "Women's interior world - her psyche - must be transformed, for without such a change, improvements in her exterior world will not liberate her from the kind of patriarchal thought that undermines her confidence." (Jeyaraj 19- 20). Lack of confidence coupled with the feeling of loss due to Clarissa's wrong choice led to endless miserable situations. She had lost the power to get over this failure that left her lifeless.

Virginia Woolf does not see woman as leading a life independent of men, but the problems encountered with men who are highly constructive like Richard or destructive like Septimus or romantic like Peter Walsh. What is therefore required to replace this pseudo - reality is authentic realism. "Within this perspective, literature is seen as a potential vehicle for change in women's lives, since it can serve as a catalyst for consciousness - raising and a basis for constructing models for other ways of living." (Mills 51). Authentic realism can help women deal with their problems and turns more practical and applicable as the novelist intends to offer insights that can uplift and transform women. The objectives of empowerment must be expanded and enhanced to activate effective empowerment. Women ought to be equipped the right way so that disappointments will not destroy them. Women must learn to challenge loneliness with godliness. Life lived should result in true power, real understanding and effective empowerment. Feminism must therefore be re-visioned and re-constructed towards holistic empowerment to influence and transform society using truly empowered women.

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