

Social Influences and Symbolism in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

Dr. Shiraz Khan

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Virangana Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt Girls Degree College Jhansi

ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf was one of the most sophisticated and artistic writer of her time. A number of factors such as conventions political, economic, educational and religious atmosphere influenced great deal on the writer of that time. Her works reflect the social and psychological aspects. In her novels Virginia Woolf has used stream of consciousness technique. In *Mrs Dalloway* symbols are used to depict the various social aspects and complexities of life. Values of life and the serious indictment of society, mixture of feelings are well expressed through symbols in the novel. We find a clear impression of the experiences of Virginia Woolf in her novels. The pains, despair, distrust and sufferings of the war gets reflected in her novels.

Keywords: social, symbols, complexities, war, technique.

Introduction

She belongs to the Bloomsbury group and was influenced from the literary group of her father's friends. A writer is the product of the society of the age and it reflects the society showing the ideas and thoughts of the time. Virginia wrote about the people she knew closely and of middle-class with the experiences of her time and generation. It was the time of World War of 1920's which played a vital role in making up her mind in exploring the deep meaning of humanity. It was the end of the 19th century an age of great change in England which completely changed the rural England into a nation of cities and industries. The result of this change was industrialisation and prosperity but at the same time there was an increase in crimes and corruption as well and the shortage of dwellings and morality of people declined.

The World War II further ruined the family relations and increased frustration and tensions. Virginia belonged to the aristocratic intellectual society, she stresses on the importance of freedom in her

family. Her father promoted her writings and allowed his children to read and write and made them understand to express their full views in few sentences. As Mrs Woolf's diary of 19th December 1938 shows her writings "absorbing ever since I was a little creature scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green Plush sofa in the drawing room at Saint Ives while the grown -ups dined."(6)

The Bloomsbury group a literary club was founded by Virginia which started its function after Queen Victoria passed away till the Second World War. The group was influenced by G. E. Moor's philosophy. The refined and difficult work with no sentimental philosophy gave the group dignity. Virginia became the leader of the group for having studied at Cambridge and also being inspired by the ideas of G. E. Moor. She was married to Leonardo Woolf and their married life was happy but because she was a sensitive soul she had nostalgia and depression, when the First World War broke out and it was the end of an era of security and stability. Virginia was a hard worker and besides her writings she also worked for the labour party with her husband. After the War she suffered due to ill-health and depression and when the Second World War broke out it destroyed her interest in life. Later she committed suicide by drowning herself.

Virginia was a rational being who suppressed her feelings and had a great control over herself. She had an appealing simplicity and seriousness in attitude. She was also very fond of poetry, painting and music. Her novels show vital response as she admired her surroundings and it can be traced in her works. Her senses coordinate well with her intelligence. If she had sympathy for the people around, she would go and meet them personally.

Stream of Consciousness Technique

Virginia Woolf was an intellectual scholar. She was brought up in a refined and intellectual atmosphere. She was a great learner and learnt French and English classics very early in her life. She was very fond of Jane Austen and George Eliot. Virginia adopted the revolutionary technique of expression and use stream of consciousness method to express the impact of life and the personality of the characters in her novels. All novels are read with great interest by the readers and the novel *Between the Axe* is considered as one of the best works where as her novels *Orlando* is a fantasy biography that is unique. As Chambers observes – "she advanced the frontiers of English novel by the mastery of a new and potentially fruitful technique and

so in the list of great novelist she will find a place perhaps not without honour.” Her novel *Mrs Dalloway* of 1925 is the most famous and important novel. As Virginia Woolf herself wrote “I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and insane side by side something like that”. She was more interested in the character of the novel than the plot. She portrayed the inner reality of the spirit and truth she has never filled her novel with characters of heroes, heroines and villains. They are drawn vividly and admirably by the writer that provides memorable gallery of characters. Her characters change with the passage of time and she does not bother about their moral quality. They are not noble or evil, saints or sinners but common men revealing their inner thoughts and feelings.

Symbolism in Mrs Dalloway

Virginia Woolf uses nature in a symbolic manner in her novels. There are settings of natural phenomena with the use of day and night, autumn and spring, sunshine and fog, holiday and season for the souls as symbols in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. She has used two patterns in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* first the pattern of prose where he reader gets a picture of the modern world with its destructive forces, class struggle and war. The other part explains the poetic form with love, death, life and the beauty of the world. The various psychological complexities are linked up with the social problems. The theme is concerned with the fundamental questions and values of life and the serious indictment of society. The novel is a mixture of feelings which are happy and polite, the flower shop, Clarissa’s cool and dignified home and the preparation of a party. On the other hand the smoothness cracks and reality comes in with the appearance of Peter Walsh and the heroine Clarissa goes to the attic room in loneliness. Mrs Dalloway represents the outward glitz and show but inside she is suffering from spiritual barrenness.

Peter Walsh, Sally Seton and Septimus Smith are also the symbolic figures in the novel. Peter represents adventures of foreign lands and his love, truth, knowledge, wealth and disagrees with pomp and show, pride and vanity. Peter and Sally both stand for the new wave and ideals. The character of Septimus smith is a victim of the War he was a young patriot, handsome and intelligent who voluntarily joined the army and after the war he was reduced to a neurotic suffering from nervous breakdown whom medicines failed to cure and later he commits suicide.

The writer has used nature as symbols and images where the fresh morning air, flap of wave, the coolness of atmosphere symbolised the youth of Clarisse at her parents' home. Flowers and green fields show peace, calm and contentment. The beautiful cloudscape observed by Elizabeth as she walks home show light and shade symbolising joys and sorrows of life. The street show mystery of all lives and the houses, doors, windows, cities are symbols of various aspects of life. Peter Walsh knife is taken as his silly, unconventionality, weakness and lack of feelings. The symbols used in the novel by the writer have no traditional ambiguity. They help the characters in showing their inner feelings and consciousness. The streets and banks of river show the feelings of mysterious contacts with the crowd moving and the ripples in water. It shows the mystery of life and witnesses the solitude and the two extremes meeting in the novel. Houses have significant meaning like shelter and express shades of human existence. It shows activities, darkness, silence and loneliness from one room to another.

It shows integration of a person with family or a group of people in protection and intimacy. The roses and fresh flowers in the flower shop show happiness and love in one's life. With roses Richard Dalloways's expresses his love for the wife Clarissa. The other symbols like birds butterflies and gulls are also shades of human behaviour. The butterflies on flowers show the lamps that are lost in the forest of darkness. Fishes symbolised the breaking of man's consciousness with of obscure signs. Clarissa's character shows love and religion whereas Doris Killman represents corrupt and possessive love. Religion is not able to give her spiritual peace and change her moral code. Doctor Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw stand as symbols of ruthless impositions of an individual will on others. They represent the force and strength of character which make them the object of fear for the others. Peter Sally and Septimus symbolise adventure of the foreign lands. Thus we can say that the theme of the novel is death, time, personalities and relations of the character with each other. It exposes the horrors and evils of the materialistic world and portrays the human feelings towards relationships with special stress on life, love, pity, sympathy and death.

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf is credited with one of the finest works in the stream of consciousness technique. The period of World Wars had a great impact on the writer. The resultant complexities could be seen in her

novels. In *Mrs Dalloway* Virginia Woolf uses symbols to highlight the disintegration of values, ruthlessness and human emotions. It also projects how religion is not able to give spiritual peace and values of life. Man's sub-consciousness reveals the hidden emotions and feelings. The stream of consciousness technique probes the psyche of characters to unfold the truth and symbols become a medium of expressing them.

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