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Exploration of Women's Potentials in To *The Lighthouse*

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Karna Bahadur Rajbanshi has prepared the thesis "Exploration of Women's Potentials in *To the Lighthouse*" under my supervision from 2008 to 2009. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for Viva-Voce.

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Abstract

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* embodies the encouraging and enticing ideas for the promotion of women exploited and their desires repressed in patriarchy through the historical span of time. The characters portrayed in the novel are symbolic and speak the voice of both the ruled and the ruler, in other words, females and males respectively. The female characters carry on the Woolf's views and attitudes towards men and the rest of the male-dominated society. Mrs. Ramsay is contrasted to her husband Mr. Ramsay who represents the men of the time. He is the authoritative figure who holds the power in the family but his customary role is handled by his wife Mrs. Ramsay which indeed proves a great challenge to patriarchy and its ideologies. Woolf through another female character, Lily Briscoe has attempted to make it crystal clear that there is nothing that women cannot do. On this ground women are as valiant and courageous as men and everything is possible on the part of the entire sex, female. To the customary trend women are confined to a certain domain of duties and responsibilities and most of them are concerned with emotional and delicate notion of jobs but *To the Lighthouse* breaks this boundary extant in patriarchy by forwarding Lily Briscoe as a painter and Mrs. Ramsay as a commendable and reliable director in her family affair.

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I. Woolf as a Feminist Writer

Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on January 25, 1882, in London. Her parents were Leslie Stephen, editor of the Dictionary of National Biography and Julia Princes Jackson Duckworth Stephen. Both parents had married before and had children. Together, the Stephens had three other children in addition to Virginia: Vanessa, born in 1879; Thoby, born in 1880; and Adrian, born in 1883. Woolf was educated at home where she had free access to her father's extensive library. In 1895 her mother died, and Woolf faced the first of many psychological breakdowns that would plague her throughout her life. Her half sister Stella, thirteen years Woolf's senior, assumed management of the household, a position she relinquished to Vanessa moved the family to the bohemian Bloomsbury section of London, where Woolf began her writing career and where the Thursday evening gatherings with Thoby's Cambridge friends constituted the beginning of the Bloomsbury Group. During this time the four Stephen siblings traveled, in 1904 to Paris and Italy, and two years later to Greece, where Woolf and Thoby both contracted typhoid fever; the illness proved fatal for Thoby.

In 1912 Woolf married Leonard Woolf- one of the original Bloomsbury members recently returned from a seven-year period of civil war in Ceylon. Soon afterwards suffered a serious mental breakdown involving another suicide attempt; she remained in severe mental distress for the next three years. During this period, Woolf completed her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, published in 1915. Two years later, the Woolfs established their own publishing company in the basement of their home; the Hogarth Press published not only Woolf's work, but those of T. S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, and Sigmund Freud, among others. In 1920, through a series of letters to the editor of the New Statesman, Woolf engaged in a dispute over women's

intellectual abilities with Desmond McCarthy, a member of the Bloomsbury Group who wrote under the name “Affable Hawk”. She pursued the subject in greater depth at the end of the decade with her feminist essay *A Room of One’s Own*. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Woolf continued writing and publishing, producing several more novels and a number of essays. In 1941, fearing the onset of another psychological breakdown, Woolf committed suicide by filling her pockets with rocks and drowning herself in the River Ouse.

Virginia Woolf has always been known for her careful, finely crafted prose. Separately, Woolf has always been renowned for her feminist consciousness. Historically, the two have been divorced, as modernists speak of her aesthetic virtuosity, and feminist scholars praise her social agenda. But detaching her beautiful writing from her feminism ignores the most radical aspect of Woolf’s effort: the creation of a technically remarkable prose that would help effect social change.

In a famous passage from *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf argues for a new syntax: “The woman writer [must] alter the current ‘man’s sentence,’ which is unsuited for woman’s use” (115). As would later feminist critics, Woolf wonders what it would mean to create a social upheaval in syntax. We might ask, then, about the function of socially significant syntax in wedding those two aspects of Woolf that resist unification: splendid prose and feminist principles. To read Woolf’s linguistic style as a social project—in the way her speculations about the nature of language would seem to require us to do – requires close, careful scrutiny of how her irregular phraseology and her pairing and multiplying of subjects, verbs, tenses, and moods challenge reality, subjectivity, and hegemony. Within her grammatical constructions, Woolf does not re-inscribe epistemology or teleology; neither does she profess truth. Instead, she suggests on a grammatical level that any reliance on posited reality will

give way, revealing the fragility and despair of inherited modes of conceptualization, and refuting traditional models of subject construction through complex grammatical game.

Although Woolf wrote a number of short stories, her best-known fiction has always been her novels, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and to a lesser extent *Orlando* (1928) and *The Waves* (1931). *Mrs. Dalloway*, frequently compared to James Joyce's 1922 work *Ulysses*, is an expansion of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," a short story Woolf produced for *Dial* magazine in 1923. The events of the plot occur over a period of twenty-four hours in the life of society hostess Clarissa Dalloway and culminate in a large, elaborate party. The work is not only a critique of social system, but deals as well with issues of madness and suicide through Woolf's characterization of Septimus Smith, a psychological casualty of the war. *To the Lighthouse*, a family novel with obvious connections to Woolf's own early life, involves Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, thinly disguised versions of her parents. Notwithstanding the subtitle's claim that *Orlando* is a biography, it is, in fact, a novel featuring an androgynous main character said to be modeled after Woolf's friend and reputed lover, Vita Sackville-West. *The Waves*, a complicated exploration of the inevitable mutability of human life, is perhaps Woolf's most complex work, considered by some, including her husband, to be her masterpiece. Woolf explored issues of sex, gender, and feminism to some degree in her novels, particularly *Orlando*, and in her short stories, particularly "A Society". However, she most thoroughly articulated her ideas on the equality of women in her essays, especially *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (1938). Both books explore male power and the injustices associated with it; Woolf especially criticizes the lack of legal rights, educational opportunities, and financial independence for women. Unlike some of her

contemporaries, however, Woolf did not believe that women should strive to be like men. She believed, rather, that men should take on some of the characteristics associated with women.

To the Lighthouse is a landmark novel of high modernism, the text centering on the Ramsay family and their visits to the Isle of Skye in Scotland between 1910 and 1920, skillfully manipulates temporality and psychological exploration. It is set in the Ramsays' summer home in the Hebrides, on the Isle of Skye. The Window, the first part begins with Mrs. Ramsay assuring James that they should be able to visit the lighthouse on the next day. This prediction is denied by Mr. Ramsay, who voices his certainty that the weather will not be clear, an opinion that forces a certain tension between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and also between Ramsay and his son, James. This particular incident is referred to on various occasions throughout the chapter, especially in the context of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship.

The Ramsays have been joined at the house by a number of friends and colleagues, one of them being Lily Briscoe who begins the novel as a young, uncertain painter attempting a portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay and her son James Briscoe finds herself plagued by doubts throughout the novel, doubts largely fed by the statements of Charles Tansley, another guest, claiming that women can neither paint nor write. Tansley himself is an admirer of Mr. Ramsay and his philosophical treatises.

This section closes with a large dinner party. Mr. Ramsay nearly snaps at Augustus Carmichael, a visiting poet, when the latter asks for a second serving of soup. Mrs. Ramsay, who is striving for the perfect dinner is herself out of sorts when Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, two acquaintances who she has brought together in

engagement, arrive late to dinner, as Minta lost her grandmother's brooch on the beach.

Time Passes, the second part of the text, is employed by the author to give a sense of time passing. Woolf explains the purpose of this section, writing that it was, "an interesting experiment that gave the sense of ten years passing" (24). This section's role in linking the two dominant parts of the story was also expressed in Woolf's notes for the novel, where above a drawing of an "H" shape she wrote, "two blocks joined by a corridor" (25). During this period Britain begins and finishes fighting World War I. In addition, readers are informed as to the fates of a number of characters introduced in the first part of the novel: Mrs. Ramsay passes away, Prue dies from complications of childbirth, and Andrew is killed in the war. Mr. Ramsay is left adrift without his wife to praise and comfort him during his bouts of fear and his anguish regarding the longevity of his philosophical work.

In the final section some of the remaining Ramsays return to their summer home ten years after the events of Part I, as Mr. Ramsay finally plans on taking the long-delayed trip to the lighthouse with his son James and daughter Camilla. The trip almost does not happen, as the children had not been ready, but they eventually take off. En route, the children give their father the silent treatment for forcing them to come along. James keeps the sailing boat steady, and rather than receiving the harsh words he has come to expect from his father, he hears praise, providing a rare moment of empathy between father and son; Cam's attitude towards her father has changed as well. They are accompanied by the sailor Macalister and his son, who catches fish during the trip. The son cuts a piece of flesh from a fish he has caught to use for bait, throwing the injured fish back into the sea.

While they set sail for the lighthouse, Lily attempts to complete her long-unfinished painting. She reconsiders Mrs. Ramsay's memory, grateful for her help in pushing Lily to continue with her art, yet at the same time struggling to free herself from the tacit control Mrs. Ramsay had over other aspects of her life. Upon finishing the painting and seeing that it satisfies her, she realizes that the execution of her vision is more important to her than the idea of leaving some sort of legacy in her work—a lesson Mr. Ramsay has yet to learn.

Critical Reception

In the novel, *To the Lighthouse* Woolf seeks to come to terms with her parents' stifling Victorian marriage and events of her own childhood, as well as to explore such feminist issues as the necessity, or even desirability, of marriage for women and the difficulties for women in pursuing a career in the arts. A striking mix of autobiographical elements, philosophical questions, and social concerns, *To the Lighthouse* is generally considered to be Woolf's greatest fictional achievement.

To the Lighthouse has sustained critical predominance in Woolf's canon since its publication in 1927. It is widely considered her most successful use of stream-of-consciousness narrative, nonlinear plot, and interior monologue, crisply identifying characters without the formal structure of chronological time and omniscient narration, as passage of time. The novel is often described as an elegy to Woolf's mother, and as such it is thought to be a complex and poetic character study, incorporating all facets of personality, including emotions dark and hopeless. In her diary Woolf recorded her many difficulties in writing *To the Lighthouse*, including her fears about reliving her parents' deaths—events that precipitated two of her most devastating emotional breakdowns. But Woolf evidently realized the greater significance of *To the Lighthouse* beyond its fictional portrayal of her childhood; in a

diary entry written during her final revision of the novel in 1926 she wrote, “My present opinion is that it is easily the best of my books,” an assessment with which most critics agree.

Since the publication the text, *To the Lighthouse*, it has been responded in many ways by distinct scholars. A keen reviewer of the book, Robert Mathias has stated: “This simple and haunting story captures the transience of life and its surrounding emotions” (32). His sharp observation to the text exposes Woolf’s untiring attempts in the portrayal of the inner layer of human life and its significance in the promotion of the whole human domain. In the course of time Paul Fischer asserted:

To the Lighthouse is the most autobiographical of Virginia Woolf’s novels. It is based on her childhood experiences, and while it touches on childhood and children’s perceptions and desires; it is at its most trenchant when exploring adult relationships, marriage and, indeed, the changing class-structure of its time.(7)

Fischer seems to have stressed on the sources of the text that the text was the creation out of the author’s personal experiences. Furthermore he has highlighted different stages of human life and their distinct features. His criticism displays the fact that this text has incorporated human and social especially economic phenomena. After all, his observation is appreciative and remarkable.

Leishman Penn avers: “To the Lighthouse plays back and forth between telescopic and microscopic views of nature and human nature. Mrs. Ramsay is both trapped in and pleased in her roles as wife, mother and hostess”(9). Hence he highlights the contribution and sacrifice of a woman in different roles at distinct

stages of human life. Female compassion is so high that she always lives for others.

Matthew Krichman forwards his views regarding the text:

To the Lighthouse is about the emotional and emotional and philosophical ruminations of Woolf's characters, none of whom is particularly sympathetic or engrossing. Woolf juxtaposes the rational, abrasive Mr. Ramsay with the pleasant, introspective Mrs. Ramsay in an attempt to make profound statements about the differences between men and women. (5)

Here the critic has shown the contrast between Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay emphasizing the positions of the female character and her outstanding qualities and instincts. This researcher's effort will be similar to Krichman's that Mr. Ramsay is as a typical male, rational, insensitive, aloof, lonely and perhaps ridiculous: the lighthouse by day. The lighthouse at its most useful at night is represented by the capable and inspiring Mrs. Ramsay, whose role is taken on and adapted by Lily Briscoe as she seeks to capture the changing nature of people and events in a single composition. Samuel Bennet states in this regard: "Woolf juxtaposes the rational, abrasive Mr. Ramsay with the pleasant, introspective Mrs. Ramsay in an attempt to make profound statements about the differences between men and women" (23). His focus on the distinction between male and female is remarkable and noteworthy that further says that Woolf has expressed her thoughts regarding the sex differences.

After all, the researcher will make innumerable efforts to justify that Mrs. Ramsay's principles of life are emotional and flexible since they are compassionate and humane. Moreover the researcher will look at the text through the lenses of feminism in order to prove Mrs. Ramsay's position stronger and commendable in the readers' eyes.

II. Feminism: Search for Gender Equality

The distinction between male and female and masculinity and femininity continues to polarize relations between the sexes in ways that generally subordinate, marginalize, or undermine women with respect to men. The gender literature has recently challenged the singular and unitary conception of gender identity, arguing that there are a multiplicity of masculinities and femininities that are often fragile, fragmented and fluid. Despite this, the binary relationship between men and women continues to obstruct the development of sexual equality. Hence it tends to focus on the binary and, in particular, its association with hierarchy, where men dominate women and masculinity assigns to femininity a marginal or 'Other' inferior status. It suggests that hierarchy is a condition and consequence of the reification of the binary that is difficult to challenge from within a representational epistemology that continues to dominate even studies of gender. Deconstructing the gender binary is simply to challenge the reification of the terms wherein the divisions between male and female, masculine and feminine or men and women are treated as absolute and unchallenging. As Hekman has argued:

The history of feminism is one in which one or other of two strategies has been pre-eminent in responding to the gender binary and the hierarchy of evaluation that surrounds it. One solution is for feminists to deny the difference between men and women, thus encouraging women to play the 'male game' with as much tenacity of purpose as men. Another is to seek to reverse the hierarchical evaluation, claiming that it is women that are superior because of a whole range of sensitivities and social skills that men lack. (432)

Both strategies can be found in our society and are endorsed, in different degrees, by some men as well as some women. The first strategy reflects and reproduces the beliefs in equal opportunity, but it can lead ambitious women to emulate men and to manifest many of the characteristics of a particular mode of masculinity sometimes even more exaggeratedly than men themselves.

Feminism as a movement got its impetus within the social history of modern women. The women recognized unequal status and banded together in collective action to rectify the wrong done to them. They dared to come out from behind closed door to tell their plight and their vision without sexual bias. Men had long denied women their right to personhood. They achieved that by not allowing women to own property, or enter into contracts, education and citizenship.

Feminism came into existence with women questioning their place in patriarchal society. They examined the control men had on women and established the ground on which women started their concerns of subjugation. A good understanding of a definition of feminism becomes crucial to give a clear-cut concept of the term and its basic premises. Feminism is a doctrine that holds a belief in sex equality and opposes the sex hierarchy. It presupposes that woman's condition is socially constructed rather than simply predestined by God or nature. It posits that women perceive themselves not only as a biological sex but a social grouping. Gerda Lerner articulates her opinion regarding a feminist consciousness:

I define feminist consciousness as the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is socially determined; that they must join with other with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally that they must and can provide an

alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination. (14)

Feminist consciousness developed over time and challenged the practices that perpetuated notions of superiority of men and inferiority of women. Feminism demands equal rights and opportunities for women in a political, economic, psychological, social and individual sense.

The term 'female' since the initiation of human civilization has reserved its validity and conception as a biological contrast to male 'sex'. Indeed the natural biological contrast pervades each individual sex with distinctive features, physical qualities and assertions that are assumed to be essential and vital to sustain the true nature of human evolution and civilization. In fact the sex is the natural creation. Some social and cultural variations lie in terms of their behavior, manners, food habit, education and the attitude of society towards them. However, these discrepancies are apparently based on society. This is how some biased definitions, along with physical assertions are attached to each sex and they are bound to get identified with asymmetrical, hierarchical socio-cultural notions called 'gender'. Nature based female and male relation turns into society based women and men's feminine and masculine relation. The very relation exists as a hierarchical power relation where men dominate women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life. The prejudice sustains itself in the form of male domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy nurtures the gender based inequalities that present men superior to women and men more powerful than women.

Since race, class, culture, and sexuality also affect how people are treated, gender and sex are understood by taking into account cultural practices. Because of the history of male dominance, women in western societies have taken notice and

action against the inequality they have historically experienced. Feminism has been used to create awareness of gender inequality in society. It has also been used as a jumping off point in taking action to address inequality.

Male dominance was perpetuated by men who determined the history of social life as a male endeavor. As texts were written by men, they assumed or promoted their own superiority. Women were assumed to lack intelligence, but in actuality, women were not allowed to be literate. Taking such issues into historical context one can study some historical literary evolution. Feminism became a dominant approach in literature only in the late nineteenth century with the recognition of women's roles and achievements. It began when women became conscious of their relationship to language and of themselves as writers. Twentieth century writers such Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir laid the groundwork for the development of feminist theory.

Feminism is a divergent collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, extensively motivated by the bitter and sweet experiences of women. Most feminists are especially concerned with social, political, religious, racial and economic inequality between women and men; some have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as "woman" and "man", are socially constructed. Feminists differ over the sources of inequality, how to attain equality and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned and critiqued. Variations in the issues of feminists are because of their distinct belonging and upbringing to and in diverse cultures and societies. Feminism is a theoretical discourse that advocates women's rights based on the equality of the sexes. It is a doctrine redefining women's activities and goals from women-centered point of view and refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object, a second sex, and a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination,

oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex, and defend equal rights for women in a political, economic, psychological, personal and esthetic sense.

It is very much clear that feminism as movement appeared to defend the position of woman race and to create a world of women free from all sorts of male interference and oppression. The level of consciousness in women grew high and they started thinking of their selves which their sisters had hardly thought of before. Consciousness in women did not limit to the West rather it spread its wings to East and African countries as well. Distinct perspectives of females in the non-western countries came in the course of time and they commenced intellectual revolution with the hope that they would be able to create their own identity and milieu that of freedom and humanity where there is no suppression and exploitation.

The present stands on the ideological foundation of the past. The economic, social, religious, and philosophical perspectives of the past pave a distinct avenue for the formation of social concepts, manners, and expectations in the present. Maithreyi Krishnaraj declares: “Rejecting all tradition is neither possible nor advisable because one has to seek validation within one’s own culture and history” (27). Accordingly, women in the West and in the East tend to derive the psychological effect from the past while resisting the male-domination. Myriad culture, historical and mythological figures, various movements, and social factors account for the difference in the women’s voice against male-oppression on women.

The west has a culture of disintegration, marked by the colonial search for power and material gain. Its root has been set on the always-flowing forces, which are unable to assimilate and reconcile with one another. It was always motivated by self-benefit and self-thinking with sufficient self-confidence to obtain its destination.

Consequently, it has created the type of human morality confined within the pragmatic utility and mechanistic life-style where people compete and acquire the acme of success.

The origin of women's voice against male-domination is a kind of political consciousness of the inferiority of women in comparison to men. Women in the West are economically and academically advanced. They have realized the undervalued position of women imprisoned within the narrow domestic world of mothering and house managing, and the biasness in the field of education and employment. As a result they are demanding for proper place of women in the society. Nancy F. Cott examines the origin of women's movement: "Such consciousness of [...] inferiority was the first group-consciousness likely to produce a feminist movement, because it acknowledged cultural and social determinants of women's capabilities as well as divine and natural ones, and thus allowed for the possibility of change" (The Bonds202). The revolutionary origin has given an impetus to the development of historical feminist figures.

Historical feminist personalities have raised a strong voice for women's liberation from the biased male-tyranny on women. Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century attempted to liberate women from male-dominating motives hidden in the emphasis of feminine features like meekness, humility, and childishness. Unraveling the bases of women socialization whereby they are taught to be feminine, Wollstonecraft indicates the fault in the process of the socialization. She detests the then false education system that inspired women to love at the expense of reason, and encouraged women to study medicine, business, and mathematics. Rosemarie Tong examines Wollstonecraft's views about women's education that they should "be

provided with a real education, one that sharpens and focuses her mind and gives her a chance to develop her national and moral capacities, her full human potential”(15).

Similarly Virginia Woolf advocates for the radical change in the conception of family and social life. She refutes the traditional view about women that they are submissive, and cried for a separate space for women in literature and society because they are also independent human beings like men. Hazard Adams presents Woolf’s view about women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation [...]; it is narrow-mindedness in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting, stocking, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (822)

Another historical figure, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, directs women towards useful works created by modern industry and profession. Highlighting women’s capability to work in the public world, she focuses on economically beneficial occupation for women. She refutes the childcare and housework, which deprive them of opportunity and the development of their genuine potentiality. Cott speaks of Gilman: “She proposed [...] the socialization of remaining home employments such as cooking and laundry and argued that housecleaning and childcare would be better performed by specialized paid employees than by housewives and mothers not necessarily suited and not paid for the tasks” (*The Grounding 41*).

Simone de Beauvoir has brought a widespread consciousness on the part of women, pointing to the socio-historical construction of women. She contends the socialization that persuades women to be sexy and to be flesh for the mere entertainment of male ego. Rather, she creates a mentality for women to be self-assertive and determinate to tackle with impediments, and to liberate them from the social construction of femininity. Jane Freedman says that her “distinction between biological sex and the social creation of the ‘eternal feminine’ is a precursor of the distinction between sex and gender that is common in much feminist theory” (14).

Kate Millett has further led the women’s revolution making a connection between the personal and the private world. Maggie Humm presents her remarks: “The personal is political” (195). It is by scrutinizing the personal level internally at home that we can comprehend suppression on women at broader level, and it is by addressing the collective issues related with men’s power and upper position that we can reconstruct and reform the structure, which ultimately influences women’s life at personal level. She doesn’t find any difference between the personal and the public level. The decisions made by the public sector regarding women, childcare, and family planning ultimately affects the private life of women.

Shulamith Firestone proposes a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of offspring. And males are the owners of the labor market; females are no more than the workers to the reproductive system. Oppression upon women due to the productive function is a historical act, and the emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denies the emotional attachment of parents with their children, and spoke for undoing family unit. Freedman further displays her: “Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family unit, with children being brought

up by 'households' made up of about 10 adults, and set up to bring up children over a period of time. Children would develop no special bonds with their 'parents' but would instead form love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex" (70). Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity.

It is very much clear that feminism as movement appeared to defend the position of woman race and to create a world of women free from all sorts of male interference and oppression. The level of consciousness in women grew high and they started thinking of their selves which their sisters had hardly thought of before. Consciousness in women did not limit to the West rather it spread its wings to East and African countries as well. Distinct perspectives of females in the non-western countries came in the course of time and they commenced intellectual revolution with the hope that they would be able to create their own identity and milieu that of freedom and humanity where there is no suppression and exploitation.

Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own: British Woman Novelist from Bronte of Lessing* is a prominent masterpiece of the theoretical work on feminism. It describes the female literary tradition in the English novels from the Brontes onward as a development of subculture within the framework of a larger society; their work would demonstrate a unity of values, conventions experiences, and behaviors encroaching on each individual. Showalter divides feminist criticism into two distinct modes. The first mode is ideological which she terms 'feminist critique'. It is concerned with the feminist as reader and it offers feminist reading of texts which considers the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the exclusion and misconceptions about women in criticism, and women-assign in semiotic systems. The second mode of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is the study of women

as writers. She calls it 'gynocritics' and provides the subjects, "the history, styles, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the devolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (Showalter248). Showalter, likewise, in her analyses of historical development of feminism presents three important stages of women writing: feminine, feminist and female. First is the female imitation of mainstream (male) literary tradition dated from 1840 to 1880 and it includes the writers like George Eliot and Bronte sisters. The second is the protest against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights. It is dated from 1880 to 1920 and it includes the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, and Oliver Schveiner. The third stage is self-discovery which aims at search for independent identity. It is dated from 1920 onward, and it includes the writers like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* is another brilliantly written massive book on historical study of feminism which stresses especially the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar in this book, according to M.H. Abrams:

Propose that the 'anxiety of authorship' that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effective in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to the heroine...such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.
(236)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that artistic creative of the nineteenth century tradition which is perceived basically as a male quality, is in fact patriarchal

superimposition upon the women writers who are imprisoned within it. They suggest the female writers first to struggle against the effect of socialization that becomes struggle against men's oppressive reading of women. But they further argue that the women can begin such struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, who far from representing a threatening forces to be denied or killed, proven by examples that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible. *The Madwoman in the Attic* profits from the historical emphasis of Showalter. It stresses that in the nineteenth century female-authored text, an important character is the madwoman double that exists in the fantasies and dreams of every decorous spinster, herself often a double of her author. Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar adapted Harold Bloom's reading of male authors, 'The anxiety of Influence' to reveal in the work of women writers a narrative that expressed their feelings of being restricted, silenced and dispossessed by an oppressive patriarchal culture. For Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, and feminist critics who follow their lead, the practice of feminism is political in that any criticism which does not take the feminist perspective into account is flamed and deceptive.

French Model of Feminism concerns itself with philosophical and psychoanalytical issues relating to woman and language in the search for writing peculiar to women. It questions the Lacanian assumption that femininity can only be seen from the point of view of phallic culture. It believes that femininity offers a possible procedure for subverting the marginalizing mechanisms of power, thereby breaking it up. M.H. Abrams emphasizes the major concern of its theorists:

To establish the very possibility of a woman's language that will not, when a woman writes, automatically be appropriated into this phallic-centric language, since such appropriation is said to force her into

complicity with linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience or even of linguistic nonentity. (92)

The writings of these French critics such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva have also interacted with two leading French male thinkers-Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida in philosophy. Cixous is allied to other French feminist in her emphasis on the unconscious, the deep structures of culture and language, and the usually hidden body. She sees the world as text and, using the language of psychoanalysis; she separates the female from the male unconscious and upholds the former as the site of disruption of a dominant patriarchy. Her best known essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" intends to break down the favored status of the rational published text, celebrating the Derridean notion of difference and suggesting a repressed, unsignified feminine which 'defers' meaning while suggesting a repressed, unsignified feminine which 'defers' meaning while suggesting multiple significance through 'difference'. Julia Kristeva, as contrasted to Cixous and Irigaray, is much more directly interested in examining the nature of literary discourse. Her *Revolution in Poetic Language* sought to problematize the position of subject in language, emphasizing language as process. She posited two processes in sign-making-language per se (symbolic) and all those signs which precede or exist outside of language (semiotic). The two modalities are inextricably entangled in Kristeva's view, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse which emerges.

By observing brief scenario of the history of feminist literary criticism, we can divide the development of the entire feminist literary criticism into three distinct phases. The first phase was centered on "the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angles or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion

of women from literary history” (5). The second phase of it was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate the culture. Hundreds of lost women writers were rediscovered, and the territory of the females plot was constructed in this phase. And, the third phase of feminist criticism demanded a radical rethinking of the conceptual ground of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences.

Influenced by a great variety of theoretical emergences, the feminism presently has been a broad concept which covers a broader scope and includes different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women. It, now, no more remains a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and diverse post-structuralism theories. The dimension of feminism, which is equally known as English model of feminism, has a closer link with socialism and Marxism. It analyses the connection between gender and class, emphasizes on popular culture, and provides a feminist critique of Marxist literary theory. Deriving their impetus from the changing socio-economic conditions and changing balances of power between the sexes, the leading Marxist and socialist feminists such as Mary Jacobus, Rosalind Loward, Michele Barrette, Juliet Mitchel and Cora Kaplan combine Marxist theoretical interest in the production and ideology of literature with feminist concerns for women’s writing. Marxist and Socialist feminist believe that the text is a part of process of the social construction of meanings and subjectivities. And, literature is one of the ways in which gender relations and gender ideology are produced and reproduced. Gender, in their opinion is not produced simply by masculine thought,

but rather it is the product of that thought as it related to the particular ways in which women's productive, reproductive and domestic life is organized. They consider the notion of femininity and masculinity as myths or ideologies. Such beliefs, for them, are the values that are not detached from social life but rather are lived or embodied in what we say and do, and have no other existence.

Marxist and Socialist feminism, therefore, often takes an explicitly and aggressively ideological stance, stressing the important contribution of literature and literary criticism to a radical, even revolutionary reformation of culture.

The socio-historic dimension of feminism, which is more popularly known as American school of feminism, tries to recover women's historical experiences as readers and writers. It focuses on exploring the awakening feminine consciousness reflected in literature by and about women. By close textual analysis, it often stresses a psychological maturation not only through recognition of gender difference but also through a growing sense of 'sisterhood' with other women. They tend to recover the patriarchal remains in the male-author texts through close reader and replace them with their own. The socio-historical feminism has its two groups practicing two different ways of feminist criticism.

One group practiced 'feminist critique' examining how women characters are portrayed, exposing the patriarchal ideology implicit in the so-called classic, and demonstrating that attitudes and traditions reinforcing systematic masculine dominance are inscribed in the literary cannon. Kristeva writes that when men kill themselves, it is to prove their power over life, their power to be God. Their dying is about being. When women commit suicide, on contrary, it is not to be God, nor even to be dead, but in order not to be. Being exists in time and time exists in the symbolic, while women who commit suicide are called by the maternal to go beyond time,

being, and language. One symptom is that they are sick of words. To stave off the call of the mother, the call beyond time, these women, persecuted by voices, madness, hallucinations, try for a time, to cling to the symbolic, identify with the father, compensate with language, but, eventually they can no longer hold on. They begin to slip, life itself can't hang on: slowly, gently, death settles in. Kristeva writes:

I think of Virginia Woolf, who sank wordlessly into the river, her pockets weighted with stones. Haunted by voices, by lights, in love with colors-blue, green- seized by a sort of bizarre gaiety that brought on the fits of strangled, hooting, uncontrollable laughter remembered by Miss Brown. Or I think of the dark corner of the deserted farmhouse in the Russian countryside where, a few months later in that same year, 1941, Maria Tsvetaieva hanged herself...Tsvetaieva, the most rhythmic of the Russian poets. (34)

What Kristeva has to say about women is often melancholic and disturbing and has been much contested by feminist scholars: women, for Kristeva, must forsake their pleasure for a French passport, but perhaps also for a passport to the symbolic; female sexuality is most often depressive; women are more prone to insanity and fanaticism than are men; women's options are silence, identification by Kristeva, is very likely to teeter into madness and suicide. This dark view of women's options should be and has been problematized; however, the aim of the current essay is the more limited one of exploring the manner in which Kristeva's theoretical framework functions to explain the themes of women's troubled relations to language and the maternal in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.

After the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote of her depiction of her parents' marriage, "I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and writing of them

was a necessary act” (12). Her own mother had died suddenly when Woolf was thirteen. Considered a model wife and mother, Julia Stephen was known to exhaust herself regularly to please her demanding husband, the writer and intellectual figure Leslie Stephen. But Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are heavily fictionalized portrayals of Woolf’s parents, and neither they nor the other characters in *To the Lighthouse* are meant to fully represent the Stephen family; rather, they are extremely complex, symbolic, and, some say, mythical figures that are not easily categorized. Literary theorists are sharply divided over the deeper meanings of Woolf’s characters. Some interpret Mrs. Ramsay as the embodiment of the feminine ideal and Mr. Ramsay as that of the masculine ideal—the pure, elemental forces of the genders. Feminist critics dispute this notion, positing instead that the Ramsays’ marriage is typical of most marriages in the pre-World War I period, forcing the wife into the role of “angel of the house”—unquestioning, supportive, generous, and self-sacrificing at any cost to personal ambition and satisfaction. These critics consider Mr. Ramsay an overbearing and domineering patriarch who drives his wife to the brink of feeble-mindedness. Still others surmise just the opposite: namely, that Mrs. Ramsay is a cold-hearted, social-climbing harpy, and Mr. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe is generally considered representative of Woolf’s strong feminist principles, particularly in her refusal to marry and her commitment to painting, despite the urging of others to abandon art. Overriding concerns of *To the Lighthouse* and all of its characters are death, mourning, and the inexorable passage of time. When Mrs. Ramsay dies, she takes with her the sense of order in the family; children die, Lily and Mr. Ramsay fall into abiding grief, and even the house itself declines into disrepair. The consummation of the trip to the lighthouse and Lily’s completion of her painting, with a single line down the centre

representing Mrs. Ramsay, signify the triumph of order over disorder and life over death and grief.

III. Exploration of Women's Self

Although the novel, *To the Lighthouse* by Woolf is told via the thought processes of different characters, it is Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe that stand out the most. Mrs. Ramsay, a matriarchal figure, has eight children and a scholar for a husband, to all of whom she is deeply attached. She is a beautiful woman, and with it, has a certain sense of superiority that puts some people off, particularly Lily Briscoe and William Banks. Her aspirations on life are to see her children and friends happily married off and to keep her husband happy. Even though her thoughts centre on a very old-fashioned family life of nearly 100 years ago, there is much in common with modern day women; for example, wanting to see her children lead happy and successful lives while wanting them to stay the same age. She is certainly an interesting character, with much to recommend her, but somehow, although wanting to see everyone happy, she expresses herself in a rather patronizing way, which is perhaps because of her obvious view that men lead the world; without them nothing would happen, whereas a woman's role is to care for and protect the men.

The narrator details the family structure of Mrs. Ramsay and further it becomes clear the role of Mrs. Ramsay is much vital in association with all family members who are with her. It is said in the introductory part of the text, *To the Lighthouse*: "The family consists of the scholarly and somehow aloof Mrs. Ramsay, who is a warm, maternal and capable figure at the centre of the household, their eight children, an assorted friends and guests among whom is the artist Lily Briscoe" (Introduction). Hence the focus is on the central figure, Mrs. Ramsay who deals with all sorts of problems of her family. She proves a good mother who seems to have been doing every thing for sake of her children in particular and betterment and progress for the entire community in general. She never thinks of negative of others since she

is maternal in heart and loves humanity. She is capable enough of tackling every sort of up and down. In contrary to her characterization, her husband Mr. Ramsay is much tyrannical and despotic. This is the reason he is somewhat alienated everywhere. The writer throws a glimpse on his character:

Mr. Ramsay is seen as a typical male, rational, insensitive, aloof, lonely and perhaps ridiculous: the lighthouse by day. The lighthouse at its most useful at night is represented by the capable and inspiring Mrs. Ramsay, whose role is taken on and adapted by Lily Briscoe as she seeks to capture the changing nature of people and events in a single composition. (Introduction)

Hence Mrs. Ramsay is craved in very much positive way and is presented as a meek and commendable person who contradicts the Mr. Ramsay's character. She is emotional and scarifying whereas Mr. Ramsay is mechanical in relationship. He thinks more than he feels. This is why his relationship with other family members is not so sound and lively.

The book, *To the Lighthouse* touches on many vital topics, from the battle and personal cost of artistic creativity for women as opposed to their expected roles of wife and mother, to remembrance and struggles to escape the tyrannies of the past. The writer highlights Mr. Ramsay's interpersonal relationship with other family members which seem transparent as such:

Mr. Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence; standing, as now, lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in

every way than he was, but also with some secret conceit as his own accuracy of judgment. (1)

Although Mrs. Ramsay and his children are the integral part of his life, he does not feel comfortable to remain in their touch normally. Rather he is sarcastic and tries to ridicule his wife and tease his children which are indeed much disgusting. He behaves as if he is a great opponent to his wife and children. Consequently children like James remain much closer to mother than to father. He is a conceited personality why he ill-treats them. Despite the fact he is rational, he does not try to understand other people's innermost feelings and attitudes. Hence the father is shown to play the role of authority that controls the family. Mr. Ramsay is a male image which implies the authority and power. The writer further avers in the same light:

Indeed, she (Mrs. Ramsay) had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valor, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, man without loss of dignity, and woe betide the girl-play Heaven it was none of her daughters!-who did not feel the worth of it, and all that it implied, to the marrow of her bones. (3)

Hereby the writer opines that Mrs. Ramsay sometimes feels unable to explain every thing at the same degree and furthermore she shows Mr. Ramsay as a person who is respected and dignified in the society he lives in. However, he does not sense other's sentiment and feelings. The negative presentation of his characterization is indeed true and reliable since males in the contemporary time behaves and deserves similar criticism and treatment.

Another prominent female character in *To the Lighthouse* is Lily Briscoe who undercuts the boundary of the male-dominated society and challenges the mega-male-structured society by doing her best in the domain of painting and thus the writer discloses the fact about Briscoe in this way: “Lily’s picture! Mrs. Ramsay smiled. With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; but she was an independent little creature, Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it, and so remembering her promise, she bent her head”(10). Mrs. Ramsay is much delighted to see the picture by Lily and further she assimilates her potential in the very field. Due to Lily’s physical appearance similar to Chinese people, she is committed not to marrying forever. However, Mrs. Ramsay is much soft and meek towards her. Thus their relations show the fact they coordinate with each other in very friendly manner which further strengthens both of them for battles in the male-dominated society. Mrs. Ramsay is so clean-hearted that she is always loving and kind as well as positive to Lily.

As the society is much biased and discouraging for women, Lily gets targeted to make her a victim in the sense that males cannot feel good at her progress and prosperity. This is why there are challenges from outside every time. It is focused in the text: “Such she often felt herself-struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: But this is what I see; this is what I see,’ and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her”(12). She goes against many challenges and struggles so valiantly for her success by hook and crook. She does not get afraid of any sort of consequence of her deed. Rather she continuously keeps on doing her job with the faith that her every effort will bring about fruition in her life. She is so keen at comparing one person with other and derives satisfaction through such judgment. In fact she is fair and unbiased

in the matter of putting two people into two distinct boxes on the basis of their qualities and human behavior. Thus Lily compares and says:

I respect you (Mr. Bankes) she addressed him silently) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal; you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the finest human being that I know; you have neither wife nor child (without any sexual feeling, she longed to cherish that loneliness), you live for science (involuntarily, sections of potatoes rose before her eyes); praise would be an insult to you; generous, pure-hearted, heroic man! (15)

Lily compares Mr. Bankes with Mr. Ramsay and says he is far better than him. He is a vain person. Rather he is the finest model of humanity and further tells us about his sexual life which is idiosyncratic and this idiosyncrasy really differs him from other males who dominate opposite sexes and seek for their selfishness. Though Mr. Bankes is not married and does not have any children, he knows the feelings of others. He feels more than he thinks. Hence he is upgraded in a very charismatic way that he is at par excellence and there is nothing as a mischief on his part. She balances her remarks by stating that he is pure-hearted and heroic in nature which is not false praise in any way. Thus Mr. Bankes' position is heightened in much decorated manner. It further implies that his distinct quality makes him prominent in the eyes of others. Perhaps he is a bit away from the world of tyranny and despotism cultivated by male figures.

One of the main focuses of the course is '*To the Lighthouse*' a deceptively short book that covers a wide range of themes, subjects and acerbic social commentary. Not only is Woolf's style of writing hugely original and the fact is admirable that she triumphed as party of 1920s Modernism a predominantly male

canon. The word 'feminist' is often bandied around too much about any literary female but Woolf really did set a standard to which a lot of subsequent women are writing aspired. The similar theme is dominant in *To the Lighthouse*. Further Lily aspires and decorates the Mr. Bankes' personality saying:

You have greatness, she continued, but Mr. Ramsay has none of it. He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death; but he has what you (she addressed Mr. Bankes) have not; a fiery unworldliness; he knows nothing about trifles; he loves dogs and his children. He has eight. You have none. (16)

Woolf through Lily speaks out the character of Mr. Ramsay, a typical male who embodies all dominating features of males of the time. Hence it becomes pretty clear that Mr. Ramsay is totally a spoilt character in the sense that he is despotic in nature and imposes his views on his wife, Mrs. Ramsay despite the fact she is much sacred and loving. The woman without any flaw is exploited at his hands. He tortures her mentally and makes her do something beyond her wants and desire which is indeed inhumane and cruel. He boasts unnecessarily and thinks of him that he is superior to others. As a matter of fact flaws stand for the features of males of the time. Further it indicates the interrelations between males and females and how women are victimized in the male-dominated culture. It also becomes clear that Mr. Ramsay loves only his possessions for his temporal benefits and has some sort of inclination towards them for his selfishness.

The writer simplifies the Mrs. Ramsay's character in much delicate way and says:

If it was her (Mrs. Ramsay) beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing (they were carrying bricks up a little plank as he watched them), and work it into the picture; or if one thought of her simply as a woman, one must endow her with some freak of idiosyncrasy; or suppose some latent desire to diff her royalty of form as if her beauty bored her and all that men say of beauty, and she wanted only to be like other people, insignificant. (19)

In fact Mrs. Ramsay is the persona of the writer that is why she conveys her views about her and others through Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay is so simple and embodies no any distinct character and extraordinary feature is aimed at saying that Woolf was as insignificant as common people are. She does not create any kind of rift between commoners and herself simply because she tends to show humanity on her part to a greater extent. In the eyes of readers Mrs. Ramsay can be an idiosyncratic person that she is not, is apparently clear in the novel, *To the Lighthouse*. The full-fledged notion of Mrs. Ramsay's human character reveals the fact that she is nowhere found to be boasting about her beauty. Rather she is much maternal and fully emotional. This is pretty clear: "They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions (21). People love to go in her touch since whoever goes near her, feels much comfortable and good. After all, she is the source of inspiration and comfort. She takes care of eight children with equal degree of love and thinks that she is nothing. Rather she is simply a woman and mother of children which is full of emotions. Hence her emotional part is much crucial as it heightens the position of women in general.

But in the eyes of males she seems somehow redundant and useless since she has grown up and now she is not as well-maintained as before. Due to being mother of eight children, she is morally bound to remain busy in domesticity for better care and rear of those children. The writer discloses this fact with evidence from the text: “Shabby and worn out, and not presumably (her cheeks were hollow, her hair was white) any longer a sight that filled the eyes with joy, she had better devote her mind to the story of the Fisherman and his Wife and so pacify that bundle of sensitiveness (none of her children was as sensitive as he was) her son James” (28). Woolf allows enough freedom through outlining her characters for the readers to fill in some of their own experiences, while being able to understand the thoughts presented in the book. Hence the focus is on the deteriorating condition of Mrs. Ramsay’s physical appearance and thus her portrayal is much significant here to show the fact males are tempted to the glowing beauty of women and they become less interested in women when they turn old. The concern of males is only with their pleasure and once the source gets empty that it stops providing pleasure to people and throw away the very. Thus the relationship between males and females is shown mechanical and commercial.

Lily has an extensive pluck and she feels everything is possible though complicated and challenging. Therefore she suspects the grand design of males that teaching and preaching is beyond human power. Thus it is said: “Teaching and preaching is beyond human power, Lily suspected. (She was putting away her things.) If you are exalted you must somehow come a cropper. Mrs. Ramsay gave him what he asked too easily. Then the change must be so upsetting, Lily said” (30). Lily doubts the very statement since males might attempt to keep women in ignorance about the matter. Their plan might be to separate intellectual domain for only males. They

perhaps fear that once women get aware and knowledgeable about the practical life, they may revolt against. After all, to suspect such unfair statement is appreciative.

Lily is portrayed as a competent painter in the text, *To the Lighthouse* which is the bitter truth to men. Thus the text exposes the fact about them:

Lily Briscoe went on putting away her brushes, looking up, looking down. Looking up, there he was-Mr. Ramsay-advancing towards them, swinging, careless, oblivious, remote. A bit of a hypocrite? She repeated. Oh no-the most sincere of men, the truest (here he was), the best; but, looking down, she thought, he is absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust; and kept looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays. (31)

Lily Briscoe is a young woman in her early thirties at the beginning of the book. She is unattractive: too thin and with slanted eyes that remind her friends of Chinese eyes. She is deeply sensitive to the feelings of those around her and their reaction to her; as an artist, she is upset by Charles Tansley's suggestion that women cannot paint (or in fact do much at all). As a single woman, if she cannot paint, then she is left with no purpose in life-her art is to her what Mr. Ramsay's scholarly work is to him. She admires Mrs. Ramsay for her powers at keeping every one together, but at the same time finds her somewhat overbearing. As for the somewhat short-tempered Mr. Ramsay, she finds it hard to tell what he is thinking. As a matter of fact she is the character in *To the Lighthouse* to whom everything and everyone is related. Her reactions to the others seem very natural. She is not necessarily married, but happy with her lot. To her Mr. Ramsay is a hypocrite and pretends to be what he is not. In one sense she is against Mr. Ramsay's character which further implicates that she

opposes the entire male-dominated society which often undermines women's potential and capability.

It is much difficult to say what Mrs. Ramsay thinks of Mr. Ramsay in reality. She is found puzzled and her stance is also vague. Her attitude towards males and females is much transparent. To have a glance at her mood is essential to say more about her: "Mrs. Ramsay thought that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped; they could only seek shelter under the shade which Mr. Banks extended over them both" (33). In *To the Lighthouse* female voice and writing style are to stand against the male-dominated literary canon. This book is written entirely in a stream-of-consciousness style, the longed winded sentences striving to evoke each character's thought process as their minds flit from one topic to another, and back and forth through their lives. Despite being her preferred means to find the feminine voice for example wife as she drifts off to sleep, masturbates, and comes onto her period. The text is highly creative and revealing insight into a woman's mind that is, of course, written by a man. *To the Lighthouse* is similarly a celebration of the feminine against male oppression as well as a very effective and chilling observation of the generation gap carved by the First World War, particularly in the changing attitudes of women. There are two options before Mrs. Ramsay whether she accepts Mr. Ramsay or rejects. As the writer says:

She must accept him, or she must refuse him. This going off after luncheon for a walk, even though Andrew was with them-what could it mean? Except that she has decided, rightly, Mrs. Ramsay, realizing that James was tugging at her to make her go on reading aloud the *Fisherman and his Wife*, she did in her own heart infinitely prefer boobies to clever men who wrote dissertations. (37)

Mrs. Ramsay implicitly does something beyond the expectation of her husband Mr. Ramsay and supports her son, James who has not been affected by his father. Rather he does disagree with Mr. Ramsay in many ways. He is much inclined towards Mrs. Ramsay simply because her opinions and ideas to him are as a source of inspiration. This is why Mrs. Ramsay does everything for the sake of her children rather than her husband. As she plays her role of a good human being, she is blamed in many ways since people in the male-dominated society cannot tolerate the active role and position of women. Hence the writer makes it clear:

Wishing to dominate, wishing to interfere, making people do what she wished-that was the charge against her, and she thought it most unjust. How could she help being 'like that' to look at? No one could accuse her of taking pains to impress. She was often ashamed of her own shabbiness. Nor was she domineering, nor was she tyrannical. (39)

There are many charges against Mrs. Ramsay since she does everything with passion and full energy. As a matter of fact the male-dominated society perceives such women with biased eyes. Mrs. Ramsay as a conscious human being can minutely and closely perceive and read the people's mindsets. This is why she takes such unwanted charges unjust and shameful. She further makes it clear that she never sells her service and compassion for the sake of cheap popularity. Rather she does everything for the sake of human betterment and comfort. The jobs most often women do in the society are also highlighted for the further evidence how women are ill-treated and deprived of intellectual battering in the male-dominated society:

She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence

that lie, any lie. She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching; she was beautiful like that light. (43)

Mrs. Ramsay is so powerful at heart and mind that no one can easily degrade her. She is purifying her in such a way that she becomes an idol for successors and they will approach her way of life. She is so strong and harsh that nothing can badly affect her. She is beautiful like light. Hence light refers to double meanings: knowledge and brightness whenever knowledge reflects her mental beauty and brightness symbolizes her physical charm. After all, she is inspiring and resourceful.

In the same vein, another woman character, Minta who is closely observed by Andrew and commented on especially regarding her gestures and fashion:

Minta, Andrew observed, was rather a good walker. She wore more sensible clothes than most women. She wore very short skirts and black knickerbockers. She would jump straight into a stream and flounder across. He liked her rashness, but he was that it would not do- she would kill herself in some idiotic way one of these days. She seemed to be afraid of nothing-except bulls. (51)

To Andrew's observation, Minta is a good walker and puts on more clothes than most of the women. However, her clothes are short and black. In such short clothes she looks beautiful and attractive. He feels pleased at her gesture since he can derive a sort of pleasure out of her pace and delicacy. But much remarkable thing is that he is happy even at her foolishness. Hence it is mentioned that she is afraid only of bulls. Bulls perhaps stand for dangerous men that she is not afraid of common people especially women. As she lives in patriarchy, she suspects the men who will probably

attack at her. Again the writer focuses on Mrs. Ramsay's physical and mental stance in much critical way. It is mentioned:

But indeed she was not jealous, only, now and then, when she made herself look in her glass a little resentful that she had grown old, perhaps, by her own fault. [...] she was grateful to them for laughing at him. ('How many pipes have you smoked to-day, Mr. Ramsay?' and so on), till he seemed a young man; a man very attractive to women, not burdened, not weighed down with the greatness of his labors and the sorrows of the world and his fame or his failure, but gains as she had first known him, gaunt but gallant; helping her out of a boat, she remembered; with delightful ways, like that. (69)

There are many ups and downs in her life. Her relationship with Mr. Ramsay is old and they have ever been intact with each other. But now time has transfigured Mrs. Ramsay and she is a juiceless woman due to the fact she has borne eight children. Consequently her health has gone down and she looks old. However she is jealous to anyone. She copes up with time and its hazards. She does not complain. She feels sorry when her conjugal life seems fragile due to indifferent nature of her husband, Mr. Ramsay. She praises him and reveals the fact he was very much brave and courageous and they had beautiful days in the company of each other. There was a complete harmony and peace in their conjugal life. But with the passage of time he has totally changed and has started drinking and smoking which perhaps leads to the unbearable situation. This is why she is much worried and recalls her past days. In this way Lily, the popular and competent painter remarks that to stay idle is absurd and meaningless. She reacts in much grave way and says:

How childlike, how absurd she was, sitting up there with all her beauty opened again in her, talking about the skins of vegetables. There was something frightening about her. She was irresistible. Always she got her own way in the end, Lily thought. Now she had brought this off—Paul and Minta, one might suppose, were engaged. (70)

When Minta behaves childishly, Lily does not like simply because she thinks every woman should be active and energetic. They should have some purpose of life in order to promote them economically and socially. She comments on the cheap purpose of Minta that is to say marriage. To Lily marriage is the end of women's life since this institution is miserable, oppressive and exploitative. She does not confide in this institution that is overtly the source of misery and pains. Minta's engagement with Paul is the mark of the very institution.

Woolf talks about the dual character of men. In this sense masculine intelligence is fabricated and laminated in such a way that commoners cannot feel different. Rather women fall victims in the hands of such men whose real and genuine character does not appear. The writer says:

On Lord Rosebery; on Creevey's Memoirs; she let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree. (73)

Men uphold the entire world and they rule it as they prefer. They undermine the potentials of women and simply expose their magnificence and omnipotence through abuse of the authority. Furthermore, she is much critical about the masculine notion and lens that men use to perceive the world around. In fact men control the entire world and even the mind of women through their economy as comparatively they have ever been powerful throughout the history. The gold watch symbolizes the economy of men and they attempt to tempt women with. It is clearly said in the text: “I’ve done it, Mrs. Ramsay. I owe it all to you.’ And seeing the gold watch lying in his hand, Mrs. Ramsay felt. How extraordinarily lucky Minta is! She is marrying a man who has a gold watch in a wash-leather bag! (81)”. The life of women is judged in the measure of their husband’s economy. They are called lucky and fortunate in case their husbands possess a lot of property. After all their fate is evaluated in terms of their material facilities not in the term of the fact how freely and independently they live their life in the company of a male in the male-dominated society.

The most significant thing in the novel, *To the Lighthouse* is the female characters emerge and do not stay static and idle every time. Rather they gradually develop mentally and become capable of observing the world in much critical and minute manner. Hence the writer says: “But she was becoming conscious of her husband looking at her. He was smiling at her, quizzically, as if he were ridiculing her gently for being asleep in broad daylight, but at the same he was thinking, Go on reading. You don’t look sad now, he thought”(85). One thing is apparently clear here that men crack jokes and burst into laughter when they find women doing something different from their by-gone sisters. In this sense women are stereotyped in such a way that they do not have potential to do something on their own that is different from their customary duties forcibly provided by the male-dominated society.

But Woolf discards such stereotypes and brings women to the stage where they can show their potential at the par excellence and can stay and live life with equal dignity and prestige as men have ever enjoyed. The hasty remark that women cannot paint and read made by Charles Tansley gets shattered in very precarious manner: “Charles Tansley used to say that, she remembered, women can’t paint, can’t write” (117). The main theme that stands out is the exploration of the relationship between the different sexes and the struggle of women like Lily to make their mark in a world that still does not accept women as people in their own right. The sea is an important symbol, with its constant movement and potential danger, presumably meaning that life goes on, but not always in the way that we would like it. Lily Briscoe’s picture of Mrs. Ramsay seems to be another important symbol, perhaps pointing to the fact that life can be encapsulated in a work of art, but that again, life goes on, and the chances are that the picture will be relegated to an attic-or that the memories of certain people will eventually be put to the back of one’s mind.

IV. Conclusion

Feminism focuses on existence with women questioning their place in patriarchal society. It examines how males control women and keep them on margin and moreover made to work as subordinate to men in patriarchy. A good understanding of a definition of feminism becomes crucial to give a clear-cut concept of the term and its basic premises. Feminism is a doctrine that holds a belief in sex equality and opposes the sex hierarchy. It presupposes that woman's condition is socially constructed rather than simply predestined by God or nature.

To the Lighthouse is the most autobiographical of Virginia Woolf's novels. It is based on her own childhood experiences, and while it touches on childhood and children's perceptions and desires, it is at its most trenchant when exploring adult relationships, marriage and, indeed, the changing class-structure of its time. The book, *To the Lighthouse* touches on many vital topics, from the battle and personal cost of artistic creativity for women as opposed to their expected roles of wife and mother, to remembrance and struggles to escape the tyrannies of the past. The writer highlights Mr. Ramsay's interpersonal relationship with other family members.

There is a good deal of the family structure of Mrs. Ramsay and further which makes it crystal clear that the role of Mrs. Ramsay is much vital in association with all family members who are with her. Mrs. Ramsay is a warm, maternal and capable figure at the centre of the household, their eight children, an assorted friends and guests among who is the artist Lily Briscoe. Hence the focus is on the central figure, Mrs. Ramsay who deals with all sorts of problems of her family. She proves a good mother who seems to have been doing every thing for sake of her children in particular and betterment and progress for the entire community in general. She never thinks of negative of others since she is maternal in heart and loves humanity. She is

accomplished enough to tackling every sort of up and down. In contrary to her characterization, her husband Mr. Ramsay is much totalitarian and repressive. This is the reason he is somewhat estranged everywhere.

Men uphold the complete world and they rule it as they prefer. They challenge the potentials of women and simply expose their brilliance and supremacy through abuse of the authority. Furthermore, she is much critical about the mannish notion and lens that men use to perceive the world around. In fact men control the entire world and even the mind of women through their economy as comparatively they have ever been authoritative throughout the history. The gold watch symbolizes the economy of men and they attempt to entice women with. The most momentous thing in the novel, *To the Lighthouse* is the female characters come forward and do not hang about static and at leisure every time. Rather they gradually develop mentally and become capable of observing the world in much critical and microscopic manner.

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