UNIT 15 : VIRGINIA WOOLF: *MRS DALLOWAY* II

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- discuss the various possible themes of the novel *Mrs Dalloway*
- describe the different characters and place them in the context of the novel
- explain Woolf's narrative style which refers mostly to the stream of consciousness technique
- discuss the significance of the novel in its own time as well as in the later periods.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the life and works of Virginia Woolf with particular reference to her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In this unit, you will find an opportunity to read more about the themes, characters and narrative technique used by Woolf in the novel. You will note that *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel about the flow of consciousness and awareness, of the life of

existence. Although the sense of consciousness is very strong in this book, one must also consider it to be the result of a sense of solitude, an acute sense of loneliness, an existential sense of boredom and separation and a lack of communication. Woolf clearly understood that a sense of crisis and extremity had engulf the great modern writings.

15.3 READING THE NOVEL

The following subsections will enable you to approach the novel in terms of its various aspects.

15.3.1 Major Themes

While going through the novel, you will find the following themes to be very significant in the novel.

Oppression of Patriarchy :

An underlying theme of the novel is the oppression of patriarchy which leaves not only the women but also the men victimized. Both Clarissa and Septimus are linked by their marginal status in a highly patriarchal English society. Although the thoughts of each are disjointed, they are actually associative. The only difference is that Clarissa has the ability to draw her fragments together which Septimus does not. While doing this, Woolf is actually referring to her own mental breakdown following the death of her parents, and provides her own definition of madness or trauma. In society, it is necessary for the individuals to answer for themselves and their action as responsible and stable identities. That is why perhaps, the social dimension, the 'party' bringing different identities together, gains significance at the climax of the novel.

Following the contemporary feminist debates regarding the position and the status of a woman in a patriarchal society, Woolf has enabled Clarissa to understand herself for herself, and to distinguish 'what is herself' from 'what is not herself' in a chaotic conglomeration of sense-perceptions and images. Clarissa enters

the patriarchal London world which for Woolf is a gendered male and assembles them into a concentrated single image. But most often she withdraws from the masculine world, and seeks support in her own 'attic room'- a room of one's own in which Woolf laid tremendous importance. In this 'attic room', Clarissa is resented as sexually innocent figure without any desire for Richard. However, the idea of an 'attic room' might also be read as an example of characters free from the male world and withdrawn into the female world.

Although Woolf did not consider patriarchy as the source of all evil or believe that evil was gender-related, it was that patriarchy in which one could find the source of injustice, suffering and oppression in society. Her own experience of life made her understand that it is the force of patriarchal authority, which she understood to be the root of social injustice and brutality as well as of individual or domestic unhappiness. Her aesthetic attempts as well as the content of her thought helped her to undermine patriarchal domination and subvert all forms of authoritarianism.



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Virginia Woolf wrote a good deal about women's writing influencing much of modern feminist criticism. Although she never adopted a feminist stance, her continual examination of the problems women writers were facing helped her fellow writers and critics working for the empowerment of the women. She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles in their literary ambitions. She herself was well aware of the restricted education she received. By adopting 'Androgyny', she withdrew from the struggle between male and female sexuality. Her repeated attacks of madness and eventual suicidal attempts suggest that the struggle in her to transcend sexuality actually failed.

The Idea of Androgyny :

In her work “A Room of One's Own” Virginia Woolf refers to the notion of 'Androgyny'. Woolf thought if there are two sexes both male and female in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, or if they are required to be united to derive complete satisfaction and happiness. You should later read that the famous feminist critic Elaine Showalter further defined the idea of androgyny as 'full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements'. Woolf's strategy however was to fuse them to make room for a hybrid identity. *Mrs Dalloway* offers an interesting analysis of the androgynous nature of Clarissa by presenting a number of sexual possibilities situated in the past. Clarissa repeatedly returns to her youth at Bourton and her choice of either Sally Seton, or Peter Walsh, or Richard Dalloway. This helps to explore the possibilities of Clarissa in love with another woman (Sally), with a man (Peter Walsh) who is not 'manly', and another man who epitomises masculinity (Richard). Similarly, in Septimus' admiration of Evans can be seen as an erotic homosexual love resulting in the apparent sexual impotence with his wife Lucrezia. Woolf indirectly affirms that Clarissa has a 'manly' side just as Septimus has a 'womanly' side.

Use of 'Spatial' Aspects :

The 'spatial' character of modernist fiction is perhaps given the most detailed treatment in *Mrs Dalloway*. The inclination of modernist literature towards spatial form means that the readers are supposed to apprehend the works spatially, that means in a moment of time rather than in a sequence. Looking at London in *Mrs Dalloway* we can say that the city plays a major role in the setting of the novel. The Dalloways have a unique place in the London scene. Clarissa's promenade in the city has a profound meaning as a part of her fascination with the city, leading her to mystically communicate herself with the 'locale'-the space at a particular time in one morning. The following lines from the text makes everything clear:

"For having lived in Westminster- how many years now? over

twenty-one feels even in the, midst of the traffic, or walking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity: an indescribable pause: a suspense.. before Big Ben strikes...." However, this social quality of Clarissa's character does not fully explain the other side of the story.

Idea of the Double :

There is another darker side of Clarissa, often exemplified by her sense of boredom and a feeling of futility and occasional thoughts of suicide. This side of Clarissa 's character come to the forefront at her party when Sir William Bradshaw informs of Septimus' suicide-the death of the non-conformist Septimus who failed to secure a place for himself in the vast multitudes of London and who ended his life by jumping out of his window of his Bloomsbury apartments. Preoccupied with the thoughts of Septimus she walks to the window, she too could feel an ***'epiphany'*** on the futility of life: "Clarissa felt somehow very like him-the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it: thrown it away. The clock was striking." But she had to move back to the party as she could not but conform to the social conduct of which she was a part. Many critics even feel that Clarissa is Septimus' double. But she does not act like Septimus only because her social life does not allow her to become a non-conformist like Septimus.



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Epiphany **:** The term originally denotes the festival commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi. The feast is observed on January 6th 'Twelfth Night', the Festival of the three kings. More generally the term denotes the presence of God in the world. It was however, James Joyce who gave this word a particular literary meaning in his novel *Stephen Hero* which later became his most acclaimed novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* published in 1916.

Use of Time and Space :

The fact is that retrospect and anticipation constitute the very essence of consciousness at any specific time. In other words, the relation of consciousness to time is not the one of events to time, but are independent of any chronological sequence. Moreover, the quality of an experience of any new phenomenon is conditioned by a group of similar experiences scattered through past time, the association of which with the present experience is what makes the present experience what it is. The modern writers, to avoid the clumsiness of this method, were opting out for a more fluid technique which will enable them to utilise constantly those ever resent contacts with the past constituting the very stuff of consciousness. It was the result of such a realisation that the Stream of Consciousness technique was introduced into fictions.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, if we are to judge it by its chronological time scheme, is a story of one day in the life of a middle-aged woman. But it is not exactly that. The story embraces much of Clarissa's or Mrs. Dalloway's past as well as the present making it easier for us to look at the story as more than just a day's activity. Thus, the inclusion of so much of Clarissa's past life is made possible by the way in which her ever-changing state of mind is described. The time sequence is marked by the most common devises as the striking of the clock. Fixing her character physically at a given point of time and space, Woolf is free to follow the character's 'Stream of Consciousness' up and down the line of thought. The greatness of a novel like *Mrs Dalloway* can be explained more successfully by a metaphor that its significance lies in the tributaries explored rather than in the mainstream.



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You should note that in her essay entitled "Modern Fiction" (1919) Woolf decried the

'materialists' for writing on 'the unimportant things' making the transitory appear everlasting and significant. Going against the mass of facts presented by the realists, Woolf said that the interests for modernist authors 'lie very likely in the dark places of psychology'. She further added thus, "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions-trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all side they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms."

Woolf's another key essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924) read like this- 'in or about December, 1910, human nature changed'. Woolf believed that the purpose of the novel was to represent character. She further added that with the coming of the new novelists there will be revolutionary change: "The literary convention of the time is so artificial…that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage, and the strong are led to destroy the very foundations and rules of literary society. Signs of this are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated, syntax disintegrated." Such ideas were to tremendously affect Woolf's writings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss the theme of patriarchal pressure explicit in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Q 2: How does time function in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*?

Q 3: How did Virginia Woolf influence modern feminist writings?

15.3.2 Major Characters

Virginia Woolf realised that a psychologically accurate account of what a man/woman is at a given moment cannot be provided through the traditional methods. Subsequently, she became interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments but which

are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature independent of any given time. Thus, the problem of character portrayal became very central to Stream of Consciousness fiction like *Mrs Dalloway*. The following are the most important characters in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Clarissa Dalloway :

The central character in the novel is perhaps Clarissa Dalloway herself. She is 52 years of age and has been seriously weakened by influenza as the novel opens. She has been at a loss throughout her life. But she is also the hostess of an upper middle class English life, herself being the wife of an Imperial Officer Richard Dalloway. However, the affairs of the husband do not interest her. But her social life does make sense as it gives meaning to her existence. Peter Walsh, who wanted to marry her thirty years ago, reappears. In fact, Clarissa rediscovers herself and her unifying wholeness while walking through London. But her sense of wholeness is never complete as the evening party is interrupted by death. Throughout the book she is conscious of the confined spaces of her life. In her recollection of the past through her presence the moments of choosing between Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway come to the forefront. She sleeps alone in an attic room of her house which frequently reminds her of some wholeness lost. Her relationship with Sally Saton with whom she had half fallen in love also goes unfulfilled. Clarissa does not have any alternative and she is compelled to be tied to the world of power and government, and simply remains to be the wife of Richard Dalloway. To Peter she was a snob and to Richard she was childish.

Richard Dalloway :

Richard Dalloway is the husband of Clarissa. He is an important Conservative Member of the Parliament who is always busy with public affairs and having little concern for his wife. Since the beginning of their married life, both of them are living a life of freedom and Clarissa never felt it necessary to ask her husband whether he was in a committee or conducting a meeting somewhere even if she had needed him beside her.

Peter Walsh :

Peter Walsh is another significant character of the novel. Once he was in love with Clarissa. He is coming to the party Clarissa has organised in the evening. It was by no means an accident that he had been in India for twenty years and has now arrived at London after a lapse of five years. His long absence has intensified his impressions on the people and more generally on London. For him now people look different, and unlike the pre-war London, there is a new a sense of freedom and tolerance. He feels that now, just like in India, he could fall in love with every woman in London. But, the post war London also makes Peter aware of his failure, as at the age of fifty three he has returned to London to look for a job. But although Peter Walsh was a failure he had a unique power of seeing through the shallowness and snobbery of the London upper class people. After meeting Clarissa in the morning, Peter goes to Regent's Park where he falls asleep on a bench. Waking up he remembers his unhappy days when he was hopelessly in love with Clarissa who callously rejected him.

Sir William Bradshaw :

Bradshaw is the doctor to whom Rezia brings Septimus for consulting the reasons of his eccentric and strange behaviour. Overconfident of his own vision of life, Bradshaw diagnoses Septimus as having lost the sense of 'proportion' and advises "rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books; without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stones six comes out weighing twelve." What could be funnier than this for a doctor to deny the validity of the tormented experience and to impose his own will upon those who suffer. Woolf chose the character of Bradshaw from her own experience of the doctors who had treated her during the time of her mental breakdown. The idea was perhaps to satirise those doctors she herself experienced. Bradshaw turned out to be a failure as Septimus rather than to surrender to Bradshaw "had thrown himself from a window".

Septimus :

Introduction of Septimus Warren Smith helped Woolf in creating a story of two worlds connected indirectly. Unlike Clarissa who extolled the contemporary public life of London, Septimus became the embodiment of another London wracked and devastated by the World War. This is one of the most significant aspects of the novel. Like many representative figures of the postwar generation, Septimus belongs to what we can call the 'tragic generation' which the novel wants to explore. Being a figure of fragmented consciousness in a different way from Clarissa, Septimus represents a world of violent forces and defeat.

The disturbance of Septimus's consciousness is also linked with his sexuality as he represses his desire for his officer Evans and cannot even contemplate sex with his wife who constantly dreams of having children. It is quite ironical that Septimus who is presented as a coward fearing death, takes his own life. Although he never wanted to die, suicide was the only resort for defeating the world represented by the so-called psychiatrist William Bradshaw who always proclaimed that 'health is proportion'. The world which Septimus represents also demands his death. It is a masculine culture surrounding him in war memories, doctors, capitalists and politicians. So, suffering from the ***shell-shock***, Septimus is obsessed with the thoughts of death and suicide. His Italian wife Rezia, following the doctor's advice, is constantly trying to make Septimus feel interested in the immediate surroundings and London with its variety.



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***Shell-Shock* :** Shell-shock became a pertinent issue in British Psychiatry during 1920s. It is 'a condition of alternate moods of apathy and high excitement, with very quick reaction to sudden happenings and emergencies but without any capacity for thinking. It thus refers to the brutal realities of the World War I. Shell-shock, for many

physicians, meant cowardice or disobedience. And it was actually because of Shell-shock that the Freudian analysis through neurosis and the unconscious gained popularity.

Lucrezia :

Lucrezia is the Italian wife of Septimus Warren Smith. She is also referred to as Rezia in this novel. It is quite natural for Rezia to feel alienated in a strange city like London with a mentally disturbed husband. She begins comparing her Italy with London. Unlike in Italy where in the evening the streets are always crowded with people talking and merry-making, here in London, she is frequently confronted with the lonely and ordinary everyday life tortured and bulled by "this malignant torturer"- her demented husband. She is hopelessly seen trying to come to live in this awful city of London. We cannot but sympathise with her for the miseries she has undergone. She is left helpless once again by the death of her husband Septimus.

Sally Saton :

The usual image of Sally can be seen as someone sitting on the floor, smoking, saying she was descended from Marie Antoinette and so on. She happened to be so utterly crude that Clarissa's family could not accept her and thought her untidy. Sally taught Clarissa about life, sex, men, and politics, things from which she was shielded at Bourton, her home before marriage. She had spent a considerable time with Clarissa before her marriage. Clarissa's feelings for Sally were protective and pure. Sally brought excitements into Clarissa's life. In several nights, Sally dined with them. Sally went out with Clarissa for walking, stopped to pick a flower and kissed Clarissa on the lips. In another sense, Sally could make her forget the need for a man to a great extent. Sally Saton had unexpectedly married a rich man and lived in a big house. She makes her presence felt once again in the evening party of Clarissa.

Elizabeth :

Elizabeth, the seventeen year old daughter of the Dalloways, has her own way of living life. She spends much of the time with Miss Kilman. She likes freedom. Boarding a bus and taking a seat on top she was "delighted to be free". She enjoys going out to the remote parts of London and finds it surprising to see the city people preoccupied with trivial chattering, with thoughts of ships, business, law, administration and so on. She knows that her mother would not like her to walk by herself in strange parts of London, but then, at this moment, her mother seemed to Elizabeth "extremely immature, like a child, attached to dolls, to old slippers." Elizabeth's adventure throughout London is regarded as a radical step towards her maturity and that gets reflected in the way she appears at the evening party making everyone mesmerized as even her father failed to recognise her changed appearance at first.

Miss Kilman :

Miss Kilman is presented as the tutor of Elizabeth. But she is not only her teacher but also her best companion and mentor. She takes Elizabeth to shopping, to the remote places of London as Elizabeth likes to roam about. This arouses much concern in Mrs Dalloway as this has further alienated Elizabeth from the parents. Also found in her a kind of resentment of wealth and class comfort of a family like that of the Dalloways. Her religious enthusiasm serves as the vehicle for both expressing and containing her overwhelming sense of embittered self pity and resentment. Mrs Dalloway is always repelled by Miss Kilman not because of her baleful influence on Elizabeth but also because of her attitude, her gait and her dress codes. She is gracious and self-effacing with a sense that the personal is always better than the doctrinal. Miss Kilman, for Clarissa is one who 'had taken her daughter from her'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: What kind of a character is Mrs Dalloway?

Q5: What is so specific about characterisation in Virginia Woolf?

Q 6: Explain the significance of the character of Septimus in the novel.

15.3.3 Narrative Style

You have read that Virginia Woolf made it customary to maintain diaries since 1915 which continued up to the time of her death in 1941. Actually, it was through her diaries, letters, and notebooks that she tried to explain her writing methods. Even the accounts she presents in her diaries about the composition of the novel provides a clear idea regarding the genealogy of the novel.

"Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges: Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning-fresh as if issued to children on a beach."

This is how the novel begins. This makes it clear that although Mrs Dalloway is about to go out, she is also thinking. But the style in which her thoughts are reported puts them and her at an ironic distance-"Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself", the first sentence of the novel as well as that of the authorial narrator, does not clearly explain who Mrs Dalloway is or why she needed to buy flowers. The sudden plunge of the readers into the middle of an ongoing city life typifies the presentation of the consciousness as a 'stream'. The very next sentence "For Lucy had her work cut out for her", moves the focus of the narrative into the character's mind by adopting a free indirect style, omitting the intrusive authorial voice. The exclamations like, "What a lark! What a plunge!" look more like interior monologue, but they are not the character's response to the

Westminster morning; rather Clarissa is actually remembering, how at the age of eighteen she had remembered herself as a child. Or we can look at it in a different way. The image "fresh as if issued to children on a beach", reminds her of how the metaphors of children larking in the sea would come to her mind as she 'plunged' into the fresh air of the summer morning at Burton where she is supposed to meet someone called Peter Walsh. Hence, the actual and the metaphorical, time present and time past both interact and interweave in the sentences each thought or memory insisting the next. But realistically enough, Clarissa cannot always trust her memory as she said, "'Musing among the vegetables?'- was that it? - 'I prefer men to cauliflowers'- was that it?"). This is what makes the style of the novel playful adding to its strength as a modernist novel.

In 1919, came out Virginia Woolf's essay “Modern Fiction” in which Woolf appealed her contemporary writers for a more inward kind of action, a kind of novel which should not conform to the norms of old conventions and chronologies. However, to understand the works of Woolf, we must try to conceptualise the term "Stream of Consciousness" which was originally used by the psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), to describe the chaotic, ceaseless and multileveled flow that characterises human mind. Its manifestations in the world of fictions can be perceived by the presence of interior monologues which help in capturing the exact nature of the flow. She wrote in her essay:

"If a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style…Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged: but a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumcised spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible."

This technique is made much more complex by Woolf's peculiar handling of the notion of time. It is seen that throughout the novel she contrasts public time with private time. In the external public time only a minute may have passed but in internal private time of the characters, it might have passed several minutes. Hence, Woolf's technique distinguished between temporal duration in the mind and chronological common time in the world once again asserting the significance of the individual against the social.

Her claim-"I substantiate, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality-its cheapness" clearly explains her distrust in materialism and more specifically fictional realism. And it was finally in the essay - “Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1924) where she made the proclamation that reality is not a matter of fact but an aesthetic and metaphysical question. Such an understanding of realism made it possible for her to put some newness in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. In October, 1923 she also noted, " I took a year's groping to discover what I call my tunneling process, by which I tell the past in installments, as I have need of it…". There is no denying the fact that Woolf's method of narrating through consciousness owes much to her contemporary James Joyce. But she also differs from Joyce in presenting the flow of consciousness as the author's own sense of aesthetic creation.

Use of Images and Symbols :

It has been unanimously accepted by the critics that the city or the 'locale' bears a specific significance in modernist novels. Because the identity of the city is also related to the identity of the people inhabiting that city. On the basis of this fact, the city of London plays a very significant role. Clarissa Dalloway's promenade through the London streets on a specific June morning, in a way defines her social character. The various associations and reminiscences which we find during her walk determine her status as one belonging to the English upper class of the city of London, known for its industrial growth and cultural superiority. She is actually going to buy flowers in Bond street which became the most expensive shopping centre of London at that time.

London, just like a character, looms large in the novel. The novel is set in a great imperial city which survived after the war. It was Clarissa's social London as well as the London which “swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith." London is a city with its legendary past and history. It is a city that both defeats and destroys. It is also a city of great parks, military parades, of royalty power and pride. "A splendid achievement on its own way, after all, London: the season: civilisation,' thinks Peter Walsh as he walks through it, following a girl who has caught his attention in the crowd. It is also a city of dull buildings and basement railings that swallows up people like Septimus Warren Smith. Although the two central characters Clarissa and Septimus never meet each other, the city, the streets, the ringing of the Big Ben connect them together.

In the story line of the novel the clock Big Ben is equally significant. Big Ben as a symbol of eternal time as well as of imperial power mark out the seventeen hours in which the story begins and ends. The clock in a way also links the characters in a common time. Woolf here presents instances of both exterior time and interior time-the exterior represented by the Big Ben and the interior by the consciousness of the characters as the present flows into the past. In this novel, the notion of time is superficially structured around the division of the clock. Yet, time connects the different characters by forming links across different spaces.

The aeroplane flying over the city reminds us of the recent World War as well as the modern technological growth. The car on the streets reassures the presence of the rich crowds, and the voices of authority. The World War in fact haunts the novel in different ways as Septimus imagines the world as a battle field. The other basic images and symbols include the flowers, Peter's pen-knife, the tolling of clocks, the ominous bedclothes in Clarissa's attic room and so on. But underlying all these is the strong sense of a world changed by modernity itself.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is meant by the term 'Stream of Consciousness'?

Q 8: What does Woolf write about the flow of consciousness in her essay "Modern Fiction"?

Q 9: What role does the city of London play in the novel?

15.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

With the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* and the other novels that followed, Woolf became the most representative woman writer of fictional modernism in the first half of the 20th century. She was a writer who could be compared with Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide or William Faulkner and their experimental endeavours. Her contemporary friend E. M. Forster clearly summarises her fictional attempts like this: "She is always stretching out from her enchanted tree and snatching bits from the flux of daily life as they float past, and out of these bits she builds novels." By the time of the World War II, her works came to be recognised as a dominant strand in the modernist movement. However, 1940s and 1950s demanded another chronicle of historical change, and a tendency to return to social realism in contemporary novel writings sent Woolf's reputation into the sideline. There was a reaction against the entire Bloomsbury Group. To them Woolf was not only the representative writer of what they had dismissively called the 'experimental novels' which were more concerned with private affairs of the elite class, but also of the dominance of a social caste in the British literary scenario and claimed the rights of aesthetic understanding to itself.

However, the most constructive feminist attack on Virginia Woolf came in the form of Elaine Showalter's rejection of Woolf in her “Virginia Woolf and the Flight to Androgyny”. Showalter claims that Woolf's concept of androgyny in her “A Room of One's Own” was a 'myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.' She further claimed 'Woolf's

wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience.' Replying to the charges brought by Showalter, Toril Moi seeks to rescue Woolf's status as a modern writer by showing how Woolf succeeds in producing something which we can call a 'deconstructive' form of writing. Moi writes that in her own textual practice "Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning.[For this you can refer and read Toril Moi's essay “Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf”, in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*.]

Later popular reception of Woolf resulted in the film version of *Mrs Dalloway* made in 1997 by Dutch feminist film director Marleen Gorris. After that, number of film versions of the novels of Woolf began to increase.



15.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the novel *Mrs Dalloway* in terms of its different aspects like themes, characters and narrative techniques. Although one cannot find any story in the conventional sense, the novel presents an extraordinary example of modern fiction by exploring and asserting the relevance of certain very crucial and essential states of human sensitivity and intensity. Besides, having some discussions of the various important themes of the novel, we have also tried to explore the various characters to know how they behave and react in the novel. You have also learnt that the novels of Virginia Woolf should be studied in the context of the 'Stream of Consciousness' which is a techniques to explain the flow of consciousness as reflected in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.



15.6 FURTHER READING

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4) Lodge, David. (1991). *The Art of Fiction*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 1991.

5) Peck, John & Martin Coyle. (2002). *Literary Terms and Criticism*. Palgrave.

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7) Woolf, Virginia. (2000). *Mrs Dalloway*. New Delhi: UBSPD.

15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The oppression of patriarchy victimises women and men alike. Both Clarissa and Septimus are linked by their marginal status in a highly patriarchal English society. Although the thoughts of each are disjointed, their experiences are actually associative. Following the contemporary feminist debates regarding the position and the status of a woman in a patriarchal society, Woolf has enabled Clarissa to understand herself for herself, and to distinguish 'what is herself' from 'what is not herself' in a patriarchal society.

Ans to Q No 2: In *Mrs Dalloway*, if we are to judge it by its chronological time scheme, is a story of one day in the life of a middle-aged woman. But it is not exactly that. The story embraces much of Clarissa's or Mrs Dalloway's past as well as the present making it easier for us to look at the story as more than just a day's activity. Thus, the inclusion of so much of Clarissa'a past life is made possible by the way in which her ever-changing state of mind is described. The time sequence is marked by the most common devises as the striking of the clock.

Ans to Q No 3: Virginia Woolf wrote a good deal about women's writing influencing much of modern feminist criticism. Although she never adopted a feminist stance, her continual examination of the problems women writers were facing helped her fellow writers and critics working for the empowerment of the women. By adopting 'Androgyny', she withdrew from the struggle between male and female sexuality. Her

repeated attacks of madness and eventual suicidal attempts suggest that the struggle in her to transcend sexuality actually failed.

Ans to Q No 4: Mrs Dalloway or Clarissa Dalloway is the central character of the novel. She is 52 years of age and has been seriously weakened by influenza when the novel opens. She has been at a loss throughout her life. But she is also the hostess of an upper middle class English life. But her social life does make sense as it gives meaning to her existence.

Ans to Q No 5: Virginia Woolf realised that a psychologically accurate account of what a man/woman is at a given moment cannot be provided through the traditional methods. She became interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments but which are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature independent of any given time.

Ans to Q No 6: Unlike Clarissa who extolled the contemporary public life of London, Septimus became the embodiment of another London wracked and devastated by the World War. Septimus belongs to what we can call the 'tragic generation'. Being a figure of fragmented consciousness in a different way from Clarissa's, Septimus represents a world of violent forces and defeat.

Ans to Q No 7: The term "Stream of Consciousness" was originally used by the psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), to describe the chaotic, ceaseless and multi-leveled flow that characterises human mind. Its manifestations in the world of fictions can be perceived by the presence of interior monologues which help in capturing the exact nature of the flow.

Ans to Q No 8: "If a writer were a free man and not a slave , if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style…Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged: but a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."

Ans to Q No 9: The city of London plays a very significant role. Clarissa Dalloway's promenade through the London Streets on a specific June morning, in a way defines her social character. She is buying flowers in Bond Street which became the most expensive shopping center of London at that time. Thus, post war London, just like a character, looms large in the novel. But, it is also a city of dull buildings and basement railings that swallows up people like Septimus Warren Smith.



15.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1. How does Virginia Woolf expose the patriarchal character of the society in which she lived in terms of the various male characters in the novel?

Q 2. Do you think that a 'character' is so important in modernist fiction?

Q 3. *Mrs Dalloway* is not 'being' but 'becoming'. Comment from your reading of the novel.

Q 4. Comment on the narrative techniques used by Virginia Woolf in writing the novel.

Q 5. What, according to you, is the significance of what Woolf said in her essay "Modern Fiction"? Discuss with reference to the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Q 6. Why do you think that a character is so important in modernist novels?

Q 7. What are the similarities in the characters of Clarissa and Septimus?

Q 8. What ideas of narrative techniques do you find significant in *Mrs Dalloway*?

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