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TO THE LIGHTHOUSE AS A ECOFEMINIST TEXT

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Abstract

Human mind colossal devastation, throttled hopes, bloodshed, disorderly human life, dilapidated spirit, fragmented faith was opened in society after the lethal attack of two world wars. The world war opened new gateways of literary expressions. Society underwent drastic change and new modes of literary writings questioned human order of mind, existence, social norms, values and gender biasness. Undoubtedly, with the advent of Modernism from 1950's onward a naked realism came forth. It enlightened the mind of intellectual writers, these sects of writers seek forward new and multifaceted interpretation of distinct issues prevailing in society. The Wasteland (1922), To the Lighthouse (1927), Ulysses (1922) were a few prominent benchmarks and repository to mark distinct traits of modernism, realism, and reality. With so many rapid changes that took in society man was totally disconnected with nature which can actually add harmony in fragmentary human life. In this purview the present paper decodes the novel, 'To the Lighthouse,' in a new perspective of ecofeministic consciousness. The paper analyses the main character the Ramsay couple and Lily Briscoe. Mr. Ramsay mostly ignores natural law whereas her wife Mrs. Ramsay enjoys the beauty of nature, which in return makes her a pleasant and happy personality; whereas Lily alienates herself from nature, which makes her puzzled. The novel is further explored in terms of ecofeministic relationship between man and woman, the differences in the values of the Ramsay couple, and how in the end Woolf conveys the significance of having harmony between nature and humans and equality between men and women.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Nature, Man, Woman, Equality, Harmony

To the Lighthouse as a Ecofeminist Text

- Dr. Suruchi Upadhyay

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was an outstanding British novelist. During the era she started writing there were other prominent novelists as E.M. Forster, Graham Greene, George Orwell, John Steinbeck, Aldous Huxley, H.G. Wells, T.S. Eliot and others who were writing on different aspects and issues that were latent and burning in society. Virginia Woolf preferred to take a distinct strain to write upon, she pioneered in her work inner shades of mind and articulated issues of females. Her essays, book reviews, and novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* (1938).

During the twentieth century fictional writing went through a tremendous change and a lot of novelists were writing and experimenting with different ways of writing, to make people aware of realities after post world war. Virginia Woolf's novel depicts to portray the inner layers of human mind. Apart from it, there were satires on political and social hypocrisies written by George Orwell, there were novels written on modern and political issues of modern world by Graham Greene, spiritual bankruptcy by Aldous Huxley, struggle for acceptance between man and woman by E.M. Forster, torn sexuality issues and emotional health issues by D.H. Lawrence, but Virginia Woolf chose to depict a unique sensitivity and her novels are marked with stream of consciousness which came by Psychologist William James in the 19th century.

Undoubtedly, the *Lighthouse* can be interpreted in several ways. The story line of the novel is divided into three structural divisions: *The Window*, *Time Passes*, and *To the Lighthouse*. Succinctly, the *Window* shows a gateway and a glimpse of a married couple Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the gap that exists between them, their wish to visit the Lighthouse which could not be fulfilled due to bad weather. The second part, *Time Passes*, shows the demise of Mrs. Ramsay, the war broke out, the guests who have arrived they have left, and gradual changes and disconnection happen in Mr. Ramsay and the last part reconciliation and

fulfillment of family visit to the lighthouse and disintegration and disconnection that happened at several ends leads to a pacifying end.

The novel is interpreted in a different parameter as a Ecofeminist text. The word Ecofeminism was first coined by French writer Françoise d' Aubertin in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (1974). It is interpreted to analyse relationship between (human and natural world). Due to war, industrialisation, technological advancements how man was disconnected with nature, which added more chaos, not only in personal life but to maintain harmony with society and people all around. Irrespective of gender, man disconnection brought forth mental restlessness, it questions the basic harmony and order that existed in nature. Ecofeminism examines the connection between women and nature, between women and men, how women when connected with nature have more holistic vision, endurance and patience, merit of intuition and commitment, and their awareness to nature makes them better, more compassionate and genuine nurturers.

Ecofeminists discuss and talk about when women are dominated and unjust is done to them, how it affects them, how women and environment are deeply connected, while men were characterized as rational, ordered, they can direct and use women and can develop them. Theologian Rosemary Ruther asserts that all women acknowledge and work to end the domination of nature. They all should work towards their liberation. Women and environmentalists continue to work together to end patriarchal system, control unequal socio-economic order and the ecofeminists talk about aggressive domination, masculinity, productivity, marginalized oppression, racism, class, sexuality, celebration of mother nature as caretaker and so on.

The Ecofeminist theory is an attempt to add on a new perspective and establish new and regenerate lost relationship with nature. *To the Lighthouse* was received and interpreted differently by abroad scholars. The novel is famous as modern novel, stream-of-consciousness novel, for its various symbols, feminist novel, and can be further interpreted in various ways. Hui Jingrui assumed *Lighthouse* can be the embodiment of the harmonious relationship between men and women. Ferhat Ordu and Murat Karakas, 'To the lighthouse was Woolf's most influential work from the perspective of feminist criticism.

Woolf's tries to solve the gender identity problem, focus on the struggle of modern woman to locate her identity in dominant patriarchal set up.

Wang Nan indicated Woolf tried to awaken women's consciousness , encouraging them to think independently and to achieve their own integrity. He asserted that potential topics such as culture, gender, race, can be dug from the novel to clearly understand the important relationship between human and nature, between men and women. Xin Linping thought that ecofeminist literary criticism was a new way of criticism and it focused on the relationship between women's domination and natural domination and it provided constantly new perspective for people to understand literary work. Only in a new vein the novel can be casted a fresh look by tracing and looking it as text of Ecofeminist Study. The novel echoes traces of harmonious existence between human being and nature.

As per environmentalist the basic factor that caused ecological problem is 'anthropocentrism' the ecological crisis 'androcentricism' or patriarchal society , as people try to control nature and they even go beyond which can be easily seen from Mr. Ramsay. Mr . Ramsay is a rational man, he is leading member in the family and a dominant father. Mrs. Ramsay promises to his son James that they will visit the lighthouse, but Mr. Ramsay disagrees as he observes and decides the weather conditions will not be fruitful. Mr. Ramsay never adjust as per others wish. This led to discord between father and son. Mr. Ramsay thinks he can transcend nature and constantly encourage others to struggle and conquer nature. He identifies with patriarchal system that exists in society, where man thinks he has a power to control and manage everything. As per point of view of ecofeminism women are closely connected with nature, as nature nurtures, similarly a woman has a capacity to nurture. There is contrast of attitude between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, where Mr. Ramsay is indifferent towards nature and hence he is rigid, dominant and tries to control everything, where as Mrs. Ramsay enjoys little kindness of nature.

Mrs. Ramsay seemed to raise herself with an effort and at once to pour into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were fused into force, burning and illuminating. (13). She cares about her husband's feelings and mood. What nature does to human beings, similarly females can

provide support and energy to males. Mrs. Ramsay,' seems to fold herself together, one pelat closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon herself." (13). She feels exhausted after consoling and listening to Mr. Ramsay.

There is another important character Lily Briscoe. She is a female painter and shown as a different character from rest of the women. She is a woman who shows no interest in topics like family, marriage. During that era women cannot be equal to men, she cannot pursue career as men, painting is a hobby that exclusively belongs to men, but Lily Briscoe opposes patriarch system, she is not willing to marry either after insisting pursual of Mrs. Ramsay, she prefers to pursue her hobby of painting. In this process of passion, she alienates herself from nature and that bring forth a sense of rigidity in her. She is not flexible, and restricts her imagination to artistic creation. As Lily disconnect from nature she fails to harmonise and integrate well, she fails to finish her painting, she fails to locate tree in her painting, and after 10 years of gap when she understand and connect with nature, a solace and harmony breeds in her. She is able to complete her painting, and able to paste the tree in her painting. She achieves self-reconciliation. When Lily Briscoe, connects with nature, her approach towards everything changes gradually.

Coming back to the relationship between men and women in relation to Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, another interesting insight is drawn and understood from Ecofeminist perspective. The differences that exist between these two opposite gender is due to inbuilt gap that exist in their personalities. Women being nurturer, bearer, caretaker, family runner, have more forbearance tolerance and patience as compared to men. Whereas, men in general are supposed to be more rational, provider, seeing society more are considered to be more aggressive and dominant. These binary gaps and construct are being built by society which actually controls both men and women. These biased concept creates a great clash in any individual who is exiting in contrary are fails to conform these already floating social norms. Mr . Ramsay is preoccupied with his philosophy, thinking, and thinks he has achieved a lot in his academic career. The dominant way he communicates with his wife and children shows his arrogance. He thinks his wife knowledge is limited and comment on

short sighted views of women. This brings a gap in their understanding, as he loses his temper and complaints against his wife personality .

Whereas Mrs. Ramsay respects her husband, she can foresee different mood patterns in him and adjust and respond as per his mood. Her gradual adaptation shows her close affinity with nature. In long run she is tired, ' She feels, ' She was nothing but a sponge sapped full of human emotions." 13

Mrs. Ramsay fails to show her inner world, although several time Mr. Ramsay crushed her self esteem. Mrs. Ramsay suffers personally, she sacrifice , but tries to meet her husband's needs. With the passage of time she break up and dies. Mrs. Ramsay's death make Mr. Ramsay realized what he had lost, their was no one to listen to him, there was no one to give me assurance and encouragement, he realized he failed to recognize the merits of woman. Even harmonious sexual relationship can be only possible between men and women when from ecological perspective the distinct drive of men and women can be understood, otherwise living together and creating a nuisance will go hand in hand, which invite mental incompatibilities.

There is a similar affinity between Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay as both are strong willed and independent from mind. They both are disconnected from nature and henceforth rigid Lily pursue independent dreams in spite of being a woman and even she gives a challenge to Mr. Ramsay who believes women can neither paint nor write. Even Mr. Bankes failed to recognize her dreams. Lily even admires Mr. Ramsay's intelligence and can objectively comment on his merits and demerits. Gradually in the end of the novel, there is a change is Lily Briscoe outlook, she shows more flexibility, and sympathise with Mr. Ramsay. They both change, Mr. Ramsay started respecting female, and lily being connected with Nature becomes more adaptable and flexible.Lily feminist outlook bring forth more compassion and sympathy for Mr. Ramsay. Lily's change outlook is a reflection of ecofeminism , it even shows if men and women harmonise well, they can make life better and peaceful, they can live in harmony.

Mr. Ramsay's rigidity is even lessened as he thinks by achieving great achievement he may be remembered forever, but realizes nothing is eternal in nature, nature has its own rules and laws, there are no theories in nature over there different mechanism operates, in later part of the novel, Mr. Ramsay realized the actual needs of his wife and his failure to recognize her inner world. It highlights the harmonious ecofeminist relationship is very important in between two opposite genders in marriage.

The novel shows the gap between two genders, the patriarch set up in society, how harmony can create a balance between men/ women / nature will yield productive outcome in society, how men and women if harmonise better may then offer a real solution to now a day's issues and dichotomies of life .

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