

“Fallen” to New Women: Reflection on the Social Condition of  
Women in Light of Modernist Expression in the Novels of Virginia  
Woolf and Kate Chopin

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in English

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**Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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**Approval**

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## Abstract

The main focus of my thesis is that I want to analyze the situation and the position of women in the society of late 19th and early 20th century in light of modernist expression and how the then society shaped women's lives by its patriarchal norms, sexual repression and ideologies of gender. I will also represent and compare women's situation through both of the writers' works and show their different ideas in terms of women's freedom and the norms of society and how the position of women changes over the time.

Women in the 19th and 20th century lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. Their position in the society was very much limited along with their rights. The society unveils gender hegemony, which governs what is most beneficial to their genre, with the majority of men belonging to the public sphere, playing an active role in their society, and the majority of women belonging to the private sphere, taking care of domestic matters. I will try to reflect in my paper how Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin portrayed this conventional society where women's lives were shaped by the patriarchal society. Besides, as modernist writers, Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin also portrayed their thoughts using the modernist expressions in their writings to show the evolution of the characters. In Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, she shows Mrs. Dalloway's character evolution through the concept of 'stream of consciousness'. In literature, stream of consciousness refers to a narrative technique that recounts events as they occur in the characters' minds. Through this method Virginia Woolf tries to depict the conscious and subconscious thoughts of her character and how her situation affects her individually. Kate Chopin in her novel *The Awakening*, tries to bring up the protagonists Edna Pontellier's sense of realization about freedom using the concept of 'epiphany'. Epiphany is a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization which enables the characters to realize their life's interests. Kate Chopin tries to bring up the protagonist's ultimate realization about her freedom from the societal norms and from

everything which hinders her self-growth through her epiphany. In the paper, I will focus on the technique of 'stream of consciousness' and the concept of 'epiphany' to show how it helps the protagonists to finally realize their own worth, also how it helps them to free themselves from the so called societal norms.

Therefore, the paper aims to portray the protagonists' character evolution from 'fallen women' to 'new women' through the modernist expressions of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany' which will reflect their struggle, sacrifice and dedication to change their position in the patriarchal society along with their success to overcome it.

**Keywords:** Stream of consciousness, Epiphany, Women, Patriarchy, Society.

### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my beloved mother, Aleya Begum whom I miss every second of my life. I sincerely pray to Allah and hope that you are in a better place now and waiting to meet you soon there. I love you Ammu.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are two of the most prosperous periods in English literature. Not only English Literature attains its pinnacle but also many social, political and economical changes took place in this period. Despite the great extent of progress, women's rights were still limited during this period. Women were mostly expected to obey their fathers and husbands' instructions. At that time, there were very few options for occupations. Women in the society did not have the freedom to select what they wanted to do with their lives; instead, they had to follow their father or husband and stay inside the constraints of their family. The society was heavily dominated by men, and therefore, middle class and lower class women stayed at home to take care for their children and manage the family. Women were basically controlled by men and the society which is named as 'patriarchal society'. Here "Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. Feminists mainly use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women" (Sultana 2). Patriarchy is more than a phrase in this scenario. It is a concept that feminists employ to help readers understand the realities of women which implies that, "man holds power in all the important institutions of the society and that women are deprived of access to such power" (3). Female education was one of the most controversial issues during that time. It is because educating girls can change women's position in the society which can be a threat to men and the man-made so-called norms. Thus, rather than receiving an education, girls should be trained how to cook, sew, and take care of the children. These are the common scenario of a patriarchal society. Though there were differences among the upper class, middle class and lower class women. Upper class women

were expected to be well-educated, and they spent most of their time attending tea parties, knitting and maintaining social communication with the other elite women in the society. Their duties included appropriately instructing their servants and training upper-class young girls to become like them whereas middle class women were expected to please only their husbands and take care of children and household chores. They had no right to have education or think about their career and they are supposed to confine themselves within the four walled house. Lower class women labored in factories to help the Industrial Revolution progress, but they had no pay rights. They do not even receive the equal pay as men and the top of that they were supposed to give their little earning to their husbands and fathers obediently at the end of the day. This scenario goes under the terminology of gender based deprivation and male dominance. Abeda Sultana in this sense mentions that, “patriarchy describes the institutionalized system of male dominance” (3). This elaborates the connection of the situation that, being inferior in gender stated by the patriarchal system, women are always taken for granted so that they can be dominated by their male counterparts whether it is in their own family or in their workplace. The condition of women in the society of 19th and 20th century is well portrayed in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. Both the writer very carefully and clearly represented the then scenario of women in the society along with the modernist expressions. Virginia Woolf reveal Mrs. Dalloway’s self-evolution using the narrative technique of ‘stream of consciousness’ and Kate Chopin reveal Edna Pontellier’s character evolution through the technique of ‘epiphany’. The technique of ‘stream of consciousness and ‘epiphany’ play a significant role in the case of the both characters development. It shows how their situation changes through their self-realization. As both of the writers belong to the same period and experienced similar structures of domination from the then patriarchal society, they were able

to show the psychological and external sufferings of women living a confined life where they deprived of voices and the position in the society in their novels.

Virginia Woolf was born on January 26, 1882, into a well-educated and sophisticated family in London. She was a notable figure in British intellectual culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She is also well recognized for her militant writings against patriarchy in her time, as well as her status as a leading modernist writer, though her subversion of patriarchal norms encompassed the problems a writer must face in attempting to subvert the male narratorial voice in literature. Rachel Duplesis shares his views regarding this in his article titled, "Breaking the Sentence, Breaking the Sequence" from the book *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. According to Duplesis,

The sentence broken is one that expresses the ridicule, the censure, the assurance of inferiority about women's cultural ineptitude and deficiencies. To break the sentence rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender- in short any way in which dominant structure shape muted ones. (Duplesis 222)

Sir Leslie Stephen Woolf, Woolf's father, was a well-known critic, historian, academic, and author of numerous critical, biographical, and philosophical articles. Woolf was educated at home by her parents. Thus, it is no surprise that she had a great influence from her father on her. Woolf was able to enter the literary society due to her father's intellectual background. Though she had a great impact of her father's presence in life, she also suffered from her father's duality. She faced discrimination from the very beginning of her childhood. Woolf talks about her father's "double standard" characteristics in which he always preferred his sons' first in every matter than his daughters. Margaret Blanchard in her article titled

“Socialization in Mrs. Dalloway” speaks about it. Virginia Woolf’s father “deeply resented anyone pampering her because she was a woman” (Blanchard 288). The sons were sent abroad for higher education whereas the women in the family were being taught at home. These were the common scenario of the then society of 19th and 20th century where women have no position in their own family as well as in the society. Woolf’s real-life experiences influenced her entire body of work. Her experiences inspired her to make a voice against all these discriminations, sufferings of patriarchal society through her novels. She always seems to connect her real life experiences to the characters of her novels. *Mrs. Dalloway* is no exception and it is considered mostly one of her autobiographical novels. Just like Woolf’s father, Mr. Dalloway, as a member of parliament, was never observed encouraging his wife to work outside the home. The beginning scene of the novel reflects this scenario where Clarissa Dalloway was seen organizing the party, which was her sole opportunity to demonstrate her inventiveness.

Like Virginia Woolf’s other famous works for example, *To the Lighthouse*, *Between the Acts*, *A Room of One’s own* and *Three Guineas*, *Mrs. Dalloway* also represents her perceptions about female suppression and society’s impacts on it. The protagonist of the novel, Clarissa Dalloway feels like she is lost in the rules of patriarchal society where she and the women like her are confined by it and could not able to express their individuality. Their existence is dependent on their male counterparts. Clarissa Dalloway was a woman who had maintained her appearance from wife to mother to a daughter and also fulfilled her social duties. Amidst these she tried to repress her own feelings in order to conform to the demands of the age and society. It was difficult to live without liking what she did and masking her feelings, but because women had little rights at the time, she had no choice but to accept subservience and not go against the norms of the society. Not only Clarissa Dalloway but the other female characters in the novel also portray this sense of confinement in their life. Just

like the women characters in the novel, Virginia Woolf was also subjected to a depressive atmosphere and patriarchal rule in her family. As she has this experience of being dominated, subjugated by the society and its men, she was aware of the importance of the need for all women to rebel against the patriarchal system and make a position of their own in the society.

Kate Chopin was an American novelist and short story writer best known for her novel, *The Awakening*, published in 1899. She was born on 8 February of 1850 in the prominent St. Louise family. Chopin became interested in literature and storytelling at a very early age specially, after the death of her father, great-grandmother and half-brother. Emily Toth in her book titled, *Unveiling Kate Chopin* describes Chopin's upbringing and personal life in detail. In Emily Toth's book it is noted that, Kate Chopin sent to a boarding school at an early age and from there she got her primary education. As girls and women are not allowed to have education with boys or to work with men hand in hand in the society, home schooling or boarding schools only for girls are the ways to have education during that time. While staying at the boarding school, Chopin wrote about a mixed race girl and a white girl. The mixed race girl is discriminated and rejected by her family as well as by the Whites. Both the girls are affected by the actions of cruel society and their own family and just like Kate Chopin, they are sent to boarding school. These started to develop questions about the sufferings of girls and social system in her mind. Chopin somehow reflects her own sufferings in her writings through the characters. Her real life experiences also had a great influence in her writings. Through her writings she tries to represent the sufferings of women, discriminations and patriarchal norms of society in front of the people. In her most renowned novel *The Awakening*, she shares her perception about women suppression and society's impacts on it. Edna Pontellier's character in the novel portrays the role of women which is different from society's expectation. Her denial of the role only limited to as a mother and wife set an example to the society made contemporary roles of women.

Moreover, as both of the writers belong to the modernist era of literature, different modernist techniques are reflected in their writings. Breakdown of social norms, alienation, spiritual loneliness, disillusionment, rejection of an old social system, stream of consciousness, epiphany, self-realization, and other topics influenced them the most. Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin both of them use modernist techniques to show the character evolution of their protagonists in their novels. Virginia Woolf as a modernist writer uses the technique of 'stream of consciousness' to represent Clarissa Dalloway's self-evolution which allows her to free herself from her sufferings eventually. Woolf uses this technique to allow the readers to feel as if they are snooping on the characters and their thoughts. On the other hand, Kate Chopin in her novel *The Awakening* uses the technique of 'epiphany' to show the internal revelation of Edna Pontellier's character. Here the technique of epiphany plays an important role in developing the character of Edna Pontellier which in the end led her to her freedom.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the situation and the position of women in the society of late nineteenth and early twentieth century and how the then society shaped women's lives by its patriarchal norms, sexual repression and ideologies of gender through Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. This thesis will also portray the character evolution of Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier in light of William James' theory of 'stream of consciousness' and James Joyce's term, 'epiphany' to show how the characters develop themselves from 'fallen women' to 'new women' which will reflect their struggle, sacrifice and dedication to change their position in the patriarchal society.

## Chapter 2

### Research Questions and Methodology

#### 2.1

How are modernist techniques used to reflect the condition of late 19th and early 20th century's women and society? How did Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin use this methodology in their writings to represent the then situation of women in the society? Are gender inequality, societal prejudice and so-called patriarchal norms the reason behind confining women within the four walls? Or sabotaging their position in the society? Or is it their own hesitation which hindered themselves to realize their self-worth? How do the modernist narrative techniques of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany', for example the internal revelation of Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier plays a significant role in developing the protagonists' character which eventually led them to their freedom? And finally, how do the works of these writers show the evolution/or not of such techniques of representation along with the changing condition of British women.

#### 2.2

I am mainly focusing on the situation and position of women in British society and how their lives were shaped by patriarchal norms, sexual repression and ideologies of gender and, I hope to investigate the aforementioned research questions in my paper. In exploring such issues, I will be conducting research through qualitative methodology which will involve the analysis of texts and articles. My primary sources will be Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and I will use different articles and modernist expressions of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany' for writing this paper.

### Chapter 3

#### Literature Review

*Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Awakening*, the novels written by Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin, depict a time when women were viewed as secondary to men. In the case of Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's life experiences inspired her writing, as she wrote about a society in which women have few rights and are forced to live in a world governed by males. Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening* is not a typical woman of the era. During a time when a woman's primary responsibility was to her children, husband, and house, Edna Pontellier embarked on a personal quest to discover herself as more than a "mother-woman". In the end, she fights against the social customs of her time. Both Chopin and Pontellier were well ahead of their time in terms of rebellion. In this case, in both of the novels the writers tried to bring the characters self-development through the modernist expressions of 'stream of consciousness' in the case of Clarissa Dalloway and 'epiphany' in the case of Edna Pontellier.

Besides, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are two of the most prosperous periods in English literature. It is because modern and classical aspects are intertwined. In the twentieth century, modernism as a literary movement attained its pinnacle. Modernist writers based their works on such themes as, breakdown of social norms, alienation, spiritual loneliness, disillusionment, rejection of outdated social system, epiphany, self-realization etc. Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin are one of those writers who mostly experienced the new narrative techniques of modernism. They are also well recognized for their militant writings against patriarchy in their time, as well as their status as leading modernist writers. Rachel Duplessis shares his views regarding this in his article titled,



“Breaking the Sentence, Breaking the Sequence” from the book *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. According to Duplessis,

The sentence broken is one that expresses the ridicule, the censure, the assurance of inferiority about women’s cultural ineptitude and deficiencies. To break the sentence rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender- in short any way in which dominant structure shape muted ones. (Duplessis 222)

Both in Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin’s novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Awakening*, the personality of the characters are revealed by a series of unrelated impressions filtered mainly through the consciousness of people with whom they interact. The writing technique ‘stream of consciousness’ is highly noticeable in the case of character development of Clarissa Dalloway and the term epiphany in Edna Pontellier. Both of the literary devices refers to the modernist fiction which not only expresses the characters evolution but also represents the modernist characteristics throughout the novels. Alina Maria in her article titled, “Modern characteristics in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway” states that, “In Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf tried to carry the stream of consciousness technique to its highest level of achievement by making it completely artistic way of portraying life” (Maria 227). This is how both the writers’ preferred to treat the life of the mind and not necessarily that of the body. In the case of the novel, *The Awakening*, main character Edna Pontellier attains her self-realization through the moment of epiphany. She goes for self-exploration through the process of ‘epiphany’ where she could finally put an end to her sufferings and find her own freedom.

In the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, the main character, Clarissa Dalloway is confined by patriarchal society where she feels as though she is lost in society and cannot express

individuality. She tries and overcome this while being tied to a man through marriage. Clarissa's existence is dependent on her husband Richard, this shows her change of identity and possible lack of self. Her image and potential is determined by her husband in the society which represents her self-confinement as a woman in the society. Though she finds herself confined within her husband's identity and also has a soft corner for her former lover Peter, she still respects their marital relationship. The moment Richard bought her flowers, she immediately recognizes that she appreciates the space between herself and Richard since it enables them both to be free and independent while also liberating them of having to pay attention to some areas of life. Author Candis E. Bond in her article spoke about this. In her article titled, "Remapping Female Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Scenic Memory and Woolf's "Bye Street aesthetic" she says that, "The novel is clearly critical of the patriarchal institution of marriage and its oppression of women, but Clarissa's appreciation suggests it is integral to her present identity" (Bond 75).

In the course of time, Clarissa through her actual experience is finally able to recollect her thoughts in a way which lead her to realize her self-worth. Virginia Woolf uses this technique "stream of consciousness" to show Clarissa's character evolution. "Recalling the past at Bourton and contrasting it with both the strengths and limitations of her marriage in the present provides Clarissa with a sense of completeness and her past and present selves have connected, resulting in a moment of vision" (75). Unlike Clarissa, who tries to disregard her uneasy surroundings, her own suggested mental illness, and the involvement of societal standards and expectations, Septimus portrays the breakdown of such a culture. He can't stand the thought of being confined, so he jumps to his death. In this regard, Karen DeMeester in her article titled, "Trauma and recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" states that,

Woolf's characterization of Septimus as a martyr who gives his life in a final effort to communicate and thereby to change a culture that perpetuated war and imperialism challenges in interpretation of Clarissa's return to her party, her recommitment to a life of Proportion and her efforts at Conversion, as a triumph. Though Clarissa's reaffirmation of the meaning of her life is a brilliant moment of artistic order and harmony within the novel, it is undermined by the example set by Septimus. (DeMeester 663)

Septimus is the character through whom Clarissa eventually realizes the actual meaning of freedom. It is evident that, she does not commit suicide in the physical form, but she does commit emotional suicide by sheltering herself from unpleasant realities. "Clarissa's faith in social convention as a means of ordering a post-traumatic world originates in her own attempt to recover from a trauma" (663). Clarissa, like Septimus, is a trauma sufferer, although she and Septimus have different ways of dealing with it. Septimus is praised by Clarissa for having the guts to break out from the confinement she observes in her own life, despite her best efforts to ignore it. "Clarissa perpetuates the conflict in herself by continuing to repress her understanding of the evil nature of man. She no longer fears the heat of the sun not because it has lost its power but because she reinforces her protective shield, fortifies her defenses" (665). Though in the beginning Clarissa tries to shape her life according the norms of the patriarchal society, she eventually realizes her self-worth through Septimus' suicide. Her sudden self-realization through the technique of stream of consciousness leads her to find the solution of her confinement which she thought she would never find and thus, she becomes a new woman who holds the confidence to be who she really is.

*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin is a remarkable piece of literature in its time and the protagonist of the novel named Edna Pontellier is a controversial character. Through the character Edna Pontellier, Kate Chopin wanted to bring a change in people and society's

perspective regarding women's contemporary roles. She demolishes numerous 19th century preconceptions for women and their assumed roles through the character Edna Pontellier in her novel. As a modernist writer, Chopin uses the narrative technique 'epiphany' to show the character evolution of Edna Pontellier. One of the most shocking actions of Edna Pontellier is her denial of her role as a mother and wife. Edna is fighting against the societal and natural conventions of motherhood that drive her to be defined by her title as Leonce Pontellier's wife and mother of Raoul and Etienne Pontellier, rather than by herself. Unlike Edna Pontellier, two other female characters in the novel named Adele Rataignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are the women who are considered as role models for the women. They are portrayed as the perfect wives to their husbands, perfect mother to their children and also the ones who are very much fitted to the concept of patriarchal society's women.

Edna, on the other hand, finds both role models disappointing and realizes that the life of freedom and uniqueness she desires is incompatible with both society and nature. A woman is expected to be a mother, as described in *The Awakening*, and that role should meet all of her requirements. It has been proven that a woman who embraces unconventional lifestyles and activities will embarrass her husband. Edna gradually finds herself confined within the four walls of her being a mother and wife, a place where she never finds her own true self. The hopelessness of her existence as a male-defined creature drives her to desperation, and she decides to end her life the only way she can, through suicide. Joseph R. Urgo in his article titled, "A prologue to rebellion: *The Awakening*" and the habit of self-expression" talks about Edna's rebellion against the nature of patriarchal society and her tragedy. In the article he states that, "Edna's tragedy in *The Awakening* is that she finds that what her story says is unacceptable in her culture and, that in order to live in society she must silence herself" (Urgo 23). This elaborates her final consequence which is committing suicide through which she decides to free herself from the constraints of the society.

Edna attempts to find self-definition through her desire. She expresses her aspiration to become a painter through which she will be able to create a new lifestyle option. From her first attempt of doing a painting she runs into problems. When she finally finishes a painting for Madame Ratignolle, her picture is described as one that apparently ‘bore no resemblance’ to the women and ‘greatly disappointed to Ratignolle. Joseph R. Urgo in the same article states that, “This is Edna’s first experience with having her personal interpretation of what she sees rejected as unrealistic by someone close to her. That is, Edna’s expression reveals that Edna does not “see” with the eyes of her compatriots, nor does her vision conform to standard patterns of representation” (25). Joseph also mentions that, “In fact, soon after making this unsettling portrait of Madame Ratignolle, Edna has the first of her series of “awakenings”, in which she begins to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relation as an individual to the world within and around her” (25).

Beside these, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* seems always to be read in the context of gender inequality at the turn of the last century. The text repeatedly establishes the extent to which the patriarchal pressure of that period posed severe obstacles for even the most privileged women. This is very well portrayed in the character of Edna Pontellier. Peter Ramos in his article titled, “Unbearable realism: Freedom, ethics and identity in *The Awakening*” talked about this issue. He mentions that, “Edna’s final actions serve as an example of what can happen to a protagonist whose unwillingness to continue dedicating herself to any of the available social roles leads her to abandon all of them in favor of an enticing yet ever-elusive freedom” (Ramos 147). Despite the fact that Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle have social, economic, and political restrictions as a result of their gender, they have a limited number of socially approved identities to choose from, whereas Edna does not. Her final action indicates her committing suicide through which she eventually finds the freedom she always longed for. In this regard Peter Ramos says that,

Edna ultimately responds by attempting to live outside of all social constructions, beyond any workplace, practical fiction, entering what she imagines to be a space of unmediated reality beyond identity- a space that that can neither be inhabited nor endured as she comes to reject in succession the various social roles available to her whether that of wife, mother, women of society, artist or lover. (149)

Thus, the situation and position of women in 19th and 20th century British society and how their lives were shaped by patriarchal norms are shown through the novels of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The women characters of the novels portrayed how society shaped their lives and limited their roles as women. As both the writers have faced the sufferings caused by patriarchal norms, sexual repression and ideologies of gender, their experiences inspired them to raise a voice against all these discriminations, and sufferings of patriarchal society through their novels.

## Chapter 4

### Depiction of Women and Society in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

For centuries, gender-differentiated cultural conceptions have been deeply embedded in public life. Women have always been oppressed to some level throughout history, whether due to a lack of equal education or the expectation of subservience. Virginia Woolf wrote her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, in 1925- a period where women were presented as inferior and secondary to men. Woolf wrote about her society in which women have lack of rights and are forced to live in a male-dominated world. She, like other women of the period, was forced to shrink in order to avoid posing a threat to men. The idea was that women would remain dependent on men as daughters and eventually as wives. They adopted a self-effacing demeanor in which they were nearly completely subordinate to their husbands, children, or even visitors and friends. Abeda Sultana in her article titled, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis" discusses about this issue. She states that,

Women's subordination' refers to the inferior position of women, their lack of access to resources and decision making etc. and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies. So, women's subordination means the inferior position of women to men. The feeling of powerlessness, discrimination and experience of limited self-esteem and self-confidence jointly contribute to the subordination of women. Thus, women's subordination is a situation, where a power relationship exists and men dominate women. (Sultana 7)

This elaborates the confined situation of women in the then society. They were not only subordinate to men but also their feelings of powerlessness, discrimination, lack of self-esteem and, negligence from their male counterparts imprisoned them within the four walled house which hindered them to see the beauty of the outside world. Another thing is, women

were supposed to be the moral overseers of men. Man needed to have a moral compass in the form of a woman while he faced the world's secular vulgarities. In this sense women need to be the lighthouse for man, who would otherwise be thrown down the cliff of insurrection. This ideology was also set up by the patriarchal society. Here patriarchal society refers to the idea that, “regarding the existence and origin of patriarchy, traditionalists do believe that men are born to dominate and women to be subordinate and they believe that, this hierarchy has always existed and will continue, and like other rules of nature this one too cannot be changed” (3). Thus, patriarchy created 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes by which males might dominate women in order to perpetuate male supremacy. Feminist writers use the term 'patriarchy' to refer to the systemic framework of male supremacy over women in this context. They've produced a lot of theories to better explain the patriarchal society's foundations of female subordination. Besides, the issue of male female, masculine feminine, male connected with masculinity and, female linked with femininity arises as a result of gender disparities. The biological disparities between men and women are translated into social phrases and descriptions through such constructions. As a result of it masculine and feminine ideology arises in the society and women are dominated accordingly.

Virginia Woolf as a modernist writer has taken many themes for her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. The portrayal of female characters under the male dominated society is one of them. Society always plays a vital role in people's lives. It is a constantly evolving concept. People go through it without really thinking about what they're doing. They don't always realize how much pressure society puts on one's being, creating conflict. Woolf also views society as a center for conflict for the characters in her novel specially the female characters. For the characters in Woolf's work, society is always a source of tension. The characters battle with the internal conflict of whether they should be themselves or what others want them to be. The female characters from the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* are no exception. Alex



Zwerdling in her article titled, “*Mrs. Dalloway* and the Social System” mentions Virginia Woolf’s statement which is, “I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” (Zwerdling 69). This statement of Virginia Woolf shows her intentions of writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in which she tries to represent the societal injustices, done by men to suppress women. Woolf in her novel basically tries to portray the social structure of 19th and 20th century society where the man-made patriarchal norms clearly imply the idea that every man has a superior role and every woman has a secondary role in the society. In this regard Abeda Sultana in her article says that, “This control over and exploitation of areas of women’s lives mean that men benefit materially from patriarchy, they derive concrete economic gains from the subordination of women” (9). It elaborates the fact that there is an economic base of patriarchy which is directly related to societal sectors. As women are considered as producing class specially the house-wives and men as the bread-earning class, women’s hard work and endless labor is not counted as work at all and house-wives are seen to be dependent on their husbands. This scenario is also shown by Virginia Woolf in Clarissa Dalloway’s case in the novel, and this is how women were being treated back then in the society by men. Virginia Woolf beautifully portrayed these discriminations and sufferings of women in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century English society through the characters in her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

#### **4.1 Condition of Women under the Patriarchal Gaze in *Mrs. Dalloway***

Understanding women’s roles as determined by the male gaze is critical to comprehending their place in society. We can agree that a woman’s position in society is dictated by her external appearance, and that appearance is dictated primarily by her gender. Women are classified as ‘others’ or ‘not males’ and this distinction would be impossible if

women were not visually distinguishable from men. In light of this, film, as a prominent type of visual popular culture, and its linkages to visual representations and the gaze, seems logical to look at it. In film, the gaze is essentially the camera's perspective. The gaze can be employed as a strong discourse since the camera's outlook builds identification with the viewer. Laura Mulvey in her article titled, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" says that, "...the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (Mulvey 833). Here Mulvey demonstrates the fact that, women are always considered as the objects of the gaze and never the possessors of the gaze and control of the camera, and thus control of the gaze, is always firmly established in the male domain in film. Virginia Woolf understood this 'patriarchal gaze' which stifled women's minds and freedom, and she couldn't ignore the fact that male power was at the helm of everything. Thus, Woolf's novels were written in such a way that, while they did not directly criticize the social order, they made female readers aware of their entrapment in the form of her wonderfully projected female characters. *Mrs. Dalloway*, a supposedly simple story in the eyes of her contemporaries, becomes one of the clearest examples of Woolf's use of art to express her dissatisfaction with the social system which relied under the 'patriarchal gaze'. *Mrs. Dalloway* the title of the novel itself reflects the idea of women's confinement under the theory of patriarchal gaze. The change of the surname after the marriage not only shows the society made custom but, also represents the fact that women are bound to change their identity according to their husband's identity and confine themselves within it. Throughout the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf uses different types of female characters to present her ideas differently but among them Clarissa Dalloway who is the protagonist of the novel plays a significant role to portray those ideas. Though the story of this novel is very simple and it tells the story of an ordinary woman named Clarissa Dalloway on a single ordinary day

in June, the structure of the story is highly unconventional, leading the reader to become engrossed in the minds of the characters in the novel.

Clarissa Dalloway, the main character in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, is confined by the patriarchal society and has a sense of being lost in the society and unable to express her individuality. Despite the fact that she is married, she attempts to overcome this. Clarissa's identity is dependent on her husband Richard, implying a change in her character and possibly a lack of self-awareness. Her position and capabilities in society are decided by her husband, who reflects her social constraint as a woman. Despite the fact that she is trapped under her husband's identity and has a warm spot for her old lover Peter, she respects their marriage. Author Candis E. Bond in her article spoke about this. In her article titled, "Remapping Female Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Scenic Memory and Woolf's "Bye Street aesthetic" she says that, "The novel is clearly critical of the patriarchal institution of marriage and its oppression of women, but Clarissa's appreciation suggests it is integral to her present identity" (Bond 75). This states the fact that though Clarissa is suffering from the existential crisis, she somehow accepts the reality that no matter what, wherever she goes she cannot deny her marital status in the society and thus all she can do is to take it as positively as she can. Besides this, the very first sentence of the novel portrays Clarissa's situation of self-questioning. "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (Woolf 5). This line from the novel signifies the fact that, Clarissa Dalloway was capable of getting the flowers on her own without the assistance of a male partner which is a very much unexpected norm in a patriarchal society in which she lives in. It is because, though she is bound to her marital relationship, she still tries to find her identity going against the commonly expected norm in the society which is expecting flowers from a male partner. Apart from Clarissa Dalloway, Sally Seton is the one who tries to go against the man-made societal norms and live on her own terms. Sally is an unusual young woman who detests social conventions and lives her

life on her own terms. She, for example, smokes like a man and even rushes naked down the hall to collect the shower sponge before taking a bath. Clarissa's heart is filled with a great longing for independence because of her appearance. Clarissa is immediately drawn to her independent spirit and courage, and the two quickly become great friends who can share and speak about almost everything. Though Sally Seton has a great influence on Clarissa in her earlier days because of her individualistic characteristics, in the end just like Clarissa she has married and is the mother to five sons. They both become confined to the society and their lives with their marital status.

In the novel, the characters Clarissa, Lucrezia and Lady Bradshaw are used by Virginia Woolf to make a powerful statement about the role of wives in the society and in their marriages. While these women have had a variety of experiences in their marriages and are subjected to the societal norms, there is one thing that they all have in common which is oppression. The novel revolves around these women, who provide meaning and reason in the lives of the men in the story. However, these women are gradually driven to abandon their own ambitions in order to conform to the social standards imposed by marriage for women. Woolf conveys through the wives in *Mrs. Dalloway* that marriage is an institution in which women are required to sacrifice their own desires and interests in order to serve their husband and pursue his own objectives as a top priority. Since Clarissa is subjected to the harsh nature of marriage, her bright and hopeful spirit has become jaded and burdened. The same thing goes to Lucrezia Smith. She is forced to bear the burden of Septimus's mental illness. As she is his wife she is bound to do so in order to live up to the expectation of the society. In the case of Lady Bradshaw, Woolf says in the novel that, "Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through..." (90). This elaborates the fact that, after marrying, a woman who once enjoyed fishing salmon

is changed into a typical upper-class woman who follows patriarchal standards and is devoid of independent thoughts. To put it another way, she becomes a self-stringing puppet, requiring her husband's control.

Therefore, in this regard Virginia Woolf depicts 'patriarchal gaze' and the cruelty of society through the characters of Sir William Bradshaw, Peter Walsh and to some extent Richard Dalloway. Though these male characters pretend to be independent thinkers on the surface, it is apparent that they are pleased to be a patriarchal member and support it. As proud patriarchs, they believe that women should view the world in the same way that they do, because in their opinion women are inferior to them and are considered as 'others'. In this case, Laura Mulvey states that, "Women stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of women still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (834). In the novel this is reflected in Peter Walsh and Clarissa's case. Clarissa's rejection of Peter is depicted as still surprising Peter. He, on the other hand, blames Clarissa for being cold, egotistical, and cautious in making this poor decision for not marrying him, and he never directly points at himself, but always at Clarissa. All he wants is to change Clarissa to fit in his ideal because he wants to perceive Clarissa as his possession, as a right bestowed by hierarchy. It is visible in the novel where Clarissa says to Peter Walsh that, "He's (Richard Dalloway) very well dressed; yet he always criticizes me" (38). Just like him the other male characters in the novel show more or less the same tendency to portray women as object or 'others' in their so-called patriarchal society.

## 4.2 Clarissa Dalloway and the Technique of “Stream of Consciousness”

*Mrs. Dalloway* is regarded as a modernist text. Virginia Woolf uses the narrative style and subject matter in a way that it results in a fine modernist text in its time. Virginia Woolf as a modernist writer has taken many narrative styles to show her emotions through the characters of her novels. In *Mrs. Dalloway* she uses the technique of ‘stream of consciousness’ to represent Clarissa Dalloway’s self-evolution. Woolf uses this technique to allow the readers to feel as if they are snooping on the characters and their thoughts. In the novel, Mrs. Dalloway's unconventionality is reflected through the use of stream of consciousness technique, which is also considered as a break from the traditional form of writing. This criteria of writing not only reflects the character of Clarissa but also Virginia Woolf herself. Woolf basically preferred to treat the life of the mind and not necessarily that of the body using the technique of stream of consciousness in her characters. Thus, Modernist writers were expected to look beyond societal limitations, and as a result, modernism is considered as an intricate set of social transformations.

Stream of consciousness is a style of speaking or writing in which the speaker or writer says everything unfiltered, as it comes to mind. It is impossible to talk or write exactly as we think because our brains are capable of producing millions of thoughts and perceptions at once. As a result, stream of consciousness is impressionistic, imitating a direct cognitive process. Besides, stream of consciousness is a style of writing that was popularized by psychologist William James’ work. In the book *Principles of Psychology* he states that,

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A “river” or a “stream” are the metaphors by which it is

most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life. (James 239)

Thus, the main goal of stream of consciousness is to simulate the flow of thought through one's mind without any impediments. As a result, sometimes sentences lengthen, becomes less ordered, and become more irregular in style. Its lack of structure may not appeal to everyone, but that does not rule out the possibility of order. William James viewed it in his own way. In this regard, Frederick J. Hoffman in his article titled, "William James and the Modern Literary Consciousness" states that, "William James, instead of asserting the self, examined it as a stream of consciousness. In so doing, he radically altered the space-time relationship within it" (Hoffman 6). This elaborates the process that, one must assume that an instant of time is passing from one state to another. Since the positing of a temporal instrument of continuation saves the process from extinction, both subjective and objective contexts are required for the investigation of process; the 'I' observes or experiences the 'me' in the moment of procedural existence.

Clarissa Dalloway, the heroin of the novel, continuously tries to find the balance between her internal and external lives. Her life is full of glistening surfaces like beautiful attire, parties, and high society, yet as she goes through it, she looks underneath those appearances for greater significance. As a result she often tries to recall her past memories to escape from her reality at least for sometime. Virginia Woolf beautifully portrayed Clarissa's situation in the light of the technique stream of consciousness. The stream of consciousness of Clarissa Dalloway explores the theme through her memories and experiences. As the story begins it shows that Clarissa is out shopping for flowers for the party and then she has a flashback to her childhood in Bourton, when she meets Peter Walsh. Through the flashback of her memories in Bourton, she feels like she can imagine whatever she wants and there is no restriction in it, also her thoughts are not constrained in any manner, neither is she

questionable to anyone, but in reality she feels confined in her marriage with Richard. Author Candis E. Bond in her article spoke about this. In her article titled, "Remapping Female Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Scenic Memory and Woolf's "Bye Street aesthetic" she says that, "Recalling the past at Bourton and contrasting it with both the strengths and limitations of her marriage in the present provides Clarissa with a sense of completeness and her past and present selves have connected, resulting in a moment of vision" (Bond 75). This is the characteristic of modernism and the technique stream of consciousness which extends the link between the artists and the representation of reality.

Moreover, Clarissa is constantly free in her mind and she can think about anything as she wishes, yet in real life she is attempting to build social connections but failing miserably. It is like Clarissa is continuously battling to reconnect herself between the past and present. This battle between the past and the present reveals her dual personality. On one level, she transforms into a free spirit, recalling Peter and Sally Seton and the memories with them. Secondly, though she can recall her past or imagine the things as she wishes, in reality these are the horrible things she could never think of in her everyday life. Frederick J. Hoffman in his article talks about this dilemma faced by Clarissa in light of William James' understanding according to the technique of stream of consciousness. He says that, "...the ultimate character of reality was a willed thing, further that reality is what the will decides it to be, in accordance with what the process of experience should become. James therefore put the vital question of the self as a challenge to the will to make of reality what it can..." (6). Clarissa through her actual experience is eventually able to recollect her thoughts. Though she still feels doubtful about the decisions she took in her life, she also realizes the fact that life with Peter would have been difficult just like Richard in present. She often desires for a second chance in life and she feels a moment of calmness and tranquility when she watches her old neighbor through her window. This brief moment more or less makes her realize the



fact that the life she has is all she has, and she will find the strength to face her sufferings and will survive through it. Thus, this is how Virginia Woolf uses the technique “stream of consciousness” to show Clarissa’s character evolution in the novel.

## Chapter 5

### Depiction of Women and Society in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is considered as a bold piece of fiction in its time. Through the novel Kate Chopin wanted to bring a change in people and society's perspective regarding women's contemporary roles. It is because at that era when the novel was written, women in the society were considered as inferior and secondary to men and their primary responsibility was to take care of their children, husbands, and houses. The society was full of patriarchy and male domination and women were confined to it. For ages, patriarchy has characterized women as objects to serve the interests of the masculine majority. Previously, the ideology of patriarchal society is to confine women to their reproductive function which still continues more or less in the society. Shaista Malik in his article titled "Women's Objectification by Consumer Culture" speaks about this issue. He says that, "Man was associated with thought, rationality, meditation whereas woman was considered a deviation from that norm hence she was associated with body and feelings divorced from intellect. This association of women by philosophers and intellectuals led her confinement to reproductive and aesthetic purposes" (Malik 88).

Thus, the novel, *The Awakening* depicts men's perceptions of women in society. The views of women in society and the need for self-identity are discussed in it, implying that women battled to have a voice and an existence outside of their families and homes. The novel is set in the late 1800s and illustrates the scrutiny that women faced in areas such as marriage and divorce at that time. Through the novel Chopin spoke about the view of women, not just how men perceived them, but also how society viewed them and therefore, Chopin tried to bring a change in the society and people's perspective through her writings.

Besides, Chopin demolishes numerous 19th century preconceptions for women and their assumed roles through the character Edna Pontellier in her novel. Edna Pontellier is a portrayal of a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage where her only value was to serve as a symbol of her husband's wealth. This is not only the case of Edna but also the case of every woman in the society during the time. This situation reflects how males as well as the society in the 19th century portrayed women. Women were expected to stay at home because there were people to do all of the required duties, leaving them feeling unneeded and with no other purpose than to be there so their husband can claim a wife, a representation of his money if he will. This is considered a form of patriarchy. Abeda Sultana in her article titled "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis" states that,

The norms and practices that define women as inferior to men, impose controls on them, are present everywhere in our families, social relations, religious, laws, schools, textbooks, media, factories, offices. Thus, patriarchy is called the sum of the kind of male domination we see around women all the time. In this ideology, men are superior to women and women are part of men's property, so women should be controlled by men and this produces women's subordination. (Sultana 8)

Some of them wanted to figure out what sparks their interests and what they wanted to do with their lives and for this they needed to change what they had been used to all their lives. But unfortunately as their lives had been in their husband's control up until then and also they feared that the society would not accept them, they were being demotivated to change their situation. Women's mental and physical states were so vulnerable in the 19th century society that they were afraid to accept any change in their lives. These were the common scenarios of women's situation back then in the society. As a result of it, Kate Chopin through the character of her novel, Edna Pontellier tried to show an exception to the society and people's ideology.

Apart from these, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin seems to be viewed inevitably via the lens of gender discrimination. Even the most affluent women faced significant challenges as a result of patriarchal influences at that period, as exemplified by Edna Pontellier's character in the novel. The society depicted in *The Awakening* is the society of late 19th century New Orleans and Grand Isle. In this society, Edna, the central character, is an upper class wife and just like the character Edna, Kate Chopin also held this position in her own life. Chopin, being a progressive woman felt that women in America today were not provided with their full respect and freedom and thus, expressed many of her own views through Edna in the novel. The constant boundaries and restrictions placed on women by the patriarchal society were very much prominent at that time. The situation is portrayed in the novel where Chopin reveals the scenario through the character Edna, saying that, "Mrs. Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences... at a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual- that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 21). This patriarchal system of the society discriminated them in a numerous way. Regarding this 'patriarchal' issue Abeda Sultana in her article says that, "Patriarchy is a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. The subordination that we experience at a daily level, regardless of the class we might belong to, takes various forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence – within the family, at the place of work, in society" (7).

A few examples are provided to exemplify a specific sort of prejudice as well as a characteristic of patriarchy. Gender disparity, food supply discrimination against girls, domestic work burden on young girls and women, inadequate educational opportunities for girls, lack of rights and freedom for girls, physical assault of women, male control over women and girls are just a few examples and features of patriarchal society, with women being the primary victims. As Kate Chopin also belonged to the same society, she tried to

reflect these discriminations and sufferings of women in 19th and 20th century society through the female characters in her novel, *The Awakening*.

### **5.1 Condition of Women under the Patriarchal Gaze in *The Awakening***

Women are always portrayed in society depending on their domestic and maternal roles, rather than their individuality as subject. If a woman deviates from her prescribed roles, patriarchal culture gives the male the power to represent her and stigmatizes her. In a nutshell, we can say that, the external manifestation of a woman's identity defines her role in society, and that identity is identified first and foremost by her gender. In this case women are always classified as 'others/objects' in the society in terms of the ideology of the 'patriarchal gaze'. Here patriarchal gaze refers to a manner of representing and viewing women that empowers men while sexualizing and demeaning women. Laura Mulvey is the one who first introduce this concept of 'patriarchal/male gaze' in her essay titled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" critiquing the image of the objectified female in films. This notion arose from the feminist movement, which sought to throw light on problematic female depictions by asserting that women's existence can be shown in patriarchal terms and in relation to men. In light of this Dr. Manal Abdullah Batobara in his article titled, "The Image of Woman and the Concept of Male Gaze in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*" states that, "Women lack men's distinguished traits and this lack, consequently, plays a significant role towards the construction of the symbolic male gaze. Gender power is found to be a controlling force not only in films but in theatre too and that is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses" (Batobara 442).

This is not only the cases for films or theaters but also this patriarchal gaze is prominent in the novels. The writers through their writings wanted to raise awareness among

the people about the misconceptions of the patriarchal society regarding women. Kate Chopin was no exception in this matter. Chopin understood this 'patriarchal gaze' which blocked women's minds and freedom in a way that they were losing their existence not only in the society but also in their own family. Thus, Kate Chopin portrayed the then social order and its misconceptions about women through her projected female characters in the novel *The Awakening*. In the novel, *The Awakening*, the protagonist Edna Pontellier is not a typical woman of her era and she seems to be a controversial character. During a time when a woman's primary responsibility was towards her children, husband, and house, Edna Pontellier embark on a personal quest to discover herself as more than a "mother-woman" which shattered nineteenth-century conceptions of women and their perceived roles in the society. In the very beginning of the novel, the setting reflects the idea of confinement in a symbolic form. "A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door..." (Chopin 1). The birds resembles Edna Pontellier in the sense that, though she appears to have the opportunity to be free, she is unable to escape the reality to which she has been exposed. She has been confined to the society and its patriarchal norms where her voice is unheard just like the parrots in the cage which are repeating some words in Spanish that nobody understands. Women's movements, like those of birds, are restricted by society, and they are unable to communicate with the outside world.

Edna Pontellier, the main character of the novel *The Awakening*, is fighting against the societal and natural conventions of motherhood that drive her to be defined by her title as Leonce Pontellier's wife and mother of Raoul and Etienne Pontellier, rather than by herself. She realizes that the life of independence and freedom she desires is incompatible with her culture. A woman is expected to be a mother, as described in *The Awakening*, and that role should meet all of her requirements. It has been proven that a woman who embraces unconventional lifestyles and activities will embarrass her husband. Edna gradually finds

herself confined within the four walls of her maternal role and wifely duty where she never finds her own true self. The inevitability of her fate as a male-defined creature brings her to a state of despair. Joseph R. Urgo in his article titled, “A prologue to rebellion: “*The Awakening*” and the habit of self-expression” talks about Edna’s rebellion against the nature of patriarchal society and her tragedy. In the article he states that, “Edna’s tragedy in *The Awakening* is that she finds that what her story says is unacceptable in her culture and, that in order to live in society she must silence herself” (Urgo 23). This elaborates her final consequence which is committing suicide through which she decides to free herself from the constraints of the patriarchal society. Beside these, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* seems always to be read in the context of gender inequality at the turn of the last century. The text repeatedly establish the extent to which the patriarchal pressure of that period posed severe obstacles for even the most privileged women which is very much well portrayed in the character of Edna Pontellier. Peter Ramos in his article titled, “Unbearable realism: Freedom, ethics and identity in *The Awakening*” talked about this issue. He mentions that, “Edna’s final actions serve as an example of what can happen to a protagonist whose unwillingness to continue dedicating herself to any of the available social roles leads her to abandon all of them in favor of an enticing yet ever-elusive freedom” (Ramos 147).

In the novel, two other female characters named Adele Ratingnolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are the women who are considered as role models for the women. They are portrayed as the perfect wives to their husbands, perfect mothers to their children and also the ones who are very much fitted to the concept of patriarchal gaze and patriarchal society’s women. Kate Chopin used these female characters in the novel to make a powerful statement about the role of wives in the society and in their marriages. Adele Ratingnolle fits perfectly into the criteria and also works as a foil character to the protagonist Edna Pontellier. Whereas Edna goes against the societal views regarding women and also rebels against it, Adele is the ideal

woman their male counterparts want them to be. In the novel Edna states that, “Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident” (Chopin 28). In contrast to this, Adele truly loves her husband Mr. Ratingnolle and tries to be the woman her husband wanted her to be whereas Edna finds herself confined to her marriage with Mr. Pontellier. Chopin elaborates these two examples of marriages in the novel to depict the perfect, traditional woman versus the one who violates tradition in favor of individuality. Adele is a talented pianist, but she does even the most intimate act of music production for the sake of her children. She and her husband equally saw it as a way to lighten up the house and make it more appealing to the eye, rather than as a way to show it off to the people. Regarding Mademoiselle Reisz, her most distinguishing feature is her remarkable musical talent, which she cultivates solely for herself, unlike Adele. However, these two women who confide a desire in Edna to become a painter are gradually driven to abandon their own ambitions in order to conform to the social standards imposed by patriarchal society.

Therefore, in this regard Kate Chopin depicts ‘patriarchal gaze’ and the cruelty of society through the characters of Mr. Pontellier, Mr. Ratingnolle and a few other men in the novel. When it comes to the male characters in the novel, Chopin reflects them in a very objectionable context. Her men are primarily possessive, cowardly, and self-serving for the most part of the novel. She mainly tries to represent the situation of the then patriarchal society and women’s suffering because of it through the characters in her novel. Mr. Pontellier, reflects Kate Chopin's belief that males objectify women in society. He believes that a man's wife is his property, and he handles her like she's some precious item that has to be taken care of. Mr. Pontellier treats Edna as if she is a child; commanding and degrading her while also requiring her to perform the role of his wife. Mr. Pontellier truly possesses all the characteristics of a dominating patriarch in the society. Regarding Mr. Ratingnolle, he also possesses the same quality as Mr. Pontellier. Both the men tried to fit their wives into the



patriarchal ideology of the society by any means. As proud patriarchs, they believe that women should view the world in the same way that they do, because in their opinion women are inferior to them and are considered as ‘others’. In the novel, Chopin mentions that, “The Pontelliers and Ratignolles walked ahead; women leaning upon the arms of their husbands” (41). Here, walking ahead symbolizes being superior and women leaning on their husbands shows their dependency on men meaning the men should be the one they have to lean on not only when they were tired but also during other times.

## **5.2 Edna Pontellier and the Concept of “Epiphany”**

*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin is a modern novel through which she established the character of Edna Pontellier, who is trying to assert her free spirit within the then society. At the beginning the protagonist of the novel, Edna Pontellier appears to define her identity in terms of being a wife, a mother, and a part of her community. Edna strives to define herself as an individual as the novel progresses. A moment in which Edna understands for the first time that she can swim serves as a turning point in her struggle. After months of struggling to learn to swim, she understands that it is simple and natural. Edna's break from understanding herself in terms of what society expects her to be, and her new realization of herself as an autonomous human being, is reflected through her finding. As a modernist writer Chopin reflected Edna's newfound self-realization through the technique of ‘epiphany’. She basically used the technique of ‘epiphany’ to show the internal revelation of Edna Pontellier's character in the novel. Regarding the nature of epiphany, Grant Kien in his article titled, “The Nature of Epiphany” says that, “...epiphany, an identifiable moment of lived experience that one can identify as a turning point in one's understanding of oneself and one's relationship to the world” (Kien 578). Edna Pontellier, embarks on a journey of self-discovery through this

process of 'epiphany' where she could finally put an end to her sufferings and find her own freedom.

The concept of 'epiphany' was first coined by the author James Joyce. In literature, an epiphany occurs when a character experiences a sudden vision or knowledge that alters their perspective. James Joyce popularized the concept, which he explained in detail in his autobiographical novel, *Stephen Hero*. In the light of James Joyce's understanding, David Hayman in his article titled, "The Purpose and Permanence of the Joycean Epiphany" states that, "Epiphanies were always brief sketches, hardly ever more than some dozen lines in length, but always very accurately observed and noted, the matter being so slight. The revelation and importance of the subconscious had caught his interest. The epiphanies became more frequently subjective and included dreams which he considered in some way revelatory" (Hayman 636). This illustrates the fact that epiphany is a potent rhetorical strategy for revealing character development. Epiphany refers to a "waking up" or realization which displays a level of character development that is likely to alter the story's direction. Besides, in another article titled, "Epiphany and Browning: Character Made Manifest", author Herbert F. Tucker explores the characteristics of Joycean epiphany. In doing so he says that,

A Joycean epiphany is the account of an experience, of a secular instant as sudden and complete as what was once called grace. Obviously, though, it is the account of an experience, the inspired composition of a moment of spiritual composure. Epiphany thus names something lived through, yet also something written down. At once empirical and documentary in character, it offers both a human image for recognition and a coded legend for interpretation. (Tucker 1208)

Therefore, the novel, *The Awakening*, portrays an influential period of the protagonist, Edna Pontellier's life. Edna experiences an epiphany, which prompts her to explain her past experiences, nostalgic and traumatic memories, her reveries, yearnings, and devotions. She pursues self-ownership and the development of her inner truth and self through self-actualization in her relationships. Regarding Edna's final surrender to her emotional conviction and self-realization as a result of her epiphany, Nicole Camastra in his article titled, "Venerable Sonority in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" mentions that, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is ostensibly a work of realism depicting the moral conflict that faces Edna Pontellier: selfhood in opposition to family" (Camastra 154). This elaborates that, in doing so, Edna significantly expands her understanding of her environment and develops her own perspective through her assessment of her childhood and her awareness of her experiences at Grand Isle and in New Orleans which results in her revelation. Moreover, she attempts to enhance her inner consciousness by respecting and considering the advice and wisdom of her family and friends, notably her husband Leonce Pontellier, Madame Adele Ratignolle, and Mademoiselle Reisz. Edna discovers herself in relation to her past and present using physical and psychic capacities, gaining unparalleled and valuable insight to her existence. Nicole Camastra again in the same article talks about this. He says that, "What prompts Edna to 'awaken' is beyond the loose impetus of sentimental fancy. Instead, her acknowledge of social structure figures prominently since she must repudiate in order to free herself from its confines" (160). In this way, Kate Chopin portrays the concept of 'epiphany' in Edna Pontellier's journey from unconscious understanding to full awareness of her dreams, desires, and passions throughout the novel, *The Awakening*.

## Chapter 6

### From 'Fallen Women' to 'New Women' in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Awakening*

In the 19th and 20th century, women's subordination by men and patriarchal norms caused a significant effect in the then society and in the lives of the women. During this era, patriarchal society severely limited women's privileges and rights and the male-dominated culture saw them as objects, also their experiences were limited only to marriage. As they did not have any position in the society and were unaware of their self-worth, they were labeled as 'fallen women'. In literature, 'fallen woman', is a term coined during the Victorian era which refers to a woman who loses her purity and innocence before marriage. Although in literature the concept of fallen women is connected to the ideology of their sexual identity, in this paper, I will represent it through the perspective of patriarchal society and its dominances which caused women's subordination throughout the century and labeled them as 'fallen women'. It is not only about the misconception of sexual identity of a woman but also gender inequality, discriminations from family to social spheres and their rights-deprivations which led them to fight against all these injustices against women. These reflect their struggle, sacrifice and dedication to change their position in the patriarchal society and became the 'new women' of their century through their self-realizations and awareness. In both the novels, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, both the protagonists', Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier reflect their subordinate situation in the patriarchal society which labeled them as 'fallen women'. Therefore, both the writers tried to bring up both the protagonists' ultimate realization through the modernist expressions about their freedom from the societal norms and from everything which hinders their self-growth and through which they can come out of their confinement and hesitations and build themselves as 'new women' who recognize their self-worth.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the main character of the novel Clarissa Dalloway, an elderly woman in her fifties, is continually evaluating her life and criticizing her significant life choices. The depiction of Clarissa's life at various stages, from her maidenhood to married status, allows readers to have an understanding of her development as a person and to take a critical stance toward her ideas. With the passage of time, Clarissa through her actual experience is finally able to recollect her thoughts in a way which lead her to realize her self-worth. Virginia Woolf uses the technique "stream of consciousness" to show Clarissa's character evolution. Regarding this Candis E. Bond in his article states that, "Recalling the past at Bourton and contrasting it with both the strengths and limitations of her marriage in the present provides Clarissa with a sense of completeness and her past and present selves have connected, resulting in a moment of vision" (75). Unlike Clarissa, who tries to disregard her uneasy surroundings, her own suggested mental illness, and the involvement of societal standards and expectations, Septimus portrays the breakdown of such a culture. He can't stand the thought of being confined, so he jumps to his death. In this regard, Karen DeMeester in her article titled, "Trauma and recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" states that,

Woolf's characterization of Septimus as a martyr who gives his life in a final effort to communicate and thereby to change a culture that perpetuated war and imperialism challenges in interpretation of Clarissa's return to her party, her recommitment to a life of Proportion and her efforts at Conversion, as a triumph. Though Clarissa's reaffirmation of the meaning of her life is a brilliant moment of artistic order and harmony within the novel, it is undermined by the example set by Septimus. (DeMeester 663)

Septimus is the character through whom Clarissa eventually realizes the actual meaning of freedom. It is evident that, even though she does not commit suicide in the

physical form, she does commit emotional suicide by sheltering herself from unpleasant realities. Karen Deemester in the same article mentions that, “Clarissa’s faith in social convention as a means of ordering a post-traumatic world originates in her own attempt to recover from a trauma” (663). Clarissa, like Septimus, is a trauma sufferer, although she and Septimus have different ways of dealing with it. Septimus is praised by Clarissa for having the courage to break out from the confinement she observes in her own life, despite her best efforts to ignore it. Karen Deemester again speaks about this issue in his article saying, “Clarissa perpetuates the conflict in herself by continuing to repress her understanding of the evil nature of man. She no longer fears the heat of the sun not because it has lost its power but because she reinforces her protective shield, fortifies her defenses” (665). Though in the beginning Clarissa tries to shape her life according the norms of the patriarchal society, she eventually realizes her self-worth through Septimus’ suicide. Her sudden realization leads her to find the solution to her confinement which she thought she would never find and thus, she becomes the ‘new woman’ who holds the confidence to be who she really is.

In the novel, *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier the protagonist, is not a contemporary woman that the society expects her to be. Edna is caught in New Orleans' upper-class, with its old-fashioned mindset, between the centuries. On the contrary, she is already forming new societal views, those of a woman of the twenty-first century. During her summer stay at Grand Isles, she gains a number of new experiences and meets new people, including Robert, with whom she falls in love. Those months on Grand Isle, as well as the circumstances in which she finds herself back in town, cause her to reflect on her life as a mother-wife with no identity and no rights. She quickly becomes dissatisfied. She learns about her own desires when confronted with challenges of self-hood, gender roles, and lack of independence. Thus, she attempts to find self-definition through her desire. She expresses her aspiration to become a painter through which she will be able to create a new lifestyle option. From her first

attempt of doing a painting she runs into problems. When she finally finishes a painting for Madame Ratignolle, her picture is described as one that apparently ‘bore no resemblance’ to the women and ‘greatly disappointed Ratignolle. Joseph R. Urgo in the article titled “A prologue to rebellion: “*The Awakening*” and the habit of self-expression” states that, “This is Edna’s first experience with having her personal interpretation of what she sees rejected as unrealistic by someone close to her. That is, Edna’s expression reveals that Edna does not “see” with the eyes of her compatriots, nor does her vision conform to standard patterns of representation” (25). In fact, Edna experiences the first of her series of "awakenings" shortly after painting this unsettling portrait of Madame Ratignolle which Kate Chopin describes in the novel. She mentions that, “Edna was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (Chopin 20-21).

Moreover, Unlike Edna Pontellier, two other female characters in the novel named Adele Ratingnolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are the women who are considered as role models for the women in the then patriarchal society. Despite the fact that Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle have social, economic, and political restrictions as a result of their gender, they had a limited number of socially approved identities to choose from, whereas Edna did not. Her final action indicates her committing suicide through which she eventually finds the freedom she always longed for. In this regard Peter Ramos in the article titled “Unbearable realism: Freedom, ethics and identity in *The Awakening*” states that,

Edna ultimately responds by attempting to live outside of all social constructions, beyond any workplace, practical fiction, entering what she imagines to be a space of unmediated reality beyond identity- a space that that can neither be inhabited nor endured as she comes to reject in succession the various social roles available to her whether that of wife, mother, women of society, artist or lover. (149)

Therefore, both the protagonists Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier from the novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Awakening*, come to realize their self-worth and freedom which end their sufferings in the end. Clarissa Dalloway finds her own freedom with the passage of time through the suicide of Septimus which is unlike Edna Pontellier. Edna Pontellier finds her own way of freedom through committing suicide. They both become the 'new women' of their century through attaining their freedom and self-confidence rather than being the 'fallen women' which once the patriarchal society labeled them as. They succeeded altogether but in different ways in their battle of suffering from the male domination, societal norms and gender inequality. This unconventional example about women transforming from 'fallen women' to 'new women' is beautifully portrayed by Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin through Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

Women were treated as subordinate and secondary to men in the family and society until the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The belief that women were not as much valuable as men, persisted in society, and they were completely controlled by the patriarchal society, and were not being allowed to enjoy the same rights and benefits as men. So far, the women's position had been at home, where she was expected to look after the children, greet visitors politely, and represent their families. This was part of the separated spheres norm, which was common among married couples. This meant that women were responsible for the family while men were responsible for earning money. On one hand, this provided wives at least some control within the household, but on the other hand, it made upper-class women like Clarissa and Edna feel continuously scrutinized by society. During the latter half of the era, the women's question became a topic of public debate and it caused women's lives to change gradually. The society underwent a considerable transformation in this later period. Women grew more aware of their subjected situations and became outspoken in their opposition to their oppression. The condition of women and society in 19th and 20th century is explored in this thesis through the analysis of two novels- Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The study observed the character evolution of the protagonists, Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier in light of the modernist expressions of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany', and also the then situation and position of women in a patriarchal society reflecting their struggle, sacrifice and dedication to change their position in a male dominated environment as well as to develop themselves from 'fallen women' to 'new women'.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway is trapped between her conscious and unconscious selves. This expresses her state of confusion which is cleared by her stream of consciousness eventually. The technique of stream of consciousness plays a vital role in Clarissa's life to help her become the woman she always wanted to be. Clarissa appears to be a character who is constantly attempting to preserve societal standards. Her struggles to find a balance between her domestic and outward lives include throwing parties and engaging with people and also she is highly careful of her actions in her sophisticated life. However, Clarissa's free soul is represented by her ability to think about anything in her mind because in her mind she is free from the restrictions. As she chooses, her way of thinking which refers to her stream of consciousness, is the only way through which she is able to keep her dignity and independence. Edna Pontellier in the novel, *The Awakening*, is also trapped in a society along with its norms where she suffers from her identity crisis. In the novel, and in Edna Pontellier's life, the true awakening is the awakening of self which happens through her 'epiphany'. Edna is on a transcendental quest of self-discovery throughout the novel. She is discovering, what it is to be a woman, a mother, and an individual and through her epiphany she is finally able to learn about her true individual self along with what she actually wants for her life to free herself from all the societal norms and restrictions. Both the novels represent that, it is the contemporary norms of a patriarchal society that caused the sufferings of both the women, Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier and as shown in the novels, society is still causing the sufferings of women in reality. Clarissa and Edna both feel like misfits in this world. The inner self's exploration and yearning for freedom are hindered and unfulfilled in both novels. Though Clarissa Dalloway seems to have an imaginary potential where she can think or imagine her life as she wants, in the case of Edna Pontellier there is a lack of possibilities. Thus, Edna represents a way to imagine an exit outside this world, which requires the destruction of the old self and the world. The endings, on the other hand, are

extremely emotional and thought-provoking. Even today, the process of empowering and equalizing women's rights is ongoing. Thus, the novels, *The Awakening* and *Mrs. Dalloway* describe societies which are not yet prepared for women like Edna and Clarissa.

To conclude, the situation and position of women in 19th and 20th century British society and how their lives were shaped by patriarchal norms are shown through the novels of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. In light of this, the aim of this thesis has been to show how women's misery has turned into a source of strength, leading them down the path to better lives. The revelation of the protagonists' inner-selves and their ultimate realization towards their freedom in light of the modernist expressions of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany' play a vital role in their lives and gives them strength to be the new women in this so-called man-made society.

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