

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS DALLOWAY: A STUDY IN THE TENSION OF LIFE

Shri. Ravan Babasaheb N.,

Shripatrao Chougule Arts /Comm. College, Malwadi-Kotoli,
Kolhapur.

Introduction:-The word 'novel' as a literary term, connoting a literary genre in English, has its origin in the 18th century. Earlier than this, however, Chaucer and Bunyan told stories using characters as vehicles to propagate morals. But Chaucer told his stories in verse, and Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* is a mere record of many adventures which the hero takes with utmost divine virtues and magic powers. It appears more like a fantastic story than a novel. One important thing, which stands out prominently in the history of the English novel, is its immense popularity in the 20th century. It has eclipsed the poetry and the drama, it is the only literary form which has competed successfully with the radio and the cinema, and it is in this genre that work of the greatest merit is being produced. Compression is the best characteristic feature both of the poetry and the drama, the modern man is under the influence of science requires more discussion, detail clarification, explanation and analysis. This is possible only in the novel and hence the preference for it.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is one of the leading twentieth century British novelists who pioneered the modern, new trends in novel writing. She has adopted revolutionary technique for the expression of her vision of life and human nature. When she started her career as a writer of fiction in the revolutionary days of World War-I she began with a unique advantage. She had the benefit of first hand knowledge through discussion, imitation, suggestion and friendly criticism of the elite in the field such as E.M. Forster, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy and a large number of others, including such great names as Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Hardy, Henry James and George Meredith.

Fiction for Virginia woolf, was a re-creation of the complexities of experience. Just as life was a most subtle and complicated succession of experience, so fiction must be infinitely adaptable and supple in order to catch the 'tones' the light and shade of experience. The art of the novelist was similar to that of the painter, and painting for Woolf did not mean the Dutch School, who were admired by George Eliot. There were different 'phrases' of

fiction and different types of novelists, equivalent to the different schools of painting, and the important task of the modern novelist was to make use of whatever was of value in the past. Woolf is among those novelists who gave to the English novel, a new form and new direction. Virginia Woolf started her career as a novelist in the tradition of Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy. Her first two novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919) continued the tradition. Novels of her middle phase- *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Light House* represent Mrs. Woolf's coming of age as a novelist. *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925, is the most popular of the novels of Mrs. Woolf. Its popularity is brought out by the fact that it has been translated into a number of languages- German, Italian, French, Danish, Hungarian, Spanish etc. It has been praised by so many critics.

A major theme of the novel is frustration in life. It is depicted in individual life through the story of Clarissa's failure in love. The same theme is generated in the story of Septimus Warren Smith which becomes a somewhat symbolic presentation of frustration in the lives that have suffered the ravages brought about by the world war. In this novel the central theme is sustained through delicate, inner linking of the two threads of the story by means of narrative on the surface time scale of just one day. Clarissa is completely frustrated because she made a wrong choice in love. Her husband Richard Dalloway, loved her and admired her, but he never understood her. He was very much interested in making a success of himself in political affairs than in making successful companionship with his life-partner.

The second story deals with failure more general and widespread in its sphere of influence. Septimus Warren Smith represents the other or seamy side of contemporary western civilisation, the brighter side of which is represented by Mrs. Dalloway and her circle. Septimus Warren Smith is victim of war. He suffers from neurosis or nervous breakdown. Leon Edel writes, "Septimus is haunted by the supposedly peculiar lack of feeling he demonstrated at the death of his friend Evans."¹ His wife Lucrezia (Rezia) Warren Smith is young and beautiful. She fails to fill the vacuum in her husband's life. For her too, life becomes total frustration. The sickness of her husband brings hardship and boredom to her. In this novel Mrs. Woolf's inward voyage has proceeded further. As has been suggested above, true to her concept of reality as the subject of fiction, this novel presents the inner lives of the leading characters Luke Clarissa, Peter, Septimus and Lucrezia. The inner working of Clarissa's mind is powerfully presented through what she talks and does throughout the day. It was the purpose of Woolf to convey her own joy in the beauty of life, and the

pleasure of living. She selects the beautiful aspects of life, but she has also presented ugliness of life. She expects understanding rather than the passing judgements. She is very much conscious of the evil in life; her novels revolve on the tension between good and evil.

Woolf presents her characters real experience of life. She is conscious both of life's magnificence, and of life's ugliness. She is conscious about the joy of living and the horror of death. Her novels move between these two extremes. Mrs Dalloway is very much interested in life and her joy in life is expressed in the novel. She likes to visit people to lunch with them, and to meet them and invite them. She loves to bring people together, and loves to hear them talking. She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite. Clarissa herself has "divine vitality". Woolf has also presented the horror and chaos of life: Septimus Warren Smith is a case of complete nervous breakdown induced by the horrors of life in the trenches. He has become a neurotic, and abnormally sensitive to sound and colours. He has no faith in human nature and with no will to live. He is always in the tension. He again and again says "Let us kill ourselves." He has lost all his interest in life. Here he is completely alienated from his self.

It is thus very much clear that Septimus Warren Smith is the novelist's representation of the evil effects/horrors of war of the neurosis and madness, tragedy and suffering caused by it. He is an admirable piece of satire on the complacency and unthinking acceptance of people like the Dalloways and Hugh Whitbread's. Novelists criticises the contemporary civilization.

There is tension in her novels between the love of life and hatred of life so also there is tension between doing and contemplating. Mrs. Woolf contemplates life, she tries to re-create it. She never make any change in it. She presents the tension of life through the minds of her characters, Mrs Dalloway praises her husband because of his work for the welfare of mankind, "While both Peter and she, frittered away their time." Woolf commented on male and female experiences. Her women are distinguished by their essential womanliness. Thus Mrs Dalloway is completely failure to distinguish between facts; she is completely ignorant of fact. Honesty is one important thing among women. They do not deceive themselves, and it is this fact which makes them valuable complements to the menfolk. In the case of Clarissa and Richard intimacy develops their live for each other and they better understand each other even without exchanging a single word.

One important incident in the novel is that Mrs Dalloway loved Peter

Walsh. He occupies an important place in the novel. Clarissa Dalloway rejected Peter because his love was too possessive and dominating. He never gave the privacy and independence to her. In the company of Peter she was always under the shadow of tension. But Richard allows her to have her own 'attic room'. Richard is free man, he gave freedom to her even he is not dominating like Peter. This reason created horror both of love and religion in Mrs Dalloway. She neglected, rejected Peter for this reason and she also detests Don's Kilman for this very reason. When Clarissa Dalloway rejected Peter, something broke within him, and he has never been the same again. It was all troublesome for him – it was horrible, the pain has endured through thirty long years as is witnessed by his bursting into tears during his visit to Mrs Dalloway. From thirty years he has been in love with the wrong woman, His life has been failure. She never accepted the idea of the teacher trying to possess the soul of her daughter.

In short, Mrs Dalloway is an impressive work. The novelist has succeeded in rendering the inner life, very shimmeriness of experience, and has retained clarity and perfect discipline. Finally I conclude my article with her own comment about life. In her essay "Modern fiction" she expresses her view of life: Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelop surrounding as from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with a little mixture of the alien and external as possible. She deals with the process of recording the impressions, "as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall." She felt this method is deeper and more suggestive for conveying not only what people say but what they have unsaid, not only what they are but what life is. For the same reason she can be called as and impressionistic also, which again deals with the mental life of the chief character rather than on the reality around him."²

Works Cited:-

- 1) Edel Leon, *the Psychological Novel*, n.p., n.p.p.132
- 2) Woolf Virginia, "Modern fiction," I, *The Common Reader*, 1925, p. 189.