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Within Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*: A Study of Female Characters with Psychological Components under Patriarchal Dominance

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Received: 17/10/2025

Reviewed: 20/10/2025

Accepted: 25/10/2025

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**Abstract:**

*In light of their deep examination of human awareness and sophisticated criticism of societal systems, Virginia Woolf's books have a special position in modernist literature. Woolf's delicate depiction of women's inner psychic lives inside a patriarchal societal context is one of the most remarkable aspects of her writing. The psychological experiences of the female characters in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse are examined in this essay, along with the widespread impact of patriarchal authority. The research examines how Woolf depicts the psychological anxieties, emotional difficulties, and identity creation of women who live behind constrictive standards of society using a qualitative textual analysis. Characters like Lily Briscoe, Mrs. Ramsay, and Clarissa Dalloway show a variety of reactions to patriarchal expectations, from self-realization and rejection to acceptance and adaptability. Readers may penetrate these women's private inner worlds and comprehend the complexity of their feelings thanks to Woolf's use of modernist literary methods, especially the stream-of-consciousness approach. In the conclusion, the study makes the case that Woolf's novels question conventional beliefs about gender roles, creativity, and individual freedom in addition to portraying the psychological reality of women in patriarchal society. Woolf makes a substantial contribution to feminist literary debate and the larger comprehension of women's psychological experiences in literature through her literary creativity.*

**Keywords:** *Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, modernist literature, feminist literary criticism, patriarchal dominance, female consciousness, psychological analysis, gender identity, female subjectivity, stream of consciousness, women's identity, patriarchal society*

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**Introduction**

The literary landscape was altered by significant social, cultural, and intellectual changes that occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century. In order to investigate the intricacies of human mind, subjective perception, and the fragmented character of contemporary existence, writers connected to modernism started to question conventional narrative conventions. Among these authors, Virginia Woolf is regarded together as one of the most significant, whose writings significantly changed how human psychology is portrayed in literature. The complex link between societal systems and individual awareness is often explored in Woolf's novels. The experiences of women who live in patriarchal societies that frequently restrict their independence, creativity, and originality are given special focus in her works.



Woolf reveals the psychological conflicts and quiet emotional challenges faced by women who try to balance their own goals with social expectations through her creative storytelling tactics. *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, two of Woolf's best-known books, provide deep insights into the interior lives of female characters. These books show women who are influenced by the social mores of their day yet have complicated interior lives that frequently challenge or oppose patriarchal rule. Each of the three characters—Lily Briscoe, Mrs. Ramsay, and Clarissa Dalloway—represents a different aspect of femininity and a unique psychological reaction to social pressures and gender norms.

In order to understand how patriarchal domination affects these female characters' identities, interpersonal interactions, and emotional experiences, this study will analyse their psychological aspects. The study intends to demonstrate Woolf's ongoing significance in conversations about gender, identity, and psychological representation in literature by examining her complex depiction of female consciousness. The term "patriarchy" describes a social structure in which women are frequently restricted to subservient roles in the home and in society while males occupy dominating position of power and authority. Instead of being defined as autonomous persons, women's identities are often established in reference to men—as husbands, mothers, or daughters—under such a society. Woolf was well aware of these societal limitations and used her writing to highlight the psychological effects of patriarchal rule. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, two of Woolf's most important books, offer deep insights into the personal lives of women who live in patriarchal societies. These books include female characters whose personalities are mentally nuanced, emotionally introspective, and intellectually perceptive. Woolf shows how patriarchal expectations affect women's identities, acquaintances, and personal decisions via their experiences.

The main character of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway, considers her previous choices and the emotional concessions that have melded her existence as she makes her way through the social milieu of post-war London. Despite playing the part of a respectable upper-class hostess, her inner thoughts show a profound knowledge of unfulfilled potential and repressed impulses. Clarissa's self-reflection draws attention to the subtle conflicts that exist between individual freedom and social conformity.

In a similar vein, *To the Lighthouse* offers a complex examination of gender roles via the opposing characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Mrs. Ramsay is a loving wife and mother who is committed to preserving peace within the family, embodying the conventional ideal of womanhood. Lily Briscoe, on the other hand, is a symbol of a new generation of women who, in spite of the scepticism and discouragement they face from male authority figures, aspire to intellectual and creative independence.

## Literature Analysis

Over the past few decades, scholarly interest in Virginia Woolf's writings has increased dramatically, especially in the areas of psychological literary analysis and feminist critique. Woolf's books are well known for their examination of women's inner lives as well as their criticism of patriarchal societal institutions that limit women's emotional and intellectual autonomy. Elaine Showalter and other feminist critics highlight how Woolf's work captures the psychological and societal challenges faced by women in cultures where males predominate. According to Showalter, Woolf attempted to establish a narrative space wherever female consciousness might be truly expressed since she was acutely aware of the historical exclusion of women's voices in literature.



In a similar vein, Woolf's writing has been studied by literary historians Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as a component of a larger feminist literary tradition. Their seminal research demonstrates how Woolf depicts women as multifaceted psychological people rather than submissive societal figures, challenging the patriarchal presumptions ingrained in literary history. Critical evaluations of Mrs. Dalloway frequently centre on Clarissa Dalloway's personality and her introspective thoughts on identity, memory, and life. Clarissa's experiences are seen by academics as typical of women navigating societal norms that frequently stifle their emotional honesty and personal wants.

On the other hand, analyses of *To the Lighthouse* often focus on the disparate personalities of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay. While Lily Briscoe represents a contemporary woman aiming for artistic and intellectual freedom, Mrs. Ramsay represents the old mother ideal honoured by patriarchal culture. These critical viewpoints offer insightful analyses of Woolf's portrayal of female psychopathology and form a crucial basis for the current investigation.

## Research Methodology

This study examines literary works using an analytical and qualitative methodology. In order to comprehend the psychological complexity of the female characters and the societal institutions that affect their lives, the technique mainly entails intensive textual examination of the books *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The research uses a feminist philosophical framework to investigate how patriarchal power dynamics affect women's identities and experiences. The interior emotional emotions, memories, and subconscious ideas that Woolf depicts through her inventive storytelling technique are also examined through psychological literary criticism. Woolf's novels serve as primary materials for the study, while scholarly publications, critical essays, and scholarly articles about female literary thought and modernist works of literature serve as secondary sources.

## Research Gap

The feminist themes found in Woolf's books have been studied by many academics, however many of these studies pay very little attention to the behavioural complexity of female characters in connection with patriarchal power systems and instead concentrate on feminist politics and social critique. Previous studies frequently focus on either psychological interpretations or feminist viewpoints independently, failing to adequately integrate these two crucial views. Furthermore, even though feminist critique has extensively examined the characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway, more research is still needed to fully understand the psychological dynamics between resistance and compliance in these characters. In a similar vein, although Lily Briscoe's artistic battle is frequently seen as a representation of female inventiveness, a thorough comparative framework has not adequately explored the psychological aspects of her opposition to patriarchal ideology.

In an effort to close these gaps, this research examines how patriarchal domination affects the interior lives of Woolf's female characters by fusing feminist literary theory with neuropsychological investigation. The study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Woolf's depiction of female consciousness by looking at the psychological struggles that Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe go through.

## Analysis and Discussion



## **Psychological Dimensions of Clarissa Dalloway**

The protagonist of Clarissa Dalloway in Mrs. Dalloway symbolizes a lady who, on the outside, satisfies the standards of upper-class society but, on the inside, engages in deep psychological introspection. Clarissa's life is centered on planning social events and upholding social harmony—roles that are consistent with what patriarchal culture expects of women.

Still, readers may access Clarissa's personal memories and ideas because to Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness narrative, which highlights the complexity of her inner life. Clarissa often thinks back on her former choices, especially her decision to wed Richard Dalloway instead of pursuing a more intense connection with Peter Walsh. Her mental struggle between personal fulfillment and societal compliance is shown in these musings.

The nuanced ways that patriarchal standards impact women's identities and choices are demonstrated by Clarissa's psychological reflection. Despite her seeming contentment with her existence, she has unanswered questions about independence, uniqueness, and untapped potential in her inner thoughts.

## **Mrs. Ramsay and the Burden of Domestic Ideals**

Mrs. Ramsay appears as a potent symbol of conventional femininity in *Into the Lighthouse*. She is presented as a loving mother and wife who devotes her life to providing for her family and preserving emotional balance in the home.

Although Mrs. Ramsay is praised for her compassion and generosity, Woolf also highlights the psychological strains that come with playing the conventional role of womanhood. Mrs. Ramsay frequently represses her own wants and worries to keep other people happy. Her identity is strongly associated with the home, which reflects the patriarchal notion that marriage and motherhood are a woman's main goals. Woolf uses Mrs. Ramsay's persona to highlight the emotional cost and dignity of upholding such standards.

## **Lily Briscoe and the Assertion of Female Creativity**

Another key character in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe, is an example of a different kind of womanhood. Lily, an unmarried woman who aspires to be an artist, questions the stereotype that women are incapable of achieving artistic success. Lily encounters criticism and scepticism throughout the book, especially from male personalities who deny her creative talent. The patriarchal belief that creative brilliance is intrinsically masculine is reflected in these sentiments. Lily perseveres and finishes her painting in spite of these obstacles. Her creative achievement represents the potential for female autonomy and self-expression outside of patriarchal social norms.

## **Findings**

On the basis of the research, Woolf's books offer a thorough examination of female psychology in the setting of patriarchal domination. Deep emotional depth is displayed by the female protagonists in these works, who constantly reflect on their identities, roles, and relationships. While some characters, like Mrs. Ramsay, represent stereotypically feminine values, others, like Lily Briscoe, defy these expectations by claiming their creative and intellectual autonomy. In the middle, Clarissa Dalloway manages the conflict between self-reflection and societal conformity. Woolf's complex comprehension of the psychological realities of women in a patriarchal society is evident in these different depictions.

## **Research Question**

1. How does Virginia Woolf portray the psychological experiences of female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*?



2. In what ways does patriarchal dominance influence the identities, emotions, and life choices of the female characters in these novels?
3. How do characters such as Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay, and Lily Briscoe respond to or negotiate the expectations imposed by patriarchal society?
4. What psychological conflicts emerge within the female characters as they attempt to balance personal desires with social responsibilities?
5. How does Woolf use modernist narrative techniques, particularly stream of consciousness, to reveal the inner lives of women?

## Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's works provide a deep and complex examination of women's psychological experiences in patriarchal society. Woolf portrays the subtle but ubiquitous impact of patriarchal domination on women's identities, feelings, and aspirations through her inventive storytelling approaches and in-depth involvement with her characters' inner lives. The female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* both exhibit a variety of reactions to the societal expectations placed upon them, offering a complex and nuanced picture of femininity in the early 20th century.

Clarissa Dalloway's character captures the inner turmoil faced by women who, on the outside, follow social conventions but, on the inside, doubt the decisions and constraints that have melded their life. Her thoughts on identity, memory, and emotional fulfilment highlight the psychological difficulties brought on by being in a society that values male leadership. Woolf's ability to depict the hidden emotional realms of women who are frequently restricted to positions set by tradition and societal expectation is demonstrated by Clarissa's introspective consciousness.

In a similar vein, Mrs. Ramsay from *To the Lighthouse* stands in for the conventional image of femininity, which is based on selflessness, emotional support, and household duties. Despite her seeming embodiment of the masculine ideal of womanhood, Woolf's portrayal highlights the quiet concessions and emotional responsibilities that come with this role. Woolf uses the figure of Mrs. Ramsay to show how patriarchal ideology creates and maintains the ideal of the loving wife and mother, frequently at the expense of a woman's individuality and intellectual independence.

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