
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mothers and Wives: Representation of Women in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

Saima Akter

Lecturer, Department of English, BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology (BUFT), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Saima Akter, **E-mail:** saima.akter@buft.edu.bd

| ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of women in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, two classic modernist novels. Second-wave feminism constitutes the conceptual framework of the paper. The paper argues that despite differences in style and subject matter, both novels critique societal expectations and constraints placed upon women in the early 20th century. Both authors highlight the agency and complexity of women while challenging patriarchal conventions through the representation of female characters. The article argues that these works are still relevant in their depiction of the ongoing struggle for the pursuit of women's liberation and gender equality.

| KEYWORDS

Feminism, representation, subaltern, women, patriarchy

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that literature is the reflection of society. It reflects the perceptions and attitudes of society. One of the most arguable and observable social phenomena today is gender roles in society. A struggle against the male-dominated society that mistreats women has been promoted by feminist critics of the feminist movement. The suffragette movement of the early 19th century led to the rise of feminist voices like Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, who fought against the social degradation of females by domineering males. In *The Second Sex*, French Simone de Beauvoir focuses on how society as a whole constructs females. It was followed by American Kate Millett, who, in her *Sexual Politics*, criticizes many male authors for portraying males reigning over females.

The aim of this article is to elaborate and bring forth the actual status of women reflected in numerous literary works, considering how literature may depict human life together with its values. It encourages investigation into modalities of power as they are mediated by gender, sexuality, class, nation, age, and ability. For this study, two English novels from Twentieth Century, *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, are selected, and second-wave feminism has been chosen as the theoretical framework as this wave mostly delves into the issues this paper has dealt with.

Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

Second-wave feminism was a period of feminist activity that began in the early 1960s and lasted roughly two decades. It took place throughout the Western world and aimed to increase equality for women by building on previous feminist gains. Whereas first-wave feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality (e.g., voting rights and property rights), second-wave feminism broadened the debate to include a wider range of issues: sexuality, family, domesticity, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. It was a movement that was focused on critiquing the patriarchal, or male-dominated, institutions and cultural practices throughout society. Second-wave feminism also drew attention to the issues of domestic violence and marital rape, created rape-crisis centers and women's shelters, and brought about changes in custody laws and divorce laws. Feminist-owned bookstores, credit unions, and restaurants were among the key meeting spaces and economic engines of the movement.

The objectives of this article are to show the representation of women of different classes in *Sons and Lovers* and *Mrs. Dalloway* in context with the feminist theory, to explain the condition of women in contemporary society, and to show the attitude of society towards women. The central female characters of the novels are analysed, and the study also addresses the suppressive condition of women, the attitude of society towards them, and how they struggle to prove themselves.

2. Literature Review

Some feminist critics like Kirsty Hewitt, Norma Gomez, Divya Singh, Joshua Rothman, and so on brought out the feminist elements of the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. According to some critics, Clarissa struggled against society to save the privacy of her soul and was able to achieve her goal in this regard. Few studies focus on the feminist reading of the novel *Sons & Lovers*. Ting Bo, Anissa Sboui, Mahbuba Sarker and Kamel Hezam are some of them. Some critics consider Lawrence as a feminist in his act of portraying the strength and influence women exert in society in *Sons and Lovers*.

In *D.H. Lawrence and the Devouring Mother*, Judith Ruderman explores the impact of maternal characters in Lawrence's books, emphasizing the consuming and possessive aspect of Gertrude Morel's bond with her sons. Hilary Simpson provides a feminist analysis of Lawrence's writings, focusing on the nuanced ways in which women are portrayed and the complexities of male-female relationships in *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism*. The complex interplay of sexual and emotional connections in *Sons and Lovers* is discussed by Mark Kinkead-Weekes in *The Marble and the Statue: The Exploratory Imagination of D.H. Lawrence*, with particular attention to the characterizations of women and their interactions with the male protagonist.

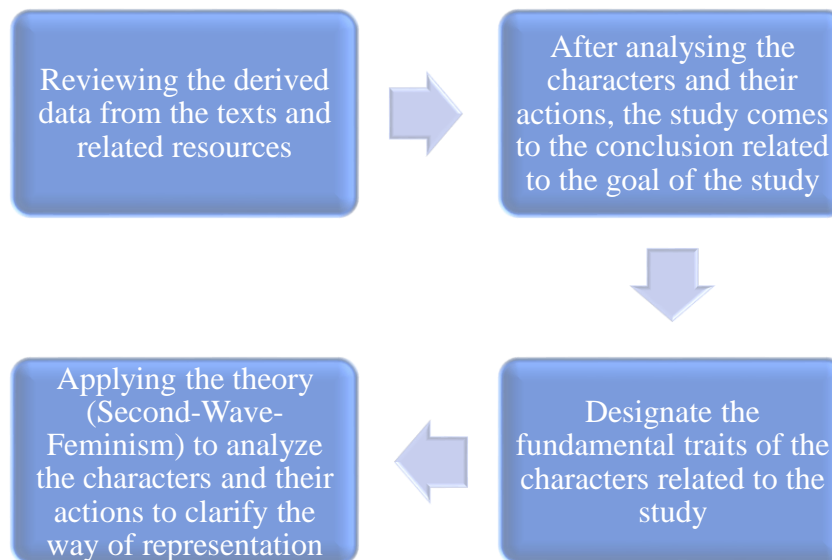
Julia Briggs, in *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, examines Woolf's depiction of Clarissa Dalloway, emphasizing how the character manages her introverted personality and societal expectations as a woman. In *Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny*, Elaine Showalter explores Woolf's fascination with androgyny and the malleability of gender norms, providing a comprehensive understanding of Clarissa's multifaceted identity and her interactions with other characters. Woolf's critique of the social world is examined by Alex Zwerdling in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, paying close emphasis to how women's lives, roles, and societal pressures are portrayed in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

3. Methodology

Figure 1: The process of data collection



Figure 2: The process of data analysis for the study



Source: Islam and Akter (2020)

Using a qualitative research approach, this study includes a thorough examination of two literary texts: *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. The methodology consists of two primary components: the process of data collection and the process of data analysis. The initial stage of data collection involves an in-depth reading of *Sons and Lovers* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. After a careful reading, data pertinent to the study objectives are carefully gathered and examined to determine the salient characteristics of the aim in order to extract the data.

The data derived from the texts are then reviewed in detail, with additional insights drawn from related resources such as literary critiques and scholarly articles. It concentrates on the characters and their actions within the texts and synthesizes the findings from the analysis and theoretical application. The study employs the Second-Wave Feminism theory to further interpret the findings. Using this theoretical framework, the texts' representations of gender roles, power relationships, and societal structures are examined.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Sons and Lovers

Sons and Lovers is a novel by D.H. Lawrence that tells the story of a man so emotionally connected to and influenced by his mother that he is unable to form lasting relationships when he encounters other women. There are two parts in the novel; one comprises the early married life of Mrs Morel, and the second part is about Paul Morel struggling with his mother's love and finding a personal life.

Mrs. Morel might not come from a rich family. However, she was raised in a family that used to be rich, and she's a well-educated and rather proud woman. She considers herself a grand, well-to-do lady trapped in a miserable life. She had been struggling against the patriarchy since she was very young, fighting for her existence and for the rights of women, yearning to be an authoritative, independent, and responsible person. That is why Mrs. Morel says, 'If I were a man, nothing could stop me.' As it is seen in the novel, after her marriage, in the man-centred family, her husband treated her sadistically. Regardless, it's obvious that she ends up hating her poor life with her poor miner husband, and her marriage to Walter turns her resentful: 'She was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness.'

Gertrude hoped she would never experience such difficulties. And when she married Walter, all of her aspirations for a lofty intellectual existence came to a stop. D.H. Lawrence even shows us how deeply she loses her identity in her marriage by the way he never refers to her by her first name once she marries Walter. Beauvoir examines the fact that women always take the title of their husbands. Lawrence proves this view throughout the novel. The name Gertrude Morel appears only twice in this novel, and she is always called Mrs. Morel.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The second sex*, points out that to the mother, the son is always the hero. Mrs. Morel thinks of William as her Knight. Women prefer male children to female children is what Beauvoir writes in her book. Despite Mrs. Morel's appreciation for Annie's academic achievements, it is clear that she feels joy at the prospect of becoming a mother of males. She and her husband argue frequently, but she is unable to leave him since their young children rely on their father, who provides for the family. She is delighted that William is advancing socially since she knows she can rely on her son if Morel fails. These represent the traditional mothers who are dependent on their sons because they do not work.

Another feminist critic called Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* focuses on the power-dominated relationship between a man and a woman. To her, 'Politics refers to relationships where one group of people is controlled by another' (Millett, 1969, p. 23). In relationships between people of the opposing sex, there is always a power struggle where men are always the subject, and women are always the object. In this novel, this struggle between Mr. and Mrs. Morel is very clearly presented, and it is also reflected in Paul's character. For Kate Millett, Paul Morel is upheld by a 'faith in male Supremacy which he has imbibed from his father and enlarged upon himself' (Millett, 1969, p. 249).

Sons and Lovers described Mr. Morel's unhappy marriage. Most of the time, she appeared to be her husband's attached property- Mrs. Morel. Even if she was hit by her husband, she had too much for her husband. Furthermore, she did not know exactly how much her husband earned. Because according to the habits, a woman must go out when a man counts the money in the room.

Like all the other women, she was the sufferer of Victorian morality. Even though she was oppressed by her husband, she could not leave him. "She went into the front garden, feeling too heavy to take herself out, yet unable to stay indoors. The heat suffocated her. And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive." Mrs. Morel naturally formed an alliance with her sons in order to survive. The kids became Mrs. Morel's tools for realizing her dreams and aspirations as she taught them how they might alter their social status and move into the middle class through knowledge and will. Later on, she turns all her love to her sons and tries to make them successful, but still, she is unsuccessful and unsatisfied in her own marriage. She could not change her fate.

Indian critic Spivak, in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', investigates the sati ritual of a widow where they were burnt alive with their deceased husbands. In the novel, Miriam equates sex with sacrifice and self-immolation. She is the symbol of the doll Arabella, who is annihilated by Paul. Spivak also observes that the subalterns are voiceless

human beings who are suppressed and marginalized. They cannot cry out against any injustice. For example, In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Africans never speak, and they cannot resist the white people from ruling them. In *Sons and Lovers*, we can find that Mrs. Morel is a subaltern who has to deal with her husband's domineering behavior. The character of Miriam is a subaltern here, particularly at the beginning, where she does not react when Paul throws the Pencil on her face. She does not misbehave with Paul, who stripped her of her marital privileges. Paul has destroyed her virtue, yet despite this, she does not approach him firmly or give him an angry reprimand.

Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* serves not only as a narrative of personal and familial conflict but also as a more comprehensive critique of the social norms that control gender roles and relationships. Through probing his characters' inner lives, Lawrence reveals the systemic injustices and disparities of power that endure in cultures ruled by men, prompting readers to consider the themes' ongoing significance in today's debates over gender and power.

4.2 Mrs. Dalloway

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the writer tends to write about a variety of themes, and feminism is one of the most fundamental topics in it, which describes the position of women in the period and their apparent insignificance. The story is about a day in which Clarissa Dalloway keeps a party, and the novel tells about the preparation and the outcome of it. During these routine and trivial chores, she reflects on her life. Woolf wanted to show through this point that women's lifestyles at that time were mostly trivial because of the restraints on them.

In a culture that places a lot of value on conforming to sexual stereotypes, middle-aged Clarissa finds it difficult to find her place in society. Since she will not be having any more children and is beyond fifty, Clarissa feels invisible and nun-like. She feels aimless in life, as her society has no real purpose for her; after she has married and had children, she has become subsumed in society's expectations of a middle-aged housewife. This aimlessness is seen in her doing trivial things. She tries to discover her purpose in life. Clarissa now feels her role is to serve as a meeting point for others.

There is still a female dependence on the male sex both economically and socially. This is demonstrated by Woolf's female lead, Clarissa Dalloway, who marries Richard and therefore achieves her objective of appearing to be "the perfect hostess" by securing her status both financially and socially. Through the use of the stream-of-consciousness style, Woolf illustrates the paradoxical nature of the mind, highlighting the struggle of numerous female characters, including Clarissa and Rezia, to exist in a patriarchal society without losing their own selves.

Virginia Woolf makes a significant point on the place of wives in society and in marriages throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* by using the characters Clarissa and Lucrezia in addition to furthering the plot. Although the hardships these women face in their marriages vary, oppression is the one factor that connects each of their marriages. These women drive the story of *Mrs. Dalloway* and provide meaning and reason in the lives of the men in the story; however, these women are gradually compelled to give up their objectives in order to act in conformity with the social standards imposed by marriage for women.

Elizabeth Abel claims that Woolf makes evident the sacrifices made to the system by women, such as in Septimus's Rezia and Richard's Clarissa. *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts the connection between men and women as somewhat self-sacrificing on the part of the female character. It is not surprising that Woolf's text discusses the fundamental themes of disparity and power struggle in the relationship between men and women at the time because Woolf was considered to be a radical feminist.

The Bradshaws' relationship exemplifies the enormous scope of male pre-eminence in 1923. Similarly, it is observed that Rezia appears to have devoted her life and will to her suffering husband through the portrayal of their relationship. According to twentieth-century critic Susan Squier, the social world of London is male dominated, and Clarissa can survive there only by becoming a kind of background for her menfolk.

For women outside of many modern cultures, marriage has traditionally been a need for a woman's safety and security. However, this has required a woman to give up her freedom and her passions, as well as subject her to an

oppressive existence. For example, in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, it is seen that Daisy married Tom Buchanan for social security even though she loved Gatsby, which is the same as we see in the case of Clarissa. Ultimately, through the wives in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf conveys that marriage is an institution where women are compelled to repress their individual desires and passions in order to serve their husbands and advance their objectives as first priority. From the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf demonstrates that Clarissa's once-bright and hopeful spirit has dimmed and burdened when subjected to the oppressive nature of marriage. The reader gets a peek at Clarissa in her younger years. The reader is given a different picture of Clarissa before marriage, with each flashback to her younger years, one that emphasizes her passion and curiosity for life. Despite her feelings of love and connection for Peter, Clarissa could not bear to be in a marriage where she would have to sacrifice her freedom. In some respects, her choice is rational, but it also calls into question whether her marriage was flawed. Clarissa was forced to choose between the security of her independence and her prospects for passion because neither choice existed or would ever exist in her society. However, men were free to wait until well into their later years before finding a bride who met their preferences because they were not compelled to make such choices. Clarissa forsook the option of passion in marriage by choosing to marry Richard over Peter.

Here, Clarissa is fighting a battle against the world of man, the world of self-importance, wars, and politics. Clarissa Dalloway has a strong sense of independence. Although she had been friends with Peter Walsh since childhood and felt more attracted to him than to Richard Dalloway, she nevertheless turned down Peter and wed Richard Dalloway because she feels that, 'in marriage little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her and she him'. This was not possible with Peter. With Peter 'everything had to be shared and everything gone into. And it was intolerable . . .'. Due to her assertive temperament, Clarissa was willing to sacrifice her love for freedom.

Clarissa adores the privacy of the soul. The enigmatic elderly woman who Clarissa sees twice through the window, continuing her lonesome household tasks, represents the idea of the privacy of the soul that could be damaged by either love (in the case of Peter Walsh) or by religion (in the case of Miss Kilman). Woolf's most famous essay is called 'A Room of One's Own', and throughout her work, separate rooms act as representations of individual souls. To experience life as a whole, one must be left alone. Clarissa's obsession with maintaining the secrecy of her soul is both her vice and her virtue.

Clarissa defines herself in terms of her husband, demonstrating the male control which was still inherent within society early in the novel, for instance: 'This being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway'. Clarissa perceives herself as small and birdlike, and she is aware that the world sees her as invisible, an extension of her politician husband – as 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway' rather than 'Clarissa.'

After hearing about Septimus's death, Clarissa immediately realizes that by killing himself, Septimus has defied men who make life intolerable, and though he had 'thrown it away,' he has not lost the independence of soul, which she respected most. At the same time, she is jealous of Septimus because she lacks his bravery. His death is also her disgrace because she compromised her passion and her soul when she married Richard. Clarissa comprehends that she has obscured the purity of her soul with conventionality and shallowness as she faces the struggle for autonomy and the right to live authentically in a world that often denies women these fundamental rights.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf not only critiques the gender norms of her time but also invites readers to consider the ongoing relevance of these issues in contemporary society. The book serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing sacrifices made by women in the name of freedom and the ongoing need for a culture that honors and respects their opinions and choices.

5. Comparative analysis between Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

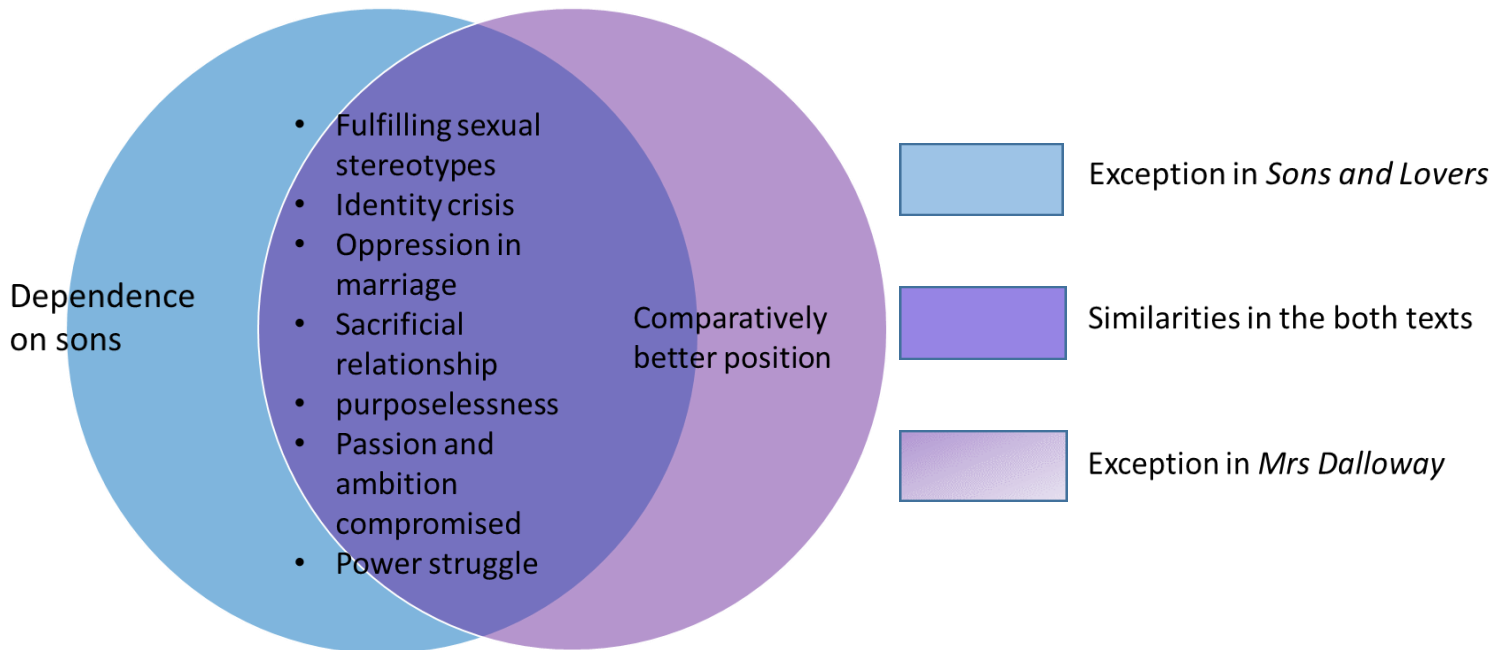
In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence portrays women as passive and submissive to men, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf presents a more complex and independent view of women.

Lawrence portrays women as objects for male pleasure and as passive vessels for male desire. The female characters in the novel are often portrayed as passive, submissive, and inferior to men. The central female character, Miriam, is

portrayed as being unable to fulfil the desires of the protagonist, Paul Morel, and is ultimately rejected by him in favor of other women.

In contrast, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* presents a more complex and nuanced representation of women. The female characters in the novel are independent and self-determined and are not defined solely by their relationships with men. Mrs. Dalloway, the main character, is a complex and dynamic figure who transcends traditional gender roles and embodies the modern woman. Woolf's representation of women is also characterized by her rejection of the patriarchal system that denies women autonomy and agency.

Figure 3: Comparative analysis Between *Sons and Lovers* and *Mrs. Dalloway*



The works of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf provide insight into the representation of women in the early 20th century. Both *Sons and Lovers* and *Mrs. Dalloway* explore various themes that highlight the experiences of women, including sexual stereotypes, identity crisis, oppression in marriage, sacrificial relationships, purposelessness, passion and ambition compromised, and power struggle, and these themes are readily apparent in the second-wave feminism.

The Venn diagram shows that, in both novels, the characters of women are often reduced to stereotypical roles and expectations based on their gender. In *Sons and Lovers*, the character of Miriam is portrayed as pure and innocent, while Clara is depicted as a sexual object. This dichotomy aligns with the second-wave feminist critique of women being pigeonholed into narrow categories based on sexuality. Similarly, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa's character is expected to conform to societal norms, and she is judged harshly when she deviates from these expectations. The women in both novels struggle with finding their place in society and defining their own identities. In *Sons and Lovers*, the character of Miriam grapples with her sense of self and her relationship with the male protagonist, Paul. Similarly, Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* faces an identity crisis as she tries to reconcile her desires and societal expectations. Both novels explore the ways in which women are oppressed in marriage. In *Sons and Lovers*, Clara is trapped in a loveless marriage and is forced to sacrifice her own needs and desires for her husband and children. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the character of Septimus's wife, Rezia, is confined to a life of domesticity and is unable to express herself freely. The women in both novels often sacrifice their own needs and desires for the sake of their relationships with men. In *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam sacrifices her own happiness for Paul's Mrs Morel for Mr. Morel, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa sacrifices her own ambitions for her husband's. Both novels explore the feeling of

purposelessness that can often accompany being a woman in early 20th-century society. In *Sons and Lovers*, the character of Miriam is left feeling aimless and unfulfilled, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa feels a lack of purpose in her life despite her societal status and wealth.

Both novels highlight the ways in which women's passion and ambition are often compromised due to societal expectations and limitations. In *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam and Mrs. Morel's aspirations are suppressed, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa's desires for personal fulfilment are unfulfilled. The novels also explore the power struggle between men and women, particularly in the realm of relationships and marriage. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul holds the power in his relationships with the women in his life, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa is forced to navigate the expectations of her husband and society in order to assert her own power. These sacrifices resonate with the second-wave feminist call for women to pursue their own dreams and objectives without compromise because they show how few options are given to women and how society pressures them to put relationships before personal fulfilment.

Despite these similarities, Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* present some contrasting depictions of women and their roles in society. In *Sons and Lovers*, the central female character, Mrs. Morel, is depicted as dependent on her sons for personal fulfilment, while Mrs. Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* is comparatively depicted as having a more empowered and independent position in society. In *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel is portrayed as a woman trapped in a loveless marriage who relies on her relationships with her sons for meaning and purpose in her life. Her relationship with her husband is depicted as distant and unfulfilling, and she becomes emotionally invested in the lives of her sons. She uses her love for her sons as a means of escape from the constraints of her own life and the limitations placed upon women in her society. In contrast, Mrs. Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* is depicted as a woman who is in control of her own life and has the agency to make choices. Mrs. Dalloway is depicted as a woman who is comfortable with her own sexuality and is able to assert herself in relationships and in the public sphere.

6. Conclusion

It is quite obvious that from the beginning of history, women are struggling to achieve their rights and to establish themselves as human beings. Throughout the world, Women are treated as inferior beings irrespective of culture, nation, and race. In this respect, many movements and literary works have been done to improve the suppressed condition of women. Still, the position of women is all the same. Oppression of women is being continued throughout the history of the human world. From the discussion about Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, one can reach the conclusion that whatever attempt a woman might take, she will be dominated and suppressed by the cruel patriarchal society. By considering the presentation of almost all the women characters in literature, it becomes quite clear and definite that in modern society, it is difficult for a woman to truly express herself as it is dominated by men, with laws and judgment based on masculine standards.

The enduring struggle for women's rights and acknowledgment, as portrayed in literature and history, draws attention to an important and permanent problem in society. Women continue to be oppressed by patriarchal institutions and have a fragile position despite the efforts of several movements and literary voices. These struggles are eloquently depicted in *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. These works highlight the structural obstacles that women must overcome in order to claim their identity and agency.

These texts and others are effective resources for comprehending and critiquing the deep-rooted gender prejudices that influence cultural norms in the field of literature education. By examining these literary works, one can explore the historical and cultural contexts that have perpetuated gender inequality and consider the role of literature as a medium for social commentary and change.

This research of *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf is inherently constrained by several factors because of the limitation of the time; the scope of the research area became narrow, and some of the aspects could not be explored. The discussion focuses primarily on the representation of women in two novels of twentieth century English literature, which excludes many other important literary works that could make the research broader, hence limiting the exploration of other significant roles the female characters played in that era.

By acknowledging these limitations, this study recognizes the complexity of interpreting literary texts and aims to encourage further research in order to provide readers with a more thorough understanding of how women are portrayed in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The outcome of the study can be applied to other female characters for a feminist reading of the texts, e.g., G.B. Shaw's *Saint Joan*, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*, Doris Lessing's *To Room Nineteen*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Szechwan* and so on. Comparative studies of other modern female writers like Radclyffe Hall, Edith Wharton, and Katherine Mansfield might provide a deeper understanding of how women were portrayed in literature at the same time.

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