

The Inner Quandary of Woman in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*

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Abstract

Daniel Defoe is an enchanted incinerator of English literature sprung during the initial years of eighteenth century. His applauded Moll Flanders (1722) is professed as picaresque in literary vegetation. He has emotionally painted the commotion of a solitary, imprudent and prevalent female distinct against an inimical and droopy humanity. As a matter of datum, the female chief strolls into the alleyway of assorted catastrophes. She has borne the humanity either in an orthodox or warped mundane. All these archetypes of women have shed light in the fiction even before the initiation of feminist movements athwart the realm. These movements have engrossed the intellect of community and sedated as operational. At regular intervals, these have performed more elegant and redundant than being operative.

Moll Flanders is not a typical incarnation of feminist thoughts. It has never strained to sketch an itinerary for the relegated female personality to outshine her eccentricity. Yet, it is indubitably pro-woman and reconnoiters a female character with the reputation of protagonist. The farsighted image of woman with grander tenets of empathy and sympathy is blossomed. In the contemporary habitat, the novel may not seem like far-reaching as it pushes the female lead to imitate and regret with ceaseless kinks and contraventions. But the novelist is ahead of his epoch in aiding his female protagonist to gallop and endure the probabilities amidst dejection and misfortunes. Hence, the research ornate has through an endeavour to enchant the inner quandary of woman in a masculine captivated sophistication with reference to Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders.

Keywords: Woman, Struggle, Dejection, Misfortune, Inner, Quandary

Introduction

The primary recipe of a novel, universally a first person account which unfolds the escapade of a rogue or lowborn buccaneer is called picaresque. It is a derivative of the Spanish expression 'picaresco'. These are usually appreciated in the form of a prose fiction and embrace realistic style. Even the literary mechanisms of this genus continually carry forward the rudiments of comedy and satire. *Moll Flanders* (1722) penned by Daniel Defoe is a picaresque expression. It is fairly incomplete in psychological consideration and states more like a narrative. Conversely, it is better to beseech this novel as a fundamental expression of literature. The important objective of this research output is not to deliberate on the potentials of a novel, but to delineate on the female protagonist Moll. In *The Taboo against Female Aggression in Moll Flanders*, Holzner writes:

In Moll Flanders, Moll Flanders was merely a victim of the male-centered society. She was driven by all the forces of the world to pursue the immoral things. (2001)

The exertion of female protagonist Moll helps to comprehend her real struggle & desperation in life. Understanding the inadequacies, she astonishes the readers with her elasticity, liveliness, obstinacy and resistance. The extended register of unethical and disgraceful conducts of protagonist is intended at enlivening the prospects to unexpected level. In the initial period of eighteenth century, the civic readership of literary works had begun to embrace.

Here, the design and summing up of literary expressions have caught the possible interest as a matter of obligation. In such a circumstance, being a proponent of literature Defoe had to make it very visible that his expression of literature never figures out as a mark of ethically belligerent. After all, the novel is not only perceived as a glamorization of a disreputable life, but also as a criticism of it.

Noticeably, the novelist has made an attempt to present the story as a reliable part of literary genre. The story is not considered just as a portion of fiction, but certainly materialized in the lifespan of this astonishing woman who leaflets it in a sequence of eruditions. The picaresque style is thus meant at captivating the appearance of reality which is marked as very much advanced. The novel begins with the first person narration, "My true name is so well-known in the records or registers at Newgate and in the old Bailey".

The female protagonist of Defoe is named as Moll Flanders. The dictionary meaning of the word 'moll' has dual connotations. These dual meanings are always applicable to the female protagonist of Defoe. The first connotation of the word 'moll' is 'a female companion of gangster' and the second connotation is 'a concubine'. Here, the female lead is bestowed with the surname as 'Flanders'. At times, the surname resonates like 'flounders'. In the novel, Moll unquestionably flounders - struggles in the façade of complications. When these complications are taken into consideration, the reader comprehends why Moll Flanders appears really tall in the midst of numerous female protagonists of English literature in spite of all her eccentricities.

Society is considered as an amalgamation of different facets of human existence. In such a scenario of human existence, the female lead Moll is observed as a victim of society from the day of her birth. She is born in one of the jails and shortly after her birth; her mother is extradited to a place called Virginia, then a noted British cluster in America. She is devoid of everything in her life - no mother, no father, no family, no property and no shelter. Even she is deprived of the minimum financial and emotional assistance from her childhood. It appears as a forbidding condemnation of the then British public organization which had no governance in

practice to show sympathy and care for the orphans or destitute children. In reality, no one stood by her either during the teenage years or later.

But just like the wish of every child, Moll develops herself the expectation of budding up as a temperate and gentle woman in true nostalgia. But the uncertain chunk is that she has suffered a lot with shortage of capitals. Even she has experienced the stigma of dowry system in the British society. She realizes that not having opulent parents is a difficulty in marrying a rich man. Moll dwells temporarily in the house of two sisters, where one of the sisters describes the condition as "if young women have beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, yet if she have not money, she is nobody".

In the course of time, Moll understands that everything will depend on the condition of financial status in life. Therefore, the saga of love, adoration, sex and offense has become the prospects of income and loss to her. To put it ironically, even her acts of love making has brought a kind of respect and morality for her in the British Empire. When she comes in contact with the first seducer, she says, "My colour came and went at the sight of the purse". Yet, the susceptibility of a woman folk that has no individuality beyond her physical presence becomes conspicuous as the elder brother captures, seduces and then forsakes her. Just before the protagonist agrees to vend her body for sensual purpose, the society leaps on her body. Eventually, Moll gets nuptial to the younger brother, which does not stay for longtime.

Soon after the breakup of marital relationship with the younger comrade, she falls prey to many hetero-sexual affiliations. For instance, her sensual intimacy with five husbands reminds us with the tale of Geoffrey Chaucer's the Wife of Bath. The nuptial knots of Moll are observed as cunning and strategic. Her strategies are very much inclined towards money making rather than the aspect of love making. The narration of novel commodifies Moll as the most explicit and unequivocal character. The novelist says, "When a woman is thus left desolate, she is just like a bag of money or jewel dropped on the highways, which is a prey to the next comer". Nonetheless, this situation expresses her vulnerability rather than a keen submission to dishonourable means. The

female protagonist Moll feels very much isolated even in the thickly inhabited society of British.

The condition of man to that of woman is portrayed very much contrarily in every society. Gender issues have always been considered important in drawing the comparison between existence of man and woman. During the eighteenth century, men had better prospects of leading a meaningful and comfortable life when compared to woman in British civilization. However, being a woman Moll could not rejoice the same respect and stature as men enjoyed. As a result, the notion of gender has managed to draw a thick line between man and woman which can be noticed even in the so called advanced societies of present time. The politics of body and love making at work place is noticed in an exposed manner. In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Gender theorist Sylvia Walby asserts:

Conceiving of patriarchy as a system of cultural practices and norms through which men control, oppress, and exploit women. (1990)

Here, the protagonist Moll somehow achieves to work out the unauthorized female physique in her courtesy. This is very much observed and commented in a sarcastic attitude. She employs her womanliness as a means of earning money for livelihood. Being a novelist, Defoe has deserved in stimulating the appreciation and approval of readers in connoting the inner quandary of Moll. In the quest for identity and survival, Moll owes to her spirit and flexibility in spite of perceptible dishonesty which wrecks the intellect. The circumstances of her life appear as circle which is bereaved of splendour and propagates her to steal. This notion of stealing has made to understand the past activities of her mother. However, Moll does not appear like a true and hardened criminal. The act of robbery provides an opportunity for Moll to experience the humanity of British. She says, "I confess the inhumanity of the action moved me very much... and tears stood in my eyes".

Considering all these traumatic conditions, one must pronounce that the society is observed as the actual offender. As Moll is seen continuously involved in robbery, one day the luck does not favour her. As a result, she is caught red handed when robbing a piece of silk. When one thinks about the past of Moll's mother, they perceive that history

repeats when she is taken to the prison of Newgate. Even the mother of Moll was once imprisoned in the same Newgate prison. More importantly, Moll was born in the same prison when her mother was behind the bars. She was also put behind the bars for stealing priceless stuffs. During the days of Defoe, the legal scheme was exceptionally punitive. Even the crimes of small degree were pronounced with death sentence.

During the eighteenth century, if someone is born as an orphan in British culture, he had to experience severe poverty and detention. The concept of hell is very much experienced by Moll in the prison. For him, the prison appeared like 'an insignia of hell' and his fellow inmates in the prison looked like 'a herd of ghosts'. In *In Defence of Moll Flanders*, Arnold Kettle opines:

Newgate is reality, the eighteenth century world with the lid off, the world from which Moll set out and to which she returns after six decades, defeated, to emerge as a conformist. (1988)

To put it ironically, the appearance of Moll in prison is opined as pitiful and criticized as home coming by many critics. Quite stimulatingly the novelist Defoe appeared himself at the prison of Newgate for his dishonourable leaflet *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* (1702). Even the title of William Shakespeare's remarkable play *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623) marks its significance. At times the readers consider it as a true poetic discrimination to conclude such an account of struggle and spirit on a catastrophic note. Being a novelist, Defoe confers contentment on the aged mother of Moll. He has penned story in such a way that the female protagonist Moll meets her mother in prison during her last days and receive a share of stuff from her mother. After meeting her mother in prison, Moll feels safe and comfortable for the first time in life.

After all these traumatic incidents, the values and etiquettes of middle class life started to originate in the life of female lead Moll. As a mark of true repentance, the protagonist Moll visited the church to find herself in the conventional British social order. All along her life, Moll has never tried to bestow care on her twelve children. But they were regarded as bothers in her path of painful existence. This is the first time where Moll really understands the revival of maternal love and care. She says, "He brought the

writings of gift and the scrivener with them, and I signed them very freely, and delivered them to him with a hundred kisses". In the literal sense, these are measured as newly developed facets in the lifespan of Moll and her mother.

Moll Flanders is not a spontaneous overflow of feminist expressions. Even it does not project a clear medium for the ostracized woman to surpass her idiosyncrasy. Nonetheless, it is certainly a literary part of pro-woman and investigates a feminine personality with the rank of the protagonist. The novel portrays the woman of early eighteenth century with greater compassion and consideration. In the face of its conventional ending, it is somewhat ahead of its period and values. In *A History of Women in the West-Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, Michèle Crampe-Casnabet writes:

Control is measured in Moll's life depending on security and stability of status. She is always looking for security and stability in marriage, but never performs her duties as wife, mother and housekeeper. (1993)

Remarkably, the novel deals with quite a number of women characters apart from Moll and her mother. The other female representations like the two sisters, nurse and governess are few to mention. These women characters are dispensed with certain roles which revolve around the life of protagonist Moll at regular intervals. All these characters and instances take the novel to the literary genre of picaresque nature. In addition, the appearance of female personalities within the restricted dominion of literary manifestation scripts as a sporadic phenomenon witnessed during the retro of Defoe.

Conclusion

Life is an expedition with different capabilities bestowed by the almighty and experienced by common folk. An individual has to deliver the best to mark his presence on this spirited and circumscribed terrain. Many writers have employed the literary genres to project the ideals and quandaries of life in an ecstatic convention. Even Daniel Defoe has made

a sincere and momentous exertion in ascertaining the standards of British Empire. His novel *Moll Flanders* has been successful in exhibiting the inner quandaries of woman who suffer, sacrifice and survive at various echelons of life in a male dominated world. To put in a closed circuit, the female protagonist of Defoe Moll has tried to feel the flavour of life with diverse contentions. She is able to capture the rhythm of life when she meets her mother in a prison. Her acquaintance with mother for shorter period has facilitated to juxtapose the elements 'mind' and 'heart' for better survival. As a result, she has realized the importance of ethics, ideals and principles for human contentment.

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