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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PATRIARCH VIS-A-VIS MATRIARCH: FILLMORE'S FRAME SEMANTIC STUDY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *BETWEEN THE ACTS*

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Abstract

Written towards the end of her life, long after Virginia Woolf had suffered from the outbreak of war, *Between the Acts* cautions critics who might be 'tempted' to interpret the novel merely from the perspective of war. Despite of not having feminist characters or explicit references to feminist ideas on the surface level, the work contains many patriarchal identifiers. The paper attempts to highlight these patriarchal identifiers using Fillmore's Frame Semantics thereby highlighting the juxtaposition of patriarchs as well as matriarchs in the defining period of literature.

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Introduction:-

The opening passages of *Between the Acts* are abound of patriarchal identifiers- "Mrs Haines, the wife of the gentleman farmer", "Isa, his son's wife", "Mrs Giles Oliver." (Between the Acts, p.308) The patriarchal identifiers heighten Woolf's concerns for emotional and social justice, along with showcasing the abuses of patriarchal power while honing her insights on dearth of significant moments between women. The general lineaments of male bonding are evident, yet as Marcus and Little argue feminism thrives in *Between the Acts*. Woolf provides nuance, clarification and scholars' understanding of her heroines' relation to England's politics, gender structure, literary transition and landscape, when analysed through Weisgerber's Structuralist Semantics opting an onomasiological method.

The Patriarchal Identifiers and the Diminishing Goddesses

The profound differences between patriarchal and matriarchal groups are evident in *Between the Acts* with goddess figures being worshipped in each group. Manresa, who is the reigning goddess of the patriarchal family, is worshipped because she nurtures patriarchal men; on the other hand, Lucy is vital to Isa and Dodge as she nurtures women and non-heroic men. The patriarchal goddesses transform into projection of male desires and fears, Manresa with her "cornucopia running over", "who restores to Old Bartholomew his spice islands" and make Giles "feel . . . more of an actor"; (p.352) is distinctly a goddess of patriarchal structure, while Lucy comes across as the great goddess figure from pre-patriarchal times.

When observed onomasiologically, the portrait of Lucy and Manresa illustrate the political significance of the images of women that cultures favour. As the novel moves towards conclusion, Bart takes Manresa's hands and "pressed it, as if to say: 'you have given me what you now take from me' and Manresa 'like a goddess, buoyant, abundant with flower-chained captives following in her wake'" (p.367) and with "Giles attendant departs." Around the same time, Dodge imitates Bart's gesture, taking Lucy's hand and praying his homage to her. These ethnoemes assert that associations between men and women in societies which worshipped the fertility goddesses were egalitarian to a greater extent than their relations which ensued under patriarchy.

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When Lucy nurtures and heals Dodge, she appears as a mother goddess to him- “some majestic goddess, rising from her throne among her peers” (p.343) and Dodge wants to “kneel before her, to kiss her hand.” (p.345) Just as Giles, Manresa and Bart are associated by their attraction to violence and dominance, Isa, Dodge and Lucy are drawn together by their necessity and potential for empathy, creativity and nurturing. The heroines in *Between the Acts* are represented as diminishing goddesses in many ways, the traces of women’s grandeur behind the facade of their existing limitations is perceptible. The intention of the novel is to awaken the heroines to their long lost magnificence through the use of intended hyperbole and litotes.

The pageant retells the story of the “patriarchal take over” by illustrating the matriarchal family in its fallen state. Through the portrayal of La Trobe, Woolf attempts to stir the readers and characters to the self-destructiveness of their involvement in patriarchal plots and roles. Woolf asks the readers to identify the pattern of the patriarchal distortion of matriarchal potential in themselves.

Woolf studies cultural patterns in the novel by juxtaposing patriarchal and matriarchal configurations taking Giles and Lucy as the central forces of the patriarchal and matriarchal configurations respectively. She identifies Giles as the patriarchal ideal by giving an exposure of his hostility and egoism as an attack on the society, which aims at every level of private and public life to manufacture brutal men like Giles. While Lucy, Isa and Dodge represent the matriarchal family in the novel, the maid, mother and son along with Bart, Giles and Manresa represent not just the patriarchal family but also the patriarchal social structure.

Let us have a look at the results obtained after applying Fillmore’s Frame Semantics on the novel as well as her personal writings-

Table 13:- Fillmore’s Frame Elements in *Between the Acts* (1941) and *Diaries* (1939-1941).

S.No.	Frame Elements in <i>Between the Acts</i>	Frame Elements in <i>Diaries</i>	Lexical Units	Comment
1.	“some majestic goddess, rising from her throne among her peers” (p.343)	“Mrs Woolf was buried yesterday . . . Yet there was something spontaneous about her. A great joy in the family; in society. All was personal. She attaches to nothing in my own life.” (p.456) (6 th July, 1939)	“some majestic goddess” and “there was something spontaneous about her.”	In her last novel before committing suicide, Woolf tries to build the identity of women in the figure of a goddess, who is powerful and abundant. While writing this novel, Woolf also bravely faced the challenges of warfare which made her strong as a woman. Leonard Woolf’s mother’s death also subsided in her subconscious, raising the aura of women to divinity.
2.	“Manresa ‘like a goddess, buoyant, abundant with flower-chained captives following in her wake’” (p.367)	“I don’t want to be a sop- a face saver. This was a nice little finish to a meeting with Morgan years ago . . . He sniffed about women on the Committee” (p.494) (7 th November, 1940)	“Manresa ‘like a goddess’ and ‘sniffed about women’”	Unlike all her previous novels and bitter experiences with men in her society, we see the need of women being raised to pedestal and worshipped for their benevolent temperament.

Between the Acts shows how people frequently take sides in Giles’s continuous conflict against women and the values represented by the goddess. Giles comes across as the spokesperson of the patriarchal culture that Woolf constantly links with the war. The replete linguisesemes and ethnoemes in the novel serve to highlight how Giles epitomizes everything about “manliness” that Woolf finds “so hateful.” He is depicted as “the muscular, the hirsute, the virile” and his “blue jacket and brass buttons” are precisely evocative of the medals and uniform of the tyrant at the conclusion of *Three Guineas* and is frequently illustrated as a fighter- to Manresa he appears “surly knight” and to Dodge “armed and valiant.” When Giles chases Manresa as she cajoles him and only associates to Isa as his wife and mother of their children, he rules out Isa’s identity as an artiste or divinity from his authenticity. His heroic

antagonism to values of goddess is demonstrated in his irrational hostility toward Lucy- which Woolf notably expresses as “taking sides with authority against his aunt.” (p.434)

The depiction of Giles and Bart is that of an essentially younger and elder version of the masculine types that Woolf detests. Like Giles, Bart bullies Lucy and is seen flaunting the misogynist ideas about the identity of a man and a woman. While Bart is addressed as “old brute”, “thief” and “master”, Giles stands as “the type of all that Mrs Manresa adored” (p.392) which significantly places Mrs Manresa in the camp of warriors. Woolf specifically condemns Manresa’s attraction to Giles when she portrays Manresa as sexually stimulated by his blood stained boots. Like Bart, Manresa is bound by her love for the hostile power that Giles personifies.

Giles, Bart and Manresa are associated by their admiration for dominating power, where everyone is stimulated throughout the course of the novel whenever the misogyny, heroics or violence associated with Giles’s militaristic masculinity is invoked. The subsequent selection during the “Age of Reason” in the pageant highlights the subterranean association between Giles, Bart and Manresa. While the three clandestinely vow loyalty to the violence and misogyny which attract them to each other, Woolf concurrently turns our attention to those excluded from the patriarchal family of Giles by their estrangement from the ideal of virility which Giles exemplifies.

Isa is excluded in the matriarchal group albeit she is connected to the outsiders by fragments of her identity at odds with the virtues that make her acceptable as a mother and a wife, which includes not only her poetic sensibility but also her resentment at domestic ties along with her husband. Isa’s potential to live differently draws her toward Dodge and Lucy, nonetheless her domestic loyalties hold her back. Among the crowd waiting for the pageant to commence only Isa identifies the importance of Dodge and Lucy, but when she asks herself “Have I the courage to go too . . . desire petered out . . . suppressed by leaden duty she owed others.” In such moments, Isa “who had drowned herself for love” (p.340) and “whose ghost haunts Pointz Hall” (p.451) submerges her goddess self beneath the self destructive angel upholding the virtues of familial love.

Conclusion:-

In each of these undertakings, the author sought to make aspects of matrimony legible to the readers and more legible to herself. Woolf questions familial bonds through the apparent dissociation and fragmented narrative of language, thought and relationship. Building upon several cases of characters and Woolf’s diary entries and letters, her work newly characterizes Woolf’s docile wives- her mixture of different social strata, modernist fiction and psychology of gender. In the ways in which she scores her lines of sight and sound, Woolf dwelled with contradictions, putting them to profitable use of deciphering the hegemonic gender constructions. *Between the Acts* in ground breaking analyses of significant aspects of Woolf’s art invite us to extend, yet again our understanding and nomenclature of feminism.

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