



University of Pune

Mahatma Gandhi Vidyamandir's



Smt. Pushpatai Hiray Mahila Mahavidyalaya,

Malegaon Camp, Dist. Nashik. (MS)

Affiliated to University of Pune

Organised

A National Conference on

Women Empowerment

23 & 24 October, 2013

Sponsored by

Board of College & University Development, University of Pune

Conference Proceeding

Editor in Chief and Convener

Dr. Subhash N. Nikam

Principal

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MARRIAGE AS AN EMBODIMENT OF ECONOMIC INDIVIDUALISM IN MOLL FLANDERS

Tushar Kamble

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Introduction: Daniel Defoe has been the subject of many books and research articles. In his life when his career as a merchant was in ruins, Defoe turned to writing to earn his livelihood. His loss in trade became gain in literature. According to Watt, Defoe's novels represent communities that privilege individual pursuit of economic possession. Watt describes Defoe's characters as "an embodiment of economic individualism". While speaking about "possessive individualism" Watt says that in this people are first and foremost autonomous economic agents who become rightful citizens only after they have become owners; they voluntarily surrender some of their natural freedoms to the state in exchange for its power to protect their property rights. This is very much true with Moll Flanders. Defoe creates a world in which people are commodities and social advancement depends on shrewd and calculated behaviour.

Moll's Contemporary World:

Moll is a woman who from the earliest possible makes use of her looks as a commodity which she sells in exchange for security, a husband, protection, food and drink. At the center of the market, a place of the 18 century a husband was an almost certain protection against poverty and want, and it was essential for a girl to get a husband at all costs. Marriage was a permanent institution involving the transfer and inheritance of property and was perhaps the major economic act most people's lives. The financial precariousness of life is such that each man has to look out for him either stealing or trying to get married under a false identity. The cruelty of the time indicates a lack of human warmth and sympathy.

Moll's Economic Ventures in Marriage Institution:

Moll's life can be divided into five parts: the life of the orphanage, life as a married woman, as a thief, experience in Newgate and life in the Virginia Plantation. We can find that money hunting is always at work in every turn of the plot movement. It seems that money is everything in her life. It is a key to get freedom and social economical security.

In her first phase, as an orphan, Moll received all the benefits of such provision. She was brought up by "a very sober pious Women" in Colchester. Moll is indeed, as she writes, "Bred up" to go into service, but the prospect terrified her, "for I had a through Aversion to going to Service as they call'd it, that is to be a Servent"(p.10) Moll's aversion to "that terrible Bug-bear going to Service" is the first sign of a more general discontent with her station: for if at first she only aspires "to be able to get my Beard by my own work"(p.13). Moll wanted to be a 'Gentlewoman' and her definition of gentlewomen is "to be able to get my bread by my own work".

"By the word gentlewoman.... I meant quite another; for alas, all I understood by being a gentlewoman was to be able to work, for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear going to service, where as they meant to live great, rich and high, and I know not what. She made up her mind that she would be such a gentlewoman as that"(12).

The second phase is composed of five marriages, each of them ended by the death or departure of a husband. When Moll enters in marriage institution, she is seduced by the elder son of her master. But she has to marry the younger son of the same family. On the death of her first husband she counts the money left. She says that

"He had been really a very good Husband to me, and we liv'd very agreeably together; But he... had in the little time he liv'd acquir'd no great Matters, so my Circumstances were not great; nor was I much mended by the match: indeed I had perserv'd the elder Brother's Bonds to me, to pay me 500/ which he offered me for my Consent to Marry his Brother; and this, with much more by my husband, left me a Widow with about 1200/ in my Pocket(46-7)."

To be happy, Moll has to make a go with some middle-class husbands and lovers. Moll herself learns early enough that, although it may be unromantic, marriage is generally regarded in an economic light, will love playing small pant. Moll is always trying to get money or to pretend that she has money, in order to attract men and this even before her beauty has faded. Moll's marriages are so closely bound up with her finances. Marriage is a deal for Moll and she expects to improve her financial situation and secure her living in this way. After her unexpected failure in her first marriage, she makes up her mind to be "well married".

Unfortunately Moll's second marriage is not successful in terms of her philosophy. The third marriage, with her half-brother, leads to the discovery of the secret of her birth and so in ruin. But she is determined and ingenious in pursuing her ambitions. Moll knows how to charm people and if they are nice people, the charm is genuine, but if they threaten her, she immediately starts to conceal things beneath the charm of the surface.

Conclusion: This shows that Moll is driven by the need for security. Property is the only thing which will keep her afloat in a very commercial society. She constantly seeks enough wealth (or a wealthy husband) to free her from the threat of poverty, destitution and a life of crime.

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