Chapter VI

WOMEN’S FREEDOM: A STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY

To support women to get their complete freedom is the most prominent event in the present era. Therefore, there are many organizations engaged in the service of women. However, some men argue that women’s freedom should not be equal to that of men. They believe that when women are free to do what they like, they lose their feminine nature. In its most cruel and brutal form, patriarchal society treats women as second-class citizens or less. Persecution of women has sometimes reached an abominable level when it is accompanied by prostitution, slavery, poverty, hunger, etc. These cases may represent the untold stories of many women who suffered in silence. However, women’s freedom has been a key question for generations to come for the reason that women constitute the most important part of the human race, yet they face discrimination in many aspects of life.

In the sixteenth century, women did not get their rights. They were not allowed to work in professions as doctor, lawyer, clergymen etc. (Clarke 19), but they had to work in other fields as hard as men or worse to survive. Many girls did not go to school and most of them were often educated at home. They learnt reading, writing and language like French, Italian, Latin, etc. Regarding higher education, “women were not allowed to study at the universities or take degrees” (Clarke 19). Only some upper-class women were well educated and one of them was Queen Elizabeth I (Loades 21). With the passage of time, women were allowed to own and inherit property.
In the seventeenth century, particularly when Charles was restored to the throne, women had some freedom and practised some of their rights. Society started to progress not only economically but also in its education, culture and moral relations. Many schools for girls were founded in different towns where girls were taught subjects like writing, music and needlework. In particular, women spent more time on learning skills like music, embroidery, etc rather than learning academic subjects. In fact, educational level of women in a society holds as an important indicator of the development of that society. As much as women receive good education, they can fight for their rights and freedom.

Some women had got jobs, yet they mainly worked spinning cloths. They were embroiderers, tailoresses, shoemakers, dyers and washerwomen, but the majority of women were kept very busy looking after the basic needs of the family and taking care of the children (Ihlo 6). In a society strongly influenced by Puritan values, it was very difficult for women to find ways of making an independent living, instead they depended on their husbands and hence finding a husband was a matter of great importance.

With all these achievements, women were not allowed to express themselves freely especially in matters concerning, love, love marriage, sexuality, etc. At the time when they commit any sin especially sexual sins, they were punished by “whipping and the stocks” which “... were commonplace and were applied not only to men but sometimes also to women for offences such as petty larceny and sexual immorality” (Ingram 59). Thus, women found themselves obliged to stay at home. As a result of women’s confinement to the domestic sphere, women spent their times in private chatting, gossip and scandal. Martin Ingram states:
Nonetheless, women in early modern England did enjoy some degree of quasi-public power; as brokers of gossip, makers and breakers of reputation . . . . But these female activities . . . were regarded by men with some ambivalence if not hostility. The stock male view was that women were unduly addicted to ‘tittle-tattle’, which was subversive, distracted women from their rightful duties, and easily led to strife. (48)

Laura Gowing explains the function of the slanderer:

The slanderous words that women exchanged in cases like these functioned both as complaint about sexual misconduct and, much more broadly, as one step in wider neighbourhood conflicts. Slander has often been conflated with gossip, understood as a way of regulating behaviour and social relations through the emphasis of group values, consonant with a larger moral system represented in various forms of contemporary culture, custom and law. (34)

Women who were convicted of being scolds or gossips were punished by being tied to a seat and then ducted into the river or any local pond. The last British woman was ducted in 1809. In their introduction to Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England, Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker point out:

In this period “scold” was a highly potent, negatively charged term, second only to “whore” as a pejorative female label. Scolding was, however, also a criminal offence, and women found guilty could be judicially ducted, fined, bound over by recognizance, or subject to numerous informal sanctions. (8)
The penalty of ducking was thought to be less severe than a whipping or being kept in the stocks. Punishment using ducking-stool was established in the late fifteenth century and constructed nearly in 1475. During Elizabeth I’s reign, this kind of punishment disappeared (Ingram 58-59). However, it started again in the early seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century. Alice Morse Earle states, “In 1803 the ducking-stool was still used in Liverpool, England, and in 1809 in Leominster, England” (95-96).

Another punishment for women was called the “branks” or “scold’s bridle,” used in England in the seventeenth century and continued nearly to “. . . the nineteenth century: at Congleton until 1824, at Shrewsbury until 1846” (Southey 204). “Scold’s bridle” was a metal frame placed over a woman’s head and stuck in her mouth to prevent her from talking. Catie Gill illustrates:

> The punishment of the scold seeks to forcibly restrain women’s speaking, when the cultural systems that actively encouraged women to self-censor had failed. Scolding women were either constrained in a bridle, or cucked on a ducking stool . . . . The bridling or cucking of the scold therefore enacts patriarchal control of language at a literal level. (72)

Women in the seventeenth century were hardly able to express themselves in the patriarchal society which refused to give any consideration to women. When women remained struggling to snatch their freedom, they faced all kinds of aggression, yet they continued their struggle to the end. What was worse was when women were being exiled because they claimed freedom; just seeking freedom was a charge.
The position of women in society from the late seventeenth century onwards was somewhat different from many years ago. Women became more cultivated and political subjects. In particular, while men were preoccupied in the country's political and economic affairs, women had complementary and secondary political parts to play. Women began to cope with the changes and developments and were able to establish themselves as indispensable figures of the society. In short, women from this time onwards were able to create a framework for understanding their importance in the society. Thus, many women were able to make their private views public through writing.

In spite of the obstacles, the presence of women in the British literature of the seventeenth century is noticeable. Women began to appear strongly in two aspects of literature. At the time when literature was dominated by men, women dared to write and express their thought boldly. Many women became authors and started expressing themselves through drama, novels, poetry and writing critical topics concerning their issues. Women characters in the literary works began to have important roles to play. Even men authors, who used to portray women characters in their literary works as mere possessions of men, began to make women characters more powerful and more efficacious.

Further, restoration drama was of great importance for it became a stereotype of society and the success of the drama depended on the role of women. Thanks to Charles who granted not only exclusive rights to the theatre of the time but also gave women a chance to be on stage which became a new feature of the Restoration stage. Women on stage put the first step to realise the importance of the opposite gender which was more entertaining than watching only male gender. Accordingly, audiences appreciated male-
female performance. The role of women on stage shows the importance of women’s role in the society where women could do whatever men did, give them a chance to realise their rights, practise their freedom and empower them to face the patriarchal society. Therefore, the issue of equality began to find its defenders, and then the issue of feminism began to float to the surface. Changing of attitude toward gender had required a great effort from women towards their own issues in which they should look at themselves as equal to men and not as inferior individuals who completely depended on men, and this is what Behn has projected in her plays.

The beginning of the eighteenth century marked a new era in the history of gender. By the end of the century, though women still suffered in many ways, they had got more freedom in many aspects of public life. Girls from different social classes could go to school even though they were still engrossed in learning skills. Scandal and gossip began to spread significantly among the upper classes, therefore Sheridan, for example, criticized it in *The School for Scandal*. However, women began to involve more and more in the affairs of the country and were able to speak out their problems since they found publication as means to express ideas freely. Women’s writings became more expressive and professional. Hence, they found a big market for their publications. Nonetheless, Mary Wollstonecraft, who is regarded as the first well-known feminist, still believed that women did not become equal to men especially in education and marriage. She argued that women’s education was not equal to that of their contemporary men, and marriage laws were in support of husbands against their wives, thus she spurred public debate to reform laws. These topics have received an extensive discussion in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 
Behn and Sheridan are from a country that ranks itself as the first country to guarantee women's freedom. In this country, women in reality and women characters in most plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were downtrodden, demeaned, coerced and oppressed by men. Contrary to the portrayal of the women characters in the plays of their contemporary writers, Behn and Sheridan support women, praise them and try to show them as powerful and important characters.

Behn was one of the first female authors who paved her way and the way for the future generations of female writers. She challenged the norm of the society where women, for example, could not speak about sex. In her poem “The Golden Age,” Behn attacks those who view female sexual desire as sin. She writes:

Oh cursed Honor! thou who first didst damn
A woman to the sin of shame;

Honor! that robb'st us of our gust,

Honor! that hindered mankind first. (Rogers and McCarthy 12)

Though Behn could speak and write all what were prohibited by Puritans and hated by many men, she was not punished as other women of her age and the ages before, yet she had received severe criticism and willful neglect. This means that she succeeded in her struggle for women's identity by educating women of how to get more freedom. In turn, Sheridan granted his women characters equal freedom to that of men.

At any rate, it has to be noted that women's freedom in politics, religion, morality, honour, marriage, sex and wealth has been addressed in the previous chapters though not in detail. This chapter also does not discuss women's freedom in its broad meaning since Behn and Sheridan give equal freedom to both sexes, but it is about three difficulties that
women characters face while dealing with men in the plays under study. They are: inability to argue, inability to take apt decisions and incomplete interaction in public life.

Women are capable of serving the society like men if they get the chance and complete freedom, but women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were still at the beginning of their struggle for their identity. Thus, they had their shortcomings which might result from their excessive rush towards obtaining freedom which again clashed with men who did not believe in women’s freedom. However, women themselves sometimes become the reason for their shortcomings since they subjugate subserviently to men’s powers for one reason or the other. In this regard, some women have dreamed pretty dreams, acted against men’s arrogances, reacted angrily to the unfair power of men, empowered themselves by available means, yet they do not persist to the end to get their complete freedom.

INABILITY TO ARGUE

Most women have the ability to argue to defend their freedom, but some others are unable despite the efforts of the dramatist to make them speak powerfully and convincingly. Some say that the analytic frame of mind for forming strong arguments is somewhat incompatible with some mental capacities. Whatever might be said, there is also the very real possibility that a given woman is not actually ready to argue for reasons she alone knows well. David Sullivan notes that women’s inability to express their will is a matter of modesty, “Modesty was associated not only with silence, but also with confinement and suppression of the will” (340). In reality, the desire to form strong arguments with the other speakers should not be at odds with the so-called ‘freedom of expression’ because every one of the speakers has the right to say what he/she reasonably
thinks to be. A woman speaker has to utilise all that she has at her own disposal to convince others of her view, and then her view should be respected. Freedom of expression sometimes gets stifled because the speakers are constantly being forced to conform to someone else.

In the plays under study, some women are rich and are from the high class, but they do not speak strongly enough about their rights and freedom especially when they are in critical situations. It is noticeable that Behn tried her best to make the speech of her women characters more powerful and convincing. Jane Spencer claims that Behn could "empower female characters" by giving them "more lines to speak than in men's." Spencer adds, "there are more women characters and more women-only scenes; and women are more often given the opening scene of a play, thus establishing a woman's viewpoint on the action as central" ("Deceit, Dissembling" 90).

In *The Rover*, Florinda's inability to argue in the critical situation is perceptible to the extent that the listeners can clearly realise her weak words. In contrast, Sheridan deliberately makes Mrs. Malaprop stammer in her speech but projects it in the form of humour.

Florinda's argumentative speech is not as strong and convincing as the speech of Angellica and Hellena. Through all her speeches, she does not take a step ahead to show the tyranny and barbarism of men. In contrast, Angellica is a well-known prostitute, but she renders an eloquent speech to defend her freedom. In the same vein, Lucetta puts her sweet words into action by tricking and stealing Blunt; even if her work is disgraceful and disgusting, she appears as a woman who can trick men. But Florinda, who has taken
the sympathy of the audience for the interference of her brother on her marriage, does not speak out her sufferings and take positive action in the face of such challenges.

To make a comparison between the two sisters Florinda and Hellena, it seems that Hellena has been ranked as the major character while Florinda as minor though she has a large role to play. In addition, most of the analysis, criticism and satire circle around Florinda and her role in the play. Undoubtedly, Florinda is regarded as an important character who holds the attention of the audience, readers and scholars. If she is excluded from the play, the play becomes just a narrative. Anand Prakash gives another example of the importance of Florinda’s presence in the play, “At one level, we cannot overlook Florinda’s own privileged position of the eldest daughter because of which she voices the clichéd dictum of the family . . .” (176). On the other hand, the play would remain a play to some extent if the role of Hellena was excluded, yet it would be without wit and humour. Nonetheless, Florinda is not the main heroine. The answer for this lies in Hellena’s self-confidence, wit, prominent and eloquent speech, outspoken argument, perseverance, clarity of mind and initiative. All these features rank Hellena as the first main female character. Anand Prakash narrates some features of Hellena’s personality, “Hellena is young, attractive, talkative and innocent. She does not have, being young, that fund of knowledge and experience which could press upon her the necessity to circumspect” (174).

Florinda’s struggle for identity can clearly be seen in her defence against Blunt’s attack. However, her self-defence is not as strong as it should be. Her words with him are not strict enough to put an end to his assault. When Blunt steps forwards to catch her, she whispers, “I beseech you, as you seem a gentleman, pity a harmless virgin that takes your
house for sanctuary” (*Rover*.4.5.38-40). Her words seem to be much alluring than defending. Therefore, Blunt continues to assault her. Anita Pacheco states, “Indeed, any resistance that Florinda makes will serve merely to condemn her as a tease who arouses male desire only to frustrate it” (“Rape and the Female Subject” 330). Nevertheless, he cleverly reverses the situation. He regards himself as a victim and she as an attacker. He awfully exclaims, “Can I not be safe in my house for you, not in my chamber, nay, even being naked too cannot secure me; this is an impudence greater than has invaded me yet—come, no resistance” (*Rover*.4.5.43-46). This is one of the tricks of men when they alter the situation in their favour even if they become liars like Blunt who lies many times to defend his crime against Florinda. In fact, he accuses Florinda and other women in general of many despicable acts just because they are women. He considers them as “a generation of damned hypocrites,” and “Dissembling witches” (*Rover*.4.5.62-64). However, it is he who has conveyed these bad spots. Later, he narrates the story of the unknown whore Florinda to his friends in a way as if she was the attacker who intended to assault and rape him, “. . . she assault me here in my own lodgings, and had doubtless committed a rape upon me . . .” (*Rover*.5.1.66-67). Ironically, it was he who assaulted her and tried to rape her. Nevertheless, his claim itself is an evidence of his guilt, but he would never be banished by the dominant world of men. Anand Prakash proclaims, “Aphra Behn’s criticism of the ways of the world (of her time) is largely informed by an anguish and a helplessness that particular women experienced during the Restoration period in their confrontation with power-wielding males” (186).

As mentioned earlier, Blunt accuses Florinda of the attack and then he goes on to rape her and pulls her rudely, but she exclaims, “Dare you be cruel” (*Rover*.4.5.47). This
statement seems to be seductive at the time of intending to rape a woman. She seems to be confused in her defence to the degree that she cannot find other words to defend herself. In addition, the defending words that she uses are regarded as a woman’s natural coquetry; therefore, Blunt gets excited to see her in this critical situation. He threatens her:

I will kiss and beat thee all over . . . thou shalt lie with me too . . . I will smile and deceive thee, flatter thee, and beat thee, kiss and swear, and lye to thee, embrace thee and rob thee, as she did me, fawn on thee, and strip thee stark naked, then hang thee out at my window by the heels, with a paper of scurvy verses fastened to thy breast, in praise of damnable women- come, come along. (*Rover.*4.5.48-57)

Even though the torment is intolerable, she remains passive in front of these threats. Anderson states the conflict between Florinda and Blunt and attributes the reason to Blunt who represents Whigs. Anderson asserts:

The comic event reverses the power dynamic between Florinda and Blunt: a woman takes her revenge on two men not because she makes no distinctions between men (as Blunt refuses to distinguish between women) but because they are the wrong men who seek her out as a general sexual commodity. Their beatings, a standard punishment for Whigs in Behn’s plays, brings them back to the immediacy of the body even as it exiles them from the world of sexual pleasure. (87)

Blunt does not see Florinda as a human being who has feelings, honour etc. Unfortunately, he thinks only about how to take revenge on women to compensate
himself of the trick that he had faced with Lucetta, so he sees Florinda as a target. Heidi Hutner states, “Behn suggests that Blunt finds it necessary to master a woman because he cannot master himself. In order for the duped Blunt to regain his manly authority, he attacks a woman — any woman” (Rereading Aphra Behn 110). Nevertheless, Florinda keeps silent towards Blunt’s abuse, waiting to put his words into action.

In this critical situation, she implores him to leave her since it is irrational to be punished for a crime that she did not commit but committed by another woman. She tells him, “Alas, sir, must I be sacrificed for the crimes of the most infamous of my sex?” (Rover.4.5.58-659). So far, her excuse and her argument regarding her case falls on deaf ears and they seem to be not strong enough to block his attempts. Unbelievable action floats on the surface when Blunt boasts of his barbarity in front of his friend Frederick by saying, “I am glad thou art come to be a witness of my dire revenge” (Rover.4.5.69-70). Since Blunt is a man without mercy, he is delighted by torturing her, “... no prayers or tears shall mitigate my rage; therefore prepare for both my pleasure of enjoyment and revenge, for I am resolved to make up my loss here on thy body, I’ll take it out in kindness and in beating” (Rover.4.5.77-80). She does not react positively to these threats, instead of crying, fighting or trying to leave the house, she remains there and provokes him, “I think he will not — dares not — be so barbarous” (Rover.4.5.82). Heidi Hutner states, “Despite Florinda’s traditionally feminine passive nature, she is ultimately subject to the same verbal and physical abuse and condemnation by the masculinist ideology of her culture as Hellena and Angellica...” (Rereading Aphra Behn 110).

Behn actually renders the brutality of men in its most hideous form when Frederick decides to join Blunt in raping Florinda instead of protecting this scared and
trembling woman. She tells them about the reason for her presence and beseeches them to leave her to go out, but her petition touches deaf ears. Frederick firmly threatens her, “for we are fellows not to be caught twice in the same trap” (*Rover*.4.5.95-96). Moreover, Frederick confirms that Blunt has the right to take revenge. He reprimands Florinda as if she is responsible for what has happened to Blunt, “See how a female picaroon of this island of rogues has shattered him, and canst thou hope for any mercy?” (*Rover*.4.5.98-99). No one can believe that the two men would rape Florinda at the same time when one is watching the other. This crime indeed confirms the brutality of men especially when they desire to see her suffer. Blunt assures Frederick, “we’ll both lie with her, and then let me alone to bang her” (*Rover*.4.5.101-02). Frederick replies, “I’m ready to serve you in matters of revenge that has a double pleasure in’t” (*Rover*.4.5.103-04). Paradoxically, Frederick sympathises with Blunt for being tricked by Lucetta, but he does not sympathise or be human with Florinda, instead they insist on defaming her reputation and violating her honour. It is immoral to see Frederick helping the attacker against the victim. Yet it seems that both men are diagnosed with a wrong notion that Blunt has the right to rape Florinda since he was tricked by Lucetta.

Florinda finds no way to resist except to use the reputation of Belvile, her fiancé, “Stay, sir; I have seen you with Belvile, an English cavalier for his sake use me kindly; you know him, Sir” (*Rover*.4.5.108-09). Then, she adds, “Sir if you have any esteem for that Belvile, I conjure you to treat me with more gentleness; he’ll thank you for the justice” (*Rover*.4.5.114-15). This is, in fact, another example that Florinda cannot defend herself and she is waiting for a man to protect her. When she talks about Belvile, they stop their assault for a while to discuss the matter, this encourages Florinda to use the
reputation of Belvile more. She tells them, "Sir if you find me not worth Belvile's care, use me as you please, and that you may think I merit better treatment then you threaten" (Rover.4.5.117-19). When Florinda gives them a ring to hand it over to Belvile, they decide to postpone the rape until finding out whether this is really a woman of high repute or just a whore. Unfortunately, Frederick needs a proof to believe her and this is regarded as an immoral spot in his character. On hearing the name of Belvile, they decide to lock her up in a room until they make sure of her identify from Belvile. Strangely enough, Florinda's existence as a human being becomes useless while just the reputation of a man -- only the reputation -- is effective and powerful enough to stop the assault. In fact, Frederick's behaviour with Florinda is immoral for the reason that he should have stopped Blunt from committing the crime of rape. Surprisingly, he himself is about to share the crime of committing a rape believing her to be a harlot.

Florinda's verbal resentment makes one argue that she fails to defend herself as it should have, and this is clear in her soft argument with them. All her words and statements do not convey any strictness and ferocity. Her repetition of 'sir' and some other soft words are regarded to be normal women's foreplay to stir men's sexual instincts. The audience expects her, at least, to weep, yet it does not happen. Her statements, for example, 'use me kindly,' 'treat me with more gentleness' and 'use me as you please' seem to be an indirect invitation for Blunt and Frederick to do what they like.

In contrast, Florinda argues well with her brother especially about her arranged marriage, so audiences are satisfied with her performance. She, for example, tells him, "I would not have a man so dear to me as my brother follow the ill customs of our country, and make a slave of his sister" (Rover.1.1.59-61). However, she does not remain
the same in her argument with the attackers — Blunt and Fredrick. Her argument with them is more tempting than convincing and does not have any seriousness and strictness though they are about to rape her.

Women in *The Rover* struggle for their identity, yet they face many hurdles and one of them is the mandatory limitation of the freedom of expression. Laura Brown lists some of the contradictions that women are facing in a male society:

> The female figure is associated with the mystifying process of fetishization, and with related problems of identity and knowledge, artifice and reality, dissembling and truth, where the effort of seeing past the objects of accumulation becomes a kind of cultural obsession. In this role the woman typically acts as a proxy for male acquisition or a scapegoat of male violence. (*Ends of Empire* 18-19)

In reality, every female character in the play has her own trouble, but Florinda undeservedly has the lion’s share of injustice. From the beginning to nearly the end of the play, Florinda is exposed to the risk of being raped. She is subjected to three rape attempts. Before the serious incidents of the play have to follow, she reveals her past story that a group of soldiers attempted to rape her, but the intervention of Belvile prevented the happening. She reveals that she could not defend herself, it was only Belvile who saved her at the right time. In the second time, Florinda is about to be raped in the garden when she keeps waiting for Belvile. Willmore attacks her, believing her to be a whore. However, she is rescued by Belvile. The third near-rape that Florinda faced is in Blunt’s chamber. Frederick intends to join Blunt in raping Florinda, but they postpone the rape until they make sure of her identity and then Florinda is being saved by Valeria.
Behn concerns much about sexual violation and female victimization. Hence, her plays contain excessive discussion of rape. Rape was almost an essential aspect of Restoration drama, yet many male dramatists did not discuss its social consequences in their plays, but they presented it as a sexual issue. Jacqueline Pearson considers 'rape' as the most heinous crime perpetrated by men against women, "All kinds of dangers threaten to disrupt the typical lives of women in drama of the period, dangers of poverty, forced marriage, and sexual harassment. But the danger felt to be most theatrically appealing was rape . . ." (95-96). Millett interprets the issue of rape in the light of the concept of sexuality:

In rape, the emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt, and the desire to break or violate personality, take a form consummately appropriate to sexual politics. Patriarchal societies typically link feelings of cruelty with sexuality, the latter often equated both with evil and with power. (529)

In turn, Jocelyn Catty considers "the act of rape" as "an extreme expression of the power relation between men and women." Catty adds, "... despite social sanctions against it, it is and has been an intrinsic part of Western society's subjection of women. Literature, along with the visual arts, inscribes this violence in culture" (2).

Behn uses Florinda as a tool to show the barbarous treatment and the arrogance of men towards women. Florinda is a respectable woman as per the audience, yet she has been incurred to rape more than once. She has tried to do her best to keep her chastity and to get her normal freedom, but all men stand against her, including the close friends of her lover who have tried to rape her. Thus, she tolerates all kinds of sufferings by men as near-rape, beatings, insults, defamation, etc. The attempts of the main male characters to
rape her including her brother depict men as monsters in which they consider women as creatures who were born only to satisfy their sexual desires. At the time when women try to resist, men use force. Susan Griffin points out that "In the spectrum of male behaviour, rape . . . is the penultimate act. Erotic pleasure cannot be separated from culture, and in our culture male eroticism is wedded to power" (287). In this sense, it can be said in a metaphorical comparison that men are barbarous and they behave like animals. In short, Florinda's severe hardship depicts men as misogynists. Hence, Joan Kelly argues that the earlier feminist writers, one of them was Behn, had a certain agenda in their writings, "The immediate aim of these feminist theorists was to oppose the mistreatment of women. Their concern was for women, that they might have the knowledge and confidence to reject misogynist claims . .." (Women, History and Theory 67).

In The Rivals, Mrs. Malaprop is a woman of strong personality especially in her dealings with Lydia. She is educated and tries to speak in a bombastic way, but she cannot express in the right way what she intends to say. She uses incorrect words to express herself. In most of her arguments, she intends to say something while her words mean something else and hence her wrong usage of words sometimes brings laughter. Her arguments with Sir Anthony about the necessity of women's education; with Absolute about the infringement of Beverley's letter; and her letters to O'Trigger are all examples of her malapropism in which she commits many verbal mistakes. In short, she intends to say something, yet her speech and conversations convey different meanings. However, her name becomes a term in English language and it is synonymous with all those who use complicated language without trying to understand it.
In her confrontation with Sir Anthony regarding the education of women, she fails to convince him to agree with her view. He instead convinces her of the unimportance of educating women. Because of Lydia's excessive romance, he is of the opinion that women should not receive education. According to him, education crams women's minds with trivial information and then they become a burden to the society. Sir Anthony's statement regarding women's learning is unjust in the sense that he generalises the judgment according to individual's misbehaviour. If Lydia is a whimsical dreamer, majority of women are not! So, Sir Anthony's viewpoint towards women's education regards to be a black spot in his personality. The female characters in Sheridan's *The Rivals* are well-educated. This gives us a good impression about women's education in the society. Nevertheless, women in general "dominated the writing and reading" of the literature of "sentimentalism" (Barker-Benfield xvii).

On the other hand, Mrs. Malaprop stands against this negative impression and tries to defend the rights of women in getting education, but her Malapropism is more funny than persuasive. It seems as though Sheridan did not intend to defend women's rights in education. If he intended to do it, he would have found another way to discuss it, yet he deliberately made Mrs. Malaprop commit such mistakes.

In a nutshell, Mrs. Malaprop tries to use bombastic language to attract the listeners but has received criticism instead of praises. O'Trigger, for example, is the one who ostensibly praises her letter as he considers it to be Lydia's letter. Since he loves Lydia, he estimates her malapropism and describes it as a sophisticated language, "Lucy, your lady is a great mistress of language. Faith, she's quite the queen of the dictionary!" (*Rivals*.2.2.68). Nevertheless, his speech conveys a sarcastic comment since he follows
his praise with a call for criticism, “for here are a great many poor words pressed into the service of this note” (*Rivals*.2.2.68-69).

In all her arguments, Mrs. Malaprop commits verbal mistakes. For instance, she orders her niece to “. . . forget this fellow – to *illiterate* him, I say, quite from your memory” (*Rivals*.1.2.49). However, the word ‘illiterate’ is used instead of ‘obliterate.’ Then she affirms, “Now don’t attempt to *extirpate* [extricate] yourself from the matter; you know I have proof *controvertible* [incontrovertible] of it” (*Rivals*.1.2.49). Then she informs Sir Anthony that Lydia “might *reprehend* [comprehend] the true meaning of what she is saying” (*Rivals*.1.2.51). Since she wants to marry her niece to a rich man, she finds no one better than Absolute, so she asks his father, “I hope you will represent her to the captain as an object not altogether *illegible* [eligible]” (*Rivals*.1.2.52). After leaving Sir Anthony, she calls Lucy to give another letter to O’Trigger. Then she orders her to be honest in conveying the letter, “… if ever you betray what you are entrusted with . . . you forfeit my *malevolence* [benevolence] for ever . . .” (*Rivals*.1.2.53).

Mrs. Malaprop appears to be a well-educated and authoritarian woman and these two traits in addition to her witty and humorous behaviour are enough to make her a woman of clout and immense charisma. Nonetheless, her strong personality fades away as soon as the plot proceeds forwards. In this regard, Absolute is intelligent enough to deceive both Lydia and Mrs. Malaprop when he pays a visit to their house. Mrs. Malaprop welcomes him, “Your being Sir Anthony’s son, Captain, would itself be a sufficient *accommodation* [recommendation]” (*Rivals*.3.3.78). In fact, Mrs. Malaprop does not know that Absolute is Beverley in disguise. Therefore, she agrees to marry Lydia to Absolute and not to Beverley. Her detestation of Beverley has increased when

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20 The italic words are misused words, so the correct words are written inside square brackets.
she intercepts a letter sent by him to Lydia in which it contains insults to her. In reality, the letter has been sent by Absolute and not by Beverley as the two ladies think.

Absolute is intuitive to know the psychological nature of Mrs. Malaprop. Hence, he praises her education. Mrs. Malaprop is overjoyed to hear Absolute praise her education. Thus, she begins to estimate the few people who marry women for their educations and not for their beauties. She states, “few gentlemen, nowadays, know how to value the ineffectual [intellectual] qualities in a woman! Few think how a little knowledge becomes a gentlewoman! Men have no sense now but for the worthless flower of beauty!” (Rivals.3.3.78). Then she appreciates Absolute, “He is the very pineapple [pinnacle] of politeness!” (Rivals.3.3.78). However, she starts narrating her story with Lydia, but she is not successful enough in her expression since some of her words convey different meanings to what she intends to say. She tells Absolute, “Long ago I laid my positive conjunctions on her, never to think on the fellow again — I have since laid Sir Anthony’s preposition [proposition] before her — but I am sorry to say she seems resolved to decline every particle [article] that I enjoin her” (Rivals.3.3.79). Then she directs her speech to the so-called Beverley. She tells Absolute, “Oh! it gives me the hydrostatics [hysterics] to such a degree! I thought she had persisted [desisted] from corresponding with him; but behold this very day, I have interceded [intercepted] another letter from the fellow!” (Rivals.3.3.79). Actually, she is upset about his attack on her language. She says:

There, sir! an attack upon my language! . . . An aspersion upon my parts of speech! Was ever such a brute! Sure if I reprehend [comprehend] anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular [vernacular] tongue,
and a nice *derangement* [arrangement] of *epitaphs* [epithets]!

*(Rivals.3.3.80)*

Mrs. Malaprop hands the letter to Absolute, the man who has actually sent it. She asks him to read it to know the rudeness of the sender. Absolute starts reading his letter, "so that I have a scheme to see you [Lydia] shortly with the old harridan's consent, and even to make her a go-between in our interviews" *(Rivals.3.3.80)*. In this letter, Absolute who is Beverley in disguise informs Lydia of his plan that he would befool Mrs. Malaprop in order to give him a permission to meet her. What makes it interesting is Mrs. Malaprop's threatening, "we'll try who can plot best" *(Rivals.3.3.80)*.

Absolute now puts his words into action. He convinces Mrs. Malaprop to let him meet Lydia by introducing him as Beverley. She agrees and applauds the trick. She also promises him to do her best to help him. She starts calling Lydia, "Lydia, come down here!" Then she murmurs in a way which reveals her confidence, "He'll make me a go-between in their interviews! ha! ha! ha!-come down, I say, Lydia! I don't wonder at your laughing, ha! ha! ha! His impudence is truly ridiculous" *(Rivals.3.3.81)*.

She does not realise the reality that she is really an active go-between. Absolute watches her behaviour and sarcastically remarks, "'Tis very ridiculous, upon my soul, ma'am, ha! ha! ha!" *(Rivals.3.3.81)*. It is amazing to see this plan being achieved without any huge effort. The success belongs to the presence of Absolute's mind and to his ability to clutch at the right time. He behaves tactfully to fulfill what he has already written.

In turn, Lydia boldly informs her aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, that she would never marry Absolute. Hence, Mrs. Malaprop certifies that "Oh, there's nothing to be hoped for from her! She's as headstrong as an allegory [alligator] on the banks of Nile"
(Rivals.3.3.83). Leigh Hunt states, “Mrs. Malaprop is a caricature, but a very amusing one, of Mrs. Slipslop. Even her ‘allegory on the banks of the Nile,’ however, must yield to the other’s anger in behalf of the ‘frail sect’” (viii). With all these failures, Mrs. Malaprop remains a “provincial gentlewoman” (Loftis, Sheridan and the Drama 51), and a “curiously acute” woman as Jared Sparks et al state:

Her remark to Lydia, that she is “as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile,” – her scorn of “algebra, simony, fluxions, paradoxes, and such inflammatory branches of learning,” – her quotation from Hamlet, in which the royal Dane is gifted with the “front of Job himself,” – her fear of going into “hydrostatic fits,” – her pride in the use of “her oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs,” – are characteristics, not of a mind flippantly stupid, but curiously acute. (82)

On the other hand, Absolute pretends in front of Lydia as if he is able to con Mrs. Malaprop by disguising himself as Absolute. Lydia is happy to receive the so-called Beverley at her room. She thinks that he is angry after the last quarrel they had. She is also overjoyed to see her lover being able to deceive her authoritarian aunt which becomes a romantic adventure. Hence, it is a chance for them now to discuss the final plan of their romantic elopement. She does not realise that the man in front of her is Absolute in reality and Beverley in disguise. However, Absolute gains the satisfaction of both ladies. Lydia thinks only of a romantic marriage, that is why she falls in the same trap of deception while Mrs. Malaprop, who is also passionately corresponding with O’Trigger, behaves in a negative way to the letter of Beverley. As a result, Mrs. Malaprop actually achieves what was planned by Absolute.
Sheridan has written a marvellous scene in each of his plays. Fiskin states, "Sheridan is usually accorded the honor of having written the most witty scenes of social satire in English comedy" (18). *The School for Scandal* has, for example, the Screen Scene which is regarded to be Sheridan’s masterpiece. The Second Scene of the Fourth Act in *The Rivals* is also regarded as a literary stunner of comedy. This scene is a mixture of many dramatic issues. At all events, Mrs. Malaprop is still praising Absolute, “His physiognomy [phraseology] so grammatical!” (*Rivals*.4.2.93). Meanwhile, she is unable to convince her niece to marry him. She tells Sir Anthony, “I am sorry to say, Sir Anthony, that my affluence [influence] over my niece is very small” (*Rivals*.4.2.94).

The guardians try to persuade Lydia and Absolute to speak to each other. Lydia sits on chair, with her face heading back. She does not like to see the Captain Absolute. She still believes that the man who visited her last time was Beverley. Also, Absolute cannot show his real personality. Sir Anthony, the quick-tempered person, gets angry to see his son hesitate to speak to Lydia. Mrs. Malaprop still berates her niece for not being respectful with her suitor. At the same time, Lydia thinks of her aunt who until now does not discover the hoax that the person who comes with Sir Anthony is different from the person who visited them previously. She does not believe that Beverley is also able to deceive Sir Anthony, but she thinks that her aunt is being purblind. Indeed, this situation is funny and embarrassing at the same time especially when Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop attempt to push Absolute and Lydia to speak to each other.

When Lydia hears Absolute’s voice, she recognises it and turns back to see in front of her Beverley. At this moment, she is really shocked to know the real personality of this man. She does not know that the man who pretended to be Beverley is in reality
Absolute, but he had played two-fold roles to win both Lydia and Mrs. Malaprop. Therefore, Absolute deceives Lydia and not Mrs. Malaprop. At this time, Lydia realises that she has been deceived in her romance. She loves Beverley, the poor man, while he is a rich baronet. Her dreams of elopement, leaving her wealth and marrying a poor man have come to an end.

In her turn, Mrs. Malaprop is also shocked to know that the man who wrote the insulting letter was Absolute and not Beverley. Nonetheless, she forgives him and rewards him by leaving the room, where Lydia and Absolute are sitting, in order to let them talk freely. By this act, it seems as if she intends to help him in wooing Lydia.

At the end of the play, Mrs. Malaprop becomes the subject of ridicule. All characters start laughing at her malapropism and mocking her love affair with O'Trigger. She remains silent towards such a slander. It is only Sir Anthony who sympathises with her and gives vent to her frustrating feelings by praising her, “Come, Mrs. Malaprop, don’t be cast down you are in your bloom yet” (Rivals.5.3.121). At this time, she is unable do anything except sadly murmuring, “Oh Sir Anthony! Men are all barbarians” (Rivals.5.3.121). Her last remark indicates her frustration of men since she cannot stand against them. Thus, she completely succumbs to men’s domination which has been crowned by her marriage to Sir Anthony.

INABILITY TO TAKE APT DECISIONS

Inability to take apt decisions at the right time can slow down the progress of any work in life. Indecision prevents a person from taking advantages of good opportunities because any opportunity needs a quick decision; otherwise, it ends. So, indecision can sometimes affect the life of a person. However, some people become unable to take
decisions for even minor things. Others are even unable to perform planned things properly due to lack of information. Taking decisions without enough information can make things almost impossible. Indecision adversely affects the future of a person especially when the person does not understand what is going on around him/her or when a person hesitates whether to take a decision now or later. In general, the pessimistic views, lack of confidence, fear of future and ambiguity of the course of life that the person wants to choose are also some reasons behind inability to take apt decisions.

Women in the plays under study have their special reasons behind delays in decision-making, it is because they give too much respect to men for love or marriage. Unfortunately, women seek freedom from the powers of men, and when they are about to be free, they clash again with men and therefore become frustrated in taking correct decisions.

Florinda, who hesitates to argue against Blunt and Frederick, also cannot take an apt decision in the proper time, and her story with Willmore is a good example. She, in fact, endangers herself when she seeks refuge from Willmore’s chase in Blunt’s chamber. To be in the hands of Willmore is more merciful than to be in Blunt’s hands. After his trick, Blunt is upset and angry for what he has faced, so he decides to take revenge on the first woman he will meet. His wrong decision to take revenge “... on one whore for the sins of another” has been quickly achieved (Rover.4.5.52). It is something unexpected to find a woman entering his chamber, so he instantly considers her a whore. He does not take even a minute to make sure of her personality whether she is a noble woman or a prostitute.
Indeed, Florinda finds no way to defend herself from the chase of Willmore except to commit a mistake by entering a man’s chamber. If carefully thought out, she would use some other ways as exposing her chaser in front of other people rather than seeking refuge in a chamber without thinking whether the chamber would be safe or dangerous. Certainly, if she did remain among other people, Willmore would not dare to rape her.

Some may argue that she does not like to expose herself to her brother, but even in this regard, it becomes another example of her inability to take an apt decision. Her brother would not harm her. In the worst probability, he would only blame her for her presence. Then it would become her responsibility to justify her presence. But she misjudges the situation and thinks that there is “... nothing can be worse than to fall into his hands” (Rover.4.4.3-4). Whatever her justifications, she commits a mistake by leaving a group of people into a separate chamber. Her wrong decision lets even her brother consider her a prostitute. When she is locked in Blunt’s chamber, her brother desires to have sex in his own way without knowing the fact that the locked girl is his sister. Her brother is of the opinion that a girl who goes to men’s chambers is a prostitute. He states, “Come, pray be kind; I know you mean to be so when you entered her . . .” (Rover.5.1.111-12).

Her inability to take an apt action at the right time can be seen when Willmore hands her his pistol when he is trying to rape her in the garden. He offers his pistol in order to reassure her that he would be a peaceful man. By giving her the pistol, he intends to give her a sign that he would not harm her but would have sex by rape if necessary. He does not think about the negative results of the crime of rape. To rape her means to ruin
her honour, future, feeling and her life in general. Rape is worse than murder in such cases. It is important to note Florinda’s reaction here. She does not take the advantage of the opportunity of obtaining a pistol and make herself in a strong position. There would not be any better chance than this. If she did so, Willmore would never dare to think to rape her. In short, Florinda moves from bad to the worst.

It is not only Florinda who does not benefit from the pistol, it can also be seen in the case of Angellica who is known for her strong personality. Angellica is more powerful in her resistance to men than Florinda. However, she does not use her pistol as it should be used. Despite Angellica being more powerful than Florinda, she remains a victim in the play. Anand Prakash points out, “In fact, Angellica is the true victim of the prevailing forces that cynically pursue their path of individual enhancement” (181). To defend herself, Angellica holds a pistol on Charles’s chest, but she does not shoot him, so her grip of the pistol is just held a coquetry. Instead, she gives him a moral lesson. The longest speech of Angellica to Willmore in Act V, Scene I is regarded as a self-contemplation and self-analysis. Her speech to Willmore is an outlet to express what is going on in her mind and heart. In fact, Angellica is not given an appropriate opportunity to defend her freedom and to condemn Willmore despite being the model of Behn. Thus, she, at last, withdraws from the dramatic scene quietly. Angellica’s remarkable trait is her eloquence which reveals her superb wit. Anand Prakash writes about the difficulties that Behn’s women are facing or are likely to face:

Aphra Behn’s women character are not found wanting in asserting their identity or sexuality, yet they remain ever conscious of the constraints of money and biology. This forces them to bargain for and strike costly deals
about their areas of supposed fulfillment (marriage, loyalty, constancy) in clash with men. (173-74)

At this point, it can be argued that the pistol is a sign of power. However, if Angellica is powerful, then there is no need to use the pistol. Pistol is used when all other legitimate means are exhausted. However, Kate Aughterson in her book *Aphra Behn: The Comedies* gives her own interpretation about the pistol:

> Yet the audience also perceive the pistol as both a desperate and a temporary assertion of a woman's power against a man: thus it works as a visual stage prop in two ways simultaneously. It represents both an expression of phallic power appropriated by woman, and a visual reminder the very limits of that power. (82)

Although Angellica seems to be more powerful than the other women, she will never kill Willmore since she has an emotional heart. She admits, “My coward heart will leave me to his mercy” (*Rover.5.1.218*). Angellica does not benefit from her power to defend herself, yet she throws herself into the arms of Willmore who does not give her any consideration. Anita Pacheco comments, “Angellica Bianca’s subject position is shown to involve a complex complicity in the same cultural legitimation of male sexual aggression” (“Rape and the Female Subject” 323). Although Angellica cannot defend herself as she should, she remains attractive for her beauty. In this regard, it can be said that Behn regards herself as Angellica Bianca. John Skinner points out:

> The first woman in England known to have made a decent living by selling her own (literary) wares, Behn may well have associated herself with the prostitute, whose initials she incidentally shares. In the context of
the play, Angellica’s gesture was regarded by prospective clients as blatant, unfeminine, but highly professional; the same attributes could equally well apply to Behn’s own literary activities. (7)

Therefore, Behn enrolls Belvile, the truthful and the best character, to describe Angellica’s beauty. Thus, all the praises for Angellica are only a metaphor for Behn’s personality. Belvile praises Angellica:

She’s now the only adored beauty of all the youth in Naples, who put on all their charms to appear lovely in her sight, their coaches, liverys, and themselves, all gay as on a monarch’s birthday, to attract the eyes of this fair character, while she has the pleasure to behold all languish for her that see her. (Rover.1.2.305-09)

Frederick adds, “Tis pretty to see with how much love the men regard her, and how much enemy the women” (Rover.1.2.310-11). Indeed, Angellica takes the attention of all male and female characters. Though she is known as a prostitute, men run after her and seek for her consent, yet they look only at her body and not at her heart and feelings. Laura Brown points out that the function of a woman is “represented in terms of the female body and of sexuality” (Ends of Empire 19). Paradoxically, respectable men like Willmore, Frederick, Belvile and Blunt try their best to get her consent. When they fail, they start insulting her. Nevertheless, these men are praised by all and are not degraded as Angellica. It is only Angellica who has been disgraced and her reputation is being distorted.

Behn’s women, who are seen heading to love and be loved, are unable to take apt decisions because of certain social restrictions. In contrast, women’s decision-making in
Sheridan's plays is often directed in the wrong way. For example, Lydia in *The Rivals* decides to marry a half-paid soldier. Her wish to marry him is not based on love but on her desire to achieve her romantic dream. Her love for the so-called Beverley is weak in its intensity when compared to the love between Julia and Faulkland. She does not love him as Julia loves Faulkland, but she loves to behave as a romantic lover. In one of her romantic acts, she deliberately fabricates a story in order to enjoy the pleasure of the quarrel with Beverley to an unthinkable extent. Her feigned story is similar to that of Faulkland's concocted story.

By the same token, the relationship between Lydia and her aunt Mrs. Malaprop is not on good terms. Lydia is obsessed with the idea of being disobedient especially towards her aunt. She is influenced by many romantic stories of disobedience and elopement. Most of the critics agree that Lydia is a romancer, but her insistence on trivial demands takes her away from the real work that needs to be done. She prefers whimsical romantic fancies rather than realistic advices of her aunt. However, Lydia's romance is a model of her time especially when youths stand against the will of their families and try to achieve their narrow interests. They surely face obstacles and difficulties, but they do not care due to the influence of their personal motives. On a whole, Lydia Languish can be considered a good representative of youthful female enthusiasts who attempt to achieve their whimsical dreams. Thomas Moore illustrates Lydia's romance:

Lydia Languish, in proclaiming the extravagance of her own romantic notions, prepares us for events much more ludicrous and eccentric, than those in which the plot allows her to be concerned; and the young lady
herself is scarcely more disappointed than we are, at the ameness with
which her amour concludes. (141)

Lydia Languish's strong fondness for reading romances and her insistence to
apply whatever is written in them can be held as a criticism on women's romantic whims.
Sheridan wants to say that to read romances means to get more education but not to adopt
the misconceptions of those romances. Since Lydia is confined to romances, she is about
to destroy her future life. It is actually funny to see her insisting on marrying a poor
person and refusing a rich one simply because the romances have raised the same subject.

At the same time, Sheridan succeeds like Behn in resisting the interference of the
parents. He makes Lydia stand firm against her aunt who wants to marry her according to
her choice. So, Lydia has decided to marry the person she loves. In this case, she has the
right, yet her excessive whimsical romance becomes unacceptable. In this regard, her
aunt introduces her to more than one suitor because she wants to marry her to a man who
can ensure her a decent life, but Lydia refuses all and looks to marriage from a different
angle, from the point of how to elope and then perform a runaway marriage. Since she is
rich, she prefers to marry a poor man; if necessary, she would leave her wealth. This
behaviour is wrong from the viewpoint of Sheridan. Sheridan insists that she can marry
the desired person without destroying her future by upholding the trivial romantic fancy.

Lydia is annoyed to know the real personality of Beverley. She grievously takes
out a small picture of the so-called Beverley and throws it on his face. Her reaction to the
discovery of the real personality of Beverley is completely different from Julia. Lydia
reluctantly decides to marry the man that has been suggested by her aunt as a punishment
for Beverley. She does not think for a while that Absolute finds no way to win her heart
except to be Beverley. Hence, Absolute’s act ought to deepen her love for him but not weaken her love.

Indeed, Lydia gets upset to know that Beverley is a rich baronet and a Captain in army, but she craves for him just after a short time of leaving each other. She discovers the reality which cannot be ignored that she loves the man and not the name. Hence, she is now in need of a consolation and an advice from her cousin Julia. She confesses, “I believe one lecture from my grave cousin will make me recall him” (Rivals.5.1.108). Ridiculously, she has received many advices from Julia, but she does not listen to them. However, Julia encourages her to maintain Absolute because he is a typical man who should deserve her great sacrifices. She honestly advises her “. . . not to let a man, who loves you with sincerity, suffer that unhappiness from your caprice which I know too well caprice can inflict” (Rivals.5.1.109-110).

Further, Lydia is unable to take an apt decision as Julia when they hear about the duel that is going to be held between Absolute and Faulkland on the one hand and O’Trigger and Acres on the other hand. Absolute does not treat Lydia cruelly, yet she does not care about his life. On the contrary, Faulkland treats Julia cruelly and leaves her with a broken heart, but she is concerned about his life. On hearing the news about the duel, Julia reacts without hesitation and tells Mrs. Malaprop, “let us instantly endeavour to prevent mischief” (Rivals.5.1.111), but Lydia hesitatingly says after a while, “What are we to do, madam?” (Rivals.5.1.111). From this, it is clear that Julia confidently reacts from her heart while Lydia’s question is subjected to several interpretations since she does not say or suggest any practical act to prevent the fight. It is also noticed that Mrs. Malaprop is braver in her reaction to the fight than Lydia. She is worried about the safety
of O'Trigger, her alleged lover, despite being in unrequited love with him. In fact, O'Trigger is the one who starts challenging the others, yet Mrs. Malaprop boldly accuses the spouses of Lydia and Julia of dragging him into this awkward predicament. She exclaims, “O mercy! have they drawn poor little dear Sir Lucius into the scrape?” Then she positively decides “. . . to prevent mischief!” (Rivals.5.1.111-12). The different responses of the three ladies lead us to conclude that Julia is loyal to her lover, Mrs. Malaprop is bold and Lydia is languishing as her surname indicates.

In brief, Lydia remains unable to take a correct decision for a simple reason that she cannot control her romantic desires. She wishes to marry only a poor half-pay soldier and dreams to elope with him in order to get a runaway marriage. She also decides to leave her fortune to try the life of poverty. However, nothing happens of whatever she has dreamt of. When she discovers the reality that Beverley is Absolute, she does nothing except reflecting her suffering to Julia, “I see I have been deceived by every one! – but I don’t care – I’ll never have him” (Rivals.5.1.109). Contrary to what she intends to do, she finally marries him. It is out of her wish when she at the beginning verbally pretends of disobeying her aunt, yet she marries the man appointed by her aunt. Besides, her marriage to Absolute comes inadvertently without being indulged in preconditioned love.

Decision-making is an essential leadership skill and Absolute is the one who can make well-considered decisions, therefore, he deserves success. Women in this play being unable to take apt decisions where the matter is very urgent. They repeatedly attempt to highlight their existence, yet they fail and then men reap success. Thanks to Absolute who is able to cure Lydia from her fancies. He tolerates her indiscretion, gives
her time to think wisely and tries at the same time to find ways to attract her. As a result of his efforts, she completely submits to him at the end.

**INCOMPLETE INTERACTION IN PUBLIC LIFE**

In the early seventeenth century, women did not have the same opportunities to interact in public life as men had. Elaine Hobby points out, “Women were not supposed to enter the public world in any form, and that prohibition extended to a ban on ‘making public’ their words” (1). During that time, women gave up their freedoms in order to be obedient to their fathers, brothers or even to the Kings. To be obedient, women were kept at homes under the observation of their families. They were usually the ones who stayed home while men were completely free to go wherever they liked. Behn broke this social custom by letting women take prominent roles in public life. Hence, Behn was bold enough to make young women attend, share, indulge and wander in the carnival, which was unfamiliar in the drama of the seventeenth century. This matter can also be interpreted in the sense that women in the seventeenth century did not get their complete freedom while men had the freedom to dress as they like, go where they like, and do what they want unlikely to the roles of women who were expected to be obedient, simple and adaptable. Further, women did not have options and opportunities as men, and they were usually the most oppressed.

However, oppressing women varies from family to family, culture to culture and century to century but the fact is that men are constantly trying to control women. In her depiction of the patriarchal society, Behn portrays women in *The Rover* as if they try different ways to vent out their frustrations as to attend carnivals. Yet they have to get permission from the person who takes care of them, or they have to go out by stealth.
Their brother and father should not know that they are going out to interact in public life. Also, when women decide to go out, they should be disguised for the fear that they may be observed by their relatives. These stratagems are very difficult to be achieved. So, both to go out as well as to stay at home constitute an obstacle to the freedom of women. It is worth mentioning that just attending a carnival in the seventeenth century was a kind of freedom for women.

Behn renders the carnival and the disguise in *The Rover* to let women practise such freedom and search for husbands too. Anand Prakash observes, “One of the central concerns of Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* is women’s freedom” (174). In *The Rover*, Behn vehemently discusses the advantage of the carnival. The carnival on one hand gives freedom to women and men as well as allows them to indulge in romantic love and then marriage. On the other hand, it is a kind of political celebration in support of the King.

In carnival, women entertain themselves, meet men, find husbands and enjoy new life instead of sitting at homes. To leave home, it means to get new knowledge and experiences. Metaphorically, their homes become prisons. At home, they are restricted to abide by the instructions of the householder either the father or the brother and they have to obey their instructions subserviently.

Pedro regards himself the guardian of his sisters. Unfortunately, he does not care of them and their feelings as he cares of himself. Therefore, he orders Callis to “lock her [Hellena] up all this carnival. . . .” He also orders Callis to keep an eye on her, “make it your business to watch this wild cat” (*Rover*.1.1.144). He behaves strangely with his sisters as if they are mischievous children. What strengthens the hypothesis that Hellena
and Florinda are submissive to their brother is the way of calling him “sir,” instead of calling him ‘brother’ or by his name. This reflects Pedro’s control over his sisters.

The other obstacle that women face is the rigid behaviour of women against women. Hellena and Florinda are seeking permission from Callis, their governess, to let them go out and attend the carnival. It is an indication that there is no understanding among women themselves though women in general seem to suffer due to the control of men. Women do not allow women to go out. It is clear when Callis, who is only a governess, does not allow them to leave home. It means that Hellena and Florinda do not have the right to object and even to face their governess. In reality, Callis observes all their movements because she has received a command from Pedro, their brother. Callis acknowledges, “I must obey the commands I have; besides, do you consider what a life you are going to lead?” (Rover.1.1.164-65). Hellena replies, “Yes, Callis, that of a nun; and till then I’ll be indebted a world of prayers to you, if you’ll let me now see, what I never did, the divertissements of a carnival” (Rover.1.1.166-68). Logically, Florinda has to take the responsibility of taking care of the house since she is older than Hellena, yet she herself seeks permission from Callis. She requests Callis, “Callis, will you give us leave to go?” (Rover.1.1.177). Callis agrees to let them attend the carnival, but she decides to accompany them to keep an eye on them. This behaviour is seen in the relationship between women. Callis has kept the two young sisters under her surveillance as if they are still under the age of ten.

Callis reveals something else that she herself wants to attend the carnivals. She talks to herself, “I have a youthful itch of going myself” (Rover.1.1.178). Then she agrees to let them attend the carnival but under certain conditions, “Madam, if I thought your
brother might not know it, and I might wait on you; for by my troth, I'll not trust young
girls alone" (Rover. 1.1.180-82). Noticeably, Callis statement "I have a youthful itch of
going myself" is another proof that women do not get their freedom because Callis could
not attend carnivals in her youth for the reason that someone prevented her, yet she now
becomes an obstacle in front of the two sisters. However, it seems that she allows Hellena
and Florinda to attend the carnival because she herself wants to attend it. In contrast, the
two girls cannot do anything against their governess because they are helpless. To
imagine what would happen if Callis did not allow them to go to the carnival,
unquestionably, they would never dare to go. It is not because they are afraid of Callis,
but because they are afraid of their brother lest he knows from Callis. In both cases, they
cannot completely interact in public life despite the fact that they have powers and
facilities which other women do not have.

Florinda later affirms that she and Hellena cannot do anything towards the
behaviour of Pedro and Callis. In the garden, Florinda is eagerly waiting for Belvile to
free her from authoritarianism of Callis and Pedro by the way of elopement. She
confesses, "I'm on my way to happiness. I have got myself free from Callis; my brother
too . . ." (Rover. 3.5.1-2). Florinda's desire to elope with Belvile is because her brother
stands against her marriage to him. Hence, she seeks freedom through marriage. Thus,
Behn through Florinda has revealed the bitter reality of her society when a woman's
freedom is stifled.

It is really shameful to see the two sisters suffer because of their brother. In spite
of their sufferings, they respect him. In contrast, he does not give them any consideration.
Once he comes home upset and in a bad mood after his confrontation with his friend in
Angellica’s house. His sisters are worried to see him in his low spirits. They do not realise that their brother cares only about himself and his interests; hence, he is upset because Antonio has won Angellica.

Unfortunately, when women get out of their homes by one way or another, they clash again with men. They face sexual harassment in the carnival. Women dream to attend the carnival to enjoy themselves and to find husbands. Yet men interpret their presence in such a way as if they present themselves as prostitutes. According to women, their presence in the carnival is to explore different and new behaviours of people and then learn how to love and to be loved. Valeria reveals this reality when she says, “Well, methinks we have learnt this trade of gypsies as readily as if we have been bred upon the road to Loreto”\(^2\) (Rover.3.1.6-7). Hellena also intends to benefit from her presence in the carnival. Therefore, she decides to come back home with a positive result of how to love and to be loved. She boldly states, “I came thence not (as my wise brother imagines) to take an eternal farewell of the world, but to love and to be beloved, and I will be beloved, or I’ll get one of your men, so I will” (Rover.3.1.38-41). Then Hellena instigates her sister and Valeria to learn the technique of love, “. . . and if you are not a lover, ’tis an art soon learn – that I find” (Rover.3.1.47-48). Hellena, Florinda and Valeria intend to learn something new by meeting new people and joining new activities.

‘To love and to be loved’ becomes Hellena’s goal, so she repeats it at the end of the play when her brother asks her of her presence with Willmore, she replies, “. . . my business is the same with all living creatures of my age, to love, and be beloved, and here’s the man” (Rover. 5.1.479-81). She gets the man by her own efforts even if there is no remarkable love between them, but she learns well how to attract him. Thus, Pedro

\(^2\) In the textual notes of the play, “Loreto” is “a city in Italy famous as a place of pilgrimage.”
and Belvile are surprised by this way of marriage. Belvile tells Pedro, “I am as much surprised at this as you can be” (Rover.5.1.489). To learn how to get a lover is very important from the point of view of Behn. In this regard, Hellena, Florinda and Valeria indulge in learning how to attract men and to be attractive at the same time.

Meanwhile, Hellena and Florinda disguise themselves to be free to pursue their lovers. Kate Aughterson writes, “Thus Behn uses a comic convention (the woman in disguise to pursue her beloved), but refuses to allow it to work conventionally” (17). In their disguise, they are able to be out of the patriarchal control. Chernaik asserts, “In a number of plays by Behn, female characters are able to gain an unaccustomed momentary freedom of action by a change of costume” (193). To let women go out, attend carnivals, speak freely, practise as men and even dress as men are revolutions against the oppression of women. By this, Behn proves that women can do what men can do, and women are sometimes more accurate in their roles than men. In fact, The Rover in general and the carnival in particular seem to be pointless and fruitless without women.

Noticeably, women have sometimes disguised themselves as men to be able to achieve their private tasks. Hellena, who is known for her strong personality, has disguised in boy’s clothes to be able to observe Willmore and to protect him from the pursuit of Angellica. Hellena’s disguise as a boy indicates her struggle to interact in public life. Since she cannot keep an eye on Willmore while she is in her real identity, she is able to do so when she changes her appearance.

On the other hand, it is difficult to differentiate between a prostitute and a woman of quality in The Rover because of both being disguised. Also, their coquettish behaviour, their dress and their talk are almost the same. Behn intends to expose what is really going
on in her society where prostitutes disguise themselves to practise their works. Actresses wore masks over their faces as they perform their roles on the stage. Respectable women also disguise themselves in order to attend the carnival. In the carnival, men and women wear masks to be free to do whatsoever they like. Hence, this leads to confusion between the respectable women and prostitutes and between the cavaliers and rakes. Belvile, however, criticises these contradictions, "Oh the fantastical rogues, how they're dressed! 'tis a satire against the whole sex" (Rover.1.2.102-03). All characters men and women wear masks in the carnival except Willmore, the rake. He enters with his mask in his hand and openly talks about sex without any restriction. He proudly boasts and wonders, "Does not my fortune sit triumphant on my brow? Dost not see the little wanton god there all gay and smiling? Have I not an air about my face and eyes that distinguish me from the crowd of common lovers?" (Rover.3.1.87-89).

Some critics believe that Nell Gwyn, the great actress in Charles II's time, had worked at the royal palace, and she had questionable relationship with King Charles II (Perry 100). They believe that she was a spy who had been cultivated among the highly educated people like playwrights, novelists, poets and actresses to fetch the news to the King. Shyamala A Narayan certifies that "The King [Charles II] kept several mistresses, including Nell Gwyn, who was an actress, and bestowed titles and estates on his women and bastards" (126). Behn had also worked as a spy for Charles II. Thomas L. Cooksey points out, "She may also have engaged in political and sexual intrigue and even acted as a spy for Charles II" (59). She had also been accused of being a prostitute. The issue of prostitution became a fertile subject in the Restoration drama. Riwako Kaji states, "On the Restoration stage, adulterous wives, cuckold husbands, rakes and prostitutes are often
presented with an emphasis on their sexual looseness” (38). During that time, the actresses were regarded to be prostitutes by some audiences. Audiences believed that the woman who showed herself on the stage, used sexual words and conversation, and rehearsed seductive roles was a prostitute. Elizabeth Howe in *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660-1700* claims, “no ‘respectable’ woman became an actress. Society assumed that a woman who displayed herself on the public stages was probably a whore” (32). Kate Aughterson also states, “Many men perceived women actors to be potential whores, seeing a link between performing on stage, and selling their bodies on the street” (209). Hence, restoration audiences were interested on the actress’s sexuality on the stage. Elizabeth Howe states, “Whether or not she exploited it off stage, the actress’s sexuality – her potential availability to men – became the central feature of her professional identity as a player” (34). Even respectable women who attended the theatre were also considered to be whores simply because they were disguised and wore masks. In her introduction to *The Rover*, Ann Russell points out:

> In the 1660s, some women began to wear masks when they attended the theatre. But when prostitutes also began to wear masks, the distinctions between prostitutes and ‘respectable women’ became blurred. The mask became a sign of the prostitute...” (25).

Status of women in *The Rover* is of two kinds: whores and respectable ladies. Whores are able to get money and satisfy their sexual desires without difficulty while women of quality face different sexual harassments. In other words, respectable ladies are about to be raped as rewards for their honour.
In this regard, it is unexpected to see the male characters trying to win the hearts of the prostitutes to be able to have sex with them while at the same time they use force to subjugate respectable women to satisfy their desires. In both cases, women practise sex either by their consent or by being raped. Yet, in *The Rover*, Behn presents the prostitutes in a better situation than the respectable women. Prostitutes can get money, can satisfy their desires, have many friends and have power. By this, Behn legitimises the work of the prostitutes. It is known that Behn had been accused of prostitution, so she intended to send a message that a prostitute can satisfy her sexual desire with the man she likes, but in such cases, the respectable woman is sometimes forced to have sex with an undesired man.

On the other hand, the women characters of Behn have other natural effective means to attract men, they are beautiful, witty and wealthy. These means are better than changing their appearances and behaving like courtesans. To be beautiful means to be attractive, hence Behn appoints Hellena to praise women’s beauty. Hellena once appears to speak proudly and happily about her beauty in which she uses it as a weapon to attract men, then to snipe the desired one. She tells Willmore, “... for I have considered, captain, that a handsome woman has a great deal to do whilst her face is good, for then is our harvest-time to gather friends ...” (*Rover*, 3.1.170-72). Through her statement, one may argue that she has only one noticeable characteristic, it is her beauty. She actually seems to be a woman of a slinky beauty and so she is proud of it in every occasion she appears. As an indication to the social constraints that prevent women from interacting in public life, women cover their beauties by being in disguise.
Willmore is astonished to see Hellena's beauty when she shows her face. Nevertheless, he sees her beauty in her remarkable wit. Anand Prakash observes, "The strong sexuality of Aphra Behn's women is founded upon that scintillating wit which Shakespeare's Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* is famous for" (174). Willmore has been seduced by Hellena's wit and therefore he praises her wit in several occasions. In recognition of her wit, Willmore confesses, "I cannot get her out of my head" (*Rover*.2.1.7) Willmore is known for his sexual desire and that he looks at women only from this point. He praises Hellena with such sexual words, but he never forgets her wit. He applauds her wit, "such black eye! Such a face! Such a mouth! Such teeth! And too much wit" (*Rover*.3.1.268-69). Willmore's praising statement is a call that whatever might be the cruelty of a man, in the end, he would submit to a woman's wish if she is able to use her wit. From this point, woman's wit is perhaps more effective than her beauty. If Willmore wanted to marry a woman for her beauty, he would marry Angellica whose beauty has been praised by all. Willmore once reveals his sexual desire for her beauty, "Angellica! That beauty has been too long tempting / Not to have made a thousand lovers languish" (*Rover*.5.1.252-53). At long last, he prefers to marry Hellena for her striking wit, beauty and most importantly for her wealth.

In turn, Hellena searches for a handsome husband. She reveals her intention to her sister, "I'm resolved to provide myself this carnival, if there be e'er a handsome proper fellow of my humour above ground, though I ask first" (*Rover*.1.1.32-34). Floriana Hogan points out that "Mrs. Behn wrote her comedies for the sake of humor alone. To set about to find a purpose other than that of pure entertainment for Mrs. Behn's comedies of intrigue is to destroy the very purpose for which she wrote them" (283).
Aminta in *The Forced Marriage* is a woman of wit as Hellena in *The Rover*. Hellena loves Willmore for his humour and he loves her for her wit. Also, Aminta loves Alcander for his humour. She states, “His Mean and Person, but 'bove all his Humour, / That surly Pride, though even to me addrest” (*F.M.2.2.38*). However, being witty suits women and being humorous suits men. Alcander describes Aminta as a woman without wit when they are in dispute. He tells her, “Believe a man, away, you have no wit, / I'll say as much to every pretty woman” (*F.M.3.2.83*). But when he meets her again, he asks her to love him as he deserves and calls her a woman of “... so much wit” (*F.M.4.1.97*). Then at the time of quarrel, he returns to his first notion that she is without wit. He says, “You think you’re wondrous witty now, Aminta. / But hang me if you be” (*F.M.4.1.98*). In fact, Alcander’s confusion whether Aminta is a woman of wit or not proves that she is a woman of wit. Maurice Charney confirms, “Women in comedy engage in guerrilla warfare with the official values and more ... [T]hey are consistently wittier and more intelligent than the men, especially in the domain of love and sex” (90-91).

Men in *The Rover* are mainly attracted to three qualities of women: wealth, beauty and wit. Women’s beauty and wealth are their sharp weapons, and through them, they feel that they can attract men, but sometime men look for their wit. Actually, beauty of a woman is important, but it is sometimes regarded to be the reason of her sufferings. It is because many men in reality wish to marry her for her virtual beauty, but they do not care of her real beauty, it is the beauty of spirit that they should look for. So, marrying a woman only for her beauty will fail someday. Paradoxically, when a woman is not pretty, men do not think of her as a wife. A woman’s ugliness becomes an obstacle in the way of getting married. Hence, a woman suffers in both cases – whether she is beautiful or not.
In this regard, Behn wants to say that a woman of only beauty is at risk, a woman of wit is attractive, a woman of wealth is desired, and a woman of wealth, beauty and wit is the ideal woman.

In short, women in Behn’s plays are noteworthy for the beauty, wit, influence, attraction, action and repartee. Their speeches are also witty and quaint rather than bluff. They are kind, good-natured and simple. Behn mainly appoints women characters in her plays to direct and develop the plots to the points she likes. Nevertheless, women characters remain facing many constraints that prevent them from interacting in the society of men, and all these characteristics do not demonstrate their superiority over men.

Sheridan’s women characters interact in public life more than Behn’s women characters. However, women in Sheridan’s plays get involved in nonprofit interaction and engage themselves in silly works. Hence, it is interesting to see many of them running behind fame without allowing themselves to think about the reasonable actions.

Lady Sneerwell\textsuperscript{22} in *The School for Scandal* interacts negatively in public life. Thus, her job centres on how to organise and direct the gossip to a targeted person. She carries out gossip against innocent people. Thus, she is about to destroy families in order to win Charles. She loves Charles, but instead of telling him and convincing him of her love, she turns to destroy him with the help of his brother Joseph. Noticeably, she cannot spread scandal without the help of men although she is the leader. Lady Sneerwell also uses money in wrong way. Since she cannot gets what she wants, she pays bribe to Snake to support her in her false claim that Charles is morally contracted to her.

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\textsuperscript{22} Her role in relation to scandal has been discussed in Chapter III under ‘Morality.’
Snakes exposes her conspiracy not because his conscience wakes him up but because he has “... been offered double to speak the truth” (Sch.5.3.275). So, Mr. Snake’s source of livelihood is invalid because he gets money through illegitimate ways. However, he is not ashamed of it. What is strange is his assertion about his profession of telling lies in order to earn his livelihood. When he exposes Lady Sneerwell, he pleads the present people not to speak about his last good deed because he would lose his work as a liar. He states, “I live by the badness of my character, I have nothing but my infamy to depend on! And, if it were once known that I had been betrayed into an honest action, I should lose every friend I have in the world” (Sch.5.3.276).

Moreover, it is not only Lady Sneerwell who cannot do her work herself, but it is also all the other female characters. Women cannot do anything without the help of men although they are nearly equal in numbers to men. In addition, these women characters hear men slander women without reacting to defend their freedom and personalities. They are equal to Joseph who lets them abuse his brother, Charles. Joseph might be envious of his brother who would marry Maria, but those women have nothing to fear. Nonetheless, they remain deaf and their legal professions have fallen into disrepute.

All the malicious gossips of the slanderers are almost about women. The slanderers have found women a fertile ground to spread scandals about them. It is Charles from the side of men who receives great share of gossip. Noticeably, the most gossips are about women who are not a part of the dramatis personae. Those criticised women are known for their morals, and they are in fact more famous and respectable than the women of the play. Nevertheless, the women characters in the play have bombarded those women with heavy slandering gossips for unknown reasons. This gives an impression
that women in the play are either slanderers or being slandered because they are unable to interact positively in public life. It is painful to see women criticising women with the help of men. These women characters are not aware of the fact that the drawbacks and faults of other women are indirect criticism on them. The group is actually devoid of all moral principles for the reason that they criticise even their relatives and their close friends; in short, “a person they dine with twice a week” as Sir Peter remarks (Sch.2.2.214).

Mrs. Dangle in *The Critic* has nothing to do except grumbling about her husband’s work which is not her favorite subject. Despite her efforts to convince him of the importance of politics, she is unable to change his interest in the literary work. Peculiarly, she does not like his work but attends and participates in his literary activities. Furthermore, her husband controls her senses and directs her to the point he likes as he one day commands her after their daily disputable conversation, “now we must appear loving and affectionate, or Sneer will hitch us into a story” (*Critic*.1.1.136). In short, one can say that she is unable to interact in public life without her husband.

When the Italian family singers pay a visit to get the patronage of Mr. Dangle, she tries her best to make friendship with them especially with the two daughters of an Italian musical family. Nevertheless, she is not benefited from this chance. Sheridan closes the door in front of her because of the difficulty of understanding the language. The Italian singers have brought with them a French translator who tries to translate from English into Italian and vice versa, but he is unable to translate properly. This means that she will not be able to make friendship. Mrs. Dangle mocks the translator and tells her husband, “Mr. Dangle, here are two very civil gentlemen trying to make themselves understood,
and I don’t know which is the interpreter" (Critic.1.2.146). In addition, Mr. Dangle, who is a highly sophisticated intellectual critic, remarks, “Egad, I think the interpreter is the hardest to be understood of the two” (Critic.1.2.146). However, she cannot understand the language of both the Italian singer and the French translator and this indicates that she cannot interact positively in public life.

Unmistakably, the male servants in both plays *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* do not reveal their masters’ personal secrets. Rowley in *The School for Scandal* does not tell Charles about the test that they are going to apply on him. He helps also in putting the plan of the test. Thomas and Fag in *The Rivals* do not expose their masters and their secret affairs. David, Acres’s personal servant, tries his best to prevent his master from indulging in such a deadly duel with Beverley. Indeed, these men servants do not reveal the secrets of their masters while women servants expose everything they know, and hence, it can be said, women’s interaction in public life goes wrong.

An example of these servants is Lydia’s servant, Lucy. Lucy is a shrewd servant. She plays a nasty trick on Lydia’s suitors in order to satisfy her wicked desires. She gets bribes from the suitors Beverley, Acres and O’Trigger. O’Trigger is the one who gives her large bribe, believing that she hands the letters to and from Lydia and she is the one who can seduce Lydia. In this regard, Mark. S. Auburn describes Lucy as “...a hypocrite and the only character in the play who is motivated solely by selfishness – in her case, avarice” (*Sheridan’s Comedies* 47). Nevertheless, Lucy cannot dupe Fag, Absolute’s honest servant. Fag is able to extract some good news from her. Then he rushes to report them to his master. Although she is able to deceive all lovers, she cannot deceive Fag since he knows her weak point.
Out of positive interaction in public life, Lucy turns to get a bribe and then cheats the bribers. However, this kind of work is a sore spot in many nations. To add, some people consider bribery as an accepted mechanism for legal transactions. This immoral act has been spreading because of the social acceptance. Quite clearly, Lucy is not the only one who should be blamed, but also the briber like O’Trigger. The bribed person is sometimes in need for money while the briber wants to get an unlawful act. Remarkably, if there are no bribers, there will be no bribe takers.

From what has been stated above, it can be said that women’s freedom has evolved over the years into a well-understood and structured one. Women in the late seventeenth century started the initiative by raising the issues of women’s freedom. They defended their freedom by every legitimate means and paid much for it. Hence, Behn, the first professional dramatist, addressed women’s concerns and conveyed their sufferings to the audiences and readers of her plays with the purpose to establish a general concept of the importance of women’s identity. She was bold enough to discuss topics that even men did not dare to discuss.

In the early seventeenth century women could not speak about their freedom, could not participate in the activities of the society, and could not interact in the patriarchal society. Behn, in the late seventeenth, challenged these traditional constructs and endowed her women characters with the power of legitimacy and individual presence. Yet, she was not a social reformer that makes her characters give sermons on social correctness. As she appointed her women character to fill social gaps, she attracts sympathy to her women characters of social mannerism. In her plays, she makes her women characters speaking boldly about their freedom. However, they are unable to
argue with men especially in a critical situation. She enables them to play their roles actively in the patriarchal society, yet they are unable to take apt decisions in the right time. She makes them interacting in public life, yet there are many social constraints that stood in their ways of being able to interact in the fullest way. Nevertheless, Behn succeeds to identify the significant role of women in the society, help them to come out of their bondage, encourage them to face adverse situations common to the time, and overcome the obstacles placed in front of them.

However, women in the late eighteenth century did not encounter constraints that women encountered in Behn's time. Eighteenth-century women had more power in relation to men and could practised more freedom of expression. Hence, Sheridan's women characters feel free to speak about their issues, yet they deviate to discuss irrelevant topics and then they become more willing to start gossiping and making fun of others which are considered as a revolt against Puritans who prevented women from speaking about issues that concern women. In addition, some women speak in lofty tones and bombastic language to show others that they are educated and cultured, yet they still remained unable to express themselves about what they believe to be. Sheridan's women characters indulge in daily activities without being inconvenienced, yet their wishes to apply and use what was prohibited and forbidden in many years ago make them desiring imaginary things and searching for frivolous demands which are at times not reasonable. This means that they again clash with the norms of society. Hence, the conflict between personal desires and social norms makes them unable to take apt decisions. Further, Sheridan's women characters have got freedom to interact in public life, yet they misuse
their freedom and shift from fruitful interaction to running after fleeting pleasures without realising the importance of their presence as active members within society.