

The Presence of Abhbabagamana Demises the Function of Confession

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ABSTRACT

The presence of 'Abhbabagamana' is the reason which restricts the true power of "Confession" on Moll Flanders. The function of spiritual disguise in Moll Flanders plays a significant role in the novel. The part of the novel in which Moll's repentance and confession are depicted, is not convincing to the readers. If Moll is not honest in her repentance it means she is not changed and so Defoe's claim that Moll has transformed from a criminal to a penitent is deceptive. According to Moll, her life is a kind of journey to salvation. However, it is the history of a woman who lost her virtue and her modesty. "Confession" for Moll is a mask to conceal her real intentions of getting money. What we see a woman who has already recognized money as the key to survival. This realization denies her to progress in her quest for spiritual Enlightenment.

Introduction:

This paper studies the function of the Christian concept "Confession" and its role in Moll's life. Confession plays a very significant role in the life of a Christian. It is a religious concept which in some churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church used as a way to receive absolution from the sins. Here sinners confess their sins in front of a priest to get rid of their sinful past. Sometimes sinners used to stand outside the church and would ask church goers to pray for them. It is supposed that due to such practices, the god forgives their sins. In this context, Alexander Pope aptly said that "to err is human but to forgive is divine".

Methodology:

The conceptual tool of 'Abhbabagamana' from Buddhism can be applied to prove Moll's incapability to progress in spiritual pursuit. The presence of 'Abhbabagamana' is the reason which restricts the true power of "Confession" on Moll. So, it simply remains a kind of mask to hide Moll's real self. The concept of "Abhbabagamana" is related to those who are obstructed by their evil actions ('kamma', 'karma'), by their evil views with fixed destiny (defilement). Such people are unable to enter the right path and reach perfection.

Discussion:

Moll is a victim of evil actions and vices. Her life is a journey from one crime to another in the materialistic world. Thus, she could not progress spiritually and her repentance which is the main part of the story remains pretence to get her age-old expected aim, namely, to earn economic stability and so-called respectability in society. Moll is the product of materialistic world turned to worldly zeal. She is a woman who is involved in the trade. She always interprets her each experience in terms of gain and loss. May it be the institution of marriage or the world of prostitute, everything is a kind of money-making machine for her. The philosophy of trade maligns her soul and she could not rise above this mean materialistic pursuit. Defoe tries his best to erect Moll's image

as a repentant by giving more emphasis on the repentance episode of the novel. To achieve this target, he makes use of the religious concept "confession" which may assist him to shade the impression of Moll as an awakened soul. But Moll becomes Defoe's creation of a troubled conscious.

In the novel, Moll is aware of the conflict between the demands of commercial gain and that of spiritual salvation. Though she is efficient and resourceful in her difficulties of life as a trade, she is nagged by doubt and a sense of guilt, by an awareness of what she has ignored or put by in her single-minded commitment. However, these pangs are not very effectual. The ways of her heart are revealed to Moll by her conduct more than by her consciousness, and even her most earnest repentance arouses her own distrust. The novel is an account of Moll's spiritual self-deception. We may say that Moll makes use of spiritual disguise to meet her end as a penitent.

The function of spiritual disguise in Moll Flanders plays a significant role in the novel. The part of the novel in which Moll's repentance and confession is depicted, is not convincing to the readers because the feeling of repentance is always followed by Moll's ambition and her designs to earn money. Her attitude towards money making and the role of the money in the social life create doubts about her sincerity and legitimacy of her so-called "true" penitence in Newgate prison. This has been given rise to the wide debate on the problem of Moll's penitence. It is important to look into the inner world of Moll. The deeper we explore into what Moll is, the more we are confirmed about the absence of any real repentance. It shows that Moll's repentance is simply another disguise to conceal Moll's real identity. In this context Chen says that "If the "real" repentance is proved to be false or partial then there is no difference between Moll who was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own brother) Twelve year a thief" and Moll who was "Eight year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a penitent".¹ If Moll is not honest in her repentance it means she is not changed and so Defoe's claim that Moll has transformed from a criminal to a penitent is

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

In her first phase, Moll wanted to be a 'Gentlewoman' and her definition of gentlewomen is "to be able to get my bread by my own work".² When Moll is in an orphanage, she acquires the skill of needlework. This skill is sufficient for her to earn her livelihood. Accordingly, she tries to frame out the image of a gentlewoman. Any woman who can support herself with her work can become a gentlewoman for her. Moll names a gentlewoman she knows as an example to explain others what she meant. It is a woman of ill fame with three bastards. Such a whore stands for gentlewoman to Moll. She insists that the whore is a gentlewoman, who does not go to service nor does house work

"By the word gentlewoman.... I meant quite another; for alas, all I understood by being a gentlewoman was to be able to work, for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear going to service, where as they meant to live great, rich and high, and I know not what She made up her mind that she would be such a gentlewoman as that".³

This shows that how much economic independence is important for Moll to survive in the society. Moll's desire to become a gentlewoman is associated with freedom from economic want. For her, morality doesn't have much importance. Later on, Moll is seduced by the elder son of her master. This episode is not a case of conscience for her. On the contrary, she admits that "I gave up myself to a readiness of being ruined without the least concern".⁴ When she says that "I had not one Thought of my own Safety or of my Virtue about me",⁵ her point is not that she forfeits both, but that she does so without a thought. After her seduction Moll's situation is entangled by the younger brother who proposes to marry her. Her reply is to him, "I resisted the Proposal with Obstinacy," she reports, "I laid before him the inequality of the match; the treatment I should meet with in the family; the ingratitude it would be to his good father and mother, who had taken me into their house upon such generous principles".⁶ Here, Moll's conscience is aroused. She starts to weigh her conduct in the light of moral principles. But she ignores this awakening of her soul.

I said everything to dissuade him from his design that I could imagine...".⁷ Her reticence towards that younger brother leads to disguise and concealment of the truth. After the marriage, Moll says of her former lover that "I committed Adultery and Incest with him every Day in my Desires, which without doubt was as effectually Criminal in the Nature of the Guilt as if I had actually done it".⁸

According to G.A. Starr, Moll's confession of adulterous desires is a kind of pleas for sympathy. When she marries the younger son of the same family, she counts the money left on the death of her husband. She says that

"he had been really a very good Husband to me, and we liv'd very agreeably together; But he... had in the little time he liv'd acquir'd no great Matters, so my Circumstances were not great; nor was I much mended by the match: indeed I had perserv'd the elder Brother's Bonds to me, to pay me 500/ which he offered me for my Consent to Marry his Brother; and this, with much more by my husband, left me a Widow with about 1200/ in my Pocket".⁹

Marriage is a deal for Moll and she expects to improve her financial situation and secure her living in this way. After her unexpected failure in her first marriage, she makes up her mind to be "well-married". For Moll "well-married" means the promise of money which her future husband might bring. Unfortunately, she could not fulfill her wish to be prosperous through being "well-married" but she could manage to maintain her living in her other four marriages. She always lies about her financial position, even to those she loves. For instance, when the mutual trickery with James is revealed, she conceals a thirty-pound bank-bill. Similarly, once she rolls a drunk after a night spent whoring, comes home to count and weigh her loot. She is highly satisfied with her gain and then reflects on the sins which fathers visit upon their children by drunkenness. Here she is even inspired to quote Solomon on the foul disease. This account is followed by the adventure into which she had brought the gentleman to reform his ways, restored him to the bosom of loving wife, and secured the happiness of an innocent family. On the basis of such incidents Defoe advises us to make "virtuous and religious" uses of the story. Moll advocates morals but forgets that her adventures are criminal. She only wants economical security and middleclass respectability. In the words of Dorothy Van Ghant "she thinks middle-class thoughts; her morality is middle-class morality-Platitudinous, Stereotypic, a morality suited to the human species in its peculiar aspect as cash calculator, and a morality therefore, most particularly suitable to the prostitute".¹⁰ In many incidents Moll's spiritual self-deception is portrayed by Defoe. One famous instance is the passage when she consoles herself for having stolen a child's gold necklace. The way she consoles herself shows her deliberate blindness to her own spiritual and mental dishonesty. "I only thought I had given the Parents a just Reproof for their Negligence, in leaving the poor little lamb to come home by itself, and it would teach them to take more Care another time".¹¹ This context makes it quite clear that Moll is not only blind to the beam in her own eye but she is actually berating herself for it. From the language of the passage, it becomes clear that there is nothing remotely suggestive of her rage. If Moll has awakened by the robbery of a child, that would have preserved her from many future crimes. Her depredations upon one drunk would have preserved the happiness of many families. Moll as a character tends to be blind to her situation and reveal only the dimmest understanding of her true moral state. On the surface level of her narrative Moll sees her life as a Christian penitent but she operates on the level of natural law, pursuing security through marriage and then self-preservation through theft. If we see stealing after she has enough money to live on as a principle of life, it is our blindness to Moll's blindness.

According to Moll, her life is a kind of journey to salvation. However, it is the history of a woman who lost her

virtue and her modesty. Finally, she is caught in the midst of sins and had fear of God in Newgate. Here she has repented, reformed and became the penitent, confronted with the wicked past and reveals it for the readers' benefit. The narrator tries to emphasize that Moll is confessing. She professes awareness of her own wrong-doing. She is fully aware that she had committed a sin, for instance, a sin of her own in letting the elder brother of Colchester go. But as readers, we find that she is psychologically unaffected of her awareness of her own wrong-doing as she does not stop. "I Had a great many adventures after this, but I was young in the business, and did not know how to manage, otherwise than as the devil put things into my head; and indeed he was seldom backward to me. One adventure I had which was very lucky to me..."¹²

Moll must always evaluate her own actions. Since, most of the actions are criminal. The question is there that how can the sinner expect to be believed if she condemns her acts and repents of them even as she is about to go out and sin again. Moreover, she blames heaven for forcing her to continue into the world of wickedness. As Moll notes of her own inability to give up the "horrid Trade" of theft, which had made her rich: "Avarice join'd so with the Success, that I had no more thoughts of coming to a timely Alteration of life; tho' without it I coul'd expect no Safety, no Tranquility in the Possession of what I had so wickedly gain'd".¹³ When Moll grows old and then could not make use of her beauty, she turns to thievery. In this phase of life, she could achieve prosperity and fame which she has been aspiring for. With her own wit and hand, she is able to support herself through tricks and cunning. After being arrested, sent to Newgate and transported to Virginia, Moll inherits the money from her mother and becomes prosperous and seemingly penitent.

Defoe put so much emphasis on the part of repentance of Moll in the Editor's preface. Moll always reflects on what she has done and reproach of her conscience which makes her regret and repent. But after such state of mind, she would start counting the money gained in each adventure, and then hurry to another adventure planning to make more profits. This shows that the part of repentance evaporates soon and has no effect on Moll at all for she soon forgets what she has repented of. This is true with the most of her episodes so that when the reader is informed that Moll is repenting her follies in Newgate, expects this as a false alarm again. Here, we can have a glimpse towards Moll's experience in Newgate in which a Minister sent by the Governess comes to meet her. In front of the Minister, Moll starts mentioning her true repentance saying that: "It was now that for the first time I felt any real signs of real repentance: I now began to look back upon my past life with abhorrence and having a kind of view into the other Side of time, the things of Life...".¹⁴ This shows that Moll seems to have severe reproaches on her wretched behavior of her past life. The confession to be penitent in front of the Minister is an activity for Moll to be indulged in only when there is either no necessity or no opportunity to improve the time. We can notice Moll's sharp and observing eyes are fixed on an innocent Minister who is the only person she can get a hold of in prison and who in fact, turns out to be the one that helps her to reprieve. Here is the impression of the Moll of Minister:

He Did not come as Ordinary of the Place, whose business it is to extort confessions from Prisoners, for private Ends, or for the father detecting of other

Offenders; that his business was to move me to such freedom of discourse as might serve to disturthen my own Mind, and furnish him to administer comfort to me as far as was in his Power; and asur'd me, that whatever I said to him should remain with him, and be as much a Secret as if it was known only to God and myself.¹⁵

Moll knows the fact that the Minister takes it as a sign of true penitence when the criminal under his care "moved" to confessing personal secrets to him. Therefore, Moll seems to be moved by the Minister and repent her sin by telling her story to the Minister: "This honest Friendly way of treating me unlock'd all the Sluices of my Passions: He broke into my very Soul by it; and I unravell'd all the Wickedness of my Life to him: in a word, I gave him an Abridgement of this whole History; I gave him the picture of my Conduct for 50 Years in Miniature".¹⁶ Here we find Moll is empowered by her repentance and regard herself as: "A true Penitent, and obtaining the comfort of a Penitent, I thought I could freely have gone out that Minute to Execution, without any uneasiness at all, casting my Soul entirely into the Arms of infinite Mercy as a Penitent".¹⁷ But this state of mind could not last for many days. When Moll finds her name on the list, the thought of execution made her uneasy: "I found my Name was among them; a terrible blow this was to my new Resolutions, indeed my Heart sunk within me, and I swoon'd away twice, one after another, but spoke not a word...".¹⁸ This shows that Moll was conscious that becoming a penitent can save her life. As per her expectation, the Minister is moved and her execution was reprieved. Moll is aware of the thing that the Minister is the only person who could do something for her. She describes her wonder of not seeing the Minister the day before the execution and when he comes:

My heart leap'd within me for joy, when I heard his Voice at the door even before I saw him; but let anyone judge what kind of Motion I found in my soul, when after having made a short excuse for his not coming, he shew'd me that his time had been employ'd on my Account; that he had obtain'd a favourable Report from the Recorder to the Secretary of State in my particular case, and in short that he had brought me a Reprieve.¹⁹

Here she gives wrong impression to the Minister that she is moved. So, the Minister tries to save Moll from execution. The Minister asks Moll "to retain the same Sentiments of the things of Life" and told her that she "should not conclude that all was over, that a reprieve was not a Pardon".²⁰

Moll is happy for transportation to the New World as it is a kind of solution to her problem of identity and there she can appear like a new person. But the Minister is in worry as Moll's repentance is coming to an end. Accordingly, he tries his best to prevent her transportation so that she can continue with her repentance.

The good Minister stood very hard on another Account to prevent my being transported also, but he was answer'd, that indeed my Life had been given me at his first Solicitations, and therefore he ought to ask no more; he was sensibly griev'd at my going,

because, as he said, he fear'd I should lose the good impressions, which a prospect of Death had at first made on me, and which were since increas'd by his instructions, and the pious Gentleman was exceedingly concerned about me on that Account".²¹

Immediately, Moll admits her disguising of her feelings to the Minister on the issue of transportation: "On the other Hand, I really was not so solicitous about it as I was before, but I industriously conceal'd my Reasons for it from the Minister, and to the last he did not know, but that I went with the utmost reluctance and affliction".²² In front of the Minister, Moll has to act like one who does not like to be transported. But, to be transported is exactly what Moll longs for. This shows that it is money that can promise her a life without going to service and further a new position in the new world. Moll's emphasis on the discourse of money is always at work after she claims to be a penitent. We can take an example of Moll's contention that money plays a significant role in the prison while waiting the Minister impatiently. She also preaches the importance of money to Jemmy. She instructs him to manage himself and how to avoid being a servant. She knows it is the money which can be the only friend in such condition. For Jemmy, to be transported is condemnation while for Moll; it is a blessing as long as one has money in hand. On the ship to the New World, Moll gives the impression that she is a rich woman. She sends a letter to the Governess demanding things, she needs on the voyage. She takes great care to establish herself as someone more than she is: "When I gave the Boatmen the Letter, I gave him a Shilling with it, which I told him was for the Charge of a messenger or Porter which I entreated him to send with the letter, as soon as he came on Shore".²³ Moll further illustrates her central belief of how money can talk by the impression of being rich through her gesture:

I Took care when I saw gave him the shilling to let him see that I had a little better Furniture about me, than the ordinary prisoners, for he saw that I had a Purse, and in it a pretty deal money, and I found that every sight of it, immediately furnish'd me with very different Treatment from what I should otherwise have met with in the ship....²⁴

In the last phase of her life Moll does not engage on thievery. This may give impression to the reader that this time her repentance is true. This is the point which Defoe asserts in the preface of the novel. This is the real repentance of Moll in Newgate. But, in this part also we find connection between repentance and her motives to keep money. Though she does

not rely on thievery to gain her livelihood, she has promise of money through her mother's legacy and her son's support. It is the factor of money that has changed her mind, not the awakening of conscience that makes Moll quit the thievery. In this context, the observation of John J. Richetti in "Crime, Adventure, and Domesticity" is important. He says: "Moll is hardly modest about her accomplishments as a thief... Even as Moll records with shame her 'hardening' in crime, she still reports her unparalleled success at it, celebrating her fame even as she deplors it cause."²⁵ This shows that Discourse of money pervades the whole novel before the "true" repentance and after. The moral claims cannot survive in Moll's world, no matter in the orphanage, the husband-hunting, or thievery episodes, or during the imprisonment in Newgate, and later transportation to New England.

Conclusion:

To conclude, the assumption that is Moll is a penitent is questionable. It seems that there is no time for Moll to pause a little but to hurry to another adventure in life. She develops a pattern at the end of every adventure to repent for what she has done and then hurries to count the money she has earned and lost in the adventure. "Confession" for Moll is a mask to conceal her real intentions of getting money. What we see a woman who has already recognized money as the key to survival. This realization denies her to progress in her quest for spiritual Enlightenment. Accordingly, she takes many evil actions. This is what the meaning of the term 'Abhabbagamana'. So, she is incapable of progressing in her spiritual quest. Though she claims herself to have converted from a thief and criminal to a penitent, Moll Flanders does not actually change or develop. Her penitence is a change overnight without any cause to this effect. If there is one, then it is money inherited from her mother in Virginia that makes her quit the thievery, not the awakening of conscience.

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