



THE FEMINIST THOUGHT IN “A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN” BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Abstract

The title of my Term Paper is The Feminist thought in “*A Room of One’s own*” by Virginia Woolf as a feminist. After giving introduction about Virginia Woolf’s, my first intention is to give introduction to feminism. The paper aims to highlight Woolf’s feminist sensibility which it importance for a woman to have a room of one’s own. Adeline Virginia Stephen became famous by name of Virginia Woolf. , is a woman with vision and a mission, courage, determination, hard work and above all a novelist par excellence qualities. Woolf wrote *A Room of one's Own* in 1928, Woolf's first book about feminism. In this work, she dwelled on woman and literature.

1. FEMINISM

A Room of One's Own is a landmark in the history of English literary criticism and feminist theory. It is remarkable for its distinctive tone a narrative in defence of women and the prospects of their coming to grip with reality. Virginia Woolf is the first great feminist both in her creative and critical works known for her 'stream of consciousness'. All her great novels as for example Mrs. Dalloway, *To the Light House*, the waves are written from feminist point of view, as is the case with her critical essay *A Room of One's Own*. Feminism in general is a term that is used to describe, cultural, political, and economic movements. It aims at establishing more legal, rights protection for women. Feminism is social movement that tried to achieve political equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always interest with other social hierarchies.

1.2 Feminism Definition and Meaning

To analyse Virginia Woolf's attitude towards feminism and how this is demonstrated in her books and essays, there has to be a definition of what "feminism" means in genera first : Feminism is

"the belief in the principle that women should have the equal rights and opportunities as men" also

"the movement in support of this". The media & female writers were the main supporters of the feministic movement which fights for equal rights and opportunities for women.

Feminism is a belief that women and men should be treated as equals in world and men and women should be given social, political and economic rights equal to men in all contexts. So finally feminism is a movement that believes equality between genders . The feminist movement fights for equal rights and opportunities for women. In broad definition: it is women's movement in 1960s to struggle for the equality of right.

Each writer establishes his/her own independent definition according to his/her experience.

For example, in E. Freedman's view, the emphasis is on the intellectual background:

"feminism is a social movement that tried to achieve political equality between men and women, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other on social hierarchies" (Freedman p-24)

Depending on her situation and political standpoint, Barbara Smith affirms that feminism is the practice to free all women and political theory. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement. (Smith, pp-188)

Smith is a feminist. Who played a significant role in building and sustaining Black Feminism in the United States, which is an organization emphasizing the intersectionality of racial, gender, heterosexist, and class oppression in the lives of blacks and other women of color.

In literary criticism, feminism focuses on woman's position in literature, both as writer and character, subject and object, perceiver and perceived. In politics, feminism refers to the approach which aims at having equal rights with men in all the fields of life. In order to achieve a cohesive and comprehensive definition of feminism and its manifestations, we have to explore its different aspects, such as the geographical and the historical ones.

1.3 Three Wave of Feminism

The history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three "waves". Each is described as dealing with different aspects of the same feminist issues.

• First Wave Feminism • Second Wave Feminism • Third Wave Feminism

- First Wave Feminism (Suffrage): Overall goal: to improve the legal position for women in particular to gain women vote. Mary Wollstonecraft is founder of feminism.
- Second Wave Feminism (Equal play): Women should be equal to men in all respects. The second wave of feminism which occurred in 1960-1980, came as a response to the experiences of women after World War II. Mary shelly, Bronte Sisters & Jane Austen were famous writers of that period.
- Third Wave Feminism (Patriarchy): Women seem to be more equal to men. Fight for equality by focusing in exclusively on female victims of gender – neutral issues. *A Room of one's own* (1829) is widely considered “The first modernist text of feminist criticism.” by Virginia Woolf.

1.4 FEMINISM AND HISTORY

The term feminism first appeared in France in 1880s (as feminism), Great Britain in the 1890s, and the United States in 1910. However, the real beginning of gender discrimination may have begun with the biblical narrative that places the blame for the fall of humanity on Eve, not Adam.

This discrimination has continued throughout history. For example, the ancient Greeks believed, as Aristotle asserted, that the male by nature is superior, the female inferior, the one rules, and the other is ruled. Religious leaders also supported such gender discrimination. St. Augustine, for instance, asserted that women are really imperfect men. St. Thomas in his turn pronounced woman to be an “incidental being” (De Beauvoir, 70). Roots of prejudice against women have long been embedded in the Western culture until the early 1890s, when feminist criticism began to grow. During this time, women gained the right to vote. Even before, Mary Wollstonecraft had authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). She urged women to stand up for their rights and not allow their male-dominated society to define what it means to be a woman. Women themselves must take the lead and articulate who they are, and what role they can and will play in society. Most importantly, they must reject the patriarchal assumptions that women are inferior to men.

Eliane Showalter who divided women's modern literary development of feminism into three phases: the feminine phase (1840-1880), the feminist phase (1880-1920), and the female phase (1920-the present).

In the first phase, women writers such as Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot imitated the dominant male traditions and the definition of women. For example, Bronte's first novel used a first-person male narrator. Critics have tended to see this as both an artistic error and an elision of her feminine voice. Whether she took a male or female narrator, Bronte was no less intent on examining the encoding of gender in the nineteenth-century discourse. Accordingly, these female authors wrote under male pseudonyms, hoping to be up to the intellectual and artistic achievements of their male counterparts. Female authors described the harsh and cruel treatment of female characters at the hands of their more powerful male creations. They did not even have their own way to write.

The Second Phase (1880-1920) which comes under Feminist movement, characteristic Woman as a Writer of protest against male chauvinistic canons and male values. Elizabeth Robins, Francis Trollope and others represent the phase. Feminists including male writers championing the cause of woman rejected the text that depicts a woman as a stereotype and opposed the traditional injustice done to woman. In the Feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the writing of the vote, women are historically enabled to reflect the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood. "Had seen the emergence of the so-called 'new woman' phenomenon, in which intelligent, liberated feminists were seen Taking up the strong roles in the public world" (Matthews, pp.92.)

In the third phase, women began to discuss their own problems through their writings. Within this phase, Showalter also described four models of difference taken up by many feminists around the world: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural models. The biological model is the most problematic, in which women writers relate the intimacies of the female experience of the female body. Showalter's linguistic model asserts that "women are speaking women's language as a foreign tongue" (Showalter, 1977, p.86). The third model, the psychoanalytic, identifies gender differences in the psyche and also in the artistic process. Showalter's last model is the cultural one; this model places feminist concerns within social contexts, acknowledging class, racial, national and historical differences and determinants among women. It investigates how the society (in which female authors work and function) shapes women's goals, responses, and views. Rejecting both imitation and protest. Showalter advocates approaching feminist criticism from a cultural perspective in the current female phase, instead of views that are traditionally perceived from an andocentric perspective like psychoanalytic and biological theories. Feminists in the past have worked within these traditions by revising and criticizing female representations, or lack therefore, in the male traditions (i.e. in the Feminine and Feminist phases). In her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness",

Showalter states:

"A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender.

Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space."(Showalter. pp 260.)

This argument is representative in that many feminists argue in similar lines and give more or less similar judgments.

1.5 Feminism and its Geographical Strains

Physical geography plays a great part in determining the proper definition and the major interests of the various voices of feminist criticism.

Three distinct geographical strains of feminism have emerged.

The first strain has been set by the American feminist critic Anette Kolodny who has helped to set up the major concerns of American feminism. She asserts that the male voice has for too long been dominant in society; men have had the power of the pen and the press and have been able to define and create images of women as they choose in their male texts. Such male power has caused "*anxiety of authorship*" (Gilbert, 1977, p.30) in women, causing them to fear the act of literary creation itself. A potential solution has been suggested by Gilbert who argued that "women must develop a women sentence to encourage literary autonomy" (Gilbert, 1977,p.33). Indeed, that is what Mrs.Woolf and her followers have sought to establish in their creative and critical texts.

The second strain is French feminism, which is closely associated with the theoretical and practical application of psychoanalysis. One of the famous figures in this strain is Simone De Beauvoir, whose book, *The Second Sex*, is heralded as the foundation work of twentieth-century feminism. The title, *The Second Sex*, "sums up De Beauvoir's argument that society sets up man as the positive and woman as a negative, second sex or other, an insight in some ways analogous to Virginia Woolf concept 'Woman as Mirror'"

(Humm,1994, p. 36). Judith Butler, for instance, declares that Beauvoir's formulation that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De

Beauvoir, 1949, p.301), and distinguishes between the terms 'sex' and 'gender'. Butler asserts that the book suggests that gender is an aspect of identity which is gradually acquired. Butler sees

"The

Second Sex as potentially providing a radical understanding of gender" (Butler,1980, p. 37).De

Beauvoir declares that "both French and Western societies are patriarchal" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 82). She believes that the male in these societies defines what it means to be human and what it means to be female.

She also argues that if a woman wishes to become a significant human being, she must define herself.

"Woman? ... Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female. This word is sufficient to define her" (Woolf, 1929, p.65).

The third strain is British feminism. British feminists view reading, writing and publishing as facets of material reality. For them, the goal of criticism is to change social conventions and views about man-woman relationship. One of these critics is Virginia Woolf, who is distinguished by her daring and unprecedented feminist thoughts.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf was a master of modern writing and she developed a mountain of works that explored numerous ideas like the importance of time, freedom, equality between genders, love, and death. One theme that resounded throughout most, if not all, of her writings was the concept of gender. Whether Woolf was exploring the societal impact on gender or the idea that gender is irrelevant, one thing was clear; Woolf was obsessed with gender. She was a wonderful feminist writer who was confused by the roles women were forced to play in society.

2.2 The Socio-cultural and Political Frame of Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is considered nowadays to be one of the major exponents of Modernism in

Britain. In English Literature, a lot of eminent writers are included, such as James Joyce or T.S. Eliot.

However, Virginia Woolf is maybe one of the most eminent writers who left the biggest trace in the

experimentation in Modernist English Literature. Modernism was a cultural movement of experimentation in all arts. Modernist writers looked for innovation, trying to get rid of the typical old rules of the Victorian age (1837-1901).

The childhood of Virginia Woolf was greatly influenced, although not directly, by the rules of the social system of that time. This was an age characterised by the austerity in all senses: a society marked by hard work, loyalty and strong religious beliefs. This was a society also marked by a strong patriarchal system, in which women's rights were highly restricted. The role of women was limited to the domestic life: mother and submissive wife. In that time, women were totally separated from the intellectual life, and they could not give their opinion in public.

The Modernist movement was a period of changes and experimentation in literature and also among other artistic areas. Women were not included at all in the intellectual circles of society. The Bronte sisters or Jane Austen were examples of women who struggled against the exclusion of women in the world of literature. They first promoted the integration of women in the intellectual life of Britain. On the other hand, some years later, at the end of the First World War, something very important happened. Women were first allowed to vote in Britain. (1919). Being allowed to vote was something very remarkable for women because this action let them to become integrated within public life and enabled them to promote their basic rights as women.

2.3 Virginia Woolf: Biographical aspects

Adeline Virginia Stephen was a very important and influential British writer of the modernist period English literature. She grew up in an environment frequented by intellectual people (artists, painters, etc.). Her family belonged to the upper social class of Britain. They had an economically buoyant life... Virginia received an excellent education. She received her schooling at home as along with the rest of her siblings. Adeline Virginia Stephen was constantly surrounded by intellectual people. She was still in contact with the England

of the Victorian Period. She married the economist Leonard S. Woolf in 1912 and they both founded the Hogarth

Press publishing company in 1917.

Virginia Woolf reached her maximum popularity when she published *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928) or *The Waves* in 1931. These publications established her as one of the most representative figures of the experimental English novel. Another important role which characterized the figure of Virginia Woolf was her deeply interest for the rights of women. She promoted the creation of a female identity. She struggled against the old patriarchal system of the Victorian Period, defending the conditions and rights of women.

2.4 Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group

The Bloomsbury Group was a circle of intellectuals of all kind (painters, writers...) created after the death of Virginia Woolf's father in 1904; the group's site was located in the London District of Bloomsbury. Virginia Woolf along with her sister Vanessa Bell and their siblings established this group when their father died in 1904, shortly after the end of the Victorian Period in 1901. Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey or Duncan Grant had been some of the members of this Group. They were known as the "Bloomsberries". Virginia Woolf was important member of this intellectual circle. The ideology of the Bloomsbury Group refused the canonical rules and values of the Victorian age. For them, Victorian Society was narrow-minded and they promoted several values and new ideals in order to get rid of the strict and decorous life of Victorianism. They had an attitude which was highly liberal and progressive. This group was the only one that was in favor of the rights of homosexuals. They also supported the integration of women in the world of arts and they were pacifists. They were in favour of those people who decided live their sexuality openly. Therefore, they supported open marriages and the ideal of each one living his/her sexuality without inhibitions or any ideological obstacles. Virginia Woolf was greatly influenced by this circle of intellectuals. In this group, she could express her liberal ideology openly, without prejudices or restrictions for being a woman. She also shared a lot of new ideals with the rest of members of this group.

2.5 Virginia Woolf as the key figure of the Feminist Movement

After the publication of her essays, especially the publication of *A Room of One's Own* in 1922, Virginia Woolf became established as one of the first and most important promoters and symbols of the Feminist Movement. Many people catalogued her as “feminist” in the “bad” and strict sense of the concept. However, she always tried to make clear her way of thinking about this aspect: She did not think that women were superior to men. She promoted the equality of genres and thought that women could have the same rights as men because all we are human beings and all we have rights.

The Victorian Age was a period which can be considered to be backward in this sense. Women could not express their opinions in public and education was restricted. Neither could they live their sexuality openly because this would be like treason for the pure and decorous life of Victorian values. Victorian Society was full of prejudices, all of these deeply rooted, and these were mainly caused by the strong religious beliefs of the age. Virginia Woolf wanted to break away from these values and defended the basic rights of women. She was almost concentrated on the intellectual life of women. Virginia Woolf did not consider women superior to men. In fact, she thought that both sexes only belonged to different natures but we should appreciate them in an equality manner. She promoted the mixing of these two different natures, promoting the equality in gender. The following passage shows an opinion about Virginia Woolf taken from the book *Feminist Destinations*, written by Rachel Bowlby in 1988:

“Among feminist critics who approve her work, she is seen as exemplary both in the sense of exceptional- a unique heroine, a foremother, a figurehead – and as an example, in some way representative or typical of something called “women’s writing”. Among those who dislike her work, it is taken as not matching up to the criteria of women’s writing, but fitting in all too well with the patriarchal norms, literary or social, to which authentic women’s writing should by definition be opposed” (Rachel, pp.12)

2.6 The Literary Work and Influences of Virginia Woolf

In 1905, Virginia Woolf started to write professionally. After writing a large number of essays, she began to establish herself as novelist. Her first novel was *The Voyage Out* (1915). The first novels and essays she wrote in her professional career did not help her to establish herself as a well-known novelist. However, Virginia Woolf started to be influenced by many writers and intellectuals belonging to the Modernist Period: Henry James or the philosopher Henri Bergson for instance. In this way, Virginia Woolf could feed her imagination and her undoubtedly talent.

She began to break off the canonical style of the Realism. Realist novels were focused on a particular action, in which the time-line had to be accurate. These novels had a fixed plot and the story shall be accurate as well as the role of characters. However, Modernist writers wanted to make the difference and to break with all the canonical and old devices used by the Realist writers. The main feature of Modernist Literature was the experimentation. They wanted to innovate and renovate the old-fashioned style of Realist Literature. *Jacob's Room* (1922) was the first experimental novel written by Virginia Woolf. This work promoted her career as experimental novelist. However, she actually reached great popularity when she published *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925. One of the most important and revolutionary devices used by V. Woolf was the device called *stream of consciousness*. This device was very innovative and typical in the experimentation of modernism. This device usually showed entirely the emotions of characters. The reader had a big knowledge of all what characters felt and thought during the novel. A good example of Virginia Woolf's novel in which stream of consciousness device can be found notoriously is *To the Lighthouse* (1927). This novel is based on the childhood of Virginia Woolf. A lot of images and symbols are present in this work; devices also typical of modernism. Images, sounds, symbols...in which prose ends up to evoke a kind of poetry or a lyrical frame. Virginia Woolf was influenced by the Modernists of her time and gifted with a enviable talent. She had the brilliant capacity of turning the prose into a special poetry, using the rhetorical device of symbolism magnificently. She also consolidated herself as the pioneer of the Feminist Movement of that time.

Virginia Woolf still remains a landmark in the history of English literature with regard to her innovative style of writing. Because of her originality, vision and preoccupation with the form of fiction she continues to sway the minds of the readers. Although she wrote in the first half of the twentieth century, she has been studied very seriously for more than half a century. Her fictional work has not ceased to attract critical opinions. When questions about time and consciousness, and technical innovations are raised Virginia Woolf's novels have become exemplary. Perhaps this marks why her works are more accessible now compared to the 1940's. Though Virginia Woolf was a tireless writer of letters, diaries, reviews, criticisms, essays and short stories, she was best known for her novels. By the time of her death in 1941, she had written nine novels which include *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941). Like all writers, Virginia Woolf too was influenced by the age in which she lived, that is, the early twentieth century. Like every age, the twentieth century too observed a brave new world growing space the older one, but at the cost of traditional values and certainties that went with it. All over the world, the old institutions, old traditions and old ways of life either disintegrated or became outmoded. The two World Wars were symptomatic of the change observed during the twentieth century. In most of her works, Woolf's female characters adapt themselves in order to satisfy the male-defined role of women as art objects. Barbara Hill Rigney agrees that women in Woolf's novel split themselves into two selves: the male subject as surveyor and the female object as the surveyed. Because these characters maintain themselves to identify with the patriarchal society's image of a woman by assuming the position of a male spectator towards themselves as female spectacle, they become themselves artists and art-objects at the same time. Rigney rightly believes that "this situation leads to these characters' feelings of selflessness and loss of identity" (Rigney, 1978, p. 239). However, one can notice that Rigney is concerned about these characters, not as practical artists with practical artistic production, but simply as situating themselves in the traditional position which the male society has ordained for them, i.e. women as aesthetic objects or as the "other", devoid of critical consciousness. Eileen

Ann Barrett also examines Woolf's feminism in her novels *The Voyage Out*, and *To the Lighthouse* in relation to what she believes to be Woolf's radical critique of the patriarchal culture. Barret states that when Woolf "intends the female artist to move outside the male culture, Woolf herself as artist celebrates femininity against the patriarchal system" (Barrett E.,1987, p.49). Therefore, Barrett is interested in the female artists as representing Virginia Woolf herself standing against the patriarchal society; she is concerned with presenting the underlying network or relations between the female artist and the patriarchal society. Allen MacLaurin, nonetheless, is interested in studying the patterns of consciousness in Woolf's works in his book *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved*. Drawing upon the difficult circumstances that Woolf had gone through, MacLaurin's article presents several questions about the direct and indirect reasons that drive Woolf to be a feminist. MacLaurin talks deeply about the streamofconsciousness as a technique in general and then investigates how this technique is put into practice in Virginia

Woolf's novels. His argument can be seen as an attempt at the recovery of the critical debate which has emerged in contemporary response to Woolf's creative writing. MacLaurin further studies the issue of group consciousness and states that "Woolf treats these issues in paradoxical manners, thus making its position debated and questioned"(MacLaurin,

2010, p. 53). In this book MacLaurin also deals with the dominant currents of thought in Virginia Woolf's own time. He relates his observations there to his consideration of the issue of consciousness in Woolf's fiction to gauge the extent to which such modes of thought are employed by Woolf in her work .Likewise, Hermione Lee saw that:

"Virginia Woolf was a sane woman who had an illness...Her illness is attributed to genetic, environmental and biological factors. It was periodic and recurrent" (Lee,1999, p. 175).

All these critical views stressed the idea that Woolf's standpoints concerning feminism and the female role stem from deep personal experiences. Indeed, her case has been exemplary in that she seeks to find a correspondence between the biographical and objective planes of experience.

CHAPTERWISE SUMMARY OF A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

A Room of one's Own is a key word of feminist literary criticism. Written after she delivered two lectures on the topic of fiction' at Cambridge University in 1928, Woolf's essay examines the educational, social and financial disadvantages women have faced throughout history. The theme of financial independence dominates the whole of A Room of One's Own. It contains Woolf's famous argument that, "women must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction.

Elizabethan women were subservient to men; they were dependent on their male relatives to support them. They could not even be heirs to their father's titles. All titles would have passed from father to son or brother to brother, depending on the circumstances. The only exception was the monarchy. The study also discusses "the poetry of several Elizabethan aristocratic ladies and how anger towards men and insecurity mark their writings and prevent their genius from shining through" (Woolf, 1929, p.88). Woolf's narrator (Mary Beton) mentions that the writer Aphara Behan marks a turning point. She is perhaps "the first female writer who has earned her own living without depending on any person, which made her an excellent writer" (Woolf, 1929, p.88). Mrs. Behan was forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. By implication, Mrs. Woolf suggests that *Aphara Behan* provides a good example of how literary creativity runs hand in hand with material self-sufficiency, a point very few people can question, let alone reject.

In the *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf attempts to uncover the pervading patriarchal ideology that deprives women of most of the opportunities to enjoy life as freely and confidently as men. Consisting of six chapters, *A Room of One's Own* is a seminal work that contains a set of lectures that she was invited to give. It is a sparkling, critical treatise that covers a wide area and exposes the male privilege and the way women have been excluded from the mainstream of life; how they are cornered from the cultural, social and economic life of the society. In fact, the said book seems to have been intended as a commentary on the social disabilities that have prevented women from realizing "their productive and creative possibilities".

In the first chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, she concentrates on the mechanism that makes women powerless by not allowing them to use her husband's/father's property. Generally, in a patriarchal society women are not conceived to be legal share - holders in the family property. A woman cannot spend a single penny on her own will; she even cannot use her own money without her husband's or father's consent. It is not a woman but her husband who decides how and where her money is to be spent. She reveals how it "denied them the right to possess what-money they earned." To enjoy freedom, Woolf asserts, "a woman must have money and a room of one's own...." (Virginia Woolf 1962) She sums up the works, a woman does in her

whole life: she begets children, looks after them and the house, pleases her husband by rendering her best service and that is all. A woman is poor because of her restricted world that society imposes on her. Along with this, Woolf has also highlighted several double-standards, pervading in a patriarchal society that prevents women from enjoying certain privileges of life. Woolf shares one of her experiences when she was forbidden to enter into a library because she did not have a letter of introduction.

In the second chapter, Woolf unfolds the social disparity that restricted women from getting certain share of experiences that men have. She reflects on various differences and discriminations as "Why did men drink, wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?" She probes into the fact that why women are the centre of attraction for almost all the men; why there are innumerable books, articles and essays on women by men who have no more qualification than that they are men (not woman). She also muses why men are so envious of and angry with women and concludes that it is men's sense of insecurity of losing power and the sense of male superiority that make them jealous and angry. Woolf also attempts to reveal why power is vested in men. She opines that a woman can be free and independent only when she stops "to be a protected sex" and "womanhood a protected occupation." She also gives the impression that what men call protection for a woman is basically a restriction that limits her world.

In the third chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf centres her attention on the condition of women. She meditates on the extent a woman is dependent on the will of the male members of the family; what a voiceless and identitiless creature she is; and how she is compelled to sacrifice her interests for the well-being of her male relatives. Discussing the marginalization of women, Woolf invents an imaginary story of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, who was as talented and crazy to try her fortune in the world of theatre as her brother. She meditates, initially Judith was prevented from studying; later on she got betrothed to the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler.

On opposing her premature marriage, she was cruelly beaten by her father; she was then prayed - emotionally exploited - not to hurt and shame her father in the matter of her marriage. She also went to London, like Shakespeare, to explore her fortune but in vain. Ultimately she become pregnant by Nick Green (the actor manager) and committed suicide. And all this happened because she was a woman. Woolf uncovers the double

standards that society adopts in the treatment of the fairer sex. She states that a woman cannot assert her freedom and violate the code of conduct assigned to her in a patriarchal society. Woolf also unfolds certain concepts and their significance in a woman's life.

She says that chastity has "a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest." Virginia Woolf also highlight how insignificantly and insufficiently a woman is treated in a phallogocentric society. Emotionally she is thought to be fertile; while intellectually she is considered to be sterile: "cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of

Shakespeare." Woolf mentions many female writers like George Eliot, George Sand, and Currer Bell who veiled their identity by using the names of men. They did so because they were doomed to be unread as female writers. Woolf bewails that how can a woman develop intellectually, if she is deprived of education and all the privileges of life.

In the fourth chapter, Woolf throws light on how a woman is discouraged in any of her efforts to do or say something. Deprived of all the privileges, support and encouragement, a woman cannot dare to pen down her actual feelings on paper. When she does, it reflects her anger and frustration. And reflected that a woman writer, initially started writing only to soothe herself and encourage herself knowing well that what she is writing would never be published. Woolf states that it is not only the cold reception of the hostile society that discourages women to write something, but it is their responsibility of womanhood and looking after their household that proves to be a hurdle in their creative ventures.

Most of the women novelists like Jane Austen in the nineteenth century, Woolf asserts, were to write fiction in their common sitting hall which was the centre of interruptions. Jane Austen had to hide her *Pride and Prejudice* on the occasion when a visitor came. These interruptions very often moulded the interests of the female authors. Emily Bronte should have written poetic plays, but she wrote novels because of the interferences. Woolf compares Shakespeare and Jane Austen and finds the latter no less talented. Austen's world was narrow because she was a woman, who had to pass much of her time within her house and she could not wander as freely and frequently as Shakespeare did. Being starved of the proper due of experiences,

the world of a woman's feelings is limited. It is limited because they are confined to their houses only. The other problem that a woman of nineteenth century faced was that she did not have a tradition of female writing. Woolf also talks about woman's writing but she does not mention any explicit feature of it. She just writes a sentence and calls it a man's sentence, which a woman like Jane Austen should avoid.

In the fifth chapter, Woolf again concentrates on woman's writing. She maintains that a woman should violate all the established rules to assert her identity. She opines that a woman has every right to break the sentence and the sequence if she does it "not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating." Quoting a sentence (Chloe liked Olivia....) from Mary Carmichael, Woolf observes that it happened for the first time in the history of literature that a woman liked another woman. She states that Cleopatra never liked Octavia. A Woman can write more freely and frankly only if she is independent economically and mentally. Woolf meditates: . give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak a mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days. Woolf further reflects on the causes of women's subordination and states that she is not viewed the other sex but in relation to the other sex (male sex). The lack of independent and free identity makes women a marginalized creature in all the aspects of life.

In the sixth and the last chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf reflects on the androgynous writing. She observes that it was only Shakespeare who had a man womanly mind. Shakespeare's indecent treatment of women is not objectionable because he aimed at pleasure. On the other side, writers like Mr. A. do it on purpose. They do it to protest. They protest against the equality of the other sex (i.e. female sex) by asserting their own superiority. The writings of Galsworthy and Kipling are incomprehensible to women because they assimilate a masculine bias that threatens women to disempower and subordinate. Women feel unrest in these writings because these writers "lack suggestive power... (and) it cannot penetrate within." Woolf finds Shakespeare, Coleridge,

Keats, Lamb, and Stern androgynous in mind, Shelley, a sexless person; and Milton, Tolstoy and Wordsworth the representatives of the male chauvinism. Virginia Woolf seems to have disapproved any discrimination between men and women. What she wants is a harmonious understanding between them that does not let either of them to hammer other's interests: "... it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly."

3.THE FEMINIST THOUGHT IN “A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN” BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

3.1 The Importance of A Room

Woolf's *A Room of one's Own* is a landmark in feminist literature. It is considered the first major work in feminist criticism . At that time, women were under the control of their male counterparts. They did not have their own work or even their own money. As a result, they did not have the mental freedom. And if they tried to write, they lacked the courage to sign their works. Tillie Olsen used *A Room* to meditate on the silences of women that were more marginalized than

Shakespeare's sister, exploring not only gender as one on the “ traditional silencers of humanity," but also "class-economic circumstances and color" (Tillie Olsen ,pp.24)

According to the present reading, all topics are the outcomes of one major theme which is the financial independence as seen in Michelle Barrett’s statement:

“if we may prophesy, women in time to come will write fewer novels only but poetry and criticism and history. But to be sure, one is looking ahead to that golden, that perhaps fabulous age when women will have what has so long been denied them leisure, and money, and a room to themselves” (Michelle Barrett, pp.52.)

To be able to write, there women ought to cross many obstacles such as gaining the proper education, proper space, and most importantly, money. The material autonomy is of prime importance in determining the position of the female writers. Indeed, *A Room* as manifested in the very title does stress privacy, this freedom is to be independent.

3.2 The Importance of Financial Independence

From the very beginning of the essay, Woolf asserts that "a woman must have a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1929, p.4). This sentence reflects that women at that time did not have a space of their own or even money to control their lives or display their potentials and abilities. For the narrator of *A Room of one's Own*, money is the primary element that prevents women from owning a room of their own. Thus, having money is of the utmost importance. Because women do not have financial, social, and political power, their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout the ages. She gives historical argument that lack of money and privacy prevented bright women in the past from writing effectively. For example Mary Beton asserts,

"Indeed, I thought, slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable, remembering the bitterness of those days, what a change of temper a fixed income will bring about. No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labor cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me" (Woolf, pp.38)

The role of money in woman's life is self-evident in this statement and many others. Without money, women will remain slavishly dependent on men; without privacy, constant interruptions block their creativity, freedom of thought is hampered as women consume themselves with thoughts of gender. Aphara Behan is the first female writer to earn her own money from writing. She paved the way for the 19 century novelists, like Jane Austen, who were able to write despite the lack of privacy in their family sitting rooms. Mrs. Woolf believes that contemporary female writers still generally operate out of anger or insecurity. In the future, however, with money and privacy, their minds will be freed and genius will blossom.

3.3 The Narrator

Mrs. Woolf fictionalizes an unnamed female narrator who is the only major character in *A Room of one's own*. She tells the reader to call her "Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any other name you please..." (Woolf, 1929, p. 5). Names do not count here. What is important is the content, the argument presented by the nameless narrator. "For now that Aphara Behan had done it, girls could go to their parents

and say, you need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen"(Woolf.1929. p. 67) . Mrs. Woolf uses this unnamed narrator on purpose. Her shifting identity gives her a more universal voice. By taking different names and identities, she appears as a voice recollecting all women, not just herself. One would argue that the shilling nature of this fictionalized character reflects the different identity that woman adopts to satisfy her husband, her mother-in-law, and her society. The tone of the narrator's discourse marked by bitterness, dissatisfaction and anxiety. The individual woman is not the main point. Rather what she stands for is the central issue.

3.4 Submissive role of women in society

Judith Shakespeare was created by Woolf as a metaphor. "Woolf can only imagine an unhappy ending to Judith's story. However, because of the lack of money and consequently the power of controlling her life, she loses her own life in addition to her creativity.

"Mrs. Woolf confirms that, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at.." (Woolf, pp.64).

Actually, the tragic figure of Judith has been invented to prove that a woman as talented as Shakespeare could never have achieved such success. Talent is an essential component of Shakespeare's success, but because women are treated so differently, a female Shakespeare would have been heard quite differently even if she had as much talent as Shakespeare did. The central point of *A Room of One's Own* is that every woman needs a room of her own; something men are able to enjoy without question. *A Room of One's Own* would provide a woman with the time and space to engage in an interrupted writing time. During Woolf's time, women rarely enjoyed these luxuries. They remained elusive to women and as a result, their art suffered, but Woolf is concerned with more than just the room itself; she uses the room as a symbol for many larger issues such as privacy, leisure time and financial independence, each of which is an essential component of the countless inequalities between men and women

3.5 The Social Life of Female Writer

The Other point raised in Mrs. Woolf's essays is the social life and its effect of narrow views of life imposed upon woman. She finds it convenient to draw a comparative argument between Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte. Mrs. Woolf mentions that Bronte desires more of practical experience than she possesses:

“What were they blaming Charlotte Bronte , I wondered? And I read how Jane Eyre used to go up on to the roof when Mrs. Fairfax was making jellies and looked over the fields at the distant view. And then she longed- and was for this that they blamed her that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen..” (Woolf pp.71.)

Here Woolf compares between the works of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. Woolf believes that Austen's work is better than Bronte's because of the bitterness and anger prevalent throughout Bronte's work. Mrs. Woolf concludes that Austen's nature makes her work successful because of the lack of anger and bitterness towards men. This contrasts with Bronte's work which is full of resentment and discontent. She asserts in her novel how Jane Eyre desired to have more freedom: “I desired more of practical experience that I possessed more of intercourse with my kind of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach” (Woolf, 1929, p.p.71-72). She also wonders about the fate of Austen's work if she gains the control of her own life.

3.6 Novel versus Poetry

At that time, women preferred to write novels rather than poetry. They suffered much due to the bad circumstances which put them under the control of their male counterparts. Even the poems they wrote were full of anger as we realize in Lady Winchelsea's poem:

“How we are fallen! Fallen by mistaken rules

And education's more the nature's fools” (Woolf, 1929, p. 62)

Actually, few women did write successful poetry. Woolf believes that the reason behind that is the frequent interruptions which prevent women from writing poetry or prevent the train of thought to continue and present an appropriate idea. In *A Room of One's Own* the narrator writes,

“Intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom...” (Woolf, 1929, p.7). Woolf believes that the writing of novel lends itself more easily to frequent starts and stops; so women more likely tend to write novels than poetry. Women must adapt with frequent interruptions because of the lack of room of their own in which they could write. Thus without money, women will be forever interrupted again and will remain in a second place in comparison with their creative male counterparts. Once again, the material factor is a key element in Mrs. Woolf's argument.

3.7 The Sympathizing Attitude towards Female Writers

Woolf draws attention to the attitude of male critics towards women writers, and the accompanied effect this had on their work. Of course, many writers have tried to escape this prejudice by using male pseudonyms, but nonetheless it could not be avoided. The influence of using this male pseudonyms is obvious in their writings, as she notes in *A Room of One's Own*: one has only to skim those old forgotten novels and listen to the tone in which they were written to divine that the writer was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation (Woolf, 1929, p. 83).

The pathetic situation of female writers at that time drove some male critics to sympathize with them, which also gave those critics the upper hand to control their writings indirectly, “...that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women, a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretations” (Woolf, 1928, p.102). Here, Woolf once again describes the obstacles that prevent females from pursuing their writing plans. Woolf goes on in her essay to discuss how males at that time were responsible for the internal image of women characters in literature. She discovers that males were in a position that allowed them to define the role of women in society, and their works are a mirror-image of the position of women in

real life. They portray women as "angel at home" where woman is portrayed by men as a person who has no mind or wish of her own. Rather she is there only to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

As Woolf comments on Mary Carmichael's novel *Life's Adventure* : " she broke the sentences; now she has broken the sequence" (Woolf, 1929, p.34). This leads us to the several times that women are interrupted while they write. This is because of harsh material circumstances that impede privacy and render women susceptible to interruptions and failure to embody what they have in mind.

3.8 Life of the Opposite Sex

In the sixth chapter which is the final one of *A Room of One's Own* , Woolf pays attention to the unity and rhythm that has been absent from the relation between women and men. She believes that each mind has male and female elements, and to be genius, the harmonious balance between these elements is required. In her view, Shakespeare gained all the popularity and success because of the possession of these elements "in fact one goes back to Shakespeare's mind as the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind..."(Woolf, 1929, p.102).

Woolf writes *A Room of One's Own* as an attempt to describe the relation between women and fiction, but she ends up with the demanding of women's rights. She passes from one chapter to another as a journey. She calls for the most important features of feminist thought by comparing between the lives of the opposite sexes. For example, she tries in her work to answer these questions "why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?" (Woolf, 1938, p.25). Such questions have much to do with the social conventions and norms of conduct that foster and encourage such modes of thinking and behaving.

3.8 A Room and Critics

A Room is a landmark in feminist literature whose basic subject is to evaluate the position of woman from different angles. Indeed, in Woolf's *A Room of one's Own*, it is the narrator's attempt to seek out "the manuscript of one of Milton's poems"(Woolf, 1929, p. 7) that leads her to be dissatisfied with the Oxbridge library. Woolf's critique of Milton's power continues as *A Room* concludes. The narrator calls for the woman here to "look past Milton's bogey in order to ensure that the women poet can be born" (Jensen, 2002, p. 141).

Here Marcus focuses on the various readings and their effect on understanding Woolf's text. Milton provides man's first disobedience especially in his poem *Paradise Lost*: "... Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree" (Milton, 1996, p. 6).

Throughout her work, Woolf has argued that the position of woman, which is socially and historically determined, has important psychological consequences. Woolf in each chapter mentions the different impediments against women's intellectual work and the obstacles they encountered in trying to resist the conventional feminine role. In *A Room of one's own*, she looks back a hundred years and goes on until the present moment of her discourse. Starting from the library at Oxbridge she discusses the necessity of owning female's own money clarifying that the theme of financial independence is the core of the whole essay. Indeed the other themes are simply manifestations of this underlying theme. To own a special room, the fate of highly intelligent woman, the historical circumstances, even the identity of woman could be changed if she gains her right of earning her own money. Woolf sums up her argument by stating that:

"intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely but from the beginning of time...women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own." (Woolf, pp.11)

Finally, to talk about women and fiction, women must first call for their rights and the priority must be given to financial freedom, which is related to their intellectual independence, and that leads us to the profession of writing. At least, this is how Mrs. Woolf sees in her influential essays about feminist literature. *A Room of One's Own* is certainly one of the seminal texts where the emphasis is laid on the inextricable relation between the financial and intellectual. Woman's position as a writer or, to be more specific, a novelist can only be achieved when her freedom and intellectual position are guaranteed.

CONCLUSION

Contributions of feminism to women's life and the things that women should do to have equal rights. *A Room of One's Own*, a notable work, among masterpieces of Virginia Woolf, a prominent feminist writer, as a reference in this study. She raised her voice on many subjects, especially on education, job opportunities and the matter of deserving the same respect at the community. Moreover, as Woolf state women and men should not be opponents, they should create something putting their heads together. A woman and a man are like two sides of face. The explicit and central argument of *A Room of One's Own* that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf, 1929, p. 4), is immediately complicated by the hybrid nature of the book itself. Though clearly intended by Woolf to be taken quite seriously, *A Room of One's Own* is largely playful in structure and progression. It delights in imaginative sketches of people and institutions, as well as in its ability to manipulate various aspects of narrative construction. Its blend of fiction, biography, history, polemic, satire, and other aspects, all brought together in a loose but complicated essayistic format, is unique to *A Room of One's Own*.

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