



Feminism In Virginia Woolf's *A Room Of One's Own*: A Book Review

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Abstract

Feminist critics believe in social, economic and political equal rights of men and women. Each feminist undergoes different circumstances and experiences which is depicted in their work. The movement started with the 'First Wave of Feminism' continued till the date with different objectives and achievements. Virginia Woolf's the greatest feminist writer in twentieth century expresses her ideas on feminism and gender equality through her most acclaimed critical work *A room of one's own*. It is Woolf's first book on feminism which basically deals with the rights of women writers. This paper focuses on her views on feminism.

Keywords: Feminism, First wave of Feminism, Gender equality.

Virginia Woolf, world's most praised modernist writers; especially, for the feminist approach in her writing. Woolf, born on 25th January 1882 in London was the seventh child of her parents. Unlike her brother, she and her sister didn't have privilege to attend school instead they both were taught at home. Her literary career began with the encouragement of her father in the year 1900. She has suffered several deaths of her family members which made her live a traumatic life. Throughout her life she was suffering from bipolar disorder which resulted in her suicidal death. The effects of her psychological condition are observed in most of her as she has used 'Streams of Consciousness' as a narrative technique. Woolf has authored several renowned novels, dramas and non-fiction such as '*Mrs. Dalloway*', '*To the Lighthouse*', '*Orlando: a biography*', '*The Waves*' etc. However, her most important contribution in the area of literary criticism is her long essay '*A Room of One's Own*'. The work was written based on the lecture she has delivered on 'Woman and Fiction' at Cambridge university. In this work she prominently emphasises on the importance of the financial independence of women. She develops the argument on women's inferior position in the field of literature with the fictional character of 'Shakespeare's sister'. "What would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderful gifted sister called Judith, let us say." (Woolf 55)

In spite of being as talented as Shakespeare, she couldn't attain the same fame due to lack of opportunities and resources and ends her life disastrously. Briefly, Woolf wanted women a freedom to chose her own way of living, equal rights of expressing their thoughts and earning money through their writing. She tries to emphasise on financial independence of women when she states:

A woman must have money and a room of one's own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. (Woolf 6)

Virginia Woolf in her essay '*A room of one's own*' gives her opinion about the place of women in literature and prejudices of male dominating culture to restrict women's role in it. She expresses her anger with an example when in Oxbridge neither female students nor female lecturers were allowed to walk on grass in order to go to library. They were only supposed to walk on gravel path so that a smaller number of women could come to library. This discriminatory treatment given to women is the reason of their passive participation in fiction writing even though they have equal abilities like men. Woolf also speaks about the zero share of women in her father's or husband's property and no authority to even spend her own money. Throughout her life she is forced to serve her family selflessly which leads their lives to be dependent and remain poor. Woolf in her work also opines about men's role of protector is nothing but their fear of losing power. They always try to prove their superiority over women by imposing restrictions on her, which they define woman's role. Woman was always discouraged and denied any kind of support and privilege whenever she wanted to pen down her feelings. And one who does so have to undergo various interruptions and obstacles. She gives examples of Jane Austen who has no separate and peaceful place to write, Emily Bronte has to write novel while she has immense potential of writing poetic plays. There are many female authors who were considered less talented than male authors without even noticing the incomparable conditions in which they would have produced their work. Women could not write songs and sonnets even though she is capable of writing some extraordinary literature. Even in the history the role of women in literature was submissive which were portrayed attractive but lacking in 'personality and character'. Sometimes women in fiction was always displayed exactly opposite of what she is in real life. Woolf deliberately tries to elaborate this when she Says:

A very queer, composite being this emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

Further, Woolf in '*A Room of One's Own*' talks about criticism on women's writing. She gives an example of Lady Winchelsea's poetry which could never receive luminosity of male writers even though those were beautiful poems. The work in which the working woman is portrayed is always disapproved by male writers. However, over the period women could definitely acquire the equal position and success in literature and many other areas after the struggle and movements of several years.

Conclusion:

Women received the discriminatory treatment from ancient period in the western culture. Not only the philosophers but the religious leaders spread the superiority of male over women from centuries. It was late nineteenth century when feminist movement truly began with the writings of some feminist critics such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Elaine Showalter, Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf etc. Virginia Woolf in her work 'A Room of One's Own' gave voice to various feminine issues. She also emphasises on her opinion on gender equality. According to her men and women instead of standing against each other should stand equally with each other.

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