

# FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*

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Erudite, witty, compassionate and provocative *A Room of One's Own* is a landmark in the history of English literary criticism and feminist theory. It is a curious essay 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, political, cultural and economic movements. It aims at establishing more rights and legal 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. In her essay "*Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness.*" Showalter states:

A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between woman as writers: class, 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, P.260).

Virginia Woolf in this essay explore the history of women in literature through an unconventional and highly provocative investigation of the social and material conditions requires for the writing of literature. She to her utter dismay found that even after a protest of 132 year initiated any sign of amelioration and betterment in the fate, state and plight of women due to which Woolf's personal experience of a visit to two woman colleges of Cambridge get translated in the form of her two lectures combined into one known as *A Room of One's Own*. So the main thrust of the essay is the need to provide financial security, social mobility and privacy, along with the economic security which figuratively means *A Room of One's Own*. MacLaurin studies the issue of group consciousness and states that "Woolf treats these issue in

paradoxical manners, thus making its position debated and questioned" (MacLaurin P.53) .

Her focus in this essay is women and fiction and specifically the problems faced by any woman who would become an artist. In this book she argues that any woman serious about writing must have 500 pounds per year and a room of her own in which to capture a few memories of silence. A room derives its importance from several themes it covers. Actually, they are the basic principles that women have to gain to be able to write as men. 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 prophecy, women in time to come will write fewer novels only put 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. (Barrett P.52)

Feminism inspired her book, the most charming and persuasive *A Room of One's Own*. She thinks about an imaginary picture of Shakespeare's sister who killed herself due to gender bias in the Elizabethan England because the age was patriarchal enough to restrict a woman to domestic sphere Woolf writes of many intelligent guidelines for any writer in this book. She offers a suggestion that one should write with an androgynous mind allowing both the softness of the feminine and the power of the masculine to come forth.

The different theme in this essay represent Woolf feminist thought. 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 P.4). Thus having money is of the utmost importance. Because women also not have financial, social and political power their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout the ages Woolf repeatedly stresses on the necessity of an inheritance that requires no obligations and of the privacy of one's own room for the promotion of creative genius. She gives historical argument that lack of money and

privacy prevented bright women in the past from writing effectively. For example Mary Betan asserts:

Indeed, I thought slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable remembering the bitterness of these 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 efforts and labor cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. (Woolf P.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 thought of gender. As Mary Betan suggests :

One might say I continued, laying the book down beside pride and prejudice, that the woman who wrote these pages had more genius in her than Jane Austen, but if one reads them over and marks that jerk in them that indignation. One see that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted she will write in rage where she should write calmly. (Woolf P.72-73).

Aphra Behn is the first female writer to earn her own money from writing. She paved the way for the 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists like Jane Austen, who were able to write despite the lack of privacy in their family sitting room. Mrs. Woolf believes that contemporary female writers still generally operate out of anger or insecurity. The other point raised in Mrs. Woolf's essay 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 that she possesses:

What were they blaming Charlotte Bronte for, 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 so longed and was for this that they blamed her that then I longed for a power of vision which might reach the busy world, towns. (Woolf P.71)

In one of the most well known sections of the work Mrs. Woolf tells the story of Shakespeare's sister. It is an imaginative speculation about a woman who possessed perhaps the incomparable native genius of her brother, but who was denied at first the educational opportunities and then the personal opportunities afforded to her brother. William thwarted by the scornful laughter, disapproved and limitations of a male-centred world and without having been afforded any outlets for the expression of her gifts, Mrs. Woolf speculates that this woman would have sunk beneath the weight of such conditions into madness or suicide. Mrs. Woolf later couples are more separate than Lawrence's sometimes they seem more separate than united. Her women are usually better with feelings and people than her men. Although she can do well

by the single woman as artist. She does accept Mary Datchet's devotion to women's right but Mary had a man to lose. Her best female figures are wives and mothers an interesting paradise in a woman violently attacked for her feminism. Mrs. Woolf appears to have been in life an example of the contrary states she explores in her novels. Mrs. Woolf's view runs in contrast to this statement. She notes in her diary:

That's the end of six years floundering, striving, much agony, some ecstasy: lumping the years and there cruises together as one book as indeed they are – well I was thinking of at Delphi I think. (Woolf P.276).

To conclude it can be said that 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 P.4). It delights in imaginative sketches of people and institutions, as well as in its ability to manipulate various aspects of narrative construction. She is both frightened and satisfied by the responsibility that has been laid upon her, to say something true and meaningful on a topic that has been addressed endlessly, but never adequately defined let alone resolved:

Here than was I (call me Mary Betan, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please, it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the bank of river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought. The collar I have spoken of women and fiction.

So by and large view, According to some critics Virginia Woolf may not be a radical thinker and a pragmatic philosopher as she keeps on harping on the common and deal issues, completely oblivious of the radical class struggle and socio-economic stratification in the society, but her essay provide a fertile ground to the feminist to expose and diagnose this malice of gender in equality and feminine exploitation for the upliftment and betterment of women's estate,

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