



VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE FEMINIST ASPECTS OF HER LIFE AND WORKS:

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Abstract:

Virginia Woolf was one of the most important feminist authors who always raised her voice for the right of the women. In the present paper we are going to shed light on the life of Virginia Woolf, the real incidents of her life which compels her to raise her voice for the feminist. After giving a short introduction my intention is to connect some incidents which frames Virginia Woolf mind towards feminism, how she got affected in her childhood and then she grew as a strong and independent woman. I am taking a few of her novels like “ A Room of one’s own “ and “ Orlando “; to show her contribution to feminist literary world.

Keywords: *Feminism; Feminist; Independent.*

Introduction

Adeline Virginia Woolf was an English writer, considered one of the most important modernist 20th century authors. She was the most important female authors in the transitional period from Victorian age to the Edwardian age . She published several novels, feminist essays and held two classes in Cambridge about ‘Women and Fiction ‘. In my paper I would like to introduce the feminist aspects of her novels. After giving a short view into Virginia Woolf’s life, I would like to clarify the theory of Feminism and how it affected Virginia Woolf’s literary career. I will also show how she feels about men and women and compare it to the theories of the feminist movement.

Virginia Woolf’s Life: Woolf was born in an affluent household in south Kensington, London, the seventh child of Julia Prinsep Jackson and Leslie Stephen, in a blended family of eight. She was home schooled in English classics and Victorian literature from a young age. Her father encouraged her to

write, so she began writing professionally in 1900. Virginia Woolf got disturbed and had mental-breakdowns due to her mother’s death in 1895 and seven years later, her father died of cancer. These two incidents caused a great mental injury to Woolf. She returned to London and become a part of London’s artistic and literary society. She published some of her notable works after this like her first novel appeared in 1915 (The voyage out); Mrs Dalloway (1925); to the light house (1927); Orlando (1928); A Room of one’s own (1929). She became the central figure of the 1970’s movement of feminist criticism and her works acclaimed world-wide attention for inspiring feminism. Her married life with Leonard Woolf was also not a happy one, and also had numerous breakdowns and several times she tried to commit suicide. In 1917, the couple founded the Hogarth Press, in their own house in London. Throughout her life, Virginia Woolf, was troubled by mental illness. She was institutionalized several

times and she got no effective treatment during her lifetime.

Feminism and Virginia Woolf's attitude:

Feminism is a socio-political movement that aims to define and establish the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. Feminism highlights the poor situation or condition of women in a male dominated society. They raised their voices for these unjustly treated women. Feminist movements have campaigned for women's rights, including the right to vote, hold offices, work equal pay, own property, receive education, maternity leaves etc. An important work in the field of feminism is Virginia Woolf's 'A room of one's own' (1929). This work is accepted as one of the basic texts of feminist criticism. This book is one of the easiest books of Virginia Woolf. Here the association of woman and literature is presented nicely.

There was an eternal question ask by men to women that, 'Why can't they have a genius like Shakespeare'. Virginia Woolf prepared herself and after taking a brief look at the books in the library, she told every woman that, "Earn money, have your own room and create spare time. And write, without thinking what the men say!" (Ibid). Virginia Woolf thought a lot about men's richness and women's poorness and this compels her to create an atmosphere and ground for women so that they can also write and earn. She believes that a person develop his/her talent by giving some concentration to his raw imagination. She has gone through many literary works and realize that poetical brilliance was mostly developed by the rich people, coz they money to solve each and every problems of their lives.

Her another work named, Orlando (1928), proved a success and this work provided her a bright career in literary field. This work defends the social freedom for women. Orlando is a fantasy story. The life of Orlando comes

to us in four different times of British history. Orlando, a young boy loves adventure and he also loves to go around for adventures, woods, he is awoken by trumpet sound. Queen Elizabeth arrived, young Orlando meets Queen Elizabeth; she is impressed by his youth and innocence. Two years later she makes him steward treasurer and she started loving him. But being a young boy Orlando always dates many pretty and wealthy women. After the death of Queen Elizabeth Orlando came under King James I. As the story proceeds we find Orlando fall in love with a Russian girl, Sasha but she ditched him; heartbroken Orlando closes himself into a big house and started writing poems.

He invites Nick Green a famous poet of his time, both of them enjoyed and shared their views, but after returning, Nick writes a parody of Orlando, after knowing this Orlando is again heartbroken and he burns all his poems. Only one of his poems left "The oak tree". Then Orlando left England. King Charles II sends him to Constantinople as an ambassador. After this he became a duke. At the age of thirty six he changed his gender from a man to a woman. Orlando feels comfortable being a man and being a woman. Here the feminist approach of Virginia Woolf is reflected nicely. As a woman she completely changes her mind and except the ways a woman lives. One morning when she gets up, the feminist vision can be seen in the thoughts of Orlando. The following lines from the novel are an example of this:

"Ignorant and poor as we are compared with the other sex....armored with every weapon as they

Are, while they exclude us even from knowledge of the alphabet....still—they fall from the mast-

Head" (Orlando: 107)

Here Virginia Woolf has nicely used the weapon of Irony, to present her feminist

view. Orlando is presented in a different historical period when women's were not at all given much freedom, and they were confined to their domestic life only. Orlando is also treated differently by the servants after becoming women. They all believe that her main duty is to look after the domestic work only. But Orlando does not accept the restrictions imposed on women of that time, she believes in an independent and decorous life. Virginia Woolf always thought women superior to men. She believes in the intellectual mixing which is clearly seen in Orlando.

When we speak of Virginia Woolf's, "A Room of one's own", we see that she has beautifully used stream of consciousness. She is also one of the promoters of this device. A room of one's own is an extended essay presenting women's capability of producing good work. First of all Woolf talks about Shakespeare's sister Judith. If we compare Judith and Shakespeare Judith had a miserable life. She was forced to do an early marriage. Woolf was not happy with old writers as they have not brought the subject of homosexuality into the light. She says that female writing has been less popular; as their work are based on angry responses to male literature, they have not written in a healthy atmosphere with a healthy mind. They have not followed their own flow of thoughts. In her essay "A room of one's own" Virginia Woolf argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own" (16). If she is to write fiction of any merit.

According to her, financial independence gives birth to great writing but for good writing mental freedom or happiness is also required. While thinking or writing anything new one's body and mind must be lifted and free. Virginia Woolf has beautifully presented the journey of woman which is just like our journey. She has used the stylistic techniques and convincing language to put her idea in the essay, this is the reason why we are still

reading and searching something new in her works. She has given her voice and views towards male superiority, feminism and liberalism as well as the historic barriers or chains imposed on women's preventing them from writing carriers. She has raised her voice against the prejudice of the time. After presenting the idea of "Orlando" and "A room of one's own" we can say that both these works voiced freedom. Feminism and liberalism. We can say that the only way for a woman to impart any truth is to describe her own experience. She has to come out of herself, express herself and lead a carefree life. Then only she will be able to contribute something special to the stock of literature; then only she can also be a Shakespeare. So woman be cheerful and be a Shakespeare of your own.

Reference:

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2. Black, Naomi (2004). Virginia Woolf as Feminist. London: OUP.
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