

Looking at Virginia Woolf: Women and Society

Al-Kafia Islam
Student ID: 13363006

Department of English and Humanities

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Al-Kafia Islam
Student ID: 13363006

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Table of Content

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....1

ABSTRACT3

CHAPTER I4

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER II13

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

CHAPTER III.....22

THREE GUINEAS

CHAPTER IV 322

CONCLUSION

WORKS CITED36

Abstract

This paper looks at two essays, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), of Virginia Woolf to study the position of English women living in the late nineteenth to first half of the twentieth century. These essays provide a clear glimpse into the socio-economic disparity of the men and women of her society. Both of these texts look at the contemporary debates around feminism.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf discussed the conflicting and discriminating situation that women faced if they pursued a writing career. Woolf declared through her essay that a woman must possess her own money and property and only in this way will they get their freedom. In this work, Woolf raised her voice against male dominance as a feminist for the first time and tried to establish the feminist goal of changing the society and the world into a place where the male and the female voices will be equally valued.

Through the essay, *Three Guineas*, Woolf tried to relate the issues of war with feminism because she wanted to express how far the lives of women were affected by the war. She also analyzed women's position in their society mostly at a time when the country was approaching war and discussed how far women could help the country in such critical times. She encouraged an idea of far-reaching and independent political action in which women will form a society as outsiders in order to challenge the rise of Fascism and the implication of war.

Chapter I

Introduction

—As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is
the whole world.”

— Virginia Woolf (99)

At a time when no one paid any attention to the difficulties of women, it was Virginia Woolf who, being a nonconformist revealed the actual position of women in the society. Woolf was aware of the social convention regarding women and their position in society and, hence, raised her voice to support women in their struggle against patriarchal oppression. This oppression on women was not only limited to individual households, but was integrated in the whole social system. The society never considered women as equal to men, and as a result, women were deprived. For instance, despite being citizens of a country, women could barely acquire any status or opportunity that leveled with men. Even their active involvements in the wars of national liberation were rejected by the idea of female incapability. In such a time, through her writing, Woolf tried to make women realize that they were marginalized, exploited and invisible in the society.

Virginia Woolf (25 January 1882 – 28 March 1941) belonged to an elite family which had a literary and cultural background. During her childhood, many eminent Victorian scholars used to visit her family home. This made a great impact in her life and led her towards writing and literature. However, neither Woolf nor her sister Vanessa got formal education of school and university as their brothers did. Instead, in accordance to the Victorian practice of the time, Woolf and Vanessa were educated by female tutors at home. In addition, they studied at their father's magnificent library. Thus, they enriched their

knowledge about the world. But Woolf later felt bitter about this deprivation and criticized her father for being patriarchal towards herself and her sister (Nicolson).

Woolf started to write from an early age and her interest in writing eventually introduced her to the cultured world of the middle and upper middle class scholars of that time. During 1905-06, she, along with her brothers and sister, and their friends, formed the nucleus of the intellectual circle of writers and artists known as the Bloomsbury Group. This informal association was mainly based on friendship and interest in the arts. They shared the idea that the development of art and literature was limited due to the artistic, social and sexual restrictions imposed by the Victorian society. Such beliefs led Woolf's interest towards supporting unconventional ideas of the time such as women rights in the society, open marriages, gay feminism, uninhibited sexuality and others (Brooks). Her husband, Leonard Woolf was also a member of the Bloomsbury Group. He was a literary scholar and social reformer who supported her wholeheartedly. They together founded the Hogarth Press, which went on to publish translations, papers and pamphlets on psychoanalysis, politics, aesthetics, and economics and other issues.

As a person, Woolf was very lively and witty, but she suffered from bipolar disorder, which resulted from her sexual abuse by her half-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth when she was six years old, the death of parents, brother and sister, who died at an early age; and her dread of the world war that left her traumatized for life. This unsteadiness affected her social life and her literary productivity throughout her life. But she did not let it stop her. Despite her misery, Woolf took classes in German, Greek and Latin at the ladies department of King's College London and tried to live a normal life.

Woolf rebelled against the materialism that was found in other novelists' works. As a result she developed her own style of writing, which was different from the traditional form.

Her novels were highly experimental, narrative and frequently uneventful. She would portray the psychology as well as the emotional motives of her characters very naturally and skillfully. This invention is known as the ‘streams of consciousness’. The writing style and choice of words in her scripts created a visual portrayal in the reader’s mind. This uniqueness as a novelist made her a major lyric novelist and innovator in the English language.

Virginia Woolf is considered as one of the initiators of feminism. She is remembered today because of her writings about feminine issues. Her main theme of writing was the life of woman. She not only wrote about the traditional feminine matters but also disclosed the inner thoughts of her characters. She had always strictly criticized the society which ignored women and considered them to be a weaker gender with no intellect. Hence, her versatile female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, showed that women can play a dynamic role in the development of the society. She used her intellect and delved into her ideologies to write about equality between men and women in the post war new English society and the impact of the war on the households. In her writing, we read about women who had not seen the war but whose life was affected by that extreme situation. Thus, her writing, narrated through female point of view, made her completely different from her contemporaries. Even the new school of feminist critics refers to her ideology and work. Some of her best feminist writings are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), *Three Guineas* (1938), and *The Waves* (1931).

The roots of feminism, started in ancient Greece with Sappho during 630/612-570 BCE. Since the medieval ages, other names had been added as contributors to the feminist movement, like, Hildegard of Bingen (1098- 1179), Christine de Pisan (1364-1430), Olympe de Gouge (1748- 1793), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759- 1797) and Jane Austen (1775- 1817). These writers were the foremothers of the modern feminist movement. All of them

encouraged dignity, intelligence and basic human possibilities for the female population of the world. (Rampton).

The feminist politics came from the challenges that are witnessed throughout women's social history, which has always been linked with the inequalities and oppressions faced by women. History reveals that a woman's role in a society is imposed on her on the basis of a specific historical and social background rather than a natural and universal context. In such oppressed situations women began to argue for change. During the earlier centuries, there was inequality between men and women, but soon after the industrial revolution began, society started to change and the problems and oppressions became more acute. As the 19th century proceeded on, many factories, shops and offices grew to develop the urbanization process in England. Men joined that development process of the society, while women remained at home all day to manage their domestic duties. Thus, living in separate spheres, men became an important part of the society whereas women became more and more ignorant about the new society and the developments. This even gave rise to an argument against the voting rights of women.

Furthermore, at that time the education provided to women was very different from what the men received. Women learned more household skills and hardly attempted to gain any developmental or political knowledge. There were boarding schools and residential governesses for women to learn the necessary household skills. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the snobbish Caroline Bingley listed the skills required for any young lady who wanted to consider herself accomplished as, "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages...; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions" (Austen 65). Thus, at that time a proper woman meant representing grace in feminine manner. It was also a requirement for every woman to be well aware of

household matters and to attract eligible men of the society as husbands. Girls who were devoted to developing their intellectuality were considered as unfeminine. Even some doctors reported that studying too much had a damaging effect on the ovaries and it could decrease the youthful attractiveness of a young girl. As a result, when Oxford and Cambridge became available for girls, many parents refused to send their daughters to the university, because they were anxious about their daughters' prospect of marriage. Moreover, girls were not expected to choose their husbands themselves nor remain unmarried for long. In those days, girls had to be married quite young- early to mid-20s was the usual age range. Parents raised their daughters in very protected and secured surroundings till they were married. Unmarried girls were not allowed to speak to unknown men and they could only go outside with a chaperon, which was generally their governess. Although women had to follow the conservative surroundings imposed on them, men could enjoy a free life style. Men could enjoy the company of prostitutes, not only before marriage but even after marriage. Prostitutes were considered as workers in the market who worked for money. But these women, who were only reared to be married off, occupied the worst position in the society. They faced harassment at all time. (Hughes).

Charlotte Bronte expressed her feelings about women's limited role through the protagonist of *Jane Eyre* (1847). She said, "women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (Bronte 121). However, after the publication of this novel, conservative commentators criticized the notion of equity that Bronte implied in her novel. In a review of *Jane Eyre*, Lady (Elizabeth) Eastlake showed a

strong dislike for the sexual desire of Jane because of which she ended up marrying her employer.

The women of nineteenth century struggled very hard to establish their rights. At that time, their expectation was to get equal rights to men. But historians view twentieth century as women's hour. During the first half of the twentieth century the suffragettes started to fight for equal voting right. Many women sacrificed their lives to get the voting right. Finally, in 1919, Nancy Astor, an America born English socialite became the first female member in the British parliament. The next major progress for women in politics took place in 1929 when Margaret Bondfield, a socialist and trades unionist, became the first women cabinet minister. Another significant achievement of this century was that women gradually started to join in different professions. In 1919, Sex Disqualification Removal Act allowed women to become lawyers and civil servants (Lambert). For example, previously women could only join the nursing profession, but since this act was passed, just like men, women also started to join in the medical school. However, though women started to get position in the society and in politics, it was only available for a small group of women living in the town. The larger group of women who remained in the village and those who lived away from the agitation of the town were still deprived and took no part in the changing world. Yet, at the time of Second World War, when men enrolled for war, women joined the heavy factory work, drove huge vehicles and performed agricultural duties. After the war ended, men returned and joined their previous jobs and women had to return to their previous place- their houses. But a significant number of the women who tasted the freedom could not give up their financial independence. (Murray).

The timeline of late sixties and early seventies was an unimaginably exciting time for young women and is regarded as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) or the 'Second Wave Feminism'. It started from 1960s and continued till the 90s. This phase started with a

protest held in 1968 and 69 against the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. In this protest, feminists expressed discontent and sorrow as women were always degraded as objects of beauty. Women were always dominated by patriarchy and as a result society kept women at home or in dull low paying jobs. As a protest, the radical New York group arranged a counter contest, where they decorated and crowned a sheep as Miss America and threw and burned bras, girdled, high heels, make-up and false eyelashes to the trashcan as a protest of the patriarchic view of women. This phase of the movement mainly focused on guaranteeing social equality irrespective of sex. Here, dominant issues were sexuality and reproductive rights for women. The voice of the movement was radical. This uprising also worked for the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the self-consciousness in the minority groups around the world. (Rampton)

In the history of feminism, there were a few female writers whose essays, fictions and poetry gave them a particular place. Their works directly attacked the society which underestimated women as a weaker gender of no intellect and tried to illuminate women's life. Among them Virginia Woolf was the most influential female writer. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, her writing focused on women rights, gender equality, conjugal life, homosexuality and other such unconventional issues. Her writing made her the precursor of the twentieth century feminist movement. The most notable point of her writings was that she related her writing with her own life and the contemporary society that she lived in. This made her writing more lively and reliable. In her novel, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf portrayed her parents' life through Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. This portrayal was the result of the continuous trouble that she witnessed in her parent's conjugal life, which she felt prevailed due to inequality between the importance of husband and wife. Woolf was serious about the equality between husband and wife in married life. Vanessa Bell interpreted that the character, Mrs. Ramsay, was based on her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen. She told that

her mother was always excited to accomplish the Victorian ideal and in this respect it was really tougher for Julia (her mother) to live with a man, Leslie Stephen (her father) who is quite different from her. The inequality Woolf saw in her parents' marriage made her resolute that ~~the~~ man she married would be as worthy of her as she of him. They were to be equal partners." (Nicolson). For this reason, despite numerous marriage proposals throughout her youth and adulthood, including the offers of Lytton Strachey, a famous writer and critic and Sydney Waterlow, a Baronet, Virginia Woolf finally chose to marry Leonard Woolf, a cadet in the Ceylon Civil Service. Even then, Woolf hesitated partly, due to her fear of marriage and the emotional and sexual involvement that the partnership requires. She wrote to Leonard, "As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me. It is so real, and so strange." (Woolf, 91). Woolf eventually accepted him, and at the age of 30, she married Leonard Woolf in August 1912. However, due to her unstable mental condition, they followed medical advice and did not have children.

According to Woolf, an unequal status of marriage brought faithlessness in a woman, which was a serious social offense. Woolf herself was the victim of some kind of sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brothers, as narrated in her memoir *Moments of Being*. She was highly conscious of the ways that men had access to the knowledge of sex, whereas women of the middle and upper classes were expected to remain ignorant of it. Woolf was against it and she wanted that literature will treat sexuality and especially the sexual life of women frankly (Woolf 85). In *A Room of One's Own*, she mentioned that at that time women were not allowed to get adequate education. There were countless restrictions for women whereas men had the utmost freedom. According to Woolf, women must have their own money and if they get that then they will automatically become creative and gain intellectual freedom. In

this essay, Woolf assumed the fate of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister Judith who was as brilliant as him. In the male dominated Elizabethan England, Judith did not get any chance to acquire any formal education. She was married at an early age and thus definitely sacrificed her literary genius. If she chose to run away from home, then she would have been driven to prostitution. Furthermore in this essay, Woolf mentioned the growth of women writers. She expressed that at that time female writers wrote with fear and insecurity because of the male dominated society. She named some of the female writers, and their writing style such as Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot, and even Sappho, one of the first lyric poets. But at the same time, she highlighted the name of a fictional novelist, Mary Carmichael whose writing did not suffer from the insecurity. Woolf concluded the essay by giving the idea of androgynous minds (Woolf).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf portrayed women as "outsiders" in a male-dominated society. It is a feminist-pacifist satire on patriarchy written on the threshold of World War II. Here, Woolf implied that although women cannot join the male-dominated society, they can create a new society as "outsiders' society" and in this way work towards the same aims (Woolf).

Hence, in the light of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, this paper aims to portray the difficulties and obstacles of women in the contemporary society that Virginia Woolf lived in.

Chapter II

A Room of One's Own

A Room of One's Own, published on 24th October 1929, is considered to be the first major work in feminist criticism. This essay is the proclamation of the entire feminist movement. The ideas discussed in the essay first appeared in a lecture that Woolf delivered at Cambridge on 1928. The essay describes the educational, social and financial disadvantages and prejudices that women have had to struggle with throughout history. Additionally, Woolf has put across arguments in this essay to advocate equality between men and women. She claimed that men emphasized the differences between men and women because they wanted to establish their supremacy over women. For this reason, Woolf offered women a sense of consciousness about the prevailing discrimination in the society. Besides this, she showed women the possibilities that they themselves possessed.

The excellence of *A Room of One's Own* lies in the fact that it is a balanced approach to the whole question of women's right and it is an analytical study of the position of women in the contemporary society. Thus, its appropriateness in the basic feminine issues and popularity in feminine study has awarded this book the status of the feminist Bible. (UBS viii). Woolf employed a number of methodologies- historical and sociological analysis, fictional hypothesis, and philosophy- to portray the difficulties and obstacles faced by women in her contemporary society. Many writers have used this piece of work as a tool representing the sufferings of women. Jane Marcus, in her writing, mentioned that *A Room of One's Own* is the first modern text of feminist criticism which resolved the moral and intellectual difficulties of the voiceless and oppressed women. Here, by using Shakespeare's name, Woolf has shown the male domination in the society (Marcus 79-97). Michele Barrett viewed

this essay from the Marxist-feminist perspective and praised it as fertile and still not fully explored. She said, "The conditions under which men and women produce literature are materially different" (Barrett 103). As men and women lived in completely different circumstances during the time referred to by Woolf, their psycho-intellectual idea became different from each other. As a result, they used to write from different points of view. While men wrote about war and other outdoor matters, women wrote about household matters and their sorrows and sufferings in the male dominated society. Hsiu-Chuang Deppman explained using looking-glass-image as the symbol of the reflection of the status of men and women in the society. She considered the looking glass as an ambivalent and hostile culture which endangered the psychological development of women. It signifies and supports the discrimination between men and women. Through this looking glass gaze, women may start to think themselves inferior to men. (Deppman 31-64). Margaret J. M. Ezell analyzed Woolf's *Judith Shakespeare* as a symbol of the silenced and alienated woman as well as a continuity of feminine experience of the society. (Ezell 579-92).

From the very beginning of the essay, Woolf has emphasized on the need for women to have funds and mental and physical space to express their creativity. She says, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 2). The narrator of *A Room of One's Own* considered that money and property are the primary elements that could help women. In fact, this help was not only for writing purposes but also for their financial, social and political establishment in the society. For example, Mary Beton asserted, "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 35). In this respect, the narrator expressed

the experience of her own life. She received 500 pounds every year from her aunt and it was a very respectable sum of money for any young girl to live on at the time. With such good fortune, she was able to look forward to a life of financial security and thus focus on her ambition in life - writing. The narrator, then, talked about Aphra Behn. She was the first female writer who earned her own money from writing. She was a middle-class woman whose husband's death forced her to earn her own living. Behn was the first female writer to have gained freedom of the mind, and Woolf believed that she inspired other girls into following her. She paved the way for female writers of the next generation. Thus, the narrator believed that in future women will acquire money and privacy of their own and this will flourish their intellectuality.

Woolf, next, focused on comparing two fictional universities. Those were the ritzy all-male University of Oxbridge and the shabby all-women's college, Fernham. While Oxbridge is luxurious like a bank or a private club, Fernham is accessible to anyone who walks in and can only offer people meals of stringy beef and prunes. Woolf built the whole argument of the book around the differences between these two places. Oxbridge treated women as second class citizens. Here, many opportunities were open to men but closed for women. The institutions of the university discriminated against women. At the lawn, library and dinner table the narrator was either denied admission or got inferior accommodations. To show the contrasting atmosphere of both the universities Woolf wrote, "An unending stream of gold and silver, I thought, must have flowed into this court perpetually to keep the stones coming and the masons working [...] still the flow of gold and silver went on; fellowships were founded; lectureships endowed" (Woolf 7). Again, she went on to describe the long and sensuous meals of both of the universities, "The partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads [...] their potatoes, thin as coins but not so hard; their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent. And no sooner had the roast than the silent

serving-man [...] set before us [...] a confection which rose all sugar from the waves. To call it pudding and so relate it to rice and tapioca would be an insult" (Woolf 8-9). Hence the attitude to female students reflected the prejudice and partiality of patriarchic dominance in the society where men enjoyed the luxuries and all kind of comfort of the society than women.

Throughout *A Room of One's Own*, the narrator emphasized on the fact that women are treated unequally in her society and for this reason they produced less impressive works of writing than men. To illustrate her point, the narrator created a woman named Judith Shakespeare, the imaginary twin sister of William Shakespeare. By using this female, Judith, Woolf showed the discrimination against women prevailing in the society. Judith was just as talented as her brother William. But William always got recognition and support by their family and society because of his talent. On the other hand, Judith got underestimation and for this reason she was secretive and ashamed to express her talent. Judith was not able to attend school as a result of gender discrimination. Moreover, her family even discouraged her from studying on her own. She was forced to get married against her will in her teenage. When she begged not to be married off, her beloved father beat her. She eventually committed suicide. Woolf wanted to prove that at that time a woman could never get as much success as Shakespeare. Talent is an essential component of Shakespeare's success, but because women were treated so differently, a female Shakespeare would have fared quite differently even if she had as much talent as Shakespeare did. "For a genius like Shakespeare is not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people" (Woolf 46). In this way, Woolf claims, that a female genius was always mistreated in Shakespeare's time.

Woolf depicted her realization about the society as she wrote, "looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural

size" (Woolf 33). Through this extract men's self importance and arrogant nature has been expressed. Men use women to assume men's own admirable mirror image. It is just like a mother and infant situation. The infant looks into the eyes of the mother who is gazing at him with love and affection. In this way the infant discovers himself in a conceited manner. Again, the infant identify the mother as his own person and this allows him to live self-reliantly in his own happy world of his mother's gaze. Woolf's men seem to be stuck in the infantile stage of living in the mirror gaze of women. At that time, as women had no lives or occupations of their own, they really liked to admire the men's exciting lives. Hence, men found their admirations twice enlarged through the words and facial expressions of women. Thus, he not only filled women's imaginations but also his own, at least in his own perception of that situation.

Woolf delved into the history of women's status in the literary field to study their position in the society, and so explored the fertile literary period of Elizabethan England. But this literary era had no significance for women writers willing to represent themselves or their condition at that time. Woolf found that women had very few rights in that era and the middle-class women were in very poor condition. For women in the past, the conditions were very harsh. At that time the new female writers' were in the most unfavorable condition. Moreover, the world was very reluctant towards female writers and always opposed their creativity. Even if a woman overcame various difficulties and wrote something, it would have been anonymous or pseudonymed. The influence of using this male pseudonyms were obvious in their writings, as Woolf noted in *A Room of One's Own*, "one has only to skim through 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 70). Thus, Woolf described the obstacles that prevented female writers from expressing their creative writing strategies. Woolf further talked about the

position and obstacles of women in the 16th and 17th century. She quoted the poetry of Lady Winchelsea and she found that this lady was suppressed by the insecurity and fear of the society. Next, Woolf mentioned Duchess Margaret of Newcastle and Dorothy Osborne who were suffering from the same problem. However, for Woolf, the writer Aphra Behn marked a turning point.

Woolf continued through the eras and referred to women's writing of the 19th century. During this time, women started to write novels and mentioned the four famous female novelists George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and Jane Austen. They were all better than their previous writers but they were criticized for not having enough substantial content in their writings. The substantial content at the time invariably referred to warfare topics and such issues always got better evaluation over drawing-room character studies. Rather miraculously, even in such situations, Jane Austen and Emily Brontë were able to write their books with high confidence and integrity. They ignored all criticisms against them. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, however, failed to overcome this situation.

After mentioning all these great novelists, Woolf talked about Mary Carmichael, a fictitious novelist, an epitome of Woolf's shadow. Woolf praised Mary by saying, "Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating" (Woolf 77) Mary was innovative to her writing pattern. She broke the old traditional format and changed the course of writing. Through her writing, there came a great change in women's writing. What is important to Woolf is that her writing did not suffer due to the insecurities. Woolf argued that if the female writers were given more socioeconomic opportunities then they would blossom. According to Woolf, when Mary started writing, it seemed that she has "light a torch in that vast chamber where

nobody has yet been.... It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping” (Woolf 80). Mary represented this enormous change in the state of writing and the difficulties that the female writers had to struggle with to pave their path of writing.

According to Woolf, the writings of women suffered because of the emotions of anger and fear of male domination, while the writings of men suffered because of their own supremacy. Woolf reviewed that men were not dispassionate but they were suffering from their own prejudices. In the end, their writing revolved around them rather than around their subject. In this respect, Woolf used the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea of the "androgynous" mind (Woolf 93). It was the union of male and female minds. She argued that this fusion is really necessary in both the genders. According to her, to become a successful writer, the mind must possess an ignorance of sex. Woolf wrote, ~~the~~ “the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare’s mind,” (Woolf 54). For her, the enemy of androgynous thinking is consciousness of any writer’s sex and it led to the production of unsuccessful works. Woolf did not suggest that the body should be suppressed; rather being a woman or a man is still an important factor. Woolf kept awareness of the body in her writing, as, —~~Po~~etry ought to have a mother as well as a father” (Woolf 97). Woolf reminded both the reader and the writer not to judge or create a work only as a work. They must know the writer’s sex because in this way one can understand the quality of writing. For writing, it becomes really important for a writer, men or women, to show how much they can surpass themselves. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf considered Mary Carmichael’s writing in high esteem because she had ~~m~~astered the first great lesson: she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages [are] full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself.” (Woolf 88). It is

noticeable that there is still a “sexual quality” in Carmichael’s work which suggested that the body is not to be thrown away. Woolf’s intention of introducing this concept had a positive aspect through which literature can get rid of the prevailing prejudice and discrimination in gender which became an epidemic at that time in the society. It was not symbolic to the fear of the body, colourless homogeneity, self-dissolution or narcissistic death. It was a concept based on giving importance to both the feminine and masculine quality in equal sense.

(Wright 16). Woolf used this concept not only as the genre of writing but also to reduce the social inequality between men and women. Woolf’s concept of androgynous mind was quite symbolic in this sense because it could fix and develop the position of women in the society making both men and women equally important in the society.

Elaine Showalter, the pioneer of gynocriticism, in her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), criticized the idea of Woolf’s androgynous mind. Showalter considered that Woolf’s treatment of androgyny was the retreat from expressing and denial of the femaleness of a woman. She believed that hiding one’s anger and ambition as a woman is a rebel against expressing her female identity making her an outsider in the female mainstream. Showalter evaluated that impersonality of a female writer as a woman is a deadly flaw against womanhood. Showalter insisted that “a woman’s experience should be the origin of her creativity” (Showalter 25). Following what she termed “gynocritics”, she insisted that female authors, characters, and readers should all identify with one coherent identity, which is that of a female (Showalter 25)

However, Toril Moi put an argument against Showalter’s point of view. In the introductory chapter “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf” of her book *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1986), Toril Moi addressed Showalter’s misinterpretation of Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Moi argued that the idea of gynocriticism of Showalter is a

weak mode of reading Woolf's work. Moi attempted to save Woolf from those limited readings performed by Showalter and other feminists. In her brief chapter on Woolf, she suggested the French deconstructive feminist theory as an alternative and positive means of reading Woolf as a feminist (Moi 9). Yet, Moi herself does not give any theory about Woolf's text.

Woolf was one of the feminists who tried to help women gain their position and rights in the society. In the essay, *A Room of One's Own*, she represented the unfair position of women in the society. However, James Hafley in his, *Virginia Woolf's Narrators and the Art of Life Itself*, studied the relation and interrelation between the idealism and reality presented through Woolf's essay and asserted that Woolf's narrators "are not real or even suggested reporters but are creators of the worlds they refer to" (Hafley 33). He claimed that the world described in *A Room of One's Own* was revealed to the readers through the voice of a narrator who may not be reliable in every aspect. However, he asserted that the narrator and the representation of ideas written in *A Room of One's Own* were depicted by Woolf herself and thus he supported Woolf.

In conclusion, *A Room of One's Own* talks about the ultimate position of women in the society contemporary to Woolf. The key point of this essay expresses that the position of women can only be achieved when her freedom and intellectual position are guaranteed. Woolf not only pointed out the problems of women in the society but also tried to show the way to develop their position in the society. Many arguments of the 20th century feminists has attacked this essay but even today it is considered to be the announcement of the feminist movement.

Chapter III

Three Guineas

One decade after *A Room of One's Own*, at the brim of the Second World War, Woolf wrote *Three Guineas*, an essay that discussed the attitude of men and women towards war. Though the essay has been written on the basis of anti-war arguments, but Woolf focused on English patriarchy which denied women their rights. Woolf had accumulated her ideas and arguments for this essay from several newspaper articles, biographies and histories related to the English women's movements. In this respect, Naomi Black argues —“*Three Guineas* is not only the best, clearest presentation of Woolf's feminism but also a complex theoretical analysis of the connections between pacifism and feminism that is more worth attention than ever” (Black, 2004). Black's comment showed that *Three Guineas* lays emphasis on feminine ideologies and that Woolf tried to portray the link between feminism and pacifism. Both the ideas looked for peace. On the other hand, the fascist ideology, which was popular at the time, was created on the basis of the patriarchal principles, - the celebration of masculine values and the segregation and subjugation of women - and favoured the war and its glory; a sharp contrast to the feminist and pacifist principles. In this way, *Three Guineas* represents feminism and fights against the celebration of masculine values that underestimate females and the segregation and subjugation of women. To account for the truth of the situation, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf stated that at that time the English and German newspapers published the condition and role of women in the society. She quoted from *The Daily Telegraph*, —“Homes are the real places for the women who are now compelling men to be idle. It is time the government insisted upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women they cannot now approach” (Woolf 119). She put another quotation from a German newspaper to connect the social picture of women in the society. She quoted, —“there

are two worlds in the life of the nation, the world of men and the world of women. Nature had done well to entrust the men with the care of his family and the nation. The woman's world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home" (Woolf 121). Thus, through these quotations it is evident that at that time social adherence to patriarchy was established over feminism in the English society, where women were already being controlled under male dominance for years. Again the influence of fascism which was flourishing at that time made the situation more critical for women. In this situation Woolf considered that preventing the war can reduce the difficulties of women in many ways. Even in this way, the capabilities of women will also be seen by male dominated English society. Thus, through this essay Woolf portrayed the connection between the patriarchic domination on social factors like education, economy of England and ongoing international wars which reduce the position of women and create difficulties and obstacles to establish themselves in the society.

From the very beginning of the essay, Woolf discussed a very important problem of women that is society always creates differences between men and women. She tried to identify the reason behind this problem. She said that the hostile and uncertain attitude towards women starts from their birth because a family invests a large amount of money to educate and train its boys rather than its girls. As she mentioned in the essay, about educating a boy, "For your education was not merely in book-learning; games educated your body; friends taught you more than books or games. Talk with them broadened your outlook and enriched your mind. In the holidays you travelled; acquired a taste for art; a knowledge of foreign politics" (Woolf 20). But about the education of a girl, she said it was "—on a branch of education which comes under the heading 'unpaid-for education'" (Woolf 23). In this way, in a family, boys used to get more privileges than girls. Thus, educating children in a dissimilar way differentiates between man and woman. Even the law and order of the society creates differences. As a result, their ways of thinking and approaches to do any work becomes

different. They look at the same thing but they notice and even express differently. However, Woolf never wanted to make her readers feel that the idea of seeing anything differently by men and women is negative. Rather, she thought that it has some positive impacts which could co-operate and balance to work themselves towards a common aim. In this way, women's position in the country became important in this essay. Again, about women Woolf mentioned, "They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the fascist state. Thus, we are merely carrying on the same fight" (Woolf 250). She trusted men as she said, "We have your assurance that you are fighting with us, not against us" (Woolf 250). Again, "the main distinction between us who are outside society and you who are inside society" (Woolf 270). At that time, English men were fighting against the tyranny and anarchy of fascism and were on the verge of the war. Unlike men, English women were fighting against the patriarchal domination of England. Thus, they are in struggle to establish their own right. However, society always makes differences between men and women that men are inside the society and the women are outside. Men fought to protect England from foreign rule while women could do nothing about it. Moreover, a woman becomes a foreigner by laws if she marries a foreigner. That means woman has no country and this idea always supports them as women have different tradition, different education and different values as well. At that point she concluded in an angry tone in this way, "We can best help you to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in cooperation with its aim" (Woolf 324).

Woolf always put emphasize and value on education as it is the greatest of all human values. She considered that only by acquiring proper knowledge and education women can get position and right in the society. But it was a matter of humiliation that the patriarchal society refrained women from getting proper institutional education. It was already mentioned that men and women never get equal type or amount of education and the reason

behind all these is that family focused more on investment on boys than girls. A boy always gets different and worthier training than a girl. Even their educational institutions are different and that is always far better than the ones for the girls. Here, it needs to be mentioned that though Woolf was born and brought up as a member of a large talented family, she and her sister, Vanessa, was educated by female tutors and through studying from their father's library. On the contrary, their brothers went to the Cambridge University (Nicolson, 1975). In addition, religious influence is also responsible for women's deprivation for getting similar education like men because, from the very early days of England, it was not easy for girls to get education easily. Again, society, in the mask of religion was always against the development of women. Around 250 years back, Mary Astell, the first English feminist encouraged the girls for education and she proposed to found a college for women. Princess Anne (1665-1714), an English Queen donated £10,000 to a Church to establish the women college. But, unfortunately the Church got involved in another event and thereby, that money went elsewhere and the college was never founded. Recalling that occasion, Woolf said, "I was told that desire for learning in women was against the will of God. Again education is good if it produces a belief in the Church of England; bad if it produces a belief in the Church of Rome" (Woolf 59). Here, it is also expressed that in between religious conflict, the victim was women and their development. Furthermore, at that time Government issued a strict rule regarding women's education. In the year of 1937, the women's colleges were not allowed to be members of the Cambridge university, and the number of educated men's daughters who were allowed to receive a university education was strictly limited, though both men and women contributed to the university funds. Under the circumstances, at that time women were rarely able to receive official education. Therefore, to come out from these adverse situations of female education, several people donated money and land to build schools for girls. Moreover, some women went home to home as mistresses to serve as tutor

to young girls but without salary. Woolf concluded by saying that, “We must help to rebuild the college which, imperfect as it may be, is the only alternative to the education of the private house” because “If there were no means of training them to earn their livings, they could not obtain appointments. If they could not obtain appointments, they would again be dependent upon their fathers and brothers, consciously and unconsciously in favor of war” (Woolf 78-79). In this way, Woolf tried to relate the development of women with the impending war. Just like patriarchic society, the facist ideology was also defend any kind of development of women. As a consequence, restricting women from their right is like supporting the coming war.

Woolf expressed her disappointment by recalling the history of profession for women. In early days, before 1919, marriage was the only profession opens for women. Going outside and doing any job was strictly prohibited for them. Women contributed to the development of the society but society never acknowledged them as an active part. At offices or industries, there were no vacancy for women. Recruitment of women for job was beyond one’s imagination. In the society, the positions for women was only determined as a mother, a wife and a daughter who will do their work all day long round the year without any remuneration or break. In this respect, Woolf said, “Among all those offices there is no such office as a mother’s; among all those salaries there is no such salary as a mother’s, but wives and mothers and daughters who work all day and every day, without whose work the State would collapse and fall to pieces, without whose work your sons, sir, would cease to exist” (Woolf 139-140). Here it is significant to think that, staying at home and doing household activities do not need any kind of educational qualification. Even marriage does not need any education. Hence, all these suppression against women, made them struggle to establish their own right. History says, women had to fight continuously for over 150 years to acquire their right of giving vote and to become an active part of the country. Yet another cherished desire of women was to

gain the right to earn their own living. They established this right in the year of 1919 and from then, they did not need to take money from their husbands or fathers or brothers. Since obtaining the right to earn their own living, a woman became so happy that, —she twirls the sacred coin in her hand” and —one bright new six pence in whose light every thought, every sight, every action looked different” (Woolf, 40). Woolf believed that financial power has such a type of control that can help women express their own opinion, likes and dislikes. As a result, they can take active part in any kind of intellectual decision making procedure prior to the serious situation in the society and that can be helpful for men to prevent war. She also explained the discrimination of wages and remuneration between men and women. There were many reasons behind the scenario. Firstly, at that time, the universities such as Oxford and Cambridge strictly limited the seats for women and for this reason many women, who wanted to receive higher education, couldn't receive a university education. Secondly, more daughters than sons had to stay at home to look after their old parents. Hence, fewer women than men could enter for the Civil Service Examination. In the third place, the Civil Service Examination is a stiff one so that more men were expected to pass it than women. It was also a discrimination to women as the society thought men were more capable than women in every respect. Thus, in this adverse background, if any women started to do any job they wouldn't get similar remuneration as men. After fighting for women to obtain a university level of education and to get employment with a sufficient payment to earn their living, Woolf thought about the protection of their culture and intellectual liberty. According to Woolf, —intellectual liberty may be defined as the right to say or write what you think in your own words and in your own way” (Woolf 230). She carefully explained in detail that, —it was thought vile for a woman to sell her body without love, but right to give it to the husband whom she loved, so it is wrong, you will agree, to sell your mind without love, but right to give it to the art which you love. But to sell a brain is worse than to sell a body, for when the

body seller has sold her momentary pleasure she takes good care that the matter shall end there. But when a brain seller has sold her brain, its anemic, vicious and diseased progeny are let loose upon the world to infect and corrupt and sow the seeds of disease in others” (Woolf 234). She provided some directions to avoid adultery of the brain. She suggested to avoid writing for the sake of money. Again she voiced to refuse all publishers, editors, lecture agents who tried to make a writer as a spokesman to them for the sake of money. She said to reject all those medal, honors, degrees which abolish intellectual liberty and sold intellect in captivity.

Woolf was always against any kinds of imitation of men and she encouraged women to create their own way of working. According to her, a woman’s point of view is indisputably different and unique from that of a man. If once her idea becomes established then it will be an indication of threat to the man-created sphere of activity. Women can build a newer and better realm than men but the unoriginal imitation of men will destroy their (women) intellect. Woolf recalled the successful name of women of the Victorian era. These women worked for the society but never cherished fame and they were pure to their motives. For instance, –Josephine Butler led the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act to victory, and then the campaign against the sale and purchase of children for infamous purposes” (Woolf 179). Woolf guided women to fight for their rights and showed the detailed instructions. It is obviously the kind of experiment that great numbers of outsiders can practice with very little difficulty or danger. To hide oneself, it is easier than to speak aloud at a bazaar or to draw up rules of an original kind for playing games.

Virginia Woolf’s the idea of women as an outsider was one kind of raising voice against the patriarchal subjugation to women in her time. Though it was a protest against the ongoing suppression of women, Woolf wanted to establish this idea peacefully. It gave an unique vision of idea that showed the society what peace might look like, especially in such a

country where the war was approaching very fast. According to Woolf, those who would keep women at home are no better than dictators. She asserted this angrily against the oppression of women locating the history of the oppression not only in family homes but also by the Nazi Germany. To become an outsider was not a good experience because it prevented English women from doing the duties during the crisis of their own country. Throughout the history of England the relation between women and the country was interrupted because of male dominance. Just like men, women were also the claimant of the pride of nationality but as they were deprived of it. Woolf implied that even if women cannot join the male-dominated society, they can create a new society as "outsiders' society" and in this way they will also work for the country.

Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is a multifaceted piece of writing, which at the same time talks about different issues of the contemporary English society during Woolf's lifetime. That is why, it is considered as a true manuscript of the existing society. The aim of the text was to reveal patriarchal domination in the society. Although the situation of the time made the female issues a lesser concern, the writer's tone was aggressive and severe. However, if we study the critical approvals of this essay to judge it, then we will come across a lot of controversies expressed by critics, "Woolf's controversial critique of her culture set off a series of rhetorical attacks and counterattacks that left the text near obscurity for over fifty years until it experienced a renewed interest in the later part of the twentieth century". (Silver 340). Woolf attempted to fight against the mistreatment of patriarchy in order to reveal the false truth of the nature of English society that made differences between men and women. But as the prevention of the war was more relevant to the time, her work was viewed unfavorably by the society at the time. For this reason this text had to tolerate attacks and counter attacks which took around fifty years to end. The main drawback of the essay is that it exposed the discrimination between men and women which brought the points that were

already seen. At that time, when women had supposedly won the right to vote and were entering different professions, it was really redundant to write a feminist text like *Three Guineas*. Moreover, when war was looming and unrest was approaching, writing an essay about women's rights will definitely not provoke any interest towards the text. For this reason, Jane Marcus said, "the issue that disturbed the critics of Woolf's day is not that *Three Guineas* is propaganda or hypocritical, but the timing of its publication" (Marcus). Additionally, though Woolf designed and started the essay with the concern to prevent the war, she eventually diverted towards feminine issues. For this reason it may be said that though the focus was to deal with the more important situation that was to prevent the crisis of the war, it has been ended up with women's issues.

Three Guineas was cordially received among women at that time. Woolf wrote in her diary about some supportive responses. "I am pleased this morning because Lady Rhonda writes that she is profoundly excited and moved by *Three Guineas*. Theo Bosanquet, who has a review copy, read her extracts. And she thinks it may have a great effect, and signs herself my grateful outsider." That means women were motivated and took this book positively at that time (Woolf 93). Feminist historian Jill Liddington praised *Three Guineas* by saying, "the essay is 'an eloquent and incisive attack on patriarchal structures'". Again he claimed "*Three Guineas* offers an important bridge between the earlier feminist flowering and the later 1980s wave of a women's peace (movement)" (Woolf 14-15)'

Through the essay, Virginia Woolf conveyed her thought to protect and establish women's rights in the society. She extended a message to her readers that when women obtain gender equality men will not lose anything. Rather as a consequence, men and women will take part actively in the welfare of the society. For a country, equality in genders is not only a good status but it is one that can increase the power of influential men in the society, which can help the country in any crisis. Thus, establishing equal privileges for all human

beings in general, ensuring the democratic ideals of equal opportunity and by opposing dictatorship, the lasting peace of the world can be assured.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's writings talk about the English women who lived during the late nineteenth to first half of the twentieth century and portray the contemporary socio-economic discrimination between men and women and the hold of patriarchy in the society. This paper has discussed Woolf's arguments against patriarchic domination in the society which brought to light the gender inequality and obstacles of women in the society that Virginia Woolf lived in. This matter was explicitly addressed in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Both of these texts have also looked at the contemporary debates around feminism. Here, Woolf expressed the reasons behind women's exclusion from the British cultural, political, and economical life. In fact, it was not just exclusion; rather it was as if the women were in a jail in their own country as a punishment for a great crime. For this reason the tone of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* was that of resentment and discontent. The concern of the troubled relations between women and the male dominated society started with *A Room of One's Own* that led up to an elaborated analysis of the political and cultural implications of women's oppression in *Three Guineas*.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf discussed the conflicting and discriminating situation that women faced if they pursued a writing career. Woolf said that at that time, the society celebrated the intellectuality of men whereas women's intelligence were maltreated and suppressed. In this way, the patriarchal English society reduced women's opportunities. At that time only men had the right to gain power and pelf and the society encouraged them towards it. But Woolf declared through her essay that a woman must also possess her own money and property and only in this way will they get their freedom- not only to write freely

without any kind of anxiety and fear, but also to enjoy every kind of privileges that men enjoyed. Woolf compared the atmosphere and surroundings of the male and female universities. There she found nothing but discrimination against women. Woolf showed us the contrasting picture between Oxbridge and Fernham. Through this portrayal Woolf revealed the truth behind the age old development of England. Woolf retreated to the Elizabethan times to show an example of gender inequality by portraying an imagined sister of William Shakespeare. Her tragic life expressed the untold stories of many women geniuses of that time. In this respect Woolf has quoted a popular and male dominating notion existing at that time in the English society, "For a genius like Shakespeare is not born among laboring, uneducated, servile people" (Woolf 46). Woolf studied the history of women's status in the literary field to determine female writers' position in the society. She talked about several female writers whose names and writings were lost with the passing of time because of male domination in the society. Woolf also named some successful writers like Aphra Behn, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and Jane Austen. However, in this work, Woolf raised her voice against male dominance as a feminist for the first time and tried to establish the feminist goal of changing the society and the world into a place where the male and the female voices will be equally valued. Her idea of "Androgynous mind" symbolizes the equality she expected and demonstrates her anticipation that it will solve the problems between men and women in the society. In this way Woolf has portrayed the position and difficulties of women of her time.

Three Guineas, follows *A Room of One's Own* chronologically and is more developed as well in many ways. Woolf was able to build the arguments of *Three Guineas* after ten years of research on that topic. This essay is considered to be a continuation of the previous one. However, the far-reaching implications of feminine issues have been captured in greater sense than in *A Room of One's Own*. The essay, *Three Guineas*, delineated Woolf's views on

war and women. Woolf wrote the essay as a reply to a series of letters sent to her. Here, the issue was preventing the war. Woolf addressed and explained the idea of protesting the flourishing war very wittily. Her opinion was that it was more important and foremost to know the reason of beginning of the war rather than to stop it. She clarified that the anarchy because of coming war not only affects the life of men and women but also other institutions in society such as education, the professions, the press, etc. Here in this essay she also exposed the connection between patriarchy and fascists tyranny, and between feminism and peace and justice. She expressed her anxiety for women as they were the worst sufferer in this war. In this way, the question of the position and rights of women in any patriarchal society became the focal point of this essay. Woolf was conscious of the mistreatment of women and portrayed the connection of patriarchic domination with social factors like education, economy of England and the-then ongoing international wars. Again, Woolf tried to relate the issues of war and feminism together because she wanted to express how far the lives of women were affected by the war. She also analyzed women's position in their society mostly at a time when the country was approaching war and how far women could help the country in its critical time. She encouraged an idea of far-reaching and independent political action in which women will form a society as outsiders in order to challenge the rise of Fascism and the implication of war.

Thus, both the essays *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are based on women and their problems, particularly on how the society behaved towards them and considered them as the members of the society. At that time, in a country like England, where society was developing, science was flourishing and mostly everything was prospering, such ideologies which deprive women were really incredible. In fact, patriarchic society made women unconscious about their sufferings and the male domination in their own life. For this

reason they became used to with the discrimination towards them. Woolf tried hard to develop women and create consciousness in them. Not only in these two essays but also through all her writings Woolf tried to expose the position and obstacles of the women. Though society praised her as a powerful writer, most of the time they criticized her writings as she always tried to argue and develop the position and difficulties of women. Now-a-days, English women are progressing in their life and equally justified as men but at that time these were never possible for women. Woolf was one of those feminist writers who helped women to think about their rights and possibilities in themselves. Thus, Woolf's writings are true manuscripts of women's obstacles, and difficulties of her contemporary society.

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