



Women Writing

Dr. Bhanumati Mishra M Phil, Ph D.

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Arya Mahila PG College

Banaras Hindu University

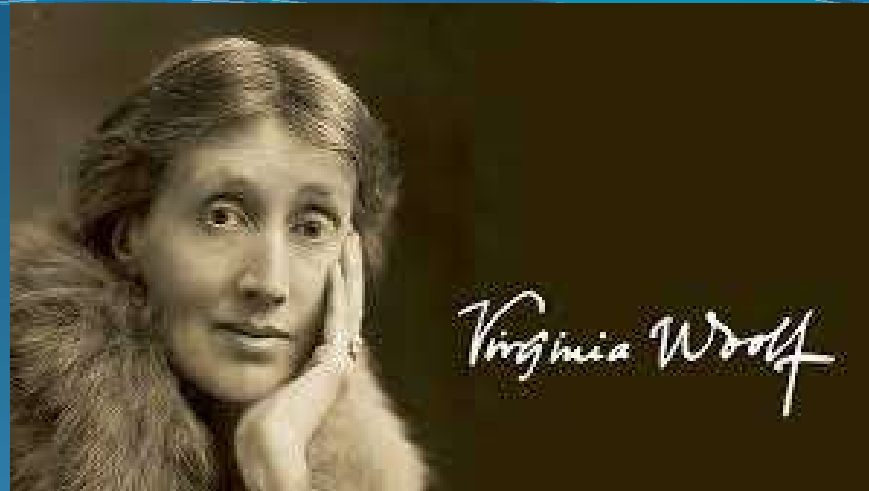
Varanasi

E-mail: bhanumish9@gmail.com

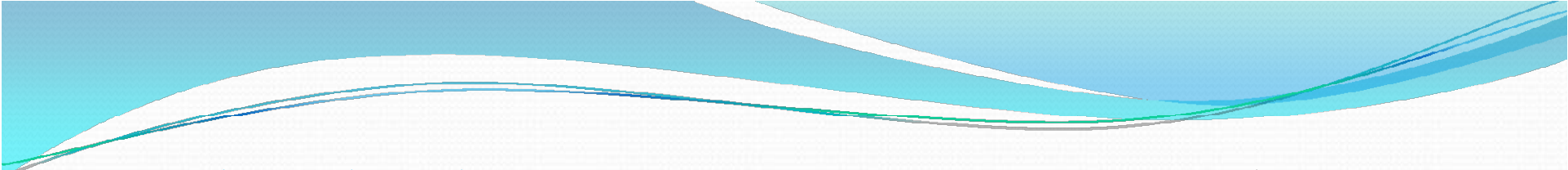


Virginia Woolf 's *A Room of One's Own*

Published in 1929, *Virginia Woolf 's A Room of One's Own* is a key work of feminist literary criticism. Written after she delivered two lectures on the topic of 'women and fiction' at Cambridge University in 1928, Woolf's essay examines the educational, social and financial disadvantages women have faced throughout history. It contains Woolf's famous argument that, '*A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction*' – although Woolf describes this as 'an opinion upon one minor point', and the essay explores the 'unsolved problems' of women and fiction.



A Room of One's Own:
**Virginia Woolf on Gender and
Pushing the Envelope**



<i>Birth & death:</i>	<i>25 January 1882-28 March 1941</i>
<i>Parents:</i>	<i>Leslie Stephen & Julia Jackson</i>
<i>Husband:</i>	<i>Leonard Woolf</i>
<i>Member of:</i>	<i>Bloomsbury Group</i>
<i>Founded:</i>	<i>Hogarth press</i>
<i>Suffered from:</i>	<i>Manic depression</i>
<i>Style:</i>	<i>Stream of consciousness</i>
<i>Content:</i>	<i>Feminist literary criticism</i>
<i>Influences:</i>	<i>Dostoyevsky, Thoreau</i>
<i>Other Works:</i>	<i>Orlando, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves</i>



A Room of One's Own

A non-fictional work which has over the years become a manifesto for women's writing. It is an extended essay by Virginia Woolf, first published in September 1929. The work is based on two lectures Woolf delivered in October 1928 at Newnham College and Girton College, women's constituent colleges at the University of Cambridge.

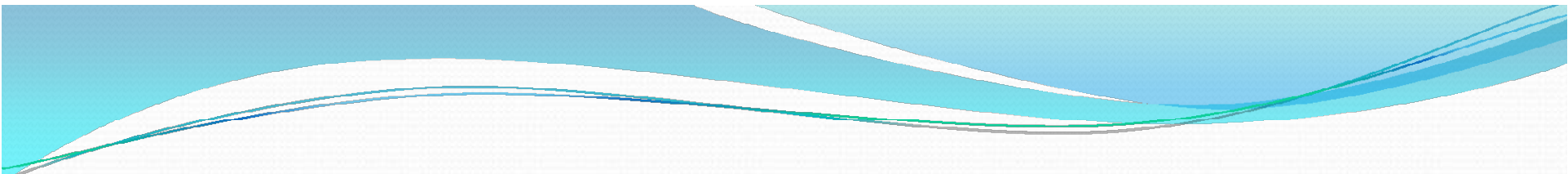
The great merit of this essay lies in the fact that it is a sober, balanced approach to the whole question of women's rights and wrongs and not a hysterical diktat of what is to be done.

1. *Woolf explores gender identity and advocates liberal attitudes related to politics, feminism and sexuality.*
2. *She blames women's absence from history not on their lack of brains and talent but on their poverty.*
3. *She urges women to destroy the proverbial "angel in the house."*
4. *She argues that unequal opportunities for women negatively affect all of society.*
5. *She illustrates the damage done to women and society over the years by sexual repression, ignorance, and discrimination.*



Other concerns of Woolf regarding women's fiction are:

- The social and economic conditions necessary for writing;
- Lack of role models in women's writing;
- Having female sentiment but no feminine language to write in;
- The ability to write without being conscious of one's own sex;
- Marginalized female experience.



❖ In one section Woolf invents a fictional character, Judith, Shakespeare's sister, to illustrate that a woman with Shakespeare's gifts would have been denied the opportunity to develop them.

❖ Woolf further opines that having a room and five hundred pounds is just the beginning. The real issue is what does she write about. Supposedly masculine topics like 'war' and 'trade' or supposedly feminine topics like 'gardening' and 'shopping'.




Important Quotes

“Of the two – the vote and the money – the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important.”


“The world did not say to her as it said to them (Keats and Flaubert), Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What’s the good of your writing?”

“Had Tolstoy lived at the Priory in seclusion, with a married lady, ‘cut off from what is called the world’, however the edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely I thought, have written War and Peace.”



Now, coming to the Indian context and taking the women's issue further , let us see if we can throw some light on the diverse views held on feminism. Let us discuss some questions:

1. What kind of **role models** do Indian women have ?
2. How does she perceive her own **empowerment**?
3. What does she do with the empowered **agency** at her disposal?



Much has changed since the late 1920's, if compared to our grandmothers. The basic rights of women to a large extent have been addressed if not completely.

With respect to India some major changes in favor of women in recent times are for e.g. legal rights, equal wages, age of marriage and for voting, equal opportunity for education, control on reproduction, easy loans, abolishing of sati; dowry; child marriage and triple talaq etc.



Being the devil's advocate:

- Women too misuse power.
- Sisterhood myth.
- Compassion is not a female trait alone.
- Women misuse sexuality.
- Constantly fighting nature's laws
- Legal rights favor women.
- Draupadi didn't punish her husbands.
- Sita couldn't control her impulsiveness.

Suggested Reading:

Ismat Chughtai -	<i>The Quilt</i>
Manjula Padmanabhan-	<i>Harvest</i>
Kamala Das-	<i>My Story</i>
Gayatri C. Spivak-	<i>Can the Subaltern Speak?</i>
Nayantara Sehgal-	<i>Rich Like Us</i>
Jhumpa Lahiri-	<i>The Namesake</i>
Arundhati Roy-	<i>God of Small Things</i>
Bama -	<i>Kurukku & Short stories</i>
Anita Desai -	<i>In Custody</i>
Kamala Markandeya	<i>Nectar in a Sieve</i>
Tarabai Shinde-	<i>A Comparison of men and women</i>
Alice Walker -	<i>The Colour Purple</i>
Radha Chakravarty -	<i>Novelist Tagore: Gender and Modernity in Selected Texts</i>
Malashri Lal & Sukrita P Kumar (ed)-	<i>Chamba Achamba: Women's Oral Culture</i>

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/>



Remember

- ***“It does no harm to repeat as often as you can: ‘without me the literary industry would not exist. The publishers, the agents, the sub-agents, the accountants, the libel lawyers, the departments of literature, the professors, the theses, the books of criticism, the reviewers, the book pages – all this vast and proliferating edifice is because of this small, patronized, put-down and under-paid person.’ ”***

-- Doris Lessing



THANK YOU!