Chapter One

Introduction

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

(Woolf *Three Guineas* 197)

Every positive thinker aims for world peace amidst the entire social, political, economic and environmental issues. Women’s issues which are categorized under social issues affect also the political and economic issues. To build a better harmonious independent future of the world, the real equality of men and women should be experienced and enjoyed in the practical application of it. When the scholar comprehends over research on women’s issues and the solutions, the writer flashes in mind was Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), a Victorian writer who has boldly, effectively and strongly asserted that a woman must have “money and a room of her own” for her to achieve in life. Among the writers whose views have turned the world upside down, Virginia Woolf also unconsciously grouped herself as one among the “the world changers”.

Everyone feels that women have been already liberated and all laws are written with women-centric perspective and so why should women cry for equality? The real contextual and practical question is, “What is reality?” The ground reality is many women suffer silently and they undergo unspeakable torments and humiliations. Both educated and uneducated women become
victims of subjugation in this so-called educated society, which in a way follow
the old patriarchal system both at homes and work places. Women are raped and
murdered and the evil-doers escape after a lapse of considerable period of time.
When this kind of injustice becomes law, women should rise, resist, emphasize
and voice forth their rights and they should reassert and reaffirm their equality
with men. The present scenario was comprehended over, and the outcome is this
dissertation.

During the Victorian period women were subjugated, enslaved and used
by men just to look after their husbands and homes. Women did not have the
right to franchise or to own a property. They were constrained to the domestic
sphere. Women were treated as stereotyped ones just to provide food on the table,
a clean home, to bear and rear children etc. Husband was the owner of the
family’s entire property and wife became “the property” of her husband. Women
were considered to be fragile and weak both physically and intellectually because
they were not allowed to take decisions. Due to the constraints like “domesticity”
and “motherhood”, women kept themselves away from the public sphere but
“feminism”, emerged as potent political force during the 19th century and
women’s positions got changed in a positive way.

This thesis focuses on the unique vision of the world as espounded by
Virginia Woolf, a Victorian writer who has paved the way for women to voice
themselves in a bolder way to get equality with their men counterparts. The
importance of women’s rights and gender equality should not be underestimated
because even in the 21st century, the report about the “United Nation’s Women’s
Treaty” states that these are the issues being faced by not only underdeveloped or
developing countries but also by the already developed nations. Hence there is a need for women’s voices and the cynosure of this dissertation is stressing on a re-reading of Virginia Woolf because she is considered to be one of the founders of feminism. The Victorian era (1837-1941) is characterized as the domestic age par excellence, epitomized by Queen Victoria who became an icon of femininity and domesticity.

Views of certain writers turn the world upside down and they are called “world changers” and one such writer was Virginia Woolf who had thrown the seeds of men-women equality in a very effective and strong manner. Hence, the scholar who has felt that gender discrimination is one of the dominant problems of the present day felt the necessity of a re-reading of Virginia Woolf in the present-day context. The writer who has boldly voiced that “a woman must have money and a room of her own” if she is to write fiction has attracted this scholar and hence the scholar has selected Virginia Woolf for her doctoral degree. The scholar has written the dissertation with psychological approach. The study here attempts to bring to light the Victorian writer Virginia Woolf with her feminist point of view by pouring out the injustices done to women. Her texts here cross-examine the patriarchal system, which shuns women as weaker sex.

The Victorian woman was often looked upon as the “angel” in the house. She was labelled as the ideal woman. This continued even long after Victorian era. The Victorian era in England witnessed the gender roles and the diverse functions assigned to men and women, more commonly known as the ideology of separate spheres. Men dominated the capacity for reason, action, aggression, independence, and self-interest. They played a major role in the family as well as
in the society whereas women were passive, submissive, emotional, selfless and dependent. Thus, men adopted their principles controlled by their mind or intellectual strength, to dominate society and control women. The rules laid by society for women were made known to them from their childhood either by their parents or by the society. Women living in such an environment made some feminists realize their life being close to slavery. Feminists and suffragists viewed their campaign as the best way to end the sexual discrimination against women. If women had decided to fight against the oppression of men then they have to dive deep into the ocean of life to get the root of the problem and women writers like Virginia Woolf succeeded in uprooting it.

In the Victorian age, men’s expectations pressured women to be “the ideal” and that in reality was “to be a slave”. A woman after her marriage became a product to her husband, she was “his property”. Her identity almost ceased to exist and by law, she was completely under the supervision of her husband. Some women thought of getting out from the clutches of their parents by getting married as they felt that they were not getting any freedom at home. They expected their husbands to take care of them and give them some freedom. Later they found themselves suffering under the grip of their husbands also. Men ignored women who held any sort of knowledge as it was not up to the Victorian expectations. Nevertheless, the women of the early twentieth century became fully aware of the fact that their freedom lay in the execution of the dogma of separate spheres, by correcting and revising men’s views, and remodelling the legal system. By discarding the biased aspects of Victorian, society women realized and believed that their position in society would increasingly improve.
Many of the freedoms, which one takes for granted today, indeed bounced from the plant of Victorian women’s repression. The main slice to be appreciated lies in women’s non-stop determination to fight patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf had a sharp vision. She perfectly studied all the rules of Victorian ideal society. In all her novels, the readers can observe each and every woman character as a creation of the Victorian era. All her novels have a link with the “Victorian society”. Just as men had expectations for the ideal Victorian women, the women also dreamt for the ideal Victorian man.

Woolf is a key figure in the modernist literary movement. She spoke about the sense of life, of time and changes of mortality. Virginia Woolf provides many reflections on servants, friends, acquaintances and family members that offer role models for the more formal discussions of socioeconomic theories. Woolf has much to say about society and the post-war changes, but a steady underlying theme in her works is feminism, the roles of women of the time period and their seeming insignificance. She narrates about the women of that era claming that within the constraints of their social roles their lives are trivial. She is best known for her writings between World War I and World War II including the 1922 essay, *A Room of One’s Own*, and novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*. Behzad Pourgharib writes:

Victorian values never ceased to haunt Virginia who found herself endlessly fighting a battle against them, though she herself was not certain about the depths into which they had entered her own psyche. She was more concerned about the women of her own generation who had their origin in Victorian society, had
grown up resenting it, but had found themselves unable to sever their ties categorically and had finally won their freedom. . . significant period for women who were called upon to make certain readjustments in their inner lives and outlook in relation to their emancipation. (Feminine Consciousness 152)

Woolf’s opinions were always related with life. Her description on history is that for most of history, anonymous was a woman. Her view on life and living is that someone has to die in order that the rest of us should value life more. Vita instigated the flowering of Virginia Woolf’s growth and served as primary source of inspiration and creativity for Woolf’s most important work, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Orlando*. Every time Woolf connects a character with a living soul. It helps her to get closer to the truths of life. She portrayed her relationship with Vanessa through her literary work, *The Waves*. She connects her mother with Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* to portray her submissive character. Mrs. Ramsay dynamically takes on the role of an ideal Victorian woman in order to secure herself a position within a patriarchal inventive and social framework. There are firm features of her personal life, which cannot be ignored when her novels are being analyzed. In the same way, this close bond between her life and her literary masterpiece makes her characters more attractive and necessitates a closer attention from reader and researcher.

Woolf’s views on writing focus on her opinion that masterpieces are not its own and single births because they are the product of many years of frequent thoughts furthermore the experience of the collection is behind the single voice. It can be said that in 1920s Woolf wrote the best of her works. Woolf’s age has
been called as “‘the Careless Twenties’, ‘the Age of Beautiful Nonsense’, ‘the age of apprehension’ and of ‘irresponsibility’” (Varshney, Common Reader 29). A critic named G.S. Fraser describes it as ‘The Gay 1920s’. During this period, the novel became a popular literary genre and came to be accepted as a serious art form. Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf called themselves as spiritualists. Woolf’s life was a life stuffed with overwork and hard work. She always suppressed her feelings. She was fond of Jane Austen and George Eliot. Her ancestors in fiction were Proust, Joyce and Dorothy Richardson. She adopted Stevenson and Moore as her ancestors for writing essay and read Bergson with great interest. Woolf was very much influenced by the Russian and she looked upon them as saints. There is always cross roads in every writer’s life in the same way Woolf’s career prospered after her membership in the Bloomsbury Group. In order to bring out her characters to limelight regarding the sufferings of female sex she adopts “stream of consciousness” and expresses clearly the impact of life on their personality.

Woolf also differed from her contemporaries. Her works exposed her taste of writing which had a mixture of bare truth focussed on women as well as the treatment of men with women. H.G Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy’s novels were much in vogue when Woolf began her writing. Woolf wanted to bring every aspects of life in her works. She was prepared to try anything thus her attitude throws light on her skills as an innovator and experimenter. She is able to creep into the inner life of a character, the women’s suffering is focussed in her works, and the readers get the visualization while reading it. She breathes into her characters and they come to life. Woolf does not
describe the true colour of her characters directly she makes her readers get an image of her crafted characters from the thoughts that arise in the minds of her created characters in the novel. Hence, it is not difficult to take the character out of the context and judge them in isolation. Woolf scribbles in her *Diary* which states that “she learned to write with a pen in her hand while working on the many essays she wrote for this journal; she also later criticized her own essay voice for being too gratuitous, too eager to please, too much like tea-table chitchat” (Ferebee, *The Essays* 805).

Woolf never defines a personality. She links her mind to a particular character and gives life to it. She starts living with her character and keeps on arousing her courage finally the “new woman” gets victory. Thus, the readers can view that none of Woolf’s women characters are ready-made, fixed or definitive but something that constantly keeps on growing and becomes unique. Therefore in her works she has exhibited certain scenes and moments through which her women character are strengthened and shaped into a free woman. Woolf demonstrates all her characters generally from the circle, which she knew and had lived. The readers are able to perceive that most of her principle characters are from the upper middle-class and the aristocracy of the West End part of London. Woolf centralizes only on those women in whose minds she could fully enter and with those eyes; she could imagine herself looking out upon the world. Woolf has clearly painted a picture of the real sufferings of women. Woolf brilliantly achieves the telescoping of the women’s internal conflicts. She is such an artist who believed in perfection and finish. Her words and sentences mean more than what they say. Her images too are suggestive giving a vision of true happenings
in the society. Throughout the novel, the readers can see her style, which is not only poetic and figurative but also natural, simple and spontaneous. The words and images flow naturally like breath of a human being and as water flowing in the stream. In fact, the researcher is of the opinion that Woolf has given her own breath to her characters. Michael Rosenthal, the Associate Dean of Columbia College, exclaims that Woolf’s overriding artistic concern; form, is her greatest accomplishment. He says:

But what is form? It is not theme, nor the stripping away of illusion. It makes comprehensible the way in which ‘various impressions and colors and darkness together constitute the texture of human life,’ and it is communicated emotionally rather than intellectually. (McLaughlin, Virginia Woolf 283)

The readers can observe that every great novelist is in fact a great philosopher. Every writer gives his/her own interpretation of reality and has their own vision of life. Through the characters they bring out their own voice and this is seen clearly in Woolf’s novels also. Of all the branches of literature, the novel has mirrored faithfully the complex life of contemporary age. Woolf was considered as one of the earliest feminists. Her role in feminism was due to her relationships with others throughout her life. Woolf was intensely critical of patriarchal, social and political system of values, particularly related with women. Her works became a vehicle for motivating women to come out of their depression and get a new identity in the society. Woolf is the most poetic of novelists, and it has become a vital routine that the development of her narratives depends more heavily upon carefully woven patterns of metaphor, symbol, and
imagery than upon the more conventional devices of characterization and plot. Patrick J. Whiteley states, “‘Self-knowledge, for Woolf, is a collective effort,’ . . . describing her selection of details; the imagination synthesizes ‘dualistic and monistic models of the mind’s relationship to externality’ ” (qtd. in Gindin 272).

The role of feminism bloomed from Woolf’s home itself. She detected that her father was a tyrant and she became the voice against male tyranny. Her works became the instrumentality for suppressed women. Woolf was not only angry with her father for showing off his superiority but also with her mother for preserving her passive nature and being submissive. Woolf assumed that her father was responsible for her mother’s death because he allotted a lot of rules for her mother. He expected her to dedicate her whole life to his needs. Though she judged her father as a culprit she placed most of her blame on her mother for losing her personal sense of self and identity. Hence, Woolf made up her mind not to settle down with a life like that of her mother. Woolf blamed men for most of the negative events in her life.

Woolf raises issues on gender and gender roles as well as forewarns the society pertaining to the drastic changes which is about to take place. The thoughts and feelings of women, their role within the family and outside the family as well as their identity are zoomed more clearly in her novel To the Lighthouse. Woolf takes this opportunity to juxtapose the images of two women, namely Mrs. Ramsay who resembles a Victorian woman and Lily as a modern woman. Being a part of the modernist era Woolf herself contributes greatly in shaping the new woman’s identity. She sets out to bury the stereo type of that time which suggested that only men can be labeled as important writers. Harrison
discovers that *To the Lighthouse* constructs new images of the female artist and explores “the struggle of a woman to fulfill her vision of herself as an artist while she negotiates the cultural expectations of her as ‘woman’” (qtd. in Bauer 498). The new Victorian woman was totally different from the traditional ones. She is a woman full of vigor when most women were seen as weak and pathetic. She is the one who retains unlimited faith and confidence in herself and her opinion. Woolf admires and respects such characters as she feels that such women have the power to rise against favoritism of the society. This powerful and optimistic depiction of women is one of the aspirations Woolf accomplished throughout her novels.

Woolf establishes a unique world by giving a perfect undertaking at the end of her novels by making every woman realize her position in the society and the steps that have to be taken in order to amend it. Woolf initiates in them a strong hope of living their life peacefully. Woolf acts as a bridge in the development of women’s life. The era started blooming with powerful and strong feminists. These kinds of women were partly responsible for the uprising of feminism that fought to question women’s traditional roles. Feminists are responsible for laying the foundation for the biased female approval and equality. Woolf deserves the praise for directing women towards the path of a unique world because her writings, like much postmodern fiction, describe awareness to their narrative method and societal environment, they self-consciously reveal the narrative principle in order to reply and stimulate positive kinds of community practices.

Woolf has sown the seeds of feminism during her period, which is continued by the later feminists. The most significant aspect regarding women’s
suppression becomes highly notable when Woolf being born as a woman portrayed the sufferings of women but Henrik Ibsen being a man realized the worst treatment given to woman by the society. In his work *A Doll’s House* he has shown the plight of a married woman, Nora, who is treated as a doll by her husband. He focuses on how a woman is a servant when she is a daughter and a doll when she is a wife. She becomes a play thing for all. Woolf is somewhat fair in her opinion because she is the one who just wanted equal rights for male and female. She never supported female dominance over men. But Henrik Ibsen’s thoughts for justice are totally diverse. He being a revolutionary writer wanted women to come out of their bondage by breaking the rules and step out with a strong audacity into the patriarchal world in order to claim a new identity for them. Thus in the play the readers can see Nora Helmer, leaving her husband and children because she wants to discover herself. Nora, the heroine, of the play plays a dual role that of ‘a child and a heroic woman in one’. She has natural feelings on the one hand and belief in authority on the other.

Woolf feels that a woman cannot be herself in an exclusively masculine society, as laws are framed by men and a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. The cruel treatment of women in the society is a known fact but no one bothers to bring a good solution to it. Woolf feels that men must be having a fear that their position will be taken by the female whom according to them is the weaker sex. This message is clearly pointed out by Woolf in her essay *A Room of One’s Own*. Though changes are seen in women in various fields still discrimination is spotted out. Still no kind of security is made for women. Woolf raised her voice through her works and many
got inspiration from her. New feminists started blooming and hence it should be noted that only when the plights of women change then only the function of human beings would be a perfect one. The society will be transformed into a peaceful one if men and women walk together in all forms of life.

The history of Victorian era will be imperfect unless the background is unveiled. The Victorian era got this name in reference to Queen Victoria who reigned during the era. The Queen was the perfect representation of the Victorian woman. She was not only a strong and powerful monarch she was also a dedicated wife to her husband Prince Albert and a dutiful mother to her nine children. She was found to be so obedient and loyal that even after her husband’s death she spent the rest of her life mourning for him and wore black clothes as a symbol of grief. Her successful marriage blinded her eyes from seeing the worse living conditions of women. She failed to realize the ill-treatment given to women by men for she judged that all women were living a well-structured and happy life as she is living. However, marriage was not pleasing one like that of the queen. Marriage was a bargain between the husband and the father each one trying to get profit from the product named ‘woman’. Some women were in search of rich and important men as they believed that they can gain respect and admiration from the society. The Victorian maidens were taught by their mother the art of attracting a man. This fact was focussed by some Victorians writers like Jane Austen who showed women waiting for their future husband thinking of a bright future.

Death was regarded as an event which required acceptable and decent funerals. The condition of a widow was pathetic and heart rending. She was
expected to mourn for two years. She was supposed to cover her hair and parts of her face. She had to wear a crape for a year and nine months. After this period, she got some rights to decide whether she would like to continue or stop wearing black clothes. However, Queen Victoria wore black clothes until her death. Susan Bennett Smith says:

Freud, in his studies of hysterics, and the contemporary nerve specialists George Savage and Silas Weir Mitchell, in case studies, treat bereaved women as mentally unbalanced. They assume a casual link between grief and madness without any analysis or explicit justification. Because women had traditionally been the primary mourners, they became the primary patients of rest cures and talking cures . . . . (310)

In the educational sphere women’s condition were not satisfactory. The number of educated girls was very few compared to that of boys. The reason behind it was that their parents felt that their daughter’s main purpose was to manage their houses after marriage so it is useless to educate them. Not only that it was believed by the society that women’s brain was too weak to put up with the learning of difficult subjects like science, physics, and so on. Therefore, they were trained in subjects like household management, which consisted of singing, cooking and playing musical instruments. Women were forbidden to hold certain jobs, taking part in any political activity or expressing themselves in public. Victorian women were not given the rights to take any legal action against the husband. They were supposed to obey and act according to the will of men.
Woolf was against the society’s beliefs and views. Thus, she alerted women through her voice to notice the difference of opinion between genders.

Woolf faced mental traumas when her mother died when she was thirteen years old. Later she lost her father and sister. To many of Virginia critics Virginia’s grief was a disease. Louise DeSalvo states:

Vanessa, like Virginia and in ‘the pattern of perpetual mourning and profound depression of her mother,’ suffered from an inability to complete her mourning for her parents: ‘Vanessa lived out her whole life in a state akin to mourning’. Critics’ failure to examine the boys’ reactions to the deaths reflects the bias that women are more likely to suffer from pathological grief than are men. (qtd. in Smith 312)

The life of women in the Victorian era was like an everlasting hell for them. But, later women realized that it’s useless to cry over their condition and it’s time for them put into words and claim for their rights. They needed a channel through which they can make their voice to be heard. Thus, the women writers became an inspiration for them. Woolf motivated them through her works that reverberated for women’s victory in the four corners of the wall where women were trapped in. The historians assessed the Victorian era in three distinct periods. Each period can be said to have contributed to the society with its merits and demerits. The first period began in 1830 and ended in 1848. It was reined by Queen Victoria, which she began when she was still eighteen years old. It also focussed on her contribution in uplifting her country. The second period is labeled as the mid-Victorians. It started from 1848 until 1870. It was a period in
which people knew stability, new reforming acts that helped to surpass some social problems. The last period lasted nearly for twenty-six years. It started from 1870 and continued till 1901. It was an age of transitions.

Lot of changes started taking shape. Writers who were bent on portraying Victorian women by focussing on their position were replaced by other writers. There were two categories of writers. The first phrase belonged to the early Victorian period. The prominent writers who existed during that period were Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), Robert Browning (1812-1889), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), George Eliot (1819-1880), Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and Anthony Trollope (1815-1882). The renowned writers belonging to late Victorian period were George Meredith (1828-1909), Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), A.E. Housman (1859-1936), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). The researcher has come across a vast difference of opinion among the writers. The early writers believed and wrote that woman’s place was in her home and not in the society. She was fit only for that. She must be faithful to her husband, should not find any fault in him, and should blame herself as though she is responsible for it. Not only man had this opinion some women also thought the same.

In 1839, Sarah Lewis wrote a book named *Women’s Mission* where she suggested women the need of evading educational culture and devoting their time for their families. She is of the opinion that women should appreciate and admit the fact that they are not in par with men. They should put their heart and soul for
the task for which they are assigned with that is none other than getting married, bearing children, looking after them and shaping the family. Women should not aim for other things. Her other works suggest some manners by which a woman should keep their husbands loving them. In 1861, Isabella Beeton wrote a manual edited *Book of Household Management* in which she gives instructions and suggestions regarding clothing, tutoring the servants to do their household tasks flawlessly, classifying their time, lending a helping hand to their husbands in order to set up and maintain their social relations. Charles Dickens works discloses his views about women and he opines that a woman who does not act in accordance with the Victorian moral values and virtues should not be given any place in the society.

George Eliot was different from the other Victorians writers. She was described as the first modern English novelist. Some found out that in her works women who are ready to rebel, or at least trying to assert their independence were inevitably punished. She feels that a woman is responsible for her doom. She has to be aware of everything. Those women who fall as victims to seduction by getting tempted are sure to bring downfall as well as face the punishment of death as fate. This is what women have to face for being careless, irresponsible and unwise. She criticized the social marginalization of women. George Meredith and George Egerton depicted women aspiring to gain freedom and fair treatment from the part of men. They were shown as trying to have their own decision for their happiness in life.

The later writers uncovered the sufferings of women. They saw the pathetic condition of women who were under the clutch of men. One among them
is Virginia Woolf. Her main aim was to discover life and she strongly feels that
the novelist should also do the same. She has created some self-absorbed
personalities as well as some characters who come out from their own shell and
interact with the outside world in order to have an identity. Each women
character is unique. She sympathizes with the suppressed women and feels that
such women characters should be portrayed so that this can help other women to
step out of the trap laid for them and become independent. She boldly works out
her new artistic form. Woolf has employed the stream-of-consciousness
technique in most of her out-standing novels. Her work has a greater sense of
order as well as cleanliness and purity. More than plot she gives importance to
her characters. For her all novels deal with character. Her novels are full of
experience. Not only Woolf focussed on the suppression of women there were
also other writers who too threw lights on women. One among them is Thomas
Hardy.

Thomas Hardy was called as ‘feminist’ due to the way he portrayed
women in his novels. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is one of the most famous
figures in the Victorian century literature. In many of his works he presents
women as attractive, sexual and pure women even if they were considered as
fallen women. He sympathized with the social position of women. He too like
Virginia Woolf laid bare his opinions without fearing the age to which he
belonged. In his works, he portrays women trying to achieve selfhood and social
freedom. He criticizes the Victorian society, which fails to recognize the
importance of women.
Charlotte Bronte’s novel showed that women are courageous. In her novel *Jane Eyre*, she attempts to focus on her main character who challenged the notion of the ideal Victorian woman. She made up her mind to portray a simple yet avid young woman who challenged the stereotype of the submissive and domestic Victorian feminine ideal. She developed it from her own dissatisfaction with domestic duties and her dislike of the Victorian culture which discouraged women from having literary aspirations. Elizabeth Gaskell’s works reveal her position as a feminist writer. In her novel *Ruth* published in 1853, she depicts how Ruth was neglected by the society when her truth is revealed. It is a social novel dealing with Victorian views about sin and illegitimacy. It portrays the Victorian society, which rarely gives a chance for women to overcome her past and start a fresh life again. Elizabeth Gaskell advises upper-class women to become active in the public sphere. Thackeray is a Victorian writer who is full of sympathy for women. He portrays his feelings for female through his works. He found women as feminist who were independent in their life and those who had a different attitude towards men and marriage.

Woolf in a careful manner has analyzed her novels and essays in theoretical perspectives. This dissertation throws light on Woolf’s theory of the Androgynous mind” and Theory of liberation”. Woolf witnesses women as having a closer relationship with androgyny. Women are considered as an outsider and her mind share equally androgynous beliefs. She never longs to be dominant over men she just wants to be in equal relationship with them. Woolf never fails to remember that the mind must contain fundamentals of both sexes in
order to be truly creative. Woolf’s key purpose is to mold a character that possesses both masculine and feminine characteristic in a tuneful blend.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century brought about the birth of philosophy and science that confronted how people traditionally recognized the world. Many artists considered it essential to ignore traditional art forms and philosophies and they attempted to create modern and innovative works of art. This revolutionary movement came to be known as “modernism”. Modernism is just a movement between World War I and World War II in literature. The exploration made the modernists enthusiastic and they challenged to set hurdles in order to get closer with reality. Woolf is one of the more famous Modernist writers. Her work reflects many of the ethics of the modernist movement. Her narration is distinct by its stream-of-conscience quality. This quality of her writing allows her to produce stories by the beauty of the microscopic facts that make up the experience of life. The feminist movement of the 1970s and the work of feminist scholars like Jane Marcus, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar activated Woolf as feminist. It was a vital, essential, and much required shift, at the same time as feminist criticism contributed to the founding of Woolf as a major modernist writer. Woolf helped to establish feminist criticism as a lawful decisive process. Before the Second World War and long before the second wave of feminism, Virginia Woolf argued that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the starting point for transformative societal change. Woolf uses a “sociological approach” to make the readers comprehend that there is a shared relationship between the self and society. Woolf takes an opportunity to show that the gender
roles are not biological but societal. The difference in the sex is created by the society. The society has made man as the dominant sex and women as an inferior one. Gender can be said as a concept imposed on people who live in the society. However, Woolf keeps her focus mainly on the new modern women, as it is through them she can give her own voice. Woolf uses the “psychological approach” of patriarchy in Mrs Dalloway. These approaches include degradation, cynicism, hopelessness and others. She presents, Clarissa as the representative of each woman who undergoes silent psychological trauma in every minute of her life. There is always a void or emptiness between a husband and wife. Soon after marriage even, a hearty laughter is denied to a woman.

Woolf dedicated many of her works to the feminist cause. One of her famous work dedicated to women is A Room of One’s Own. It presents the discrimination of women in a humorous style. She strongly sensed that the treatment towards women was becoming worse day by day. Woolf used her leadership and literary talent to fight for women’s rights, and to bring justice to the unfair obstacles women were challenged with. She took writing as her powerful weapon to improve the conditions of women. According to Woolf women must possess if not demand for a room of their own and have a mind to think and decide of their own. In order to focus on this she prepared Professions for Women. While reading her works one is induced to realizes the status of women in the society. She gives a unique vision of the world in her strong feminist views. She wants everyone to realize that what women actually long for is nothing more than “self-determination”. It can be said that postmodernism marks a change in artistic motivation. Modernist literature hunted to offer order
in disjointed human race by differing itself to social institutions and mass culture, whereas postmodern writing assumes its connotation in social systems in order to depict and develop systems of literary creation. Instead of introducing itself at the front line of culture, postmodern writing discovers the affairs between literary practices and social practices. However, one can find Woolf’s works centering on modernism, feminism, postmodernism. One must pay as much attention to one’s own purpose, approach, and perspective as to Virginia Woolf’s.

If one tries to scrutinize some of Woolf’s major novels, one can come to the conclusion that she was among the writers who sought to depict ‘women’ with new ideas in the society and a strong feminist voice. Woolf being the product of Victorian era witnessed women’s offensive way of life. She portrays the suppressed character of her own mother because she saw her fate through her own eyes. She was also aware of the fact that the Victorian society restricted women’s life cycle concerning education, economic and politics. Her development of a female writer’s creativity is seen through her *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf utters her own feminist theory and position. Since then feminism has developed a range of sophisticated approaches to reading literary works and to add more to her appreciation critics have also recognized the importance of Woolf’s leading role in modern feminist criticism.

Woolf has given feminism a strong feminist voice and holds a special place in the history of feminism. She mentions that a woman has to be absent from history, is rarely educated, has to be insignificant and remain a slave to her husband. Woolf expects nothing much from women expect their courage to fight in order to possess a room of their own and some money to be independent.
Josette Feral highlights Lacanian psychoanalysis reply to question, “What do women say in language?” He states:

Women say NOTHING because they have NOTHING to say
... whatever they may say, since it means NOTHING ... nothing about society, nothing about the structures, nothing about the laws, nothing about language ... (551)

Woolf in her essay *Professions for Women* talks about the two obstacles she faces in her professional life. One obstacle is battle with a certain phantom that is the angel in the house and the other obstacle is telling the truth about her own experiences as a body. Woolf explains the pathetic plights of women. On the subject of women, she explains that she was extremely kind. She was found to be immeasurably polite. She was wholly generous. She surpassed all the difficulties that cropped up in the family. She sacrificed herself daily. She never had a mind or a wish of her own. She always had sympathetic feelings towards others. Her wholesomeness was supposed to be her chief beauty. In spite of all this, she is made to suffer. She is not allowed to think of her own. She can’t pen down her true feelings. If she wants to write then she is allotted with many rules and she can’t even use her real name. She is supposed to use pseudo names. She should not express her views publicity. There is an angel who stops her every time reminding her of her sex. Florence Nightingale remarkably estimated Woolf’s critical vision of the “Angel in the House”. She says:

In every dream of the life of intelligence or that of activity, women are accompanied by a phantom- the phantom of sympathy guiding, lighting the way ... A woman dedicates herself to the
vocation of her husband; she fills up and performs the subordinate parts in it . . . . A man gains everything by marriage: he gains a “helpmate,” but a woman does not. (qtd. in Zwerdling 219)

Woolf feels that it is time to take action and accordingly she decides to kill the angel. She turns upon her and catches her by the throat. She does her best to kill her. Had she not killed her then she would hence being killed by the angel through its instructions and blames. She takes up her inkpot and flings it at her “she died hard”. This angel was part of the occupation of a woman writer. This angel can be experienced only by those who choose a profession. This angel accompanies only women. Women from all over the place have to fight with the angel. Woolf feels that: “She has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against” (qtd. in The Death of the Moth 241). Woolf feels that the phantom is worldwide trying to chase women and put them under its control. But now the angel’s game is over as many women writers have cropped up in spite of the obstacles and have given their voice to the voiceless like her. If a woman has a strong will power, she can withstand the obstacles and pen down her own thoughts. Mary M.Childers remarks on Woolf’s presumption. She comments:

Seeing so clearly the instruction to be polite, to defer, to phrase one’s opinions . . . . Woolf calls by the Victorian term, the Angel in the House — she tries to choose individualism. That ethic makes it possible to remind herself constantly to try to stand by what she thinks, to resist the tug of the expectations of others. (69)
Woolf was regarded as one of the famous writers of the modernist era. She was not merely a writer but also a biographer, an essayist and also a feminist. Though Woolf grew up like a Victorian daughter, her ideals were very opposed to the ideas of the perfect Victorian woman. Woolf played an important role during the manufacture of modern woman, which was a feedback to the Victorian idealization, and thus there originated the redefinition of the woman’s role in the society. Maggie Humm claims that Woolf throughout her life “challenged traditional art boundaries by signifying modernity in a wider range of aesthetics than avant-garde painting and sculpture. In her writings, art and the conditions of creativity, are interwoven with social history, ethics and philosophy” (12). The readers can perceive Woolf’s writings holding art and the conditions of creativity, which are interwoven with social history, ethics and philosophy. Jane Marcus reveals that to the English critics that Woolf was a social figure of imposing “wit and beauty, doyenne of Bloomsbury, lover of aristocracy . . . a writer, she was apolitical, artsy, convoluted, obsessed with private themes, perhaps a trifle slight . . .” (DeKovan, Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury 277). To American feminists, their Woolf is a pure patriarchal dogma.

Woolf’s attitude towards her Victorian family changed after her mother’s death in 1895. It was one of the oppositions and revolutions. Woolf stresses this rebellion through her works. Woolf sets out to destroy the Victorian ideal women’s role. She demonstrates the struggles of a woman writer in Victorian age. She knows that society’s expectation was different and women writers did not get the recognition compared to male writers. Woolf, however, knew that she had to break the Victorian rules. By breaking away from traditional category
connected to women, Woolf risks her morality as a woman. Woolf not merely tries to identify the gender roles through the character but she expresses her opinions in order to gain equality. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann reveals that Woolf’s lifelong query, both personal and literary, into the disposition of identity and her agonized hunt for her self has now become the occupation of scholars. “To anatomize her as a writer, woman, wife, Sapphist, insane invalid, feminist, catty gossipmonger, Sibyl of modern aesthetics, snobbish hostess of Bloomsbury . . .” (Magalaner, The Letters 277).

This chapter deals with the need for women’s voices and their position in feminist history. The incidents of her birth, life and career molded Woolf into an artist especially a feminist. The dominant idea behind all her novels is that women are pinned by the Victorian laws for ideal womanhood and men are dominant but due to the sufferings faced by their mother, the new generations breaks the chains of Victorian laws and have become “new woman” with a strong feminist voice in the society. The depressed conditions of women make them to cross the Victorian laws. The way Woolf discriminates the separate rooms of individual men from the common room allowed to women also distinguishes her critiques of male and female authors. Kathleen Gregory Klein highlights Woolf’s views. She says:

Great works do not identify the authors by sex. She is clearly aware of a female author’s gender; while male writers are usually treated as individuals functioning within a given society, female writers are analyzed both by their individual positions in society.
and by their place in a group identified by its gender . . . (qtd. in Trautmann 231)

Woolf gave up her life in March 1941. She did not fear that she is going to die. Her fear was that she would no longer be able to live meaningfully. According to her ideals particularly vision of life, forced her to choose death as salvation. To her, death was not an ending. She decided to preserve her spirit like her character Septimus Warren Smith. Under the strain of mental illness, she threw her life away in order to preserve her life and integrity of the soul, which was most sacred to her. Probably it seems to be contradiction- to destroy one’s life in an effort to save it. Roger Poole’s tries to reply to “Was Virginia Woolf ‘mad’?” He opposes views of Leonard Woolf, medical specialists, biographers like Quentin Bell as well as her suicide note. He opines:

There was something wrong with Virginia Woolf . . .

familiar assaults on Virginia’s psyche by the death of her mother, by her father’s emotional demands in life and in death, as well as the crude sexual abuse she suffered from Duckworth brothers.

(Magalaner, The Unknown 279)

Woolf feels that reality brings its historic and prehistoric past into the ever-flowing stream of life. She also demanded a revolution in literary technique and subject matter. Marcus asserts in New Feminist Essays “‘Virginia Woolf is the mother of us all’ . . . is to inscribe ourselves into the pre-scripted logic of fixed sexual positions of the family romance” (qtd. in Jones 4). Her voice for the voiceless has helped other women writers to face men writers boldly. She has sown the seeds of feminism. From there sprouted a directory of feminists. James.
J. Miracky in his preface reveals that “Virginia Woolf was a pioneering figure in this period, providing a voice that both proclaimed the indeterminacy of gender roles. . . thus reformulate attitudes about sex and gender in the modern era” (xii). He also states, “Virginia Woolf has been a major inspiration in the reassessment of literary modernism that has taken place over the past three decades. The only female English writer of her generation to achieve canonical status” (1). Woolf has played a significant role in trying to bring out a new identity for the suppressed women. She has strained a lot by making women aware of their embezzled and pending identities, rights, duties, desires as well as their limitations. She wanted to paint a new world with a new colour of gender equality and she has succeeded in creating it. The next chapter named as The Mind and Art of Virginia Woolf reveals the period in which she lived laying bare the picture of her life, the themes of her works and her voice in getting liberation.