THE SUICIDE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF REFLECTED IN HER MAJOR NOVELS

The word “suicide” is derived from Latin (Suicidium, from Sui caedere, to kill oneself). The *DK Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* describes ‘suicide’ is the intentional killing of oneself; self destructive action of course. Suicide is the term used for the deliberate self-destruction of a human being, by causing their body to cease life function. Such actions are typically characterized as being made out of despair, or attributed to some underlying mental disorder which includes depression, bipolar disorder (Virginia Woolf suffered from depression and bipolar disorder) schizophrenia, alcoholism and drug abuse. Financial difficulties, interpersonal relationships and other undesirable situations play a significant role. Suicide is the act of killing yourself; “it is a crime to commit suicide.” Medically assisted suicide (euthanasia, or the right to die) is currently a controversial ethical issue involving people who are terminally ill, in extreme pain, or have minimal quality of life through injury or illness (www.google.co.in/).

Virginia recorded her views on suicide as follows: while she was in good health and when she was in the thirties, she had correspondence with the composer of Ethel Smyth, one of the best friends among whom she confided about her past illnesses. When Virginia and Ethel Smyth were
talking about suicide; Virginia wrote: “By the way, what are the arguments against suicide? You know what a flibberti-gibbet I am: well there suddenly comes in a thunder clap a sense of the complete uselessness of my life. It’s like suddenly running one’s head against a wall at the end of a blind alley. Now what are the arguments against that sense – “Oh it would be better to end it”? Asked Virginia.

For Virginia Woolf, suicide was an ever-interesting topic, and she could regard it with cool detachment when she was well. She allowed herself to believe that her past attempt was reasonable and altruistic (www.en.wikisource.org). Virginia brought the suicidal inner thoughts in her novels. For example in Mrs. Dalloway, Septimus Warren Smith committed suicide by throwing himself out of the train window (Poole, unknown 187). So he committed suicide and Mrs. Dalloway pitied over his death. In To the Lighthouse, Minta Doyle committed suicide. Virginia remembered her suicidal concept through the character of Minta Doyle in To the Lighthouse. The tragedy of mind had been shown through the character of Minta Doyle, who was possessed of a tendency to commit suicide. She suffered from the malady of neurosis, as a result of which, “she would jump straight into a stream.” She would kill herself in some idiotic way” (Gupta and Gupta, 103). She seemed to be afraid of nothing except bulls. She was afraid, for she had lost her grandmother’s brooch.
“I lost my brooch—my grandmother’s brooch” (LH 132). Minta Doyle was really shocked for the loss of her treasured chastity which is nothing but her grandmother’s brooch.

Virginia Woolf dealt more with death in her novels because from 1895-1937 in Virginia’s family six deaths occurred which affected her mood, which led to mental depression. Julia Stephen died of rheumatic fever and due to “influenza” in 1895. Virginia Woolf was also affected by influenza in February 1940. Virginia Woolf’s half-sister Stella Hills died due to her first delivery in 1987. Sir Leslie Stephen passed away in 1904. Her own brother Thoby died (passed away) at the age of twenty-six in 1906. Her half-brother George Duckworth passed away in 1934. Julian Bell (son of Vanessa Bell) died in 1937. The close and beloved relative’s deaths seriously affected Virginia’s brain which let her to mental depression. It is taken from the family tree which is given in chapter II (p.136).

Virginia Woolf preferred suicide to death. As for death, Virginia’s adolescence was so replete with deaths of parents and siblings that for the rest of her life she felt the presence of the dead, and their memory, as strongly as that of the living, to the extent that her sense of reality was sometimes disturbed by the vividness of the past
(www.en.wikisource.org). The autobiographical novelist said that the event of death was deliberately distanced: not only narrated in brackets but the syntax of the sentence removed it further from direct impact upon the reader, telling of the death not in a main clause or with a finite verb at all, but in a ‘participial absolute’ construction, unrelated grammatically to the rest of the sentence, and referring to the event retrospectively. Because of this distancing her death appeared as an illustration of the apparent meaninglessness of life in face of the wild destructive force of nature. Virginia mentioned in her diary, “Death will be very dull,” Woolf confided to her diary, “there are no letters in the grave” (Sellers 113).

Another entry in her diary (October 2), which Leonard Woolf reprinted in A Writer’s Diary (353) gave vividly her mood that autumn, a kind of quietism and open-eyed contemplation of death. Death was no longer, as it is for all human beings. The end of life, seen always a long way off, unreal, through the wrong end of the telescope of life, but now it was something immediate, extraordinarily near and real (Woolf, Journey 72).

Here it is necessary to think of Emily Dickinson, who was considered one of greatest poets born in America. Her poetry is characteristic of the secluded life she led within her family circle. Certain of her poems express a state of mental breakdown and despair. Her view is different from Virginia. According to Emily Dickinson “Death is not something to
be dreaded. Death is compared to a love who is inviting his sweetheart for a pleasant ride. They are not disturbed by others and their destination is immortality.” This is taken from Emily Dickinson’s poem, “Because I could not stop for death.”

Virginia Woolf was interested in writing and reading habits which induced Virginia’s mental depression. She was very much interested in reading letters; so she charged Ethel Smyth, as follows “never see a pillar box without dropping a letter in” (Sellers 112) and urged her nephew Quentin Bell, “Please write a full and indiscreet account of your amorous adventures... or I shall be forced to invent one” (Sellers 113). Woolf also enjoyed other people’s correspondence. Again she said that “Letters and memoirs are my delight.” She wrote to Violet Dickinson, and she advised Ethel Smyth to quote letters in her work as “they often shed a whole cutler fish bag of suggestion” (Sellers, 113). So Virginia echoed the writing of letters on the character of Mrs. Dalloway. In The Voyage Out and Mrs. Dalloway wrote with the help of the pen to her friend’s (VO 14). In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay wrote many letters (217).

In the opinion of Woolf,

The fact that she had twice tried to commit suicide—and had almost succeeded—and the knowledge that terrible desperation of
depression might at any moment overwhelm her mind again meant that death was never far from her thoughts (*Journey* 74).

Virginia’s attitude towards death was very different. It was always present to her. So she made almost all the characters to die in the middle of their life itself in her novels. Example: Rachel Vinrace died in her middle age of twenty-four. “Terence was filled with resentment, not against Rachel, but against the forces outside them which was separating them” (VO 334). “As she lies dying, Terence takes her hand and feels in an ecstatic manner” but when we are together we’re perfectly happy” (118). Virginia Woolf talks about Septimus as follows: “The voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to Death” (Mrs. D 30). Virginia Woolf wanted Mrs. Dalloway to be “a study of insanity and suicide: the world seen by the sane and insane side by side – something like that” (Woolf ed. *Writer’s* 52).

The novelist very often influenced her personal matters in all of her novels. For example in *Mrs. Dalloway*, she mentioned that at first Mrs. Dalloway resented Sir Bradshaw’s having mentioned a death at her party which was a gay affair, but then she felt overwhelmed by her thoughts about death. It seemed to her that death was defiance that death was attempted to communicate, and there was an embrace in death. She
reflected that the world was full of corruptions and lies. “The young man had done well by killing himself” (Mrs. D 196). His suicide reminded her of an occasion in the past when she had said to herself: “if it were now to die, ‘were now to be most happy’” (197). Then she felt that there was, in the depths of her heart, an awful fear. But the emotional support which her husband provided to her, she ought to have perished. She had escaped death while the young man had killed himself. Mrs. Woolf had put various events within the body of the novel—death, a very tragic death, that of Septimus Warren Smith. Although Septimus was dead, the revelation of Clarissa of her identity with him paradoxically emphasized life and calms her fears of death. In Virginia Woolf’s novels, the climax of Mrs. Dalloway was an integrating epiphany that brings together many of the important themes and characters. This climax served the specific purpose of revealing the triumph of life and the value of love and human relationships.

Virginia Woolf selected only the beautiful aspects and the ugly ones ignored, or they were introduced merely to provide a contrast. When aesthetic experience flags the capacity to enjoy beautiful flags, life becomes meaningless for her characters, sadness then assaults the spirit. Like Keats she loved the principle of beauty in all things. Virginia Woolf is among those poets whom Keats admires, who have “no palpable design
upon us.” Yet the poet is not less, but more conscious of the world about him than the average man: therefore to him “the miseries of the world, are misery, and will not let him rest.” Like Keats, Virginia also felt (Arora 161). Mrs. Virginia Woolf was an aesthete, a great lover of the beautiful, and it is this love of beauty which influences her selection, and ordering of reality. Only the beautiful aspects are selected and the ugly ones ignored, or they are introduced merely to provide a contrast. When aesthetic experience flags the capacity to enjoy beauty flags, life become meaningless for her characters, sadness then assaults the spirit. Like Keats she loves the principle of beauty in all things (Varshini 44).

Keats and Virginia had the same views about death. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” said Keats. In the view of Virginia, life is presented in Mrs. Dalloway as mystery which was difficult to solve, but in her later novels there was an attempt to tear that veil of mystery and she offered an explanation for it. There might be another life more beautiful and permanent beneath and beyond this life. In *To the Lighthouse* it is conveyed that beneath the visible and the palpable aspects of life there is the principle of beauty which was a permanent nature. Death was a phenomenon accompanied with a welcome process of renewal. “Life is beautiful and lonely, but beneath it, it was elusive and sad.” Virginia influences her theory of death again in *To the Lighthouse* the boy, James
Ramsay finds himself incapable bearing the burden of life. Mrs. Ramsay too feels the burden of life and craved for death in the manner of Keats. He must lay himself down and die before morning comes...so he “squares his shoulders and stands very uprightly by the urn” (LH 50). Ramsay’s idea of death is poetic like that of Keats who longed to die a midnight death.

Virginia Woolf’s delight in beauty made her acutely conscious of the frailty and transience of life. “Life is fleeting and changing like a cloud, and this fact brings sadness and bewilderment.” Like Keats she was oppressed by the melancholy which dwells with beauty. “Beauty that must die,” and “Joy whose hand is ever at his lips bidding adieu.” “The fact of Beauty on the one hand, the fact of mutability, on the other, these are the two poles on which her panorama of human experience revolves” (Gupta and Gupta 30). In Mrs. Dalloway, life is represented as an insoluble mystery, but in Virginia’s later novels, there is an attempt to pierce through this mystery and provide an explanation. She suggested in To the Lighthouse, there is a permanent principle of ‘Beauty’ at work in the universe behind the visible and the palpable. Death is thus seen as a process of renewal to the welcomed. However, the vision which permeates her books was that of a life so beautiful yet so sad, and as
elusive, as a shred of mist. Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay and loves of beauty, which is described by the author on many occasions in her novels.

The death of Mrs. Ramsay, which was in one way, the central event of book, the marriage, and death of Prue, the death of Andrew, was conveyed briefly in brackets, as if they were mere incidentals. Careful reading made it clear that those events were seen here as illustrations of universal patterns, rather than having significance in themselves. Hence the marriage of Prue was presented as a single manifestation of the universal cycle of the seasons, and her death of the inevitable sorrows of mankind. More significant for the novel as a whole, the death of Mrs. Ramsay was death with in a similar way. James Ramsay, in To the Lighthouse found himself incapable of bearing the burden of life. Mrs. Ramsay too felt the burden of life and craved for death in the manner of Keats, “He must lay himself down and die before morning comes, death stole upon him paling the colour of the eyes. Time really intensified the tragedy of human living.” In the opinion of James Ramsay, “Had there been an axe handy, a poker, or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it” (LH 8).

What symptoms and events preceded Virginia’s death? For how long had she been depressed? Some forty years later, her husband,
Leonard Woolf, described her last years and suicide in one of the volumes of his autobiography. “Feminist” critics have been suspicious of his motives, but he was a pedantically accurate man who kept brief but detailed daily records of his activities throughout the marriage. His account was, at the very least, chronologically accurate, as he had access to these diaries, and to his wife’s lengthier journals, both made at the time of the events (www.en.wikisource.org). In the view of Virginia Woolf Feminist means “people who fight for the right of women.” Feminist literary criticism primarily responds to the way, woman is presented in literature. It has two basic premises one, ‘woman,’ presented in the writings of female writers from their point of view.

John Stuart Mill summed up, “I should say that feminist criticism is concerned” with “woman as the producer of textual meanings with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women.” Many feminist writers who had seized upon Woolf, like Sylvia Plath (American Poetess) who also killed herself, and presented her as a victim of male oppression. But Virginia committed suicide due to mental depression.

Virginia Woolf herself wrote in her diary, how she had finished the last pages of *The Waves*. For example in her diary she mentioned in it as follows:
In the concluding words of *The Waves* as her epitaph of ‘Against you I will flying myself, unanguished and unyielding, O Death!’ From these words the readers could understand how Virginia Woolf gave a warm welcome for her death (Woolf ed. *Writer’s 169*).

There were many causes for Virginia Woolf’s suicide: one among them was Virginia’s loss of control over her mind, the depression and despair which ended in her death, began only a month or two before her suicide. Though the strains and stresses of life in London and Sussex in the eight months between April 1940 and January 1941 were for her, as for everyone living in that tormented area, terrific, she was happier for the most part and her mind more tranquil than usual. The entry in her diary for May 13, already published in *A Writer’s Diary*, gave the atmosphere of those violent days and the ambivalence of her mood and mind (Woolf, *Journey* 44-45). Modern diagnostic techniques had led to her being regarded as having suffered from bipolar disorder, an illness which colored her work and life, and eventually it led to her suicide. For Virginia Woolf little treatment was available at that time and she took her won life. She believed that she was given wrong treatments by the doctors. So Virginia Woolf portrayed the same in her major novels
through the characters of Rachel Vinrace, Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay.

In *The Voyage Out* Terrence Hewet was angry because he had come to depend upon her for happiness and now she was ill. He was angry with her, but with “the force outside them.” Dr. Rodriguez was unable to treat her successfully (114). Helen demanded that they send for another doctor: St. John is sent to find one. He was riding to the town in the scorching heat in search of a doctor (114). Terence began to feel that there is no hope, when even Helen, who had always been so strong, began to cry. Rachel regained one brief moment of lucidness and then she dies. Terence was beside himself with grief. Septimus Warren Smith’s view was that he was also given wrong treatment by the doctors named William Bradhsaw (psychiatrist) and Dr. Homes.

There were so many causes for Virginia’s mental instability a major cause of Virginia’s increase instability was noted by Quentin Bell. She had reached the age of thirteen with few conceptions of self, but after the period of “nothingness” and of “positive death” (Bell’s terms for Virginia’s first breakdown), “she knew that she had been mad and might be mad again” (Love, *Sources* 278). For Virginia which was the new
terrifying and erosive way of thinking about herself that her first madness had forced upon her. Again Bell said further,

To know that you have had cancer in your body and to know that it may return must be very horrible; but a cancer of the mind, a corruption of the spirit striking one at the age of thirteen and for the rest of one’s life working away somewhere, always in suspense, a Dionysian (sic) sword above one’s head - this must be almost unendurable. So unendurable that in the end, when the voices of insanity spoke to her in 1941, she took the only remedy that remained, the cure of death (Bloomsbury 279).

The Lesbian relationship was one of the most important causes for her mental disturbances. It would be easier to trace the long and complicated history of her past attack both serious and mild. For example in 1922, Virginia Woolf met and fell in love with Vita Sackville-West. After a tentative start, they began an affair that lasted through most of the 1920. In 1928, Woolf presented Vita Sackville-West with Orlando, a fantastical biography in which the eponymous hero’s life spans three centuries and both genders. It has been called by Nigel Nicholson, Vita Sackville-West’s son, “the longest and most charming love letter in literature” (www.literaturepage.com). The author echoed lesbian habits in Mrs. Dalloway. She and Sally Seton had the lesbian relationship.
The world wars upset the whole nation. In the words of Woolf about the world wars which was horrible to human beings. So he said as follows:

There had been wars and we still prayed automatically on Sundays to a very anachronistic God to deliver us from ‘battle’ as from murder and sudden death, from the ‘crafts and assaults of the devil’ and from ‘fornication, and all other deadly sins;’ but the wars were local or without hearing the dreams and trampling of any conquest, or had had the remotest change of standing ‘on the perilous edge of battle’ (*Journey* 9).

The increasing threat of a Second World War unnerved her. When Great Britain finally declared war on Germany in 1939, both Virginia and Leonard Woolf made plans to kill themselves. She remembered this in her novel through the character of Septimus who said to his wife, “Let us kill ourself.” again he said to his wife “Let us kill ourselves” in *Mrs. Dalloway* (Tilak 70). If Germany successfully invaded England fearing how the Nazis would treat a Jewish intellectual and his wife. To escape the German bombs dropping on London, the couple moved out to Monk’s House. It was a wise choice – the Blitz destroyed their London home and Hogarth Offices (www.shmoop.com). Virginia echoed in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the voice of Septimus and Rezia had planned to kill themselves in order to escape form the life.
The impact of two great World Wars which affected the mind of Virginia Woolf could not be ignored by the readers. She remembered the two wars and the loss of precious human being’s lives led her to madness. The above mentioned wars proved a tremendous impact on Virginia Woolf.

One morning she was having breakfast in bed and I was sitting by the bedside talking with her. She was calm, well, perfectly sane. Suddenly she became violently excited, thought her mother was in the room, and began talking to her. That was the beginning of the long second stage in a complete mental breakdown (Woolf, *Journey* 79-80).

It was due to the First World War.

Woolf said about Virginia’s mental conditions in the following lines.

I think it must have been about the middle of January that I began to be uneasy about Virginia and consulted Octavia Wilberforce. Octavia was a remarkable character. Her ancestors were the famous Wilberforce of the antislavery movement; their portraits hung on her walls and she had inherited their beautiful furniture and their fine library of eighteenth-century books. Her family was
closely connected with Virginia’s both having their roots in the Clapham Sect (Journey 80).

The World War II broke out in September 1939. With her sensitive awareness of the horrors and devastation of these global conflicts she should not certainly have squeezed life into the convention of comedy without an outrageous falsification of the contemporary social reality. Jane Austen and Scott had managed to do so earlier because the Napoleonic Wars did not affect them and their country directly. Their vision of life remained undisturbed by the events in France. The writing about them in Virginia’s essay “The Leaning Tower” (Marcus 223). Virginia Woolf says,

Scott never saw the sailors drowning at Trafalgar, Jane Austen never heard the roar at Waterloo. Neither of them heard Napoleon’s voice as we hear Hitler’s voice as we sit at home of an evening (Woolf, Collected 2: 164).

In May and June 1940, Leonard, Virginia and others had discussed between themselves and with friends what action they would take in the event of a German invasion.

There were German planes over Rodmell one day and Virginia and I were standing in the garden when we heard the swishing of
bombs through the air overhead and then the dull thuds of explosions towards the River Ouse (Woolf, *Journey* 34). They had no illusions about the way in which a politically active, intellectual Jew and his wife would be treated by the Nazis. “We agreed that if the time came we would shut the garage door and commit suicide.” Leonard wrote, in June, 1940, Adrian Stephen, her psychoanalyst brother, provided the Woolf’s with lethal doses of morphine to use in the event of a German invasion. The period between April 1940 and January 1941 was stressful for everyone, especially in Southern England, with air-raids and the mounting threat of invasion,

The first sight of German planes which we saw was very odd. The real air war began for us in August 1940. on Sunday, August 18, Virginia and I had just sat down to eat our lunch when there was a tremendous roar and we were just in time to see two planes fly a few feet above the church spire, over the garden, and over our roof, and looking up as they passed above the window we saw the swastika on them. They fired and hit a cottage in the village and fired another shot into a house in Northease (32).

The German’s bombs were aimed at and missed the cement works, but one or two of them hit and breached the river bank (34). In the same year that is, 1940, the Woolf’s London Home in Mecklenburgh Square was bombed in August and their country home, Monks House in Rodmell East
Sussex which was their permanent residence. This attack was a great
temporal torture for Virginia.

For Virginia Woolf’s sensitive soul, war was horrible and nerve
shattering experience. She was weak and sickly, and due to war she
suffered from constant fits of depression. However, she continued to
work and work hard like her grandfather and father. She was living in
London, and as the wife of Leonard Woolf and the daughter of Leslie
Stephen, as by virtue of her own attainments, she was highly honoured in
the Bloomsbury circle whose other members were among the greatest men
of letters of the day. Association with this literary club was an enriching
experience and a constant source of inspiration for her. It did much to
stimulate her to creative activities—finally it was inevitable to avoid
suicide. The outbreak of the World War II destroyed Virginia’s will to
live. Virginia’s London Monk’s house was bombed and she lived until
her death in Monk’s House. She brought the same incident on the
character of Septimus Warren Smith. He had no faith in human nature
and with no will to live like Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf echoed the effects of the wars in *Mrs. Dalloway*
through the character of Septimus Warren Smith. He participated in the
first world war, where he met his officer Evans, his fastest friend, was
killed before his very eyes, but he could not feel for his death. He could escape death, but his nerves were shattered. He could feel nothing. He could not bear loneliness. In order to escape this loneliness he married Lucrezia who was only twenty-four, without any friend in Britain, left Italy for the sack of her husband. The death of Evans led him to mental disorder. The war had ended, but it not ends for people like Septimus Warren Smith who were its victims. He suffered from neurosis or nerves breakdown which induced by horrors of life in the trenches. Again and again he said to his wife, “Let us kill ourselves” (Tilak 85). Before committing suicide he was very kind and affectionate to his wife Rezia. Virginia Woolf was very kind and considerate towards his husband before her suicide. It was clear that Septimus Warren Smith was novelist’s representation of the evil effects of war, of the nervous and madness tragedy and suffering caused by it. Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist a portrait inspired by the novelist’s malice and hatred of those who dominated others, specially under cover of humanity. Once Septimus, told her wife, “I will kill myself” (Mrs. D 20). “The whole world was clamoring: kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sake?” (100).

The last novel of Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* was written under the direct shadow of the Second World War. The even tenor of
London life was seriously disturbed by wanton bombings and Virginia Woolf was compelled to shift from the city to the country. But she carried on her creative work even in the midst of the booming of guns and the shrill of sirens. In her diary we find a vivid reflection of the anguish of her mind. They spent night after night waiting for something dreadful to happen with their gas masks ready at hand (Singh 55). In the view of Leonard, in fact, Virginia was working very hard. Like Virginia, “‘Septimus has been working too hard’ – that was all she said to her mother” (Mrs. D 27). Virginia had begun both Roger Fry and *Between the Acts* in the first half of the 1938 and still writing them all through 1939. She enjoyed writing *Between the Acts*, but the life of Roger became a burden to her. When Virginia was writing the biography of Roger Fry, it was far more concerned with the facts and determined by facts than a novel—it was fact not a fiction: “When I (Leonard Woolf) first read it, he thought that there was a fact in it” (Woolf ed. *Writer’s* 328). After completing the manuscript of her last (posthumously published) novel, *Between the Acts*, Woolf fell victim to a depression similar to that which she had earlier experienced.

The onset of World War II, the destruction of her London home during the Blitz, and the cool reception given to her biography of her late friend Roger Fry all worsened her condition until she was unable to work.
Between depressive periods, Woolf was very creative and productive. In early 1913, she completed her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. But by July of that year, she was re-admitted to a nursing home, where she was given the barbiturate Vernal to help her sleep. She returned home soon after but then attempted suicide by overdosing on Vernal. She did not recover from this episode until late September 1914.

During the interwar period, Woolf was a significant figure in London Literary Society and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. Her most famous works include the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928), and the book-length essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), and Virginia Woolf, *The London Scene: Six Essays on London Life* (London) it is a gorgeous little book, but the content proved a disappointment. It was written as a series of bi-monthly columns for the British edition of *Good Housekeeping* in 1931 and, perhaps constrained by the intended audience; Woolf was not at her essayist best here. There were memorable turns of phrase but these essays rarely rise above clever description; they simply didn’t have the wit and whimsy, in short the magic, of the best of Woolf’s essays. The one exception in this book is the essay titled “Great Men’s Houses.” On its own, it’s not worth the price of the book, but it’s certainly well worth seeking out and reading.
Virginia brought the same situation in her novel. Mrs. Ramsay’s death came all of a sudden while she was in London. Mrs. MacNab touched the grey clock, which she wore when she was busy with gardening. “The garden wore a weary look,” as everything in it is utter confusion and disorder she remembered that Mrs. Ramsay, wearing her clock stood there with one of the children near her. Her Boots and shoes, a brush and a comb were lying on the table, as if she thought that she would come there the next morning. She talked to her in a sweet and pleasant manner. But she was now dead and would not come back again. As an artist, she looked at the world not through the eyes of the blind Tires as but through the intuition of the wise Mrs. Ramsay; as a critic, she was interested in the sensibility not of “the women (who) come and go/talking of Michaelangelo” but of the poor Mrs. Brown who travels in the corner of a railway carriage (Sharma 34). The whole family was in a state of gloom, as if a tragedy had overtaken them. Andrew and Prue were also dead. Mrs. MacNab’s heart was filled with the many acts of kindness of Mrs. Ramsay and she imagined her clearly moving about and talking as she used to do when alive. “Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage starched his arms out one dark morning. But Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out in vain. They remained empty” (LH 203) Here Mrs. Woolf’s detachment
seems a little strained, and, in transitional part of the book is strongest part (Majumdar and McLaurin 194).

Leonard Woolf said that Virginia had finally finished *Between the Acts* and had given it to Leonard to read. He saw at once now the ominous symptoms and became again very uneasy. After the entry in her diary on February 26, quoted above, there were only two entries before she committed suicide one on March 28, another one on March 8, of which 24 was important. Leonard then gave the unpublished portion of the March 8, entry and the final entry of March 24, since they showed, Leonard thought, very clearly the state of her mind in those last days. It was only in the first day of 1941 that the deep disturbance in her mind began to show itself clearly. Leonard should continue to quote from her diary because her own words were more revealing and authentic than Leonard’s memory. The entry for January 9 was again strange, showing her preoccupation with death.

Virginia was always thinking about death and her thoughts went on line an imaginary world like *Utopia* by Thomas Moore. “A blank all frost. Still frost, Burning white, Burning blue, The elms red. I did not mean to describe, once more, the downs in snow, but it came. And I can’t help even now turning to look at Asheam Down, red, purple, dove blue
grey, with the cross so melo dramatically against it (The stone cross on the Rodmell church is visible form the window of our sitting – room silhouetted against the down).

What is the phrase I always remember – or forget? Look you last on all things lovely. Yesterday Mrs. Dedman was buried upside down. A mishap. Such a heavy woman, as Louie put it, feasting spontaneously upon the grave. Today she buries the Aunt whose husband saw the vision at Seaford. Their home was bombed by the bomb we heard early one morning last week. And someone is lecturing and arranging the room. Are these the things that are interesting? That recall: that say Stop, you are so fair? Well, all life is so fair at my age. I mean, without much more of it I suppose to follow. And other side of the hill there’ll be no rosy blue red snow (Woolf, *Journey 78*).

The above said lines are the best example of Virginia’s mental disturbances. Really she was going mad. From these accounts an accurate diagnosis of her final illness could be made. From the suicide not alone, most psychiatrists would make a confident diagnosis of severe depression. She said that she is not only depressed, but going ‘mad’ again; she was beginning to hear voices (Virginia influenced upon Septimus the same situation). She couldn’t concentrate, couldn’t read or write. She showed self-blame, believing that she was spoiling her husband’s life.
She felt hopeless, couldn’t went on any longer. She believed suicide was the best course.

Next proof for Virginia’s madness was Dr. Peter Dally, who was a psychiatrist: “Virginia’s need to write was, among other things, to make sense out of mental chaos and gain control of madness (www.suiteidi.com). Though her novels she made her inner world less frightening. Writing was often agony but it provided the ‘strongest pleasure’ she knew. Again Dr. Peter Dally said that, if she had been alive today, Woolf’s condition could have been treated with Lithium, Prozac and therapy. By analyzing records, Mr. Dally has identified a pattern of depression occurring every January and February, followed by a “high” in the summer.

Virginia tried four times to commit suicide. In 1904, she had another breakdown and was confined to a nursing home for rest and solitude. During this episode, she heard voices and threw herself out of a window like her brother Adrian. She also experienced major attacks of mental illness between 1910 and 1912. Once Virginia jumped through the window to kill her in 1915 and her brother Adrian who was prone to suicidal despair, also threw him from the window when he was in school. She influenced the same incidents in her novel, through the character of
Septimus Warren Smith. He heard the World telling him to kill himself like Virginia heard the Bird’s Voice. According to Virginia Woolf, the meaning of death is given in *Mrs. Dalloway*,

When Clarissa party was over she heard through Sir William Bradshaw the callous mental specialist, that a young man Septimus has committed suicide by throwing himself over the parapet, she realizes the essential meaning of death. A young man had killed himself, and.... He had thrown himself from a window (196).

Virginia Woolf had indicated that Septimus was intended as a “double” for Clarissa herself; originally the two characters were merged in her mind. Virginia made both Clarissa and Septimus had literary talent in their youth. But Clarissa was outwardly successful, while Septimus was tormented and miserable. He had threatened suicide and is under treatment at present for a nervous breakdown. But the bluff general practitioner Dr. Holmes who attended him had little comprehension of his mental predicament and told him jovially that there was nothing wrong with him. Did Virginia Woolf really commit suicide? (www.chasingthefrog.com). The researcher strongly supports Virginia’s suicide. Yes, Virginia truly committed suicide. There were so many evidences for her suicide

✔ Leonard found Virginia’s walking stick and hat on the bank of the river.
Some children found the body in the river and informed to Leonard.

After suicide Virginia’s body was in the mortuary in a decaying condition.

Virginia’s suicide letters.

Though Virginia belonged to Clapham (evangelism) Christian sect, she was not given a place in the church yard for burial because she committed suicide. Virginia was cremated like non Christians.

Before her death, Virginia Woolf wrote three letters; one of which was addressed to her sister, Vanessa, the other two to her husband, Leonard. Here they had the final one, discovered at their home by Leonard on the 28 March 1941, just days after he had found his wife returning home soaking wet following what he later believed to be a failed suicide attempt. The second time however, Woolf succeeded in her efforts to escape a lifetime of mental illness, and three weeks later. Virginia’s body was found in the River Ouse, her coat’s pockets were filled with heavy pebbles (www.chasingthe.frog.com).

Virginia Woolf left two similar notes for her husband and another one to her sister. In these letters, she admitted to “go mad again” and expressed the belief that she would not recover this time
One letter was found in her house which was written ten days earlier, before a previous unsuccessful attempt, where she returned home from a walk soaking wet, saying that she had fallen in River Ouse. Around noon on March 28, 1941, at the age of fifty-nine, she walked down to the River Ouse, near her weekend house in Sussex. Leaving her hat and waking stick on the riverbank, she placed some heavy stones in her coat pocket and drowned herself. Her body was found on April 18, and the coroner declared the death a suicide. Virginia Woolf commit suicide on 28 March 1941 (www.en.wikisource.org)

Leonard Woolf could not find Virginia anywhere in the house or garden, he felt sure that she had gone down to the river. He ran across the fields down to river and almost immediately found her walking-stick (cane) and hat lying upon the bank. He searched for some time and then went back to the house and informed the police. It was three weeks before her body was found when some children saw it floating in the river. The horrible business of the identification and inquest took place in the Newhaven Mortuary on the 18th and 19th April. Virginia was cremated in Brighton on Monday, 21st April. On March (Friday) 28th Leonard went for lunch. But Virginia was not there. He found the following letter on the sitting room mantle piece (Journey 93).
The other letter was found in her house which was written ten days earlier, before a previous unsuccessful attempt where she returned home from the river soaking wet, where she had fallen. Around noon on March 28, 1941 at the age of fifty-nine, she walked down to the River Ouse, near her weekend house in Sussex... She placed some heavy stones in her coat pocket and drowned herself in the river. Virginia Woolf became very cross if she lacked vigorous physical activity. Virginia Woolf felt her best if she frequently “does battle” on the tennis or racquetball court (or engages in another form of competitive sport). Her own feelings and emotions were something of an enigma (puzzle) to Virginia, and it is often difficult for her to waves proves that she gave great importance to this flow. The significance of life and death is her central theme. It was in life as men and women experience it that the readers found out only the magnificence of life but also its ugliness and chaos. She showed that while Mrs. Dalloway loved to create order by overwhelmed by the horror and chaos of life and courts death.

Virginia’s husband, Leonard Woolf described her early stages of mania: “she talked almost without stopping for two or three days, paying no attention to anyone in the room or anything said to Her... Then gradually it became completely incoherent, a mere jumble of dissociate words.” “In full flight of madness,” according to Dally, “birds spoke to
her in Greek; her dead mother materialized and harangued her, voices
called her to ‘do wild things.”

Virginia’s letter follows in her own manuscript given below:
Monday April 21. On March (Friday) 28, Leonard went for lunch but Virginia was not there. He found the following letter on the sitting room mantelpiece.

You will find Roger’s letters to Mauro in writing table drawer in Lodge. Will you destroy all my papers?. These words were written in the margin of her second suicide letter to Leonard. This is the last words of Virginia Woolf wrote by her.

I shan’t recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can’t concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don’t think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can’t fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can’t even write this properly. I can’t read what I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that – everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can’t go on spoiling your life any longer. I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been.

Virginia
Virginia wrote another letter to her sister Vanessa

Sunday

Dearest,

You can’t think how I loved your letter. But I feel that I have gone too far this time to come back again. I am certain now that I am going mad again. It is just as it was the first time, I am always hearing voices, and I know I shan’t get over it now. All I want to say is that Leonard has been so astonishingly good every day, always; I can’t imagine that anyone could have done more for me than he has. We have been perfectly happy until the last few weeks, when this horror began. Will you assure him of this? I feel he has so much to do that he will go on, better without me, and you will help him. I can hardly think clearly any more. If I could I would tell you what you and the children have meant to me. I think you know. I have fought against it, but I can’t any longer.

Virginia.

Virginia Woolf clearly expressed her reasons for committing suicide in her last letter to husband.

After writing this note Virginia left Monk’s House, Rodmell – her home – at 11.30 a.m., and walking half – mile taking her walking stick, and crossed the water meadows to the River Ouse. Virginia Woolf wore
an old tweed coat with stones stuffed in the pockets. Her body was not recovered until the 18 April, when it was discovered by children a short way downstream. Her husband identified the body, and an inquest was held the following day at new heaven. The verdict in the standard phrase of the time was “suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed.” She was cremated privately at Brighton on 21 April, and her ashes scattered less than one of the pair of elms at Monk’s House.

Virginia Woolf’s Grave, Monk’s house

People from all walks of life paid homage to the memory tomb of Virginia Woolf. Leonard buried Virginia’s ashes at the foot of the great elm tree on the bank of the great lawn in the garden, called the Croft, which looks out over the field and the water meadows. There were two
great elms with boughs interlaced which they always called Leonard and Virginia. The first week of January 1943, in a great gale one of the elms blown down. There were so many other evidences for Virginia’s suicide.

Lehman who was in charge of Hogarth Press said that,

...in the next few days Lehman read the draft of the novel Between the Acts, ‘the first thing I noticed was that the typing – her own typing – and the spelling were more eccentric, more irregular than in any typescript of hers I had seen before. Each page was splashed with corrections, in a way that suggested that the hand that had made them had been governed by high voltage electric current (www.en.wikisource.org).

Lehman then received a letter from Virginia saying the silly and trivial and could not be published, with a covering letter from Leonard saying that she was on the verge of a breakdown. Both were probably written the day before her death. “By the time they reached me it was all over.... I was aware...of an undertow of sadness, melancholy, of great fear, but the main impression was of creature of laughter and movement.” Lehman’s memoir showed that her self-criticism was quite unjustified, exemplified by her low opinion of her novel which she had thought well
off few months earlier. Reassurances about the book and her recovery had been frequent and unavailing.

Kapur quotes on John Lehman: To examine Virginia’s novels in the light of contraries as seen in the vision and structure of her novels. John Lehman says: “The full richness and significance of what she had already given to the world is yet to be understood…” (14). This study has attempted yet another mode of approach to the rich and varied mental and emotional experience of the artist.

Another witness washer general practitioner, Dr. Octavia Wilberforce, a descendant of William Wilberforce. At that time she was also running a diary farm near at hand, and for some months had kept the Woolf’s supplied with extra butter and cream in that time of shortages. She had visited Monks House frequently from January 1941 on, but a formal consultation did not take place until 17 March. Three days earlier Virginia had discussed one of her last short stories with Doctor Wilberforce and told her that it had left her “desperate-depressed to the lowest depths.” At Leonard’s request she examined Virginia on the 26 March, the day before her death. The doctor was ill with influenza and rose from her sick-bed for the consultation. Virginia told her that it was “quiet unnecessary to have come” and did not answer her questions
frankly. She was generally ‘resistive,’ and demanded a promise that she
would not be ordered to have a rest cure, - that is, an admission to a
psychiatric nursing home – before she would submit to a physical
examination. When examined by Dr. Wilberforce the day before her
death, she had at first refused to discuss her symptoms or to admit that
there was anything wrong. Each of these symptoms was typical of severe
depression. The only typical item in the letter was her clear admission
that she was ill – that she was going mad and has a “terrible disease.”
Virginia Woolf and her madness was a worst disease.

Fortunately, her friends and family tolerated her and took care of
Virginia... Her husband Leonard acted as her protector, seeing her through
the depressions and nipping some of her manic surges in the bud: “I am
alive; rather energetic,” “Virginia wrote in her diary.” “But half the
horror is that (Leonard) instead of being, as I gathered, sympathetic has
the old rigid obstacle – my health.”

When Virginia’s suicide was declared hundreds of people sent their
condolences to Virginia’s husband and her sister Vanessa Bell. Her
suicide was both tragic and shocking even to a nation in the turmoil of the
Second World War. For the first time these personal and often intimate
letters, are stored in the Special Collections of the University of Sussex’s
Library for more than 30 years, recently it have been published. They included messages from eminent intellectuals and writers of her contemporizes, like E.M. Forster, H.G. Wells and T.S. Eliot, as well as students, reformers, refugees, devoted readers and the Woolf’s close circle of Sussex friends and relatives. Afterwards, Letters on the Death of Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh University, £17.99) is edited by Sybil Old-Field, a Research Reader in English at the University of Sussex, who spent five years tracing the writers and their surviving relatives to seek permission to publish as many as possible of the 250 letters in full.

This is the end of the story of her life, but the letters also give us a fresh perspective on what was thought about Virginia Woolf by her contemporaries, especially her personal relationships, “Says Old-Field.” During her life she was accused of being aloof and sarcastic, but it is obvious from many of these letters that people felt supported by her and sensitively understood.

Virginia’s childhood housekeeper Sophie Farrell, who was living at Sharpstone in Sussex, wrote: “She was always so sweet and good to me, I could never forget” her. Her former lover, who was living at Sharp stone, the writer Vita Sackville-West described “a loss that can never diminish.” Her Brighton doctor, Octavia Wilberforce, was deeply affected by the news.
Andrea Powell, who is a research scholar on Virginia Woolf, says this comment on web.

Studying Virginia Woolf’s life and works has been, for me, both a depressing experience and a source of inspiration. Her life was one of many horrific experiences, and in her writing, she seems to find no real meaning in living. On the other hand, she does reach profound smaller, more indefinite conclusions about several issues, including gender, sexuality, grief, and madness. Furthermore, she paved the way for acceptance of women writers, of which I am (www.en.wikisource.org).

It is a great tragedy the Victorian society that did not accept Virginia’s extraordinary intelligence simply because she was a female writer. Virginia used the term death in many of her novels. She thought that ‘Death’ is the only way to escape from the worldly miseries. In the middle of the novels she kills the characters for example Septimus Warren Smith’s suicide from the train. From this one could understand that Virginia’s mental condition. According Belle’s view on Virginia Woolf that Virginia was a famous British writer. She was not only a prolific author, she also wrote letters personal diaries throughout her life; which have been published by the Bloomsbury Group and her close friends and relatives (Woolf and Bell).
To conclude this chapter Virginia Woolf had a history of mental illness on both sides of her family. Many people (including her husband) believe that Virginia Woolf suffered from manic depression, also called bipolar disorder. Unfortunately, little treatment was available to her at the time, and she eventually took her own life at the age of fifty-nine.

The researcher is delighted to say that every year the world is celebrating the abolition of Suicide’s Day on September 14. Human beings, whether man or woman, sometimes take a wrong decision to commit suicide due to foolishness, cowardly, etc. which is a very pathetic condition. From 1960, every year the world is celebrating this day to abolish ‘the suicides.’ And to create the awareness to the people.

Virginia and her husband Leonard.