Many critics share the same view that Virginia Woolf fails to provide memorable portraits such as those provided by other great writers. E.M. Forster in his study *Virginia Woolf* declares:

She could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered, for instance, or Dorothea Casaubon, or Sophia and Constance in ‘The Old Wives’ Tale.¹

Perhaps the impression that she does not create memorable characters is due to the fact that her portraits are of a different kind to which the readers have
been accustomed. We are not here concerned with, whether they are justified
in their charges against Mrs. Woolf but with the exploration of her method of
characterization which is quite different from the treatment of characters in
fiction in general.

Mrs. Woolf’s concept of characterization was given in her essay “Modern
Fiction” as well as in “Character in Fiction” published in The Criterion, July 1924
which was reprinted as “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” the same year. She was
not inclined to create characters as was done by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy
who were “never interested in character in itself; or in the book itself. They
were interested in something outside.”² As for her she set herself for higher
flights. What she did impart was Mrs. Brownness that remained rather spiritual.
All that she says is that as a writer she should look within the character of Mrs
Brown, the Mrs Brownness, as the latter is assumed to have been travelling with
her on a train. Her venture is to remind all partners in the business of writing
books, as companions in the railway carriage, as fellow travellers with Mrs.
Brown to rescue and express her ‘at whatever cost of life, limb, damage to
valuable property’, and ‘set in her high relations to the world before the train
stopped and she disappeared forever.’³ It is personality that interested her. For
her, ‘each person is a multiplicity of characters and identities’. And her portrayal of characters is but a ceaseless process of becoming, that is, the personality ‘in its flowing through time’. In the process, the readers are presented with multiple views of her characters for building up a profile of a particular character’s traits and life being.

There may be some substance in the allegations against Mrs. Woolf by people like Arnold Bennett who say that she can’t create characters that survive. But her only answer to these allegations is:

... but I leave that to the Nation: it’s only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now; the old post – Dostoeievsky argument.\(^5\)

But it may be noted that, for whatever criticism leveled against her for her characterization she created her characters successfully to suit her purpose. A novelist who is interested in the psychic being of character will necessarily leave all details necessary for novelists like Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy. Truly as M. Mani Meitei in his thesis *The Stream of Consciousness Technique with special reference to the Novels of Virginia Woolf* states regarding the difference in the
characterization of Mrs. Woolf and the Edwardians that ‘One is shut up in himself and the other shut out’.  

Before getting into the detailed study of Mrs. Woolf’s art of characterization, it will be pertinent to locate her in the context of modern fiction where a remarkable change is observed in the early twentieth century. One factor to be reckoned with is the tendency in the writers for the search within their self. Proust, William James, Henry James and James Joyce forged a psychological theme in the novels. While Freud, Jung and their followers have shown the terrible abysmal depths of human psyche. A human being is further discovered as a bundle of inconsistencies, harried by his desires, lusts and nightmares. The modern writer, hence come to view human personality from a new perspective under the pressure of developments in physical science, psychology, philosophy and other streams of knowledge. He consciously or unconsciously comes to debase the ‘hero’ to the ‘antihero’ of modern society bringing forth a reciprocating change in the pattern of fiction.

Virginia Woolf stood up as a spokesperson for these modern writers. Indeed the conventional writers drew their characters minutely about how they dressed, what they ate, and various other things. We come to know all about
them but not what they are. However, Mrs. Woolf endeavours to portray human character following the methods of life:

... by observing the incoherence, the fresh natural sequence of a person who, wishing to tell the story of a friend’s life in talk, breaks off a thousand times to bring in something fresh, to add something forgotten, so that in the end, though one may feel that one has been in the presence of life, the particular life in question remains vague. This hand-to-mouth method, this ladling out of sentences which have the dripping brilliance of words that live upon real lips, is admirable for one purpose, disastrous for another. All is fluent and graphic; but no character or situation emerges clearly. Bits of extraneous matter are left sticking to the edges. For all their brilliancy the scenes are clouded; the crisis are blurred.\(^7\)

And after reading her novels we come ‘to know the outline, not the detail’\(^8\); which is one way of knowing her characters.

The portrayal of characters so far in the hands of the traditional novelists has been confined mainly to the conventional pattern that is set against a
number of actions and reactions seen outwardly. A drawback of this method was to deprive the reader of contact with the durational undercurrents of human personality. The characterization itself ends with the superficial self. The characters in the modern fiction like that of Virginia Woolf are differently poised from the angle of inner being. This kind of bold and dramatic experimentation now comes forward to penetrate into the thick curtain of the superficial self in order to present the nascent states of consciousness that permeates one other. In Clarissa Dalloway’s character, for instance, we are made to realize through the meanderings of her consciousness, the inner reality of herself. And similarly, as we float along with the six characters in *The Waves* in their stream of thoughts we become aware of an infinite permeation of a thousand impressions which reveal the pattern of their consciousness as it melts from one state into another.

Virginia Woolf’s keen sense of the complexity of character is clearly displayed in her mode of characterization. The basis of her characterization is that – personality flows through time and it is in the state of a ceaseless process of becoming. Her characters are not engaged in any active clash, or in any overt dramatic conflict; they are shown living from moment to moment, with multitudes of impressions. G.S. Fraser rightly observes:
What bounds the human creature for Mrs. Woolf is not the edge of his skin but the outer limits of his perceptions; and thus it is harder for her characters, each tightly if palpably closed in an exquisite world of his own, to communicate or to come into any sort of collision than for characters more crudely conceived. For my view of the sunset does not communicate or collide with yours.\(^9\)

The descriptive approach of characterization, where description of what he or she looked like, how they dressed, their oddities, and whether they were good or bad people are totally discarded for we get to know only the externals this way. Perhaps, this accounts for why Virginia Woolf’s novel lack great characters that remain in our mind after we have finished reading the novel. In fact, it is their lack of definite physical dimensions which impels Leonard Woolf to call the people in her novel as ‘ghosts’.\(^{10}\)

Joseph Warren Beach in his *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique* makes an observation on the art of characterization of H.G. Wells. Wells, he says, does not take seriously the art of characterization which forms
three fourths of fiction. He is not good in characterization except in a superficial way:

He has a knack of hitting off types, no doubt of that. But he does not get *into* the characters.\(^\text{11}\)

The fault perhaps does lie in not realizing the importance of getting into them. No doubt, Mrs. Woolf successfully gets into the inner state of her characters. But this according to few people like Thomas H. Uzzell has its limitation, that all these characters share similarity in inner states. This tendency he states is most observable in the writings of highly introverted writers like Virginia Woolf:

Her characters, moreover, are so exhaustively psychologized that they seem seized with locomotor ataxia; she, like Dostoevski, and even Joyce, dissects motives with such thoroughness that the characters capacity for action, which alone is significant, fails them, and they vanish, swooning, in the maze of their complexes.\(^\text{12}\)

Indeed her characters represent “round” in the process of becoming or evolving; far from being types.
However, it is undeniable that her range of characters is a narrow one. First of all, because her focus is on the indefinable, fluid personality and secondly she concentrates on those people into whose minds she could most fully enter and through whose eyes she could imagine herself looking out upon the world. She picks her central character from the higher rungs of society; having incomes and salaries. For instance, look at the Dalloways, the Ramsays, their needs are already fulfilled. And around them are created the minor characters like Miss Doris Kilman, maid Lucy, etc. Indeed like typical characters of a psychological novel, her characters:

... live in a cocoon, spun from the finest shades of meaning, which a society, completely unoccupied by the business of getting its living, has time to spin round and about itself.13

Virginia Woolf’s characterization is somewhat similar to Bertrand Russell’s construction of physical objects in which objects of perception are constructed from the impressions of perceivers, but not perceivers constructed from each other’s percepts. Her characters are indeed described indirectly through other people’s impressions and thoughts of them. Hence, “a sufficiently rich partial set of perspectives determines not only the overall world but the
other, missing perspective as well.”\textsuperscript{14} As a result, understanding her characters becomes a cumulative process. At this point, it is worthy to note that critics like Joan Bennett stands up in support of Mrs. Woolf’s characterization against charges like E.M. Forster’s. She holds that:

Mrs Ramsay, Mrs Dalloway, Eleanor Pargiter, each of the main personalities in \textit{Between the Acts}, and many others from her books inhabit the mind of the reader and enlarge the capacity for imaginative sympathy. It is sympathy rather than judgment that she invokes, her personages are apprehended rather than comprehended.\textsuperscript{15}

Now, the characters themselves, their broodings, their consciousness, their past and their present, the innumerable impressions and experiences, memories, intuitions, all serve as a means of bringing out the disposition of the character and also for relating them to other times and places rather than the writer’s mind, her knowledge, her skill or the colour of her temperament. The flashback technique also gives a multidimensional quality to the characters; the unfolding of these memories in the character’s mind, chaotic may they appear but they highlight the characters. And this very nature of receiving impressions by the
characters themselves manifests the incomplete nature of discovering and unfolding life.

The difficulty of knowing people is the central concern of almost all her novels. What we find in her novels is a situation where:

Scene melts into scene; person into person. People rise out of a fog of talk, and sink back into talk again. They are soft and shapeless with words. There is no grasping them.\(^\text{16}\)

This situation approximately complies with real life, for:

In daily life we never understand each other, neither complete clairvoyance nor complete confessional exists. We know each other approximately, by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy.\(^\text{17}\)

The truth being that there are depths which we can never reach. And Life is more complex inside than outside. As a result, knowing a person thoroughly inside out almost becomes unattainable. So, what Mrs. Woolf provides for her
readers is but ‘scraps, orts and fragments’\textsuperscript{18} of her character. The reader is to sum the character up for himself.

Virginia Woolf’s originality lies in her ability to explore the strangeness of the fragments of the inner experience of human life and represent this state in an ordered manner in fiction. Though her first two novels \textit{The Voyage Out} and \textit{Night and Day} were written in the conventional style before she discovered her originality and before she made her bold experiments, these novels nevertheless displayed her “artistic evolution which obviously worked according to an inner chronology that could neither be interrupted nor speeded up”.\textsuperscript{19} These two novels served an important stage in Mrs. Woolf’s art of characterization, for here she had begun to unfold some of the characters’ minds, though not the whole of consciousness. In her ability to enter the minds of the characters to record the inner experiences of their inner world. There are signs of evolution of the later concerns as a psychological novelist. The characters too, are related to one another with the help of events and incidents that are woven in a traditional style. Yet the books are not lacking in traces of rejection for she surely felt the need for taking up an altogether new manner in writing fiction. Her very intention of experimenting with a new method of picturing human being is clearly seen in a budding state in these two novels.
One who goes through *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* will observe that they are far from the proclamations made by Virginia Woolf in her “Modern Fiction” and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”. Almost each character in these novels is presented initially by introduction of their appearance either by the novelist or by one of the characters. The Dalloways, Mr Hilbery, Mary Datchet and a few other minor characters are introduced with a supply of detailed picture. However, we may take careful note of the change in her presentation of her main characters like Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewet, Ralph Denham and Katherine Hilbery. They are not drawn with full description of their appearance. Rather they are presented with a more elusive nature unlike the secondary figures which are presented with a quality that could be summed up because of their limited nature. If keenly observed, not only can we trace a spirit of a slightly changed art of presenting character but also we find Mrs. Woolf voicing her opinion of the very being which is elusive, and cannot be grasped by all means. The inability to see the real life, the depth and secrecy of each individual soul, the presence of an unreachable corner in human being is brought out in *The Voyage Out* through Terence Hewet:

> You can’t see my bubble; I can’t see yours; all we see of each other is a speck like the wick in the middle of the flame."
What we can infer from these impressions is that Virginia Woolf at some degree starts feeling the pulse of her originality in the course of writing these two novels. And here itself, she had made a slight attempt at the psychological rendering of her characters which is an altogether new and different method of characterization against convention. An instance can be seen in Rachel Vinrace’s case in *The Voyage Out*, where she is developed through a slight impression she made upon Helen Ambrose:

Helen looked at her. Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large inquiring eyes; denied beauty, how that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of colour and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than normally in competent for her years. Mrs Ambrose, who had been speaking much at random, now reflected that she certainly did not look forward to the intimacy of three or four weeks on boardship which was threatened. Women of her own age usually boring her, she supposed that girls would be worse. She glanced at Rachel again. Yes! how clear it was that she would be vacillating, emotional, when you said something to her it would make no
more lasting impression than the stroke of a stick upon water. There was nothing to take hold of in girls – nothing hard, permanent - , satisfactory.\textsuperscript{21}

Similarly, in the case of Katherine who is seen through the eyes of Ralph Denham though in this case Denham’s judgment is not completely true. Undeniably, this unfolding of the consciousness of the characters due to the impressions made by Rachel and Katherine upon their minds is a kind of a feat of Mrs. Woolf, which needs more time to mature. Rachel nor Katherine cannot be summed up as they are presented from multiple points of view, they remain abstract compared with other characters. Neither Helen Ambrose’s impressions of Rachel nor Ralph’s impressions of Katherine give the whole picture of Rachel or Katherine except that, they supply the hints to their personality.

From her third novel, \textit{Jacob’s Room}, Virginia Woolf discords the traditional mode of drawing fictional characters. Rather she comes to adopt the stream-of-consciousness technique to convey the truth of the character’s consciousness. From \textit{Jacob’s Room} onwards, the use of her multiple view points and inner thought became fundamental to her art of characterization. Excluding \textit{Jacob’s Room} and \textit{Orlando}, in her later novels she was to reveal human
personality partly through its own self-consciousness and partly through the picture projected by it upon other minds. As a result, her characters remain evasive, without explicable limits. They are seen in luminous shades, flickering and perpetually changing. In other word, her characters remain fragmentary and not well-rounded, as her whole energy was directed in exposing the hidden state of human personality in its inchoate, fleeting and generally impenetrable state.

The remaining portion of the chapter will analyse Virginia Woolf’s art of portraying character, done from a psychological point of view in her four major experimental novels *Jacob’s room, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

\[\text{I}\]

*Jacob’s Room (1922)*

It is in this novel that Virginia Woolf experiments with her new vision of human being as “fleeting, fragmentary and evasive”. On her dairy record of 26th July 1922, she admits:
There’s no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; and that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise.\textsuperscript{22}

The occasion is the publication of \textit{Jacob’s Room}, ‘a disconnected rhapsody’\textsuperscript{23} in her own terms. It is in this novel that Mrs. Woolf completely abandons the conventions of story, narrative as well as characters, for she could express life as she saw it.

In \textit{Jacob’s Room}, Virginia Woolf’s intention is to give an impression of the personality of Jacob Flanders, a young Englishman. She altogether rejects the idea of telling Jacob’s story consecutively and in detail, but what she does is to give random hints. Jacob’s personality emerges through the various images and impressions of the other people he comes in contact with. Keeping this in view, it won’t be wrong to say that the theme of \textit{Jacob’s Room} is one personality, affecting and affected by the others who come into contact with it. One important point to note is, in all her later novels excluding \textit{Orlando}, this impact of one personality upon another continues as an important means of composing the portrait of a human being.
In *Jacob’s Room*, Mrs. Woolf has sketched the outline of Jacob Flanders. The picture that we get of Jacob is indeed a series of psychological insights. We see Jacob as others sees him. His life is painted entirely through the reflections and impressions of other people around him. The novelist herself abstains from giving any external description from her side; instead she unfolds his character gradually from the mind of other characters whom he goes with, meets or talks. Thus, Jacob’s character is rendered via the successive description of impressions. And inspite of being the central main character of the novel, he remains sketchy. In view of the readers who have been used to ‘solid characters’, she remained doubtful of the success of *Jacob’s Room*. She writes:

*It will be highly praised in some places for ‘beauty’; will be crabbed by people who want human character.*

Starting from *Jacob’s Room* onwards, what we observe in her characterization is the unfolding of the personalities by the record of an inner monologue as by action and conversations. Mrs. Woolf continually shifts from mind to mind, so that we often observe the experience given by one to another as the experience each receives. Jacob Flanders as we see is never directly described, nor is he revealed by what he says or does. In fact, ‘he is never
generalized, never reduced to a definite pattern but is reduced to a fleeting personality, never complete.\textsuperscript{25} Rather we derive an impression of his personality from the effects he produces on other people in the novel, for instance, upon Mrs. Norman who travels in a train to Cambridge with him:

Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby), she once more reached his face. She dwelt upon his mouth. The lips were shut. The eyes bent down, since he was reading. All was firm, yet youthful, indifferent, unconscious – as for knocking me down! … Grave, unconscious …… He had not realized her presence she thought. Yet it was none of her fault that this was not a smoking – carriage – if that was what he meant.

Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole – they see all sorts of things – they see themselves………………

But since, even at her age, she noted his indifference, presumably he was in some way or other – to her at least – nice
handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy?

One must do the best one can with her report. Anyhow, this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen.26

Mrs Norman, who travels with Jacob Flanders in a train carriage perceives an impression of Jacob Flanders. We are provided with a hint to the character of Jacob. She is one of the many momentary characters whom Jacob meets. In the same manner as Mrs. Woolf creates Mrs Brown out of the woman she met in the same railway carriage in her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, Mrs Norman too builds up Jacob’s character. To her Jacob is ‘nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own body’. These certainly are few of the traits Jacob’s personality possess, yet there are many more left out unseen by her. However, in its own right she has given us a glimpse of Jacob; a part if not the whole.

In the same way, many more characters continue to give hints to develop Jacob’s picture, for it is impossible to grasp the whole of the other. It is indeed impossible to know people Virginia Woolf makes it more comprehensible:

One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done.27
Other characters continue to give hints and insinuations to help in composing a whole of Jacob’s personality. Each of the characters whom Jacob interacts sees him through their point of view, and ultimately throws light on Jacob’s personality. Through their minds we see what Jacob was up to from early childhood, through his university days and his days in London as a seeker after wisdom, to the time of his death in the war. There is no action worthy of mention, no “scenes”, only simply succession of glimpses of Jacob with a variety of people he joins, meets or talks with. The reader from time to time catches the nature of Jacob.

In other words, Mrs. Woolf achieves her end through the multiple view points of characters like Betty Flanders, Mr Floyd, Timmy Durrant, Clara Durrant, Mrs Durrant, Fanny Elmer, Julia Eliot, Florinda, Sandra Wentworth Williams, Bonamy, etc. Each of these characters possesses images and impressions of Jacob. Jacob’s character slowly evolves from the momentary glimpses, as he appeared to these great varieties of people, or in relation to them. If we want to know Jacob, we look back through their minds to get a part of Jacob’s personality, to know him. Hence Jacob’s character is built up in the estimate of other characters. Gradually we see Jacob through the various stages of his life. We see Jacob as a small boy, finding a sheep’s skull on the beach.
Then at Cambridge, talking literature and philosophy with his friends, at a Guy Fawkes Night party, and reading Marlowe in the British Museum. We also catch sight of him with Florinda, Clara, Fanny Elmer. Then he is in Athens, visiting the Acropolis at night with a beautiful woman, Sandra Wentworth Williams. Finally we get hints that he joins the Great War.

All these people have their views of Jacob expressed in their interior monologues as by actions and conversations:

‘Distinction’ – Mrs Durrant said that Jacob Flanders was ‘distinguished – looking’. ‘Extremely awkward’, she said, ‘but so distinguished looking.’

While Clara Durrant writes in her diary:

‘I like Jacob Flanders’, ‘He is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him, though he’s frightening because ....’

Julia Eliot on the other hand calls Jacob ‘the silent youngman,’ and as she dined with Prime Ministers, no doubt she meant: ‘If he is going to get on in the world,
he will have to find his tongue. Betty Flanders had her own feelings for her sons. She finds Archer romantic and John tender; while ‘she was unreasonably irritated by Jacob’s clumsiness in the house.’

Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why ..... 

It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow – creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us – why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.
Bonamy thinks Jacob will fall in love with ‘some Greek woman with a straight nose’. He thinks the problem with Jacob is this romantic vein in him. ‘But mixed with the stupidity which leads him into these absurd predicaments,’ ‘there is something – something’ – he sighed, for he was fonder of Jacob than of anyone in the world.\textsuperscript{33}

We learn about Jacob, what he was through these momentary glimpses of him. It is the synthesis and composition of these varied impressions that goes to compose Jacob’s character. Through these fragments of images and impressions, dissolving and merging, we see Jacob. At times, Jacob himself describes himself:

I’m twenty-two, It’s nearly the end of October. Life is thoroughly pleasant, although unfortunately there are a great number of fools about. One must apply oneself to something or other – God knows what. Everything is really very jolly – except getting up in the morning and wearing a tail coat.\textsuperscript{34}

Jacob’s profile is thus gradually built up from these multiple view points. No doubt each of the impressions remains scrappy and fragmentary; finally
summing up to Jacob’s picture not completely understandable. By the end of the novel, we come to know of few traits of Jacob, of his habit, of his temperament, of his taste, etc. This however is an achievement in its own right, for getting to know one person thoroughly through one’s life time is impossible. Prof. M. Mani Meitei gives a more precise and comprehensible picture of Jacob:

From time to time Jacob shines like a meteor on the pages of the book, leaving his small ephemeral traits. Again he is seen ascendant in the minds of many characters like a voice around which musical instruments play their part to enrich its flow and rhythm. One can see him, hear him, but not always alone; he lets other see him talk about him or feel about him, and he escapes. He is the eddy, the “varying”, the “unknown” and the uncircumscribed spirit”. 35

We may also take note that Jacob is not only presented through the other character’s eyes but also other characters are presented through the impressions they made upon Jacob. As a mirror he too reflects their shadows. He finds Bonamy, his friend ‘an amazing fellow. He knows practically everything
– not more about English literature than I do – but then he’s read all those Frenchmen’. Further, of all the women he meets in his life, he finds Clara Durrant different:

Alas, women lie! But not Clara Durrant. A flawless mind; a candid nature; a virgin chained to a rock (somewhere off Lowndes Square) eternally pouring out tea for old men in white waistcoats, blue-eyed, looking you straight in the face, playing Bach. Of all women, Jacob honoured her most.

Nor is he indifferent to the truth, though he seems to be in Florinda’s case:

Jacob took her word for it that she was chaste. She prattled, sitting by the fireside, of famous painters. The tomb of her father was mentioned. Wild and frail and beautiful she looked, and thus the women of the Greeks were, Jacob thought; and this was life; and himself a man and Florinda Chaste.

Jacob expresses his impressions of other characters like Betty Flanders, Captain Barfoot and some of his companion in the same vein.
What is observed here is that each of the characters including Jacob acts as a mirror reflecting the images and impressions of other. This is the key to Mrs. Woolf’s new experimentation with “human nature” which will continue in her later novels. After synthesizing the scrappy impressions of Jacob he remains almost a shadowy figure, a “semitransparent figure”; far from being concrete in the conventional sense. It is here, that Mrs. Woolf for the first time presents her character in isolated moments in the fragmented and discontinuous manner of real life, abstaining from any type of direct description from her side. We learn about Jacob from indirect sources; without a chance of entering into his inner life thereby leaving room for the difficulties in summing him up.

II

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925)

Virginia Woolf discovers her own genius in her art of character drawing in *Jacob’s Room* and goes on to picture human life in her next novel, *Mrs Dalloway*. It proves an improvement upon *Jacob’s Room* in the sense that she successfully renders the character of Clarissa Dalloway more distinctly. In *Jacob’s Room*, we learn whatever about Jacob from every conceivable source
except his own mind. Now in *Mrs Dalloway* she is at pains to explore the minds of the major characters, to render how it receives myriads of impressions of past and present with a personal understanding to sum them up. However, none of the characters will find way of gaining access to the mind of another. In fact, after reading the novel, ‘one feels that the mesh of civilization here is made of a coarse netting and the holes are wide apart’. ³⁹

What we get from her fiction now is not the outer social life but the inner, personal lives of the characters. From *Mrs Dalloway* onwards, she reveals the profound nature of human mind by documenting the inner articulations of the character’s mind. By unfolding their consciousness, the variety of experiences, both past and present is expressed. She provides the reader with the privileged access to the ‘inner life’ through the minds of the characters by moving easily from one consciousness to another. Thereby an intimacy between the author and the character is developed, at the same time enabling the reader to fully grasp the roundness of her characters. The whole process was to be somewhat a psychological operation of the characters, yielding us with an inner view to how their lives are affected by their surroundings. This exposition of the character’s inner feelings on the single day gives in a nutshell the whole idea of what life really is.
To begin with, in any story or narrative, we wish to know how the author presents his exposition (what the past history of the characters was), her descriptions (what they look like), and her characterization (what sort of people they are). The means by which Virginia Woolf achieved this is to be dealt with here. One who has read “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” may needless be told of the insufficiencies of the ordinary exposition, description and characterization. Virginia Woolf totally dispenses with description, as it is to present ‘a lumpish mass of items’ which is ‘heavy and solid and authoritative, but hard to digest’.\textsuperscript{40} No where we find the novelist generous with objective detail. The ‘solid fact’ that she gives is of such small amount as “every hard pellet of information” swimming in “a bath of the digestive juices of reflection and appreciation”.\textsuperscript{41}

In her later novels as well as \textit{Mrs Dalloway}, Virginia Woolf vouchsafes a relatively small number of concrete items of information about her characters, both major and minor. Rather it is the emotional situation in which the characters find themselves that reveals them to us. In fact the few ‘solid facts’ about her character could be summed up in a sentence: Clarissa Dalloway is fifty-two years old, wife of a Member of Parliament, she is beak nosed, had a narrow pea-stick figure and a ridiculous little face. These few expressive strokes of objective characterization are made significant and effective by the
background of subjective coloring on which they stand out. An increase in its number might have induced us ‘to gobble our food and risk an indigestion of mere knowledge’. ⁴²

While in *Jacob’s Room*, Jacob is seen exclusively from the outside, in *Mrs Dalloway*, the characters Clarissa Dalloway, Sally Seton, Peter Walsh, etc. are presented by revealing their inner and private selves and through the thoughts of someone else about them. The character of Clarissa Dalloway is gradually revealed through her thoughts and through her memories of the past on the day she is to give an important party. She is also revealed in the thoughts of the other people who have touched her life: her one-time suitor Peter Walsh, her childhood friend Sally Seton, her daughter Elizabeth, spinster tutor Miss Doris Kilman and the political hostess, Lady Bruton. Indeed Mrs. Woolf reflects that Clarissa Dalloway’s character ‘may be too stiff, too glittering and tinselly. But then I can bring innumerable other characters to her support’. ⁴³

Another important feature observed in *Mrs Dalloway* is the juxtaposition of the inner world and outer world, which in turn helps in highlighting the characters. So far in *Jacob’s Room*, every impression is documented in the present context, while in *Mrs Dalloway* we observe both past and present
coalesced in the character’s consciousness. The character’s present experiences are shown as relevant to their past lives or experiences. Indeed, the character of Clarissa Dalloway is achieved through what Mrs. Woolf calls in her own term ‘tunnelling process by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it’.

Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of Richard Dalloway M.P. and a fashionable London hostess, is to give an important party. Her character is gradually revealed through her thoughts on that day and through her memories of the past. Various states of consciousness of her characters are revealed. An instance can be seen in this passage where she investigates the party consciousness:

Oh dear, it was going to be a failure, a complete failure, Clarissa felt it in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there apologizing for his wife who had caught a cold at the Buckingham Palace garden party. She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticizing her, there, in that corner. Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one’s torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson! It was
extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then merely to criticize? Why always take, never give? Why not risk one’s one little point of view? There he was wandering off, and she must speak to him. But she would not get the chance. Life was that – humiliation, renunciation. What Lord Lexham was saying was that his wife would not wear her furs at the garden party because ‘my dear, you ladies are all alike’ – Lady Lexham being seventy-five at least! It was delicious, how they pitted each other, the old couple. She did like old Lord Lexham. She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat. 

In the above passage, we get a glimpse of Clarissa’s consciousness, we see her own inner self as well as the impressions she had of Peter Walsh, Ellie Henderson and Lord Lexham. Her inner world is juxtaposed to the outer world. Being a perfect hostess she is engrossed with her fear for the success of her party, at the same time concerned equally with what Peter Walsh thinks of her and reflects on Lord Lexham.
Virginia Woolf not only explores the inner mind of the character she means to portray, but also discovers the impressions of other characters on him/her. The other characters Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh, daughter Elizabeth, Miss Kilman and Lady Bruton reflect on Clarissa. These indirect impressions combined with the direct impression of Clarissa’s inner mind build up the picture of Clarissa fully. Miss Dorris Kilman, who is a tutor to Elizabeth observes Clarissa Dalloway:

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry – coloured eyes upon Clarissa, observed her small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion, Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an over mastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. It she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, you are right! But this was God’s will, not Miss Kilman’s. It was to be a religious victory. So she glanced; so she glowered.46
There are Miss Kilman’s thoughts on the conscious level. Certainly Miss Kilman does not like Clarissa; but her impression carries one facet of Clarissa. One being extremely spiritual and the other being a social butterfly, there ought to be some kind of clash in their conceptions. Each in their own place sees the other from their standpoint. Nevertheless Miss Kilman’s impression helps in providing another hint of Clarissa’s character. Throughout the day, other characters join Miss Kilman, particularly Peter Walsh in reflecting on Clarissa.

Coming back to Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Woolf never allowed us to enter deep into Jacob’s inner life or any other character’s. This is because she believed that it is impossible to understand one personality absolutely. This attitude is however dropped in Mrs Dalloway, she goes on to dig up and unfold the character’s mind revealing the hidden real life. Of all the characters Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh are seen lost in their thoughts. More than half of total impressions on Clarissa is observed from Peter Walsh and ditto; both having been intimately connected in the past. We, the readers, are not only told of others’ impression upon them, but also taken inside their consciousness both past and present. And as has been stated in Chapter-III of this thesis, the whole narrative is engrossed in unfolding the past memories in the characters thoughts, especially Clarissa’s and Peter’s with present time as the pedestal.
In the course of the day, Clarissa experiences renewals of innumerable memories of her past, she remembers incidents which have in one way or other touched her life. One such incident has been a moment when Sally Seton, her friend kissed her on her lips. This moment remained cherished in her heart unconsciously; the moment itself was a kind of a revelation for her. Sally’s memories linger on her mind:

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one’s feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally’s. For in those days she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars. Absurd, she was – very absurd. But the charm was overpowering, to her at least, so that she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the
house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud,
‘she is beneath this roof .......... she is beneath this roof!’

This again is another aspect of Clarissa Dalloway’s character which is achieved by the novelist through Clarissa’s own ponderings. We follow her mind, progressing gradually back to her olden days. She fails her husband, but cherishes a deep feeling for another woman. In a sense she may not be a lesbian downright, yet an attempt can be made to say that she had a certain liking for Sally Setan quite different from the feelings she had for other woman. This aspect adds to the complexity of her character and is revealed through her mind.

What Virginia Woolf tries to show is that different thoughts and impressions are a part and parcel of one’s consciousness. That one’s mind is mixed up with the immediate present perceptions, feelings along with his/her past memory; steeped with a multitude of incongruous and incoherent images. This way by drawing the reader directly into the character’s mind, Virginia Woolf had shown how the character’s mind works at a particular moment. This understanding of the inner self of another character is achieved by Virginia Woolf’s skilful handling of her narration and characterization.
One more interesting feature of Virginia Woolf’s art of portraying characters is through contrast between unconnected people. It is to be noted here that the characters that remained unconnected in *Jacob’s Room* are connected and interconnected for *Mrs Dalloway*. On the superficial level, Clarissa Dalloway had nothing to do with Septimus Warren Smith. Yet the Dalloway’s world and Septimus’s world are connected by the news of his death brought by the Bradshaws in the party. Peter Walsh, Rezia and Septimus became aware of their existence in the Regent’s Park. Also Peter Walsh meets the ambulance carrying Septimus’s body on his way to the party. Again, Clarissa and Septimus, though two totally different persons cannot be interpreted as separate and individualized characters. They complement each other, they represent different sides of life – Clarissa, the brighter while Septimus, the darker side of life.

Clarissa shares the same taste of life with Septimus Warren Smith, who is mentally disturbed by his experience in war. They love life and at the same time fear breaking the privacy of their soul. Both of them look at ‘death’ as a freedom to their souls. However, the misery they face of the isolation from life brings them to different end. Septimus embraces death while Clarissa lives on to
face life, the prevailing society and world. Even till his last moment, Septimus relishes life and feels reluctant to give it up:

But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings?  

It is only to escape from the clutches of ‘blood-red nostrils’ like Dr Holmes and William Bradshaw that he commits suicide. Charissa too shared the same suicidal instinct in her mind, “If it were now to die, twere now to be most happy”. And she reflects to herself that ‘dying’ is a better thing to ‘living’. Clarissa’s character is seen in a new light in contrast to Septimus’s. Septimus lacks the resources to re-integrate himself with the rest of the world unlike Clarissa Dalloway. He couldn’t evolve himself from the shocks he received from the European War. His inability to feel anything, any emotions adds more to his unbearable state of being separated from the world. His lack of the counterbalancing powers of a personality ultimately leads to his suicide. Clarissa, on the other hand possesses a sense of reintegration. An able hostess as she is, she can integrate her shattered moments by reinterpreting past associations by reformulating a new impression. A passage here will show how
Clarissa evolves after her hopes are shattered at hearing Richard Dalloway’s lunching out with Lady Bruton:

That was her self – pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her – faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch; which, she thought (combing her hair finally), is utterly base! Now, where was her dress?51

Her parties itself are attempts to reintegrate and bring people closer, to break the silence and avoid isolation. Thus by delving into the inner minds of the characters Virginia Woolf portrays her characters.
III

To the Lighthouse (1927)

To the Lighthouse is another novel where Virginia Woolf explores the truth of her characters by discovering the whole emotional experience in their consciousness. She admits of taking her character from her life:

This is going to be fairly short; to have father’s character done complete in it; and mother’s; and St Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in – life, death, etc. But the centre is father’s character, sitting in a boat, reciting. We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel. ⁵²

Yet it may be partially wrong to say that the work is wholly autobiographical. Superficially, the characters on the remote island represent a microcosm of society. However, intrinsically they reveal the sameness within differences; the true inner essence of human personality. The main characters are forced to look “inside” themselves by means of which Virginia Woolf is able to present interesting characters.
Mrs. Woolf’s characters here are astoundingly real – we feel the minute textures of their lives with their own vivid senses, and ultimately we know them in outline rather than in the round. The voyage of James and Cam, and the change in their perceptions illustrate the difficulty of judging others and the way in which new set of sensations has the power to alter a judgment. Lily Briscoe realizes the importance of this change in perceptions:

But this was one way of knowing people, she thought: to know the outline, not the detail, to sit in one’s garden and look at the slopes of a hill running purple down into the distant heather.  

Each of the characters in *To the Lighthouse* is seen with the multiplicity of points of view in the first section. We discern an intricate web of image, attitude and ideas in the minds of the characters. Everybody is attracted to Mrs Ramsay for the love and warmth she dissipates. For young James, whose hope is shattered she is “ten thousand times better in every way” than his father. Even Charles Tansley, the self centered atheist feels an extraordinary pride for he was walking with “the most beautiful person he had ever seen”. While Mr. Bankes always thought “there was something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of her face”. Thus, different aspects of Mrs Ramsay’s character
are put forward through the points of view of different characters. She is “a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assuring a factitious child”\textsuperscript{57}, at the same time “The happier Helen of our days ..... For her whose wishes must be obeyed\textsuperscript{58} to a poet. Also, she is like a “bird of speed, an arrow of directness ... willful ... commanding”\textsuperscript{59} as Lily Briscoe reflects. Different characters continue to reveal her character through their point of view in the first section descending in the second section and again ascending in the third section.

This is how Mrs. Woolf creates Mrs Ramsay, the central character of \textit{To the Lighthouse} – by giving us her stream of consciousness, supplemented from outside. By giving us also, intermittently the stream of consciousness of Mr Ramsay, of Lily Briscoe, and of other characters we see the documentation of Mrs Ramsay, from every quarter, and arrive at a solid vision of her by a process of triangulation. If keenly observed, the third part of the novel \textit{To the Lighthouse} is retrieval of Mrs Ramsay’s memory in the minds of Lily Briscoe, Mrs MacNab, Mr Ramsay and through other characters. Finally, we get a full rounded view of her personality at the end. Mrs Ramsay, who is alive in the first section, presides over her family with efficiency, her death is recorded parenthetically in the interlude of ‘Time Passes’, the second section. However, she continues to live in the memories of other characters in the third section and dominates the book.
An aura of motherly affection surrounds Mrs Ramsay from the beginning to the end. Mrs Ramsay is one of Virginia Woolf’s spokesmen, endowed with female sensibilities and virtues. She is brought in contrast to Mr Ramsay’s character, a professor of philosophy, who made an original contribution to thought in his youth and has since been repeating and elaborating it without being able to see through the implications of his system. Mrs. Ramsay who knows more of life in an unsystematic and intuitive way presides over her family with a calm and competent efficiency.

Mrs. Ramsay is a beautiful woman, a loving mother and wife, and at some degree ordering the lives of others like Paul and Minta as well as others. She is:

... though maternal, intuitive, involved in life’s common cares, and capable of an unreasoning fear when she allows herself to dwell upon the tragic fragility of human life, she nevertheless is capable also of a triumphantly mystical detachment wherein life’s inscrutable mystery appears ordered and revealed.\(^6\)

She is also endowed with non-intellectual traits, intuitiveness, compassion which helps in developing a deeper relation with other characters. No doubt,
she also possesses wisdom and knowledge. Everything in the novel seems to be touched with a permanent essence of her character. Her attempt to create a moment’s order and harmony in life, avoiding the flux and chaos around her brings success to the Boeuf en Daube dinner which merges and all characters together. Virginia Woolf’s very idea of characterization: her belief that there is a common element beneath the diversity, that fundamentally it is ‘all one stream’\textsuperscript{61} is affected precisely in the treatment of Mrs Ramsay.

Mrs Ramsay finds her attempt to integrate the characters satisfying. A common reaction is instilled into the diverse reactions of the characters even though for a moment. Time, place, person (self and other self) are all united:

... it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; ........ To stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together .......... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out .......... in the face of the flowing, the fleeing, the spectral, like a rubby; so that again to night she had the feeling that she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures.\textsuperscript{62}
Like in *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, in *To the Lighthouse*, for a complete understanding of Mrs Ramsay’s character, we take into account the image of Mrs Ramsay as recorded in the consciousness of the other characters, her husband, her children, Lily Briscoe, Mr Bankes, Mr Carmichael and Mr Tansley. The stream of consciousness of these characters enables us to see individual actions of Mrs Ramsay as well as other characters. It is a subtle and effective device used in *To the Lighthouse*. Through the stream of consciousness of Lily Briscoe, we see Mrs Ramsay vividly:

There must have been people who disliked her very much, Lily thought (Yes; she realized that the drawing room was empty, but it had no effect on her whatever. She did not want Mrs Ramsay now.) – People who thought her too sure, too drastic. Also her beauty offended people probably. How monotonous, they would say, and the same always! They preferred another type – the dark, the vivacious. Then she was weak with her husband. She let him make those scenes. Then she was reserved. Nobody knew exactly what had happened to her. And (to go back to Mr. Charmichael and his dislike) one could not imagine Mrs Ramsay standing painting, lying reading, a whole morning on the lawn. It was
unthinkable. Without saying a word, the only token of her errand a basket on her arm, she went off to town, to the poor, to sit in some stuffy little bedroom. Often and often Lily had seen her go silently in the midst of some game, some discussion, with her basket on her arm, very upright. She had noted her return. She had thought, half laughing (she was so methodical with the tea cups), half moved (her beauty took one’s breath away), eyes that are closing the pain have looked on you. You have been with them there.63

The thoughts and images contained herein Lily Briscoe’s reverie reflect back and forth some aspects of Mrs Ramsay’s character which help build the picture of Mrs Ramsay.

In the third section, where there is a shift of event, Mrs Ramsay’s character is most highlighted in Lily Briscoe’s mind. Mrs Ramsay continues to influence people around her even after her death. Lily Briscoe while struggling to complete her painting thinks of Mrs Ramsay:

“Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!” she cried, feeling the old horror come back – to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict
that still? And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Mrs. Ramsay – it was part of her perfect goodness – sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step.

There she sat.\textsuperscript{64}

This is the memory she leaves when she is gone.

From the beginning, the characters are presented and re-presented until they are finally seen as symbolic. We are from time to time shown now their own minds, their reactions on the minds of others, now the memory they leave when they are gone, now their relation to the landscape, till all adds up to something barely expressible yet significant. For a split second everything falls into a pattern, and then the meaning is lost. However, the book ends with the attainment of maximum pattern, though temporary. Lily Briscoe (Virginia Woolf’s own projection) keeps looking for the proper significance of characters and scenes. She keeps thinking of Mrs Ramsay, who is dead and of Mr Ramsay who is off with James and Cam on his journey to the lighthouse while endeavouring to finish her painting. Finally, she has her vision, while James comes to realize his dream:
James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white – washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing, was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay. In the evening one looked up and saw the eye opening and shutting and the light seemed to reach them in that airy sunny garden where they sat.65

The pattern is complete, Lily finishes her painting while James reaches the lighthouse, and the book ends. James perceptions changes with his mature outlook; what he imagined about the lighthouse is true and yet this new image is also much truer.

It is clearly evident from Virginia Woolf’s art of picturing characters that no one single trait or characteristic of a person can be seized upon and cherished as a way of ‘knowing’ him or her. Mrs Ramsay’s personality is seen emerging gradually from the attitudes and mind of others towards her as well
as from her own broodings. And the truth about Mrs Ramsay encompasses both these aspects of her personality. To know of Jacob Flanders in *Jacob’s Room*, from one person’s point of view is to get only a part of a whole. Mrs Ramsay is more than the impression, she has made upon Mr Ramsay, Lily Briscoe or any other character. Peter Walsh knows only a facet of Clarissa Dalloway’s personality. Likewise, Ralph Denham does not expose the true picture of Katherine. The point to be noted is that each of the character’s conviction about each other brings them close to reality.

**IV**

*The Waves* (1931)

The novel *The Waves* follows the minds of six characters – Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny and Louis. These six characters however represents the human being from different perspectives. Virginia Woolf notes in her diary:

> In its leaves she might see things happen. But who is she? I am very anxious that she should have no name. I don’t want a Lavinia or a Penelope: I want ‘she’. But that becomes arty, Liberty greenery yelling somehow: symbolic in loose robes – of course I
can make her think backwards and forwards; I can tell stories. But that's no it.  

It is obvious here from this passage that Mrs. Woolf deliberately wanted to do away with a central character. Rather she wanted to make things vague, to make her reader hover around a central consciousness, representing our being. So it comes as a surprise to her when her characters in *The Waves* are praised when she ‘meant to have none’.  

The six characters merge into one – they are but the six parts or aspects of one person, six apart and one.

In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf displays that she is more interested in human experience than in individual character. What we observe in *The Waves* is the concept of the multiplicity of the self. Bernard, the central character in *The Waves*, says:

> I am not one and single but complex and many. In me too the wave rises. It swells, it arches its back. I am aware, once more of a new desire.

Virginia Woolf’s idea behind her character portrayal is that as innumerable waves form an ocean also innumerable personalities collectively create perfect
personalities. Bernard’s soul is one as well as many. Mrs. Woolf believes that one-sidedness of personality has been responsible for so many disorders of society – social as well as psychological. This one-sidedness is the basic cause of the modern man’s tragic sense of loneliness and isolation. Due to his lack of intuitive element he is now a stranger to others as well as to himself.

Virginia Woolf out of her desire to create a well-integrated personality (whose services and love might be for the whole of humanity) presents the six characters, who again are one in many. They are the collective consciousness of humanity. Like the human mind which is indivisible, they are indivisible. They collectively present the internal and the external integrity of all consciousness in the form of the globe and circle (perfect and whole) seen by Bernard’s inner eye. Neville, being merely intellectual, is unable to attain perfection and integration; Susan yearns too much for natural life, Jinny is of perplexed disposition, while Rhoda and Louis are timid and incapable of facing life. Only Bernard possesses a harmonious personality. Each of the individual traits are harmonized together to make a complete and whole personality in Bernard. Hence he is intuitive, rational, at the same time mystical. He is the combination of the six parallel streams of thoughts all flowing as one, in short soul of humanity.
The inward experiences of the six characters are laid bare through the interior monologues. Through the gradual unfolding of their minds, we are acquainted with their difference one from another at different periods of their lives. And what is more, the content of their consciousness is always consistent with the individual as well as with the time of life. The distinguishing qualities of their personality are strongly emphasized from the very beginning. Some description and characterization are necessary: we want to be able to visualize the setting and the characters and to know what they are like. Well, all these things are accomplished in *The Waves*, without intervention on the part of the author. The first appearance of the six characters in the novel makes the point more comprehensible:

‘I see a ring’, said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light’.

‘I see a slab of pale yellow’, said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe’.

‘I hear a sound’, said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down’.
‘I see a globe’, said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill’.

‘I see a crimson tassel’, said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads’.

‘I hear something stamping’, said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps’.69

Here, through the eyes of the six characters, tinged with each individual sense; we see the world from different perspective. The passage itself reveals a picturesque vividness of the mental experience of the characters. Each of the characters opens his/her eyes and ears to perceive the environmental reality, which highlights the individual aspects of each character. From the colourful imagery, we get certain hints to the personality of the characters. The “ring” that Bernard sees is indicative of his search for an inseparable whole; Susan’s “Slab of pale yellow” is indicative of her earthiness; Neville’s “globe”, a symbol of his search for order and unity; Jinny’s “crimson tassel” hints at her attachment to physical sensations, and finally their lack of confidence and interest in ‘the other world’ is echoed by the sounds Rhoda and Louis hear.
Unlike in her other works *The Waves* lacks concrete character in the sense of bodily existence. They appear rather ‘the pulses of one single being’.

They merge together, transcending the concepts of time, self, personality and fixity. Their lives are inseparable. By the skillful blending of all the stream of consciousness, that is the soliloquies of the six characters, Virginia Woolf has evolved an all inclusive character in Bernard. Now he is a living stream of thought, an androgynous personality, embodying the mysteries of self, joy and pains, and search for truth. The breaking wave changes its shape and return to its original form, so also each of the characters like the waves rise and fall and rise again; yet never leaves its essence like the ocean that never ceases to be.

Virginia Woolf is more attentive in *The Waves* to giving depth to her characters, to what they feel like to be young, middle aged, or old, to be at school, in the country, in London street, and to such states as rejoicing, suffering, striving and so on. And what is more, if we come to experience any kind of excitement in the course of reading the novel: it comes from an extension of ourselves. Her characters may not have been added to the gallery of human portraits, but they quicken our memory and deepen our perceptions. And, coming to get hold of the real Bernard who represents us all is not an easy task. He cannot be known by mere appearance but by the stories he tells, by his
feelings, memories and philosophizing, by his “phrases”. Hence, the visible part of a person is no longer representative of his real personality. Rather he possesses an unconscious, a collective unconscious which is a treasure – house of feelings and experiences received through the journey of life. Besides it is the collective experience of human race. In this connection what Joan Bennett observes may be quoted:

The six combine to reveal the basic structure of human personality with its capacity for joy and pain; its earth rootedness and its fear of life; its bondage to self and its out-reaching to others, ‘its fragmentary perceptions and its nostalgia for perfect beauty and truth.’

A discussion of the characterization in Virginia Woolf’s major novels, *Jacob’s Room, Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* throws ample light on the very subjective rendering of the characters, whose identities appear in spiritual terms and not in material form of existence which would drive its sustenance from concrete objectivity and action. In fact, Virginia Woolf’s characters have their existence in the subtle psychological state that can be perceived and cannot be described. Her vision of life as she defines is highly symbolical in order that the inner state of the human mind is reproduced and
recreated with least external interference. In her characters a series of mental images are reconstructed to form patterns out of the seemingly unrelated things and impressions. They are wholes symbolically and spiritually, not in the material sense. Jacob Flanders, Mrs Ramsay, the six protean characters in *The Waves* are supreme examples of human characters who are removed from solidity to the eternal ebb and flow of human consciousness, where psychic forces of consciousness, preconsciousness, subconsciousness and the flux of reality or time – durational flux shape themselves into patterns, refined out of existence. Virginia Woolf’s characters live in the world of poetry that is endlessly becoming.
NOTES


3 Ibid., p.264.


41 *Ibid.*, p.188.

42 *Ibid.*, p.188.


46 Ibid., pp. 134-135.


51  Ibid., pp. 42-43.


54  Ibid., p.37.

55  Ibid., p.52.

56  Ibid., p.74.

57  Ibid., p.87.

58  Ibid., p.70.

59  Ibid., p.103.


61  Ibid., pp. 146-147.


63  Ibid., pp. 313-314.

64  Ibid., p 323.

65  Ibid., pp. 299-300.


