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**Mohd Ashraf Najar**  
Research Scholar, Department  
of Humanities, Rabindranath  
Tagore University, Bhopal,  
Madhya Pradesh, India

**Dr. Shabina Khan**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Humanities,  
Rabindranath Tagore  
University, Bhopal,  
Madhya Pradesh, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Mohd Ashraf Najar**  
Research Scholar, Department  
of Humanities, Rabindranath  
Tagore University, Bhopal,  
Madhya Pradesh, India

## Representation of women in feministic context of Virginia wolf

**Mohd Ashraf Najar and Dr. Shabina Khan**

### Abstract

Woolf outstandingly shows how the prioritization of the domestic space has repressed women and prevented them from taking part in everyday activities-commerce, travel, work and in a patriarchal society it has been denied to women. Women who are owned by men are mere possessions, having no control over themselves and no way to develop their own personalities. Thus, this paper will scrutinize thoroughly women's intellectual ability from a Gynocriticism perspective taking Virginia Woolf's short story "The Legacy" (published posthously in 1944) as an example. The present paper provides an analytical view of the four models of gyno-criticism; i.e., biological, linguistic, cultural, and psychological. It also attempts to shed light on some common feminist themes such as the theme of marriage and how oppressed marriage motivates male dominance. The paper addresses the relationship between wife and husband in terms of gender inequality and women's identity. It also tackles women's trapped position as distinct from the liberty of men and oppressed by husband in an unhappy marriage. It relies heavily not only on feminist perspectives as gynocriticism, gender inequality, and the theme of marriage; but also on the authors' personal life. The paper concludes that being unable to speak their voice freely, women view writing as their salvation for their voice to be heard.

**Keywords:** Virginia Woolf, representation of women, feminism

### Introduction

Virginia Woolf wants human personality to be based in a structures manner. Each and every present event has a strong link to the events which may have happened in the past and hence there exists a logical sequence between the two. Events which are woven in a diverse web, present a real 'picture of an organism. The first half of the twentieth century endures and sustains numerous revolutions such as social, cultural and sexual revolutions. It also testifies revolutionary and radical changes in all fields of life-bringing distinct changes over humanity. Women, in this transitional period, were influenced by these changes and started claiming their intellectual thinking. Over the centuries women have been struggling to gain recognition, calling their independent voice to be heard in patriarchal and racist societies. As they follow the standards and the values of their societies, women tend to break the stereotypical and submissive images that degrade their position in their societies. Such a reaction corresponded with the appearance of feminist theories that tend to reject the stereotypical notions in treating women as an "imperfect man". In fact, feminist theories deny what used to be thought of a female as Aristotle declares. For Aristotle, "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, p. 121). Therefore, feminist theories are all about respecting women seriously in setting their own identities as men. Feminism is a series of political, social, and cultural movements that aims at denying and rejecting the supremacy and gender inequality. Though the word feminism did not enter the English language until 1890, this movement can be traced back to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) [11]. It has sought to disturb the patriarchal culture, to seek independence, recognition and education. Feminism comes as a result of capitalism, patriarchy and racism that bring women under oppression and inequality. "It is concerned with the refusal and denial of the masculine notion of the authority or truth as well as the rejection of the patriarchal culture and its dominance over matriarchal one in all spheres of life" (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 1997, p. 115) [6]. Therefore, feminism eliminates any discrimination against women giving them the right to express themselves freely rather than being an object for sexual exploitation.

**Location of research gap:** Large number of the research studies has been conducted in the domain. However, all are objective in nature. Keeping in view, the investigator located the research gap for the present study.

**Statement of the research problem:** The statement of the research problem is as under:

### “Representation of women in feministic context of Virginia Woolf”

**Objectives of the study:** This paper aims at unmasking the cultural, social, and gender manifestations of feminist criticism in Virginia Woolf’s “The Legacy” depending on Woolf’s representation of women, Elaine Showalter’s concept of gynocriticism which was introduced in her seminal book *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (1979) [9] and the theme of *ells*. It is conducted by examining gynocriticism’s four models, namely biological, linguistic, psychological, and cultural. Besides the concept of gynocriticism, this paper also focuses on the theme of marriage in the story. It sheds light on the treatment of married woman as marginalized, oppressed, and submissive wife within unhappy marriage. This paper highlights the voice of a woman in a patriarchal society within the frame of feminism criticism.

▪ **Rationale of the study:** Critics have already known through the notion of Culler (1983) that feminism is an act of reading as a woman. On the other hand, Yoder (1987) said that a feminist literary criticism does not mean to criticize women themselves, or be a woman critic, or even criticize a woman writer. Rather, it is about viewing the literary works with particular awareness, and about the existing correlation between the notion of gender and that of culture, literature, and life. Thus, gender is not the only factor that influences feminist literary works. Other factors can make differences such as the author, the reader, the character, society, culture, and religion all of which influence the writing process. According to Bressler (1998) [1], the aim of feminist criticism is to change the degrading view of women so that all women will realize that they are not a “significant other” but each woman has her own identity, and her important role in the society. Bressler states that “[a]s a social movement, feminist criticism highlights the various ways women, in particular, have been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed. It asks new questions of old texts. It develops and uncovers a female tradition in writing. It analyses women writers and their words from female perspectives” (Bressler, 1998, p. 185) [1]. Feminism theory is divided into three waves. The first wave appeared in the 19th century and early 20th century. It calls for women’s rights and women’s suffrage seeking women’s right to vote and to have their distinctive tradition of writing. The second wave emerged in the 1960s. It basically calls for women’s equality and liberation. It emphasizes women’s experience outside home and sexual difference. The third wave began in the early 1990s. It continued to fulfil what the second phase asked for. Virginia Woolf is the founder of the first wave of feminism. She announced many issues that later feminist critics focused on. Woolf’s creative writing as a woman was produced in two texts which were fundamental contributions to feminist’s theory, namely, *A Room of One’s Own*

(1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). In these works, she highlights women’s disadvantages compared to men. In fact, Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* asserts women’s rights in exploring their female experience in writing without comparing their experience in reaction to men’s. Here she advocates women’s literary production. Similarly, Woolf’s essays were in favour of a distinguished tradition of women’s writing. The most important aspect of feminism that can be applied to “The Legacy” appears in the first wave. Written in 1940s, the story is told in the third person. Angela is the protagonist and round character. She is having an affair because she was not happy with her husband. Her husband, Gilbert Clandon is so busy that he does not spend time with her. Angela’s marriage is unhappy. She has an affair with B.M. whom she loves and feels happy with. With B.M, Angela expresses herself and spends time together. It is only through her diaries, her legacy that Gilbert knows about her true needs, her way of thinking, and her secret affair. At the end of the story, we learn that B.M. commits suicide because Angela does not divorce her husband. Shortly after B.M. commits suicide, Angela also commits suicide. In her legacy, Angela writes that she is proud of being Gilbert’s wife and she describes how handsome Gilbert is, but she hates and deceives Gilbert.

### Conclusion

Women in the examined story suffer from stereotypical and submissive images that degrade their position in their society. “The Legacy” represents, not only the personal struggle of the protagonist, but also the collective one through which the two protagonists stand for women in the world. The researches argue that, through the “The Legacy”, Woolf advocates women’s rights and freedom, especially the married ones. They argue that Woolf looks for ensuring women’s rights in speaking, thinking, and having their own identities, names, and emotions. In her depiction of married women, Woolf rejects the misrepresentation of women as “the Angel of the house” and replaces it with the rebellious woman who calls for an equal treatment inside and outside home. She demands women’s anger and revolution against male’s hegemony in the house, society, and everywhere through writing.

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