



Research Paper

A Critical Study Of Gender Issues In Virginia Woolf's Novel Orlando

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Abstract-

The present paper sought to analyze the feminist perspectives in the novel Orlando. The paper discusses the portrayal of gender in this novel. Orlando has attracted a wide range of discussion amongst the feminist critics because of its use of gender representation. The present paper focuses on major aspect of an individual's identity through one's own gender. It discusses on the gender issue related to the characters. The characters may be female or male but the gender matters in frame work of feminist study. Gender is culturally taken into consideration but in any literary creation role of gender establishes its own identity. Virginia Woolf is one of the most ever discussed writers in context of feminist critical theories. The present paper discusses Woolf's attachment to feminism by acknowledging the celebrated essay Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf. This study also poignantly brings out the contemporary aspects of feminist critical theories. It focuses on the concept of time in the novel used by Virginia Woolf. It explores androgyny aspect while analyzing the character of Orlando.

KEY WORDS: Feminist, Gender, Literature, Orlando and Theories etc.

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Virginia Woolf's Orlando is foundational text in realm of feminist critical theories. Her writing deals with modernity and critical thinking very effectively. Orlando supposed to be the gender reorientation of the characters in literature. Virginia Woolf has adopted the plot of the text from real life events. It seems to be truthful record of gender related issues. According to Sandra Gilbert "Woolf's Orlando is truthful but fantastic literary work "(Gilbert, P.XXV). Virginia Woolf has used the concept of time very symbolic and effective manner. The protagonist Orlando lives through centuries. Woolf not only gives an account of individual's life but goes back to the representation of British history which shows the influence of changing times on individual over longer time.

The element which is dominant in this novel is controversial concept of gender. Woolf allows her protagonist to go from male to female half way through the which novel sets in 16th century. The plot of the novel is woven round the character of Orlando who is nobleman. He strives with love and the art of writing. To escape from clinging lover, Orlando flees to Turkey where he works as ambassador. As woman, Orlando stays there with a gypsy community for a while before returning to England. She gradually becomes accustomed to her female identity. After reaching in the region of Queen Victoria She gets married and has child. Virginia Woolf presents Orlando quite normal both being male and female. He / she lives through centuries and meets some unique characters.

As we discuss Orlando in the light of gender issue, we find this text poignantly brings out the societal and cultural importance of gender related dilemmas. First of all we will discuss how Woolf has fictionalized feminist views in Orlando. She focuses on the concept of androgyny as discussed in her essay *A Room of One's Own*. We find that Orlando as an androgynous being. It also discusses how androgyny challenges the division of gender in to the binary opposition of male and female. It can be related to the concept of gender as performance. We find ambiguity in Orlando's relationships which form his gender identity. Woolf portrays gender as performance and discusses its superficial structure. A novel discusses shifts from one gender to the other. It signifies the instability of the categories of male and female. It explores the actual transformation from male to female. In the theoretical frame work of feminist criticism. The event of gender transformation challenges the

idea of gender identity which is absolute and natural. After going through this discussion novel focuses on Woolf's use of humor and mockery at stereotypical gender conventions. The novel is parody on established gender norms.

Virginia Woolf is considered as one of the pioneer feminist writers. She is always applauded for her fictional and theoretical work. Her most outstanding contribution to the feminist theory is her essay *A Room of One's Own*. In the context of Woolf's contribution Laura Marcus argues that we find relationship between Virginia Woolf and feminism because of her presentation of symbiotic character. Laura adds by commenting that Woolf's works are both fictional and the theoretical which centers around women's lives and histories and it altered perception and reception of Woolf as a writer" (Marcus,2009).

As we analyze Orlando in theoretical frame of the concept of androgyny, it signifies biological and cultural formation of gender. Sex is biological and gender is cultural. Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the term androgyny as having both male and female character; looking neither strongly male nor strongly female. Term androgyny describes someone's outer appearance and physical look. In case of Orlando; It becomes challenge to separate male and female in two independent genders. It also poses challenge to the established norms of gender. Woolf succeeds in establishing a truly androgynous character without one gender dominating the other. She portrays a feminine or masculine type androgyny that reinforces the binary oppositions of male and female.

When we discuss Orlando in the context of *A Room of one's Own*, it pertains Orlando as personification of the ideal status of androgyny. It implies someone who knows the secrets of both sexes and can access the whole specter of human experience. It allows exploiting intellect creativity fully. This state of androgyny prefers to choose best of the worlds as effectively depicted in the following lines of the novel: "nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and it's experiences multiplied" (Orlando,p153).

The narrator describes Orlando as androgynous personality by stating that it was blending her of male and female, one is uppermost and other gave her conduct of an unexpected turn"(Orlando .p.133).

The issue of gender equity is most effectively discussed in this novel. Orlando possesses both genders with equality. Her performance of masculinity and felinity is discussed in balanced way. Feminism critics argue that Orlando's awareness of both genders keeps her female and male side rigidly separated. They never blend to each other or take action at the same time. As a woman Orlando does not full fill the ideal status of androgyny. Orlando inherits the routine to tackle each situation in a given circumstances. We find event in the novel in the context of above mentioned fact of Orlando when she dresses as a man and meets with Nell. She decodes Virginia Woolf depicts as: Having been so lately a woman, she suspected that the girl's timidity and her.....to gratify her masculinity. (Orlando, 150).

Orlando performs gender through clothing which symbolizes issue related to gender differences. Disguises and costumes signify a performance of traditional meaning of the world. Virginia Woolf raises the question of identity through costumes and disguises. It presents performance of gender. In the word of Judith Butler, it reveals the very contractedness and arbitrariness of gender categories.

In nut shell, the ideas of gender are not absolute but it deals with the performing aspect of gender in Orlando. Willingness for identity and freedom for each gender presented in Orlando are very effective. It also discusses the two dominant issues of construction of gender and conventions of male and female.

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