



Exploring the Fictional Miss Shakespeare in Woolf's "Shakespeare's sister"

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Abstract— *The concerned paper tries as much as it can to sketch a feministic preview of "Shakespeare's sister", included in the famous essay "A Room of Ones Own" by Virginia Woolf, one of the most dominant female writers of English literature by virtue of exploring the fundamental problems of women, familial as well as social, regarding the various means whereby they can thrive like greatest male poets, dramatists as well as novelists of the era. Throughout the essay, Woolf endeavours to singe root and branch the man-made form of the patriarchal society, which hinders the women to have a specific space for only themselves, just like the men, even to come out of the apparently predestined social barriers and to know their inner self in order to flourish their inner capabilities, by dint of the man-made social weapons like gender discrimination, disparity as well as discrepancy. That is why, Woolf suggests, we all know great writers, particularly male writers like Shakespeare, But we know nothing about any female writer, maybe as great as Shakespeare in English literature, particularly before the 18th century.*

Keywords— *gender discrimination, patriarchal society, hindrances of women to write and become writer.*



Why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature, when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet. (Woolf, 40)

In accordance with the 'perennial puzzle' caught by Virginia Woolf in her phenomenal essay "Shakespeare Sister" in A Room of One's Own, a woman can anything but write a word of the extraordinary literature, as much extraordinary as Shakespeare, particularly before the 18th century. In order to solve the puzzle, Woolf seeks help to Professor Trevelyan, one of the most famous British historians whose "History of England" sketches the perfect situations, conditions wherein the women in general, and particularly poor women made a continuous struggle to live in society before the 18th century. An ironical civilized society where wife-beating was a recognized right of men, Marriage is like a mandatory injunction not to be refused by hook or by crook, can never provide a woman just a little space, forget about enough, to express her feelings in writing. Woolf herself believed:

....that all novels deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines.....(Albert, 518)

It seems apparently contradictory because we have seen the highest importance, significance of women pervading poetry, drama of the famous writers from cover to cover. Still, she is all but absent from history. Thus the woman, 'certainly an odd monster', 'a worm winged like an eagle', dominates the lives of kings as well as conquerors in poetry, drama and fiction- for example, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, Desdemona; and others like Clytemnestra, Antigone, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary – but actually they have no existence:

A Room of One's Own shows how rarely in the history of English literature a woman writer has had room to write. (Alexander, 357)

No one knows anything detailed about her, off and on there is a mention of an individual, Queen or a great lady, an Elizabeth or a Mary; But no woman with a middle class or poor background was ever able to leave a poem or play

whereby we can Judge her. It was impossible, root and branch, for any woman to write the plays like Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Woolf tries to imagine the life of a girl in the guise of Judith (actually she was Shakespeare's daughter), who may be Shakespeare's wonderful, gifted sister. In spite of being as imaginative, adventurous as his brother, she was not to go to school, have a chance to learn grammar and logic, to go out of the house any time to prove herself like her brother. That's why Woolf supports this common proverb:

It is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. (Woolf, 46)

This is just the one side of the coin, the tip of the iceberg, the real reality is still to come. Although it was all but impossible for a woman to get a space or room to express her feelings, emotions in writing, it can be imagined that somehow she might have completed her writing. But how could she make it published? Whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed before publishing. Moreover, the women were not to publish their writings anyhow with their real names. They had to create a pseudonym to conform to the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to them, as is found even in so late as the 19th century, such as Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand etc. It was mandatory for them to keep homage to conventional society by embracing this anonymity which possessed their selves, anonymity runs in their blood. Sooth to say, if a woman was born with the gift of poets in the 16th century, she must be an unhappy woman who was always at strife against herself, internally as well as externally, materially as well as immaterially:

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own vividly portrays the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood. (Barry, 116)

Virginia Woolf is not only exploring the difficulties to be faced by women from the beginning, but also is trying to make them realize the best solutions to revive their existence. According to Woolf, Shakespeare had a sister who died young, who never wrote a word, who was buried at the crossroads, but she still lived in all the contemporary women, women like Woolf and others who are still struggling heart and soul to revive their existence:

But she lives; For great poets do not die; They are continuing presence. They need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.
(Woolf, 107)

If the woman now can realize their inner power to provide this opportunity and also make other women realize to get this opportunity to flourish themselves, Shakespeare sister will be reborn among them. The opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare sister, will put on the body which she has so often laid down.

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