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13.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall

- Discuss summary, characters, critical appraisal and main theme of A Room of One's Own' by Virginia Woolf.
- Understand terms such as Stream of Consciousness and Bloomsbury Group.

On completing the unit, you should be able to

- recognize and comprehend features related to essay 'A Room of One's Own' written by Virginia Woolf.
- develop a better understanding of characteristics of Stream of Consciousness and Bloomsbury Group and impact of the present essay.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' is generally regarded as one of the most important feminist literary works published in 1929. The work is taken as a feminist text and noted in its argument for both a literal and figure space for feminist writers within a tradition dominated by patriarchy. Through this piece of writing she examines the educational, social and financial limitations that women have encountered throughout history. It has Woolf's notable argument that, 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'. Woolf describes this as 'an opinion upon one minor point', and the essay makes an attempt to explore the 'unsolved problems' of women and fiction 'to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money'. The essay revolves around the themes of female identity, freedom and, financial security and stability.

Undoubtedly, the essay is a landmark of twentieth-century feminist thought and examines the history of women in literature through a thorough investigation of the social and material conditions that essentially required for the writing of literature. She invented a fictional self, inviting the audience to call this fictional self, "Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael," or any other name. She is witty, ironic and uses extremely very effective images, especially her constant return to the image of the title, that a woman needs her 500 pounds a year and the room of her own – independence in some necessary manner.

13.1.1 BACKGROUND

The essay was based on two papers Woolf delivered on 20 and 26 October 1928 to two Cambridge student societies, the Newnham Arts Society at Newnham College and the ODTAA Society at Girton College, respectively. It was published in 1929 as a book with six chapters. She employed a fictional narrator and narrative to unfold women both as a writer and characters in fiction.

❖ Check your progress-1

Fill in the blanks

- 'A Room of One's Own' was published in _____.
- A woman must have _____ and a _____ of her own.

- c) 'A Room of One's Own' was based on two papers Woolf delivered on 20 and 26 October ____

13.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf original name in full Adeline Virginia Stephen was a British writer, regarded as one of the most important modernist 20th-century authors and a pioneer in using stream of consciousness as a narrative device. Woolf was brought up and educated at home. In 1895 following the death of her mother she had the first of numerous nervous breakdowns. Following the death of her father (Sir Leslie Stephen, a literary critic) in 1904, she moved with her sister and two brothers to a house in Bloomsbury. She started her career as a professional literary writer in 1905, initially for the Times Literary Supplement. In 1912 she married Leonard Woolf, a civil servant and political theorist. She was also a significant figure in London literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. In March 1941, Woolf drowned herself in the River Ouse, near her Rodmell residence. Her most famous works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928), and the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

13.2.1 STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Stream of Consciousness is a literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue. James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust are among its notable early exponents. The term was introduced by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890).

13.2.2 BLOOMSBURY GROUP

Bloomsbury Group is a name given to a group of English writers, philosophers, and artists who frequently met between about 1907 and 1930 at the houses of Clive and Vanessa Bell and of Vanessa's brother and sister Adrian and Virginia Stephen (later Virginia Woolf) in the Bloomsbury district of London. They discussed aesthetic and philosophical questions in a spirit of agnosticism and were influenced by G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) and by A.N. Whitehead's and Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13).

Check your progress-2

1. Fill in the blanks

- Virginia Woolf use _____ as a narrative device.
- Virginia Woolf started her career as a _____.
- The term stream of consciousness was introduced by _____ in his _____.

2. Short answer type question

1. Explain the term 'Streams of Consciousness.'

2. Who were the members of Bloomsbury Group?

13.3 A SHORT SUMMARY OF A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN (CHAPTER ONE TO SIX)

In the Chapter- I, the narrator begins her investigation at Oxford College, where she reflects on the different educational experiences to men and women as well as on work material differences in their lives. She then spends a day in British literary perusing the scholarship on women, all of which has been written by men and all of which has been written in anger. During that she finds very little information about the everyday lives of women that she decided to build their existences imaginatively.

In the Chapter-II, she tells of visiting the British Museum to look at history and writing about women. She concludes: ". . . England is under the rule of a patriarchy"

The Chapter-III deals with a brief history of women and women writers. She points out some key oddities, but the most central is that the actual history of women shows them to be nearly invisible and non-players, yet the treatment of women in poetry and fiction and even in the writing of history represents them as important and drivers of men's behavior.

"A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of the kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring on her finger."

In the Chapter-IV, she laments the fact that women's talent was impacted by anger and frustration, making it less likely they could have an influence on the world. But times began to change when some women began to earn money by writing. "Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for." She also found Jane Austin as an central figure: "Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching."

In the Chapter-V, she develops a fictional female writer and represents the "typical" writer of that place and time. She creates friendship between two women, bypassing the need to bounce the female character off men. Woolf realized that women writers were close to independence. Both money and a room of their own is a great necessity but the modern woman writer is close.

In the Chapter -VI, she concludes the essay with a request to her audiences of women to take up the tradition that has been so hardly bequeathed to them, and to enhance the endowment for their own daughters. She resumes the image of catching fish, i.e. creating ideas, when she advises women to write and travel and be idle and "dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream". She urges women to acquire for themselves the intellectual freedom and to create a women's literature, which metaphorically, will also occupy a room of its own.

Check your progress-3

Fill in the blanks

- a) The narrator begins her investigation at _____.
- b) After visiting the British Museum, she concludes "England is under _____."
- c) _____ dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for.

13.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Narrator- the unnamed female narrator is the one of the major characters in 'A Room of one's Own' she refers to herself only as "I". The narrator assumes various names, Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael at various points throughout the text. This frequent shifting nature of her identity complicates her narratives even more and shifting identity given her more universal voice.

The Beadle- an oxford security official who reminds the narrator that only fellows and scholars are permitted on the gran, women must remain on the shingle path.

Mary Seton - student at Dernham College and friend of the narrator.

Mary Beton – the narrator's aunt whose legacy of 500 pounds a year secures her niece's financial independences.

Judith Shakespeare- the imagined sister of William Shakespeare, who suffers greatly and eventually, commits suicide, because she finds no socially acceptance outlets for her genius.

Mary Carmichael- a factious novelist, contemporary with the narrator of Woolf's essay.

Mr. A. An imagined male author, whose work is over-shadowed by a looming self-consciousness and self-assertiveness.

Check Your Progress-4

1. Fill in the blanks

- a) _____ is a student at Dehram College.
- b) _____ is the imagined sister of Shakespeare.

2. Match the column correctly

Character	Identity
1. Mary Seton	a) Oxford security officer
2. Judith Shakespeare	b) Student at Dehram college
3. Mary Carmichael	c) Imagined sister of Shakespeare
4. Beadle	d) Novelist

13.5 THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE ESSAY

The essay elaborates that money is the primary element that prevents women from having a room of their own and thus, having money is most important. The narrator writes, “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time . . .” Without money the narrator interprets that women would second place to their male counterpart. Further, the narrator argues that even history is subjective what she seeks is nothing less than the essential all of truth. Towards the end of her essay, she expects her readers to question the veracity of everything she has presented everything as truth.

Check Your Progress-5

1. Fill in the blanks

- “Intellectual freedom depends upon _____.”
- She expects her reader to _____ the veracity of everything she has presented everything as truth.

2. Short answer type question

- Explain the central theme of the essay

13.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAY

The essay is commonly regarded as a landmark of twentieth-century feminist thought. It examines the history of women in literature through a thorough investigation of the social and material conditions that essentially required for the writing of literature. These prerequisite conditions are as leisure time, privacy, and financial independence which underwrites all literary production, but they are particularly relevant to understanding the status and condition of women in the literary tradition as women, historically, have been uniformly deprived of those basic prerequisites. During Woolf’s time women occasionally enjoyed the luxuries. They remained exclusive to women and as a result their art suffered. The fictional discrepancy between man and women at the time of Woolf’s writing perpetuated the myth that women were less noticeable

writers. Woolf is more interested in showing in the inner working of fiction. She wants to read well-written books, preferably by women for the good of women and the world at large.

She employs poetic speech in a piece of criticism on issues of literature, culture and society at large. She deliberately transfers methods from fiction to criticism and, as in the novels, departs from factual reality. The images, symbols and examples in a twentieth-century essay elucidate the personal character of criticism. She uses room as a symbol for many larger issues as privacy, leisure time and financial independence each of which is a very significant element of the countless inequalities between men and women. She uses an impressionistic method and a peculiar style that borrow from fiction and allow for some degree of subjectivity.

The character of Judith, Shakespeare puts an example of tragic fate a highly intelligent woman would have met with under those circumstances. Judith is as talented as her brother William Shakespeare but while his talents are recognized and encouraged by their family and society at large, Judith's are underestimated. The narrator invents the tragic figure of Judith to prove that a woman as talented as Shakespeare could never have achieved such success. At this backdrop, she considered the achievements of the leading women novelists of the 19th century and reflects the importance of tradition to aspiring writers. A survey of present state of literature follows conducted through a thorough reading the first novel of the narrator's contemporaries.

She does not only discuss the state of women's own literature but also the state of scholarship as well. She also explains an aesthetics based on the principle of "incandescence," the ideal state in which everything that is merely personal is consumed in the intensity and truth of one's art. She rejects standard logical argumentation in her essay's form. She writes a history of a woman's thinking about the history of thinking women and thereby her essay is a reconstruction and an argument as well. It is considered a work of fiction as well as a novel—the main difference being that the fictional narrative supports an argument, rather than a plot or character. Throughout the essay, she interacts with her readers by addressing as 'you' as if she were giving a lecture, this controversial style is crucial element of her ménage. She transcends material reality for the sake of exploring mental reality.

She exhibits the thought process behind her theory that fiction writing needs a private income and a private room, and the process has become the substance of the essay itself. It is a story that promises to continue. She encourages women to write about all of the "minutely obscure lives" which men have ignored and about themselves and their feelings and their reactions to the world around them. She brilliantly displays the indispensable link between personality, conviction, language, artistic

integrity, and inclusion of the reader. Through publication of this literary work, she established herself as a skillful theoretician and practitioner of literary criticism, a genre that she encouraged women to explore beyond the novel. She suggests that women without private spaces of their own, free of interruptions, are doomed to difficulty and even failure in their respective works. Her encouragement of women's writing have resulted in a wealth of literature that continues to prompt generations of readers, writers, and scholars.

Check Your Progress-6

Fill in the blanks

- The essay is commonly regarded as a landmark of 20th century _____ thought.
- She deliberately transfers methods from _____ to _____ as in the novel, departs from factual reality.
- The character of Judith Shakespeare puts an example of _____.

13.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt to

- recognize and comprehend features related to essay 'A Room of One's Own' written by Virginia Woolf.
- develop a better understanding of characteristics of Stream of Consciousness and Bloomsbury Group and impact of the present essay.

13.8 KEY WORDS

Stream of Consciousness	It is a method of narration that describes happenings in the flow of thoughts in the mind of character.
Bloomsbury Group	It was a group of English writers, philosophers and artists in the first half of 20 th century.
Feminist	A person who believes in feminism and tries to achieve change that helps women to get equal opportunities and treatment.
Patriarchy	A social system in which males hold the primary power.

13.9 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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- **ANSWERS**

Check your progress-1

Fill in the blanks

a) 1929 b) money, room c) 1928

Check your progress-2

1. Fill in the blanks

a) Stream of Consciousness b) literary writer c) William James, Principles of psychology

2. Short answer question

1. It is a method of narration that describes happenings in the flow of thoughts in the mind of character.

2. It was a group of English writers, artists and philosophers in the first half of twentieth century. Its members include Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, C.M. Froster, Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Duncan Grant.

Check your progress-3

Fill in the blanks

a) Oxford college b) rule of patriarchy c) Money

Check your progress-4

1. Fill in the blanks

a) Mary Seton b) Judith Shakespeare

2. Match the column

1-b), 2- c), 3-d), 4-a)

Check your progress-5

1. Fill in the blanks

a) material things b) question

2. Short answer type question

1. The essay discussed that money is the primary element, that prevents women from having a room of their own. Money is very important. The narrator writes intellectual freedom depends upon material.

Check your progress-6

Fill in the blanks

a) Feminist b) fiction, criticism c) tragic fate